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Interview with Joan Gerig

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Columbia College Chicago

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1 JESSICA PEOPLES: I'm Jessica Peoples interviewing—

2 |
3 JOAN GERIG: Joan Gerig

4 |
5 JP: Um. The date is April 23, 2009. We're at my apartment which is Van Buren and
6 Dearborn in the Fisher Building. How many years did—were you active in the Anti-
7 Apartheid Activism?

8
9 JG: OK it was ten years. I was a full-time worker, seven years I was in Chicago before
10 that and three years in Southern Africa. So that'd be twenty years.

11
12 JP: Twenty years in total. Great and so your—Can you please name again the locations of
13 your activism?

14
15 JG: Well I became um (coffee pot noise) revolutionized, you can say, in Botswana in
16 1977 I was sent there with my husband to set up a school for young people (coffee pot
17 noise) who were literally running away from Soweto during the Soweto Uprising and we
18 set up a school for these young people and um (coffee pot noise) we heard their stories,
19 listened to their stories and learned about South Africa through them and (coffee pot
20 noise) we really liked it there. We, we were ready to stay but these young people said no
21 you've got to go back to North America, my husband is Canadian and I'm (coffee pot
22 noise) American, you've got to go back to North America and tell them what's
23 happening here, because we wouldn't not be Apartheid if the North America did not want
24 it to be. (Coffee pot noise) So after our initial assignment of three years was up we came
25 back and uh tried to carry, carry on the work that they (coffee pot noise) placed on our
26 shoulders.

27 |
28 JP: OK um now I just want to get some biographical information from you and then we'll
29 start the whole process, um the year of your birth?

30
31 JG: 1946 I'm the— January, very first of the baby boomers.

32
33 JP: Nice Um the place of birth?

34
35 JG: A small town in Southeast Iowa, (coffee pot noise) farming community, um I mean I
36 never saw—I remember the first time I saw a person of color (coffee pot noise) so—

37
38 JP: Wow—

39
40 JG: You know it was when a college choir came through and it was one um black man in
41 the choir and I told my mother what is that? Who's that? (Jessica laughs) So it gives you a
42 feel for, for where I've come from—

43
44 JP: Yes—

45
46 JG: Every, everybody looked the same

47 JP: And you—were you also raised there? Is that where you were raised—
48
49 JG: Yes I was raised there. I didn't leave until I went to college.
50
51 JP: Ok um your father's place of birth?
52
53 JG: Was the same (coffee pot noise) was the same small town in Iowa and my mother as
54 well.
55
56 JP: OH and as for your mother. Ok. So let's get into the earliest memory, the earliest part
57 of your life so what is your earliest childhood memory?
58
59 JG: (coffee pot noise) I think it was, I think it was when my younger sister fell, we had a,
60 our home was on an uh on a farm and she fell threw the cold air register. You know how
61 there would be, would be a place for the cold air to go down into the furnace into the
62 fireplace, wood and coal and the warm air to come up, but she fell into that cold air and I
63 was so scared cause I thought she was going to go into the furnace and I remember my
64 mother reaching down and pulling her out by her legs
65
66 JP: Wow—
67
68 JG: That's what I remember. Now on my sister's death dead a few years ago I was telling
69 people around we were trying to help her move on because she was ready to die and so
70 we're talking about her memories and I said um my first memory is of my sister Jane and
71 when I said Jane she opened her eyes and she pointed to me. Meaning it was me that fell
72 threw and she saw me being rescued (Jessica Laughing) and there's nobody else to ask.
73 Anyway, Thank you for asking that cause that's such a point in my life.
74
75 JP: Ok that's great um describe the house that you grew up in?
76
77 JG: A farm house two stories um one bathroom um six girls, parents (noise)
78
79 JP: Ok
80
81 JG: Um we um our whole focus— I mean our focus was the farm. It was my job to go out
82 and help with the milking, help with the turkeys and um we worked together because
83 that's what you have to do on farm
84
85 JP: Ok
86
87 JG: And it was it was a very simple house certainly adequate but not very different than
88 any others in our community. I grew up with a telephone um party line. Have you ever
89 heard of party line?
90
91 JP: Yeah—
92

