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Interview with Alice Palmer

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1 Columbia College Chicago
2 Chicago Anti-Apartheid Movement Collection
3 Spring 2010
4 Interview Transcription
5 Interviewer: Kate McAuliff
6 Interviewee: Alice Palmer
7
8 (Muffled Noise: Movements of the Recorder)
9
10 Kate McAuliff: Alright, hello. I am the interviewer, and my name is Kate McAuliff. And
11 can you please state your name?
12
13 Alice Palmer: mm-hmm, Alice J. Palmer.
14
15 KM: And today's date.
16
17 AP: Is March twenty-ninth-- uh 2010.
18
19 KM: Thank you. And, will you please state where we are?
20
21 AP: We are in the um building of the Black United Fund of Illinois. Which is a self-help
22 uh- organization that is part of a federation of Black United Funds across the United
23 States.
24
25 KM: And, what were your years of Anti-Apartheid activism?
26
27 AP: Hmm, let's see. From the 70's through the umm- I guess through the 80's.
28
29 KM: And where did your activism take place?
30
31 AP: Primarily in Chicago.
32
33 KM: Okay, uhh, what year were you born?
34
35 AP: 1939.
36
37 KM: And where were you born?
38
39 AP: Indianapolis, Indiana.
40
41 KM: And were you raised there as well?
42
43 AP: Yes.
44
45 KM: And where was your father born?
46

47 AP: Umm- Cambridge, Massachusetts.
48
49 KM: And your mother?
50
51 AP: Indianapolis, Indiana.
52
53 KM: Thank you. Alright, what is your earliest memory?
54
55 AP: My earliest memory.
56
57 KM: Mm-hmm.
58
59 AP: My fifth birthday party, at which time I received a cocker spaniel umm from the,
60 from Indiana Senator, State Senator, Brokenburg, Robert Brokenburg, who was the first
61 black Indiana State Senator. And he and his wife, his wife's name was Alice so I think
62 that was why they gave me the dog.
63
64 KM: Was that the highlight of your fifth birthday? Was getting a dog from the--
65
66 AP: Yes, yes. There were lots of people there, and lots of activity going on but the dog
67 was special.
68
69 KM: How did that make you feel? Really special to get such a big present from such a
70 esteemed--
71
72 AP: Well I didn't know he was esteemed he was just someone at the party who gave me a
73 dog—
74
75 KM: That was the most exciting part of the uh--
76
77 AP: I didn't know till later he was esteemed.
78
79 KM: Alright, uh can you tell me a bit about your family?
80
81 AP: Hmmm, Well I told you where they were born—
82
83 KM: Mm-hmm.
84
85 AP: And my uh grandfather was a slave, and came to Indianapolis-- umm in his teens and
86 um, swept out stables and so forth for the doctors up and down Indiana avenue--
87
88 [Coworker1 walks past]
89
90 Coworker1: Hey there.
91
92 AP: Hi, how ya doin?

93

94 CW1: Good.

95

96 AP: And uh- one of them took a particular, he brought his mother with him out of uh
97 after slavery, and one doctor took particular interest in him and helped him learn to read,
98 he didn't learn to read until he was twenty. And then sent him to high school, he finished
99 that and then uh he went on to medical school.

100

101 KM: Wow.

102

103 AP: Uh, first he went to a um, in those days a- an- and interestingly, they have- it's called
104 pharmacognacy now and there is you can get a PhD. in it at University of Illinois, but at
105 the time it was umm I've forgotten the name of it you learned to make medicines from
106 natural uh roots and so forth. And then he went to what was uh Indiana University
107 medical school, and he finished in 18- I think like 1892 or something. He and my
108 grandmother, my grandmother was free black. She bo- interestingly both came from
109 North Carolina but she had, her family had free papers and they were able to pass through
110 the territories. Um, the governors of each territory signed it so they would not be arrested
111 or enslaved. And uh her- her father was a cleaner and dyer, and they settled in Bedford,
112 Indiana.

113 And then I don't know, a lot if this is foggy. Uh I only know these bits and pieces
114 because in my freshman um AP English class, I was the on- only black student in there,
115 and the teacher said she wanted us to write about our families, but I didn't have to do the
116 assignment because she knew colored people didn't have any history. And so I went to
117 my grandmother in tears and that's the only reason I even know this much about my
118 family--

119

120 KM: So these weren't stories that were shared--

121

122 AP: Yes right and just- just no, just because they had, the teacher had said we had no
123 history—

124

125 KM: Wow.

126

127 AP: --So my grandmother pulled out the free papers, and showed me the goats horn in the
128 den that my grandfather had brought from slavery, told me that my um, that his mother
129 had denounced Abraham Lincoln because um she felt he had really not been sincere
130 about freeing slaves.

131 So anyway, and then my mother, uh was born in 1910. My grandfather went to
132 World War I. He um, my grandparents married in 1904, and they first had a son, and then
133 my mother. And um, my grandfather put his age back and went to World War I. And
134 entered as a major because you know that's what you, if you're a medical person and um
135 he served in what amounted to a mash unit on the battlefield in France. And sadly during
136 the time that he was gone, um my um they lost their son he died in the um influenza
137 epidemic of 19- 19- 1920 whichever it was.

138 And anyway um they were very- very activist people. My grandfather was
139 Madam C.J Walker's physician. Madam Walker started her business in Indianapolis, and
140 my grandmother took her around, organized for her so forth and so on. Um, my parents,
141 when my grandfather came back um, soldiers were returning, black soldiers from World
142 War I. And they were being mistreated. And Tuskegee had a veterans' hospital, but black
143 soldiers would be left out in the hall because white nurses weren't allowed to touch them
144 so forth. So, uh the then president of uh Tuskegee who had met with the black troops in
145 France, petitioned the President of the United States to appoint a black person to head,
146 the first black person, and my grandfather ended up being that person so my
147 grandmother, my grandfather, my mother went to Tuskegee and he had to face down the
148 Klan and all the rest of that did uh from all the reports that I have seen in newspapers he
149 did a hell of a job putting it together the hospital.

150 So, my parents met there. My father came out of MIT with a masters in
151 engineering in 1932 I think, and taught at Tuskegee, he met my mother, they married, he
152 went to Howard taught there blah-dee-blah, then back to Indianapolis, and that was
153 generally them.

154
155 KM: did you hear a lot about your grandfather's activism growing up or was this all stuff
156 that you learned later?

157
158 AP: Nope, later, didn't know, these people did not talk about themselves

159
160 KM: Why do you think that is?

161
162 AP: Uhh, There was I think probably lots of reasons people just did with they had to do
163 they did not think it was extraordinary they were not boastful people they just weren't
164 that way nobody was those who were, were looked down upon so.

165
166 KM: Umm who did you spend a lot of time with as a child?

167
168 AP: Hmm my grandmother, and um the families of my uh two friends. Um my
169 grandfather delivered all three of us within days of each other so we had been friends our
170 entire lives, our mothers were friends; so yea probably my grandparents and um mostly
171 my grandmother and the families of my two friends.

172
173 KM: How do you think they influenced you?

174
175 AP: Oh in every way conceivable. Umm you were raised to be um considerate and giving
176 and um I didn't know the word activist then but uh you were supposed to, you were
177 obligated to do for others and to uh um-set right injustices and so forth so.

178
179 KM: That's a lot of responsibility for someone so young.

180
181 AP: Well it wasn't put to you in that way it, it just that was a way of life, it wasn't
182 anything anybody talked about.

183

184 KM: Uh where did you play as a child?

185

186 AP: Oh, everywhere. Life was very free and lovely. There- I- I never had a door-key.
187 Nobody I knew ever had a door-key. Um, my grandparents in fact um my grandfather
188 had a hospital uh back in the- the days the early um 30's and 20's and so forth because
189 black people were not allowed in hospitals in Indianapolis. And afterward later they
190 turned it into an apartment building and their apartment was on the first floor there was
191 no key to come into the lobby, there was no key to go into their house, their portion, none
192 of it so you- I played, when um we moved to the one block street where I spent from age
193 ten until I went to college we played in the streets, we played in- on peoples roofs, we
194 played in backyards--

195

196 KM: Safe.

197

198 AP: It was - totally safe yes. Oh, and in parks yeah, everywhere.

199

200 KM: There were a lot of parks in your neighborhood?

201

202 AP: There were parks, yes. And uh in the winter you got on a sled