93 JG: Like ring when the phone went ring, ring, ring, ring-ring, ring then that's when we
 94 knew it was for us
 95
 96 JP: Oh Wow—
 97
 98 JG: Of course you listened when it was for anybody else (Jessica Laughing) because you
 99 listened in on people and knew everything
 100
 101 JP: (laughing) Wow ok that's really cool um what are the most special items in the house
 102 that you still remember?
 103
 104 JG: Um interesting I, I can picture that telephone that connected us to the rest of the
 105 community um I can't think of anything there is a dining— part of the dining room set
 106 that my parents got uh I have that but that's— um you know the very closest memories I
 107 have are of being read to in the evening and, and the gifts I can remember are gifts of
 108 books. I remember a middle school teacher asking how many people in your class—how
 109 many of you think you have one hundred books in your house? And nobody raised their
 110 hand and I wasn't sure and I went home and counted our books and we didn't have even
 111 one hundred books but I had my two books no I had three books that had been given to
 112 me as gifts but it's such a different world that I live in now.
 113
 114 JP: Ok so what was your favorite toy?
 115
 116 JG: Oh I don't— I must have had a favorite toy but I— like I said all my memories are
 117 around my books
 118
 119 JP: Ok what was your favorite food?
 120
 121 JG: Oh we had such a limited diet. Um probably ice cream, that was ice cream, and
 122 watermelon were the two treats we had.
 123
 124 JP: OK what pet did you have growing up—
 125
 126 JG: Oh Well when your on a farm you've got lots of cats, cats, cats, cats, and we always
 127 had a farm dog um the last one was—It was dog who could help chase pigs, get the
 128 turkeys in and all of that. So uh pets and the dogs weren't— were useful the cats were—
 129 lived in the barn they didn't live in the house
 130
 131 JP: Oh Ok
 132
 133 JG: And they were of course they lived in the barn to catch the mice. So I never— I
 134 didn't have a pet I had six little sisters, five little sisters I didn't have time for a pet.
 135
 136 JP: (Laughing) what was your mom's occupation?
 137
 138 JG: Um she was a farmer like my dad.

139

140 JP: OK

141

142 JG: Now one interesting thing is she had really wanted to go to college and her parents
 143 hadn't allowed it. They barely allowed her to go high school. She wanted to be a teacher
 144 but she couldn't—wasn't allowed to go to college and uh and uh all six of her daughters
 145 became teachers (laughs)

146

147 JP: O Wow—

148

149 JG: See you can see so but she worked more than anything in the big garden she would
 150 go out and take care of the animals, and help with the harvest like I said we was all in this
 151 together

152

153 JP: Right ok um how did you manage your allowance?

154

155 JG: I was one of the very few people who I knew who got an allowance. Um I think oh
 156 dear I don't know how much—I think it was ten cents a week you know the first I can
 157 remember and five cents was going to the offering at church. I grew up with the very—
 158 church was the um focal point of our lives, It was the social connection, almost
 159 everybody we knew went to the church. So I gave a lot of it away and uh which— and
 160 save a little bit—I couldn't walk to the store to buy anything and uh later as I grew older
 161 I was given more and more money and finally in um I think it was in middle school at a
 162 time I was given ten dollars a week but I had to buy my school lunch and my clothes with
 163 that money. So learned very young how to save money for what I wanted.

164

165 JP: Um—

166

167 JG: I don't know. I just, I just— Am I'm giving you appropriate answers?

168

169 JP: Yes, yes you are, your doing great. Um how were your holidays celebrated in your
 170 family?

171

172 JG: We-Um my, my parents— I grew up thinking we were poor, and that was because we
 173 didn't spend money. We grew all our own food. My mother sewed our clothes. Um for
 174 Christmas it was— I really wanted a Christmas tree that looked like what other people
 175 had or what we saw in books or like that. We didn't have TV's. Um but my dad would go
 176 out and find an Evergreen tree in the ditch somewhere and bring it home. And it looked
 177 pretty nice out there, but when you bring it inside it was all frail. That was always a
 178 disappointment. But I had a good time when I to fill out buying gifts for my sisters it was
 179 fun. And we always got together with cousins, and aunts and uncles. That was the high
 180 point of the day. And my mother made lots of wonderful candy. Do you know what
 181 Divinity candy? Made with whipped egg whites, whew I can't make, wouldn't even try.
 182 With Peanut Brittle, my grandmother would make it with pepper nuts; we're German
 183 origin, Swiss German. So that's—we had special foods. Sweets, we really liked sweets;
 184 like Ice-cream. And uh Easter, of course we didn't believe in the Easter Bunny. Like I

185 said we're religious. But we dyed lots of Easter eggs. I can remember one Easter morning
 186 looking out on the lawn and there were colored eggs. My—one of my parents had gone
 187 out and out them. I could not believe this and said well what happen? And my mom said
 188 well the Easter bunny came and we knew there wasn't an Easter bunny; we knew there
 189 was no Santa Claus. I never believed in any of those. Not that they were evil like some
 190 people have been thought in my community. It just um wasn't the way we celebrated.
 191 What other holidays are there? Like Fourth of July you're out there combining oats. So
 192 that was not never celebrated. (Noise) Um I remember I went to school, my first year of
 193 school—School must of started um late august or so but we got out for Labor Day and I
 194 told my mom it's Labor Day, what does Labor Day mean? I never heard of it. She said
 195 well labor means work. I worked—she said I worked the whole day anything she'd say—
 196 that means I would have to do more work; that's what labor meant. (Jessica laughs) So
 197 you see I grew up working.

198
 199 JP: Ok um how were you expected to behave in front of adults?

200
 201 JG: Um I think it was more children should be seen and not heard. Now that I'm quite
 202 immersed in the African American community now threw my work threw my church. I
 203 was never taught to call them by respectful name like um called Miss Jones or Aunt Jones
 204 or something. We all— we called people by their first names, unless they were a relation.
 205 Like my aunt Ruth, who was my, you know, my mother's sister. So we didn't but there
 206 was, um, you— we didn't disrespect them but we didn't respect them with titles. I don't
 207 remember ever being—I was clearly disciplined by my parents, but I don't remember
 208 being disciplined by anyone else in the community.

209
 210 JP: Ok—

211
 212 JG: But I was the pretty—I was the oldest child and I felt, you already heard this, and I
 213 felt the weight of all those younger sister on me and I was a hard worked, I was a pleaser.
 214 I wanted to please.

215
 216 JP: Who were your friends growing up????

217
 218 JG: They were my cousins. Those cousins my dad shared farming machines with one,
 219 one of his brothers who had a girl my age and there were other cousin. So they

220
 221 JP: OK

222
 223 JG: Later there were (coughs) Now when u say growing up do you mean all the way
 224 through high school or do you mean—

225
 226 JP: Um just childhood for now

227
 228 JG: Childhood, so like twelve and under—

229
 230 JP: Yea

231
 232 JG: That would have been my life that was cousins.

233
 234 JP: Ok what did you do for fun?

235
 236 JG: Uh Sunday afternoon, well Sunday there was no work. Sunday afternoon we would
 237 go play, we would play ball. And that's when my dad, I understand now, how he dearly
 238 wanted to take a nap because we worked six days a week and that was one time he could
 239 nap cause he couldn't go out to work, bible Sabbath right? And so I remember him
 240 saying you let me sleep until two thirty or something and then I'll go—go play ball. So
 241 that was always fun playing ball. Um we would occasionally walk to a neighbor's house
 242 to play and um we were all girls and sometimes we'd go it was another—a neighbor who
 243 lived close and they had all boys I think it was twelve boys or something it was an
 244 enormous family. (Car horns) One of my sisters reminds me of how once we went down
 245 there and we said we've come to play and I don't know what —those boys were all a
 246 little older and we were but they were very nice and they would play hide and seek with
 247 us and the little kids' games. And no—we didn't go to movies. We didn't have TV's.
 248 Um, what else would you um bowling, we didn't go out we did our own fun. And we
 249 would go visit, you would go visiting. Like after supper if there was—wasn't anymore
 250 work to do, we might get in the car and drive over to somebody's house to visit them or
 251 my grandparents would come to visit and um that was a important part of social life. And
 252 Sunday after—Sunday, having, inviting people over for a meal on Sunday or being
 253 invited to somebody else's house for their lunch time dinner, noon time dinner. That was
 254 part of our social circle with the way we socialized, had fun.

255
 256 JP: Ok what would u say is your fondest childhood memory?

257
 258 JG: Um. Oh my. I didn't have a lot of time to think of that. Um I remember— birthdays
 259 were special and that we got to choose what the menu would be for that, the meal. So that
 260 was always special. We didn't have parties we could have one party as you was growing
 261 up, you have one party. So on my tenth birthday I invited well I started by inviting
 262 everybody in my Sunday school class and I wanted some people from school and my
 263 mom said you can't invite some if you're going to invitee any so there was twenty-five
 264 girls at our house for my tenth birthday party. That's one memory where I think, well I
 265 knew now from my own daughter whew it's a lot of work getting a party together and I
 266 know that my mother asked her younger sister to help do the games. And so that's very
 267 special that my—they said we worked hard. But they made that a very special day for me.
 268 We have one grainy and black and white picture of us. Oh one other thing, can I add
 269 something else? That was in winter, because I was born in January there was a very
 270 special summer thing is that through our church our denomination had—that had um
 271 congregation here in Chicago. And we're about five hours from Chicago and children
 272 who attended Sunday school here in Chicago were sent to Iowa for two weeks. It's called
 273 the Fresh Air Program. And there was one girl who came— didn't stay at our house, she
 274 stayed at a neighbor's house. She was the same age I was and every summer I would look
 275 forward to her coming because we loved the way she talked Chicago. We'd all practice
 276 saying Chicago. (Jessica laughs) and that was nice because that was a little bit of a

277 picture into a world beyond our little town. That was a warm feeling knowing that Carol
 278 would come again every year.

279
 280 JP: OK what was your worst childhood memory?

281
 282 JG: Um well my parents apologized for when I was eleven my parents bought a farm and
 283 we was share cropping we didn't use that term. But that's when you use someone else
 284 property and you give them part of whatever what was grown. The night before we
 285 moved I was sot of playing around and we went upstairs, my parents slept downstairs and
 286 I must have turned out the lights and she grabbed me and pushed me threw a window and
 287 broke a window and my parents, I didn't fall out the window, I got, I remembered I got a
 288 cut on my butt. My dad heard the screaming and came up and he yelled and spanked me.
 289 I don't ever remember being spanked, but I know now that he was tired and he had to get
 290 up and work and move then he had to replace that window because it was a rented house.
 291 We had to leave it and he spanked me. And I didn't have any clothes on. Then he sent me
 292 downstairs to my mom. My mom came and put some iodine in my cut. I was totally
 293 embarrassed and that was probably my worst, yes that was my worst memory. The
 294 scariest one, Can I tell u about the scariest one? One year later we was sitting on a
 295 Saturday evening at the dinning room table eating our supper. My dad looked out the
 296 window and said Tornado. So we ran down stairs and I don't remember hearing anything
 297 and he said we can go up now. All the front of the building was gone. All the turkeys
 298 were running around and some with their heads cut off. Part of the roof was blown off
 299 and all the windows was broken. Pretty much the house was there. There car was sitting
 300 there where it was in the garage, but the garage was gown. U say u have the garage the
 301 machine sheddy. Of course u had the turkey houses gone that was scary. My sisters and I
 302 was afraid to sleep upstairs alone and my parents bedroom was downstairs and I
 303 remember sleeping on the floor outside there bedroom for probably a week or so, because
 304 we were too frightened and I remembered my dad got up, I heard him get up. My mom
 305 started crying and she just cried and cried and cried. I was too scared to see what was
 306 wrong. I was sure that my baby sister has died, who was sleeping in the crib has died.
 307 That was the only thing I could think of that could make her cry. Well later I learned that
 308 my dad would go out and cry in the turkey house, actually one turkey house. And he
 309 would sit on a stack of hay and cry cause all this work had to be done. That was a scary
 310 time for not only what happen but what I saw my parents go though.

311
 312 JP: Ok Lets move on into your youth, what was your religion growing up?

313
 314 JG: You heard it was a major part of my life. We're Mennonite. Are you familiar with
 315 Mennonite? We're not Amish that's what people think we are. Mennonite is a Protestant
 316 and a Baptist group meaning we're baptized not as children, but as adults. I was baptized
 317 when I was thirteen but when you reach the age of reason. It's a group that started in
 318 Europe in the fifteen hundred in addition to having adult baptisms; it's also one of the
 319 peace churches. There are three historical peace churches. Quakers, it's not even that
 320 name and the church of the brother. Young men from our church did not join the arm
 321 forces they did alternative services, they did three years or whatever but they did not do it
 322 with the arm forces. A neighbor went over to build houses in Greece so um they'd did

that kind of thin in the Insane Asylums and so um in part of the um menu of being a Mennonite was a simple life you heard about that no TV no movies no internet and also no jewelry no make up I didn't cut my hair until I was twenty one because there's a place in the bible that says the women hair is the women's glory so something that was interpreted about this. I did not wear pants or shorts for gym at school there is this cool lots we could wear but we did not wear them. And therefore as you could see I'm a tall women I could be really good in basketball. In Iowa women's basketball reigns in Iowa. The coach the sisters tell me and I think I must have blocked this out The coach came out to talk to my dad to try to get me, because I told the coach I couldn't play basketball cause my parents wouldn't let me, to try to get my—him to say—to let me play basketball. And um my dad said this is what my sister said she can if she wants to. But I knew that playing basketball would mean I wouldn't be able to do all the church things that I was expected to do. So like I said I wanted to please my parents and the youth group at church we had fun even with our skirts and long hair we had fun So and Mennonites although I don't look the same as I did back then.

JP: Ok um so who were your role models?

JG: Role models as far as people I knew were probably my parent although the older I grew I knew it wasn't the life I was going to live I wasn't wanting to be on the farm Now are you talking about high school or the role models in college or—

JP: Um any role models that you care to talk about—

JG Ok When I went to college in a summer of what was called Voluntary service and this was threw our church .I went to St. Louis and I lived very public housing that just a block away there was a church there and then I worked and it was my first time living in a African American community. It was a very warm warmly embraced community. It was just wonderful it opened my world up and it yet embraced me at the same time. There was um a pastor there that was so caring and so wise how to operate he was a white man. But how to operate in this situation and he became a role model even though he was a male and then I saw somebody I can identify with being in my own race but living in two worlds, but not only making since he enjoyed it. So there was joy in the way he lived and the way his family lived and his wife that I didn't know as well because she was somewhat preoccupied with the kids. She was a role model to her kids.

JP: Um when you say living two worlds or how he enjoyed that situation do you mean how he was active with his family and then also in a community where most of his followers in his church were African Americans?

JG: He had colleagues he wasn't well we called him pastor he wasn't or reverend but he had true colleagues in the community organizer also and they were equals he wasn't telling them what to do?

JP: Ok um what was your first job?

369 JG: Well um probably was cleaning the church we had a big church of three or four
 370 hundred people, it was a big building and my sisters and I would clean the church and we
 371 got three hundred and sixty five dollars a year. And so we all put that away for our
 372 college.

373
 374 JP: Wow

375
 376 JG: and that would have been my first job and in the summer we would de-tassel corn
 377 now do you mean my first full time job or what I got paid for

378
 379 JP: Yeah what you got paid for

380
 381 JG: That would have been cleaning the church and that's when I opened a bank account
 382 but they told me don't out it all in one place and I took it serious

383
 384 JP: Ok um what world events had the most impact on you growing up as a teenager?

385
 386 JG: Um Well I remember reading about before the election the um Kennedy, who did
 387 Kennedy run against? It was Kennedy and someone anyway I grew up in a large
 388 republican community and we were clearly Catholic and John Kennedy was Catholic and
 389 you don't a Catholic being the President Terrible that I can't remember and I remember
 390 my dad saying why don't we want a Catholic and that sort of opened up we don't have to
 391 be what everyone else around us. Now that's not quite a world event it was much bigger
 392 than Wayland, Iowa. No I do um sort of the election I cam home from first grade with a
 393 Do you know the Eisenhower hat? Or perhaps it was a kernels hat I think Anyways the
 394 company stopped by the school and given us all these hats. I like Ight (??). Now this is
 395 nineteen fifty two, I remember coming home with that and the neighbor laughed of
 396 course the neighbor knew that my dad was a democratic and I didn't know anything
 397 about that. I didn't understand the laughing so that's um I don't remember anything about
 398 the Korean War Although I could have it's just the wars weren't apart of our life cause
 399 we didn't know anyone in the service because in our circles no one went into the arm
 400 forces. But I do remember a talk about Martin Luther King. My mother was our church
 401 librarian and somebody bought a book and now I think it was a book about the bus
 402 boycott and uh put it in the church library and somebody else didn't think it should be in
 403 there so she brought it home to read and I read it. It was my opening to uh to what was
 404 happening there it was a little bit too young to be apart of the Freedom summer, freedom
 405 school but that's where my heart was.

406
 407 JP: Ok um moving on to education, what were your best and worst subjects?

408
 409 JG: Math was by far my worst subject and I always did very well in reading. I can
 410 diagram a sentence.

411
 412 JP: Oh ok Um what was high school like for you?

413

414 JG: It wasn't that I was not a popular person in high school and being popular is what it
 415 was all about or was back then. I did well. I had a few good friends so we had a few
 416 slumber parties. That was probably the highlight and then we had our youth group and I
 417 was— I had some rules I was suppose to go by in the youth group and church. But um I
 418 always knew that there was more beyond high school and high school was just something
 419 you did to go further it was not a high point.

420
 421 JP: Ok um what did you want to be growing up?

422
 423 JG: I remember in the first grade drawing a picture of being a mommy. And it wasn't
 424 long after that I'd say I wanted to be a teacher. Although looking back I don't think I had
 425 great teachers at all. I didn't have any teacher who um I could say was a good teacher,
 426 excellent teacher; they were good people but not excellent teachers. Maybe I just wanted
 427 to show them I could do better.

428
 429 JP: Um what college did you attend?

430
 431 JG: I went to church schools I went to junior college in Kansas it was called Hessen
 432 College. It seemed pretty bid because it was two hundred and something people there and
 433 it had been sixty two people in my graduating class and um all throughout high school.
 434 And then I went to uh—my final two years in Neosho, Indiana. And then another school
 435 in Neosho, Indiana and that was um again I—it wasn't —It was good, it was good not
 436 great, the best years of my life were to come. I knew that. I could feel it. And I got my
 437 education degree there.

438
 439 JP: Ok um lets move on to your Anti-Apartheid Activism, how did you first learn about
 440 them apartheid?

441
 442 JG: Well, can I put a little connection here? First of all I had to get a love for Africa and
 443 after my— during my senior year in college I seen this note on the bulletin board about
 444 teaching in Mississippi and I told you I was interested in Civil Rights and I was told
 445 Mississippi is where it's at in nineteen sixty eight. My senior year Dr. King was killed.
 446 And that was the first time I ever did a public march or public demonstration in Neosho,
 447 Indiana with people from the college down to the court house. In Indiana it's um this
 448 town has KKK but we stood around the court house silently and it seemed like a long
 449 time but I remember some friends from the college said Aren't you scared to go. It was
 450 not everybody didn't do this. That book that I read back in from my church library and it
 451 took home the course I experienced in St. Louis. And in the summer I went to Mississippi
 452 and there I met this woman and there she— I lived on this Piney Woods school it was
 453 called the country life school who had married an alumni of the school. Now as a child I
 454 had been afraid that God would send me to Africa I was a religious kid and I was afraid
 455 God was going to send me to Africa. So I made a deal with God I'd go to Puerto Rico
 456 just as long as I didn't have to go to Africa and I felt that God said Ok. In college I almost
 457 failed Spanish. My GPA just dropped when I took Spanish. But I didn't make the
 458 connection then, but then I told Oh Africa I'd like to see what's happening there and then
 459 I went back to St. Louis to teach then back to Piney Woods and took a course at Jackson

460 State University about integrated African American history and art and um literature
 461 cause at that time this is nineteen sixty eight ,sixty nine, seventy the um literature books
 462 did not have African American literature in them. My students in St. Louis who was
 463 ninety percent African American didn't know who Langston Hughes was. And we take
 464 that for granted now things have changed, and I took this course for Margret Walker, Do
 465 you know the name Margret Walters? And if you're in literature she wrote for my people
 466 but anyway it was a wonderful experience but through that I just—my love—my
 467 yearning for Africa grew. So

468
 469 JP: Well why were you afraid to go to Africa when you were younger?

470
 471 JG: Oh because I heard missionaries and it sounded so scary and it was so far away see
 472 Puerto Rico wasn't that far I could. And because I didn't know anyone from Africa it was
 473 the Dark Continent for us in our little white neighborhood. So how did I get to the Anti
 474 Apartheid? Then I decided I want to go to Africa and I went to Nigeria for three years to
 475 teach and it still wasn't the anti apartheid but I bite with what people say is the Africa
 476 bug. Than I just wanted to go back and I came back to the US and um went to seminary
 477 I'm so religious I'm a very religious person and I was trying to put together what has
 478 happening and when I left the United States now of the students were wearing pants to
 479 school because they were skirts and when I came back teachers were wearing blue jeans
 480 to teach. Now in the village I was in the only people who ore jeans were prostitutes. Can
 481 you see what a—this is three years when I was gone this was third Woodstock everything
 482 was happening I wasn't here and I came back I was just really—and I didn't— and
 483 somebody suggest I go to seminary it would be a good place to go and think about what's
 484 happen to you and also there were people there who had experiences overseas. Well one
 485 of the people I met was a man who taught at Columbia and he was trying to figure out
 486 what was happening there or whatever to him and then we got married and it took us
 487 threw some steps and we moved to Canada and then I moved to Canada cause he
 488 wouldn't move to Kansas and I said Ok I'll go to Canada but then the next move is mine.
 489 Equality right? And so his job sort of fell apart and I was like ok that's cool maybe it's
 490 time to move to another country. So we looked around in this organization and turns out
 491 it was the place where they needed people to start a school in Botswana. In Botswana
 492 there was a man who worked in the United States Percy Nesbitt have you ever heard of
 493 him? He actually visited us in our home and we had never heard of him before. And um
 494 that's where we met him and uh we was like well lets settle in Chicago we didn't know
 495 where to settle but we did a lot of and we set up a school there in Botswana and um our
 496 first child was born in Botswana and he was still born so we had our very first child in
 497 Africa buried there in the hills and I just couldn't get a hold of myself because you know
 498 it was far from family but then we had a opportunity to move into Africa to do some
 499 research on force of relocation which was really happening and we spent six months
 500 living in South Africa and traveling to a thing where it was happening and put together a
 501 packet that was in a couple languages and a slide show just before and to prepare to come
 502 back like these young people had told us to come back and tell people what was going on
 503 it was seventy seven to eighties we were in the regions when this was going on in South
 504 Africa and that's how we got connected and we came back and we spent five months
 505 traveling in Canada and the US talking to church groups, youth groups, school groups

506 about what is happen in South Africa and my husband became a pastor here in Chicago
 507 so we moved here and connected with some anti apartheid work. Now you know that
 508 there was an office in this building? Nobody told you?

509
 510 JP: NO!

511
 512 JG: It said Committee for Illinois divestment in South Africa and that's how I knew this
 513 building

514
 515 JP: Wow that's crazy well what did your family think about your activism?

516
 517 JG: Uh they uh they endured it my parents were I think were somewhat proud and some
 518 or my sister just didn't understand and none of them really grasp it. We were in another
 519 world. All of them were in their white worlds it had opened up a whole multi cultural
 520 world for us. There was a time when I didn't go to family reunions much cause this is my
 521 life going to conferences, organizing protests and walkathons and news conferences and
 522 all that.

523
 524 JP: Ok um what kind of group, institution, or coalition did you work with or were apart
 525 of?

526
 527 JG: Many I told you cidsa the committee in divestment of South Africa actually that was
 528 when our daughter was very young so my husband did that more than I would we would
 529 take turns it would be monthly meetings and events then that organization then morphed
 530 into cassa committee in solidarity in south Africa and actually Illinois did divest during
 531 all this work it was certain funds they divested and they passed an ordinate that they
 532 wouldn't do business with companies that did business with South Africa. So there was a
 533 lot going on in those days. My husband and I was the founding members of a
 534 organization called Synapses it's what takes messages from one part to another I didn't
 535 know that but and so we were a group of people here who were getting information back
 536 and forth and out connection was from South Africa and other friends were threw the
 537 Philippines; the US bases and the Philippines and other friends were working on there
 538 Nicaragua. At the time Reagan was doing awful thing in Central America so threw this
 539 organization we connected we worked threw then. My husband became a pastor at the
 540 church of Brethren and we started a little organization Church of the Brethren in South
 541 Africa I worked for that. I worked for that and then I was hired by the Lutherans Southern
 542 African Network. I worked for them for five years this was a time when I was full time I
 543 never made more than twelve thousands dollars a year. Church world service and
 544 walkathons. It was a Mosenbeck solidarity network. But in the Anti Apartheid group we
 545 were the church contacts and we often time had people from South Africa coming threw
 546 and we would connect with other people. One of those are now the ambassador and
 547 others members of the _____(??) they were thrown in jail and now leaders.

548
 549 JP: Um I have a couple of questions that I'm going to ask you've covered some but I
 550 want to ask you so that they can take this down so why did you get involved in the anti
 551 apartheid movement?

552
 553 JG: It was the young people from Soweto who said you need to go home and do this
 554 while we were in Botswana Steve Biko was killed do you know? Look it up he was head
 555 of black consciousness movement. At that point in the seventies ANC Mandela was
 556 locked up and his organization was ANC the black national and that's what got the
 557 Soweto Uprising and the police killed him and there's a movie Biko and um there books
 558 about him. We keep a picture of him in our house. He was an icon to the people we
 559 listened to.

560
 561 JP: What was your main role in the movement?
 562

563 JG: I was the church I knew how to talk the church language I would go to the church
 564 and explain to them what was happening. And I would explain how the church can be
 565 apart of this movement; part of the religious committee of the anti apartheid movement.
 566 One of the first – I think I organized the first camera bell Standing of the truth campaign
 567 and he sent me one a big pack cards standing for the truth silently. Are you from
 568 Chicago? I don't know, there were some pretty big names there. But there were these
 569 young people who got word of it and they had these wild poster and they came down and
 570 started singing now here we were silently standing for the truth and they were singing. I
 571 went over there and tried to talk to them but they kept singing and I was think we have to
 572 harness this singing. And so from there we did every for six seven years on Martin Luther
 573 King Day we had a sing out for anti apartheid. It was always the coldest year, kids were
 574 out of school and the church choir it was fun and we take pictures of that and we send
 575 them out. Like ok you're a Methodist lets send it to the Methodist magazine to show what
 576 their members are doing. We sent them to all these church papers so they could see what
 577 their members were doing I like to think that moved it along a little bit.

578
 579 JP: Ok Um so were you active the whole time or were there some times when you were
 580 less active?

581
 582 JG: Well from when we came back in nineteen eighty six to ninety six I was most active
 583 because then I quit teaching school so I could do this full time.

584
 585 JP: Describe the food and living conditions in South Africa.
 586

587 JG: We lived very differently then any other people live. I just don't— you mean how we
 588 live? The main meal is pop it's very stiff porridge you take it and dip it into sauce there
 589 would be lots of meat for special occasions but to tell you the truth we did not eat like
 590 that. We ate rice and beans I can't remember it was a long time ago. I had a stove I had a
 591 fridge and many people would not have that so we did not live on the same level as poor
 592 people we lived like upper middle class.

593
 594 JP: Ok how was your living condition different in South Africa different from your living
 595 conditions here in the United States?
 596

597 JG: Uh well you didn't have a telephone now everybody has cell phones of course it's
 598 just so different now from thirty years ago. The furniture was uncomfortable and it got
 599 very cold cause there was no inside heating so we build a fire in the fireplace. There were
 600 no washing machines so we had to hire someone to do our laundry for us and she did it in
 601 the bathtub but we had reasonable furniture the government provided furniture or the
 602 organization rented furniture and it was very basic in a cement block house. It was very
 603 adequate. It would have been nice to live in a thatched roof round off but we lived in the
 604 city and uh in the capital of Botswana so it wasn't an option
 605

606 JP: Ok as a um foreigner in South Africa what conditions were applied to you that um
 607 what conditions were applied to other South Africans that weren't applied to you?
 608

609 JG: Well it was more as a white person. There were things that white people could do that
 610 black people couldn't do. One time I remember I was at Johannesburg getting a train and
 611 evidently I was on the black station and something came over the intercom but it was in
 612 African so I could understand it and a kind old African man explained to me I was on the
 613 wrong train. But there were hotel in Johannesburg that black could go to it was very
 614 expensive and we felt like we could afford it so we went to the one across the street. It
 615 was run by whites and much cheaper and they told us it was so different in South Africa.
 616 If you were white you were safe because all the civil service people were white and they
 617 looked out for you; a very scary thing. I usually traveled with my husband.
 618

619 JP: Tell me how you felt when you first experienced when you first seen the injustice of
 620 um the blacks and what they had to do in South Africa with the badges and they weren't
 621 allowed to be in the city without certain qualifications how did that make you feel when
 622 you seen that?
 623

624 JG: I'm trying to go back. I think I felt the weight of all the oppression that my race has
 625 caused. Ok course in the white area children went to white schools and they had
 626 accepted his policy. One time I was there without my husband and the daughter came in
 627 and said a racist joke but I couldn't let that go and I commented I can't remember what I
 628 said and uh the father said you don't understand what life is like here. But I'm sure I
 629 didn't understand what life was like for black people. There was a family that really
 630 opened their home up and he had hosted him and his wife at our place for six weeks and
 631 they shared very deeply about their fears. I felt honored to be in their home and for them
 632 to tell us their stories but who gave us the right be there. I don't know if I'm making
 633 sense here.
 634

635 JP: Um yeah you are how about I ask this question um because in South Africa a lot were
 636 mistreated by the whites and you being of that color were there ever a time they didn't
 637 understand what you were doing and you experienced and conflicts?
 638

639 JG: Uh yes Uh Let me tell you one story about this little school we opened for where the
 640 exiles were coming in. I went in once when hardly any students were there and started
 641 cleaning I got down on my hands in the office and started scrubbing the floor one kid
 642 poked his head out and said I didn't know white people could do that. These kids lived in

a –kids, they were young people lived in town there was no refuge camp they found places to live and they were given a stipend they came to school partly for something to do cause there lives were— there they were without family they were young people on their own and we didn't have meals but on our coffee break we could get a lot of bread not coffee tea. And the tea committee decided that some of the guys were taking too much bread so they would go open the window and serve the bread out this window. I was in the office doing something and they were having tea time and all at once it was a enormous hullabaloo they were shouting and they said King Victoria served our families this way we not going to take this. They said we're not going to drink your tea we're not going to eat your bread. They knew how to protest and so Orlando went out and he said well lets figure this out and they had two days of talks and they did resolve this but that was although it wasn't our decision to make but it was the young people who saw their people are puppets almost cause we did buy the bread and we bought the tea. But that was the most conflict and it took a while to get it solved but we didn't solve it. I didn't know whether the whole school would be up for grabs.

JP: Ok how did you mark the end of the apartheid?

JG: Well when the elections were held in Chicago South Africans came to vote here and it was a group of us who got the food together and flowers and we were in the front of the conciliate and we handed everyone out a flower after they had voted. It was a lot of fun. We were dancing we were there for twelve hours. It was a lot of dancing and we had music and hospitality suites down the block with food and drinks. So that was one of the celebrations. When Nelson Mandela was released we had a big party at Malcolm X College that was really a fun time. It was after the elections because people had come back from the elections with their hats and we gathered around the art Institute with this banner and we gathered because it was right across the street from the African Conciliate. That's also where we would often meet and do our little not our little our protesting and we took that photo but then two years ago the South African Conciliate invited everybody who was on that photo to an event at the conciliate. You heard about this?

JP: I think I seen the picture

JG: Oh ok and then they gave us placks with our names on it. Not a plack it's a dish and that was very touching. Then your school started the archive so we got our things together and brought in our things in put it in a little box along the way. Now I'm getting requests from other people about the archive.

JP: Oh ok um describe what you went threw when you transition your move from South Africa back to the United States.

JG: It was hard. The fact that people weren't really interested in what was happening; it was hard. People were trying to fix up there living spaces. I saw the great disparity in what made people happy in small places. It made people happy to live in an enormous mansion. Some of my family had big houses and it didn't make sense to me. We didn't have jobs so we was trying to figure out where of course would we live and not having

689 the connection. It took about a year or so to connect with the Anti Apartheid people here
 690 so we didn't feel grounded but once it was made we felt we belonged in Chicago.

691
 692 JP: Ok how did you feel the Anti-Apartheid Movement change you?

693
 694 JG: Oh in so many ways, it gave me a reason to be loud it gave me a reason to dance I
 695 told you I grew up not dancing right? I can dance when I'm in South Africa. It gave me
 696 reason to sing it uh I was a English major suddenly I'm editing news letters I'm writing
 697 press releases I'm doing all the things I was trained to do. It gave me reason to go out and
 698 meet people and talk to people and call those papers and said you need to be here. We
 699 have something happening you need to come see it. Sometimes I'm amazed to think I
 700 was allowed to be part of this momentous thing. I was part of it; something so much
 701 bigger than I was and I had my place. I had my little place where I could do my work. It
 702 fit in locally, it fit in nationally I connected to the people In Africa, the sister community
 703 project in San Francisco and in South Africa and I went to visit there it was very exciting.
 704 There were New York and Philadelphia people it fit nationally and then it fit
 705 internationally not only South Africa but the groups in England and the groups in Canada
 706 and all over and the Netherlands. It was just wonderful I wish that everyone could feel
 707 apart of something so big so much bigger then they are that also made them feel bigger
 708 than what they could ever be, better than what they thought they could ever be.

709
 710 JP: Looking back, what are you most proud of?

711
 712 JG: I think of the friends that I have as a result of all of this in June I'm going to Liberia
 713 and Cape Town but I'll see so many of the people that I knew back from those days and it
 714 just feel s like Oh with open arms, I feel like mother Africa has already reached out and
 715 circled me. The connections I'm most proud of.

716
 717 JP: What do you regret?

718
 719 JG: From my time there or here?

720
 721 JP: Well just from the Anti Apartheid Movement

722
 723 JG: I regret that I haven't kept some of those contacts. I have slipped away from people.

724
 725 JP: Ok what is the one thing you want most people to remember about you?

726
 727 JG: Uh Well I'm a hard worker I'm a conscientious person I liked to be known that she
 728 didn't let down those young people. I just thought of that now but Yeah I say I'm going
 729 to do me job and I do it and I do it pretty damn well. From a girl who came from the farm
 730 and grew up in a very strict religious community that didn't see much outside itself.

731
 732 JP: Um Is there anything else you would like to share?

733

734 JG: There's one thing I wanted to add I told you it was books I kept and there was an
735 author of one of those books who opened up the world to me and help me to get to
736 Africa. Louise Linksys who wrote books about children in other cultures. My sister got a
737 book about a girl who was a migrant laborer another sister got one about a boy who lived
738 in China town, the one I got was called Mama's Hattie girl it was about an African
739 American girl who lived in Mississippi you don't know how many times I read those
740 books through but I think how my mother got her hands on them but those books opened
741 up the world to me and that's probably why I'm a librarian now but I think also help me
742 make that connection to South Africa.
743
744 JP: Ok well thank you the interview is over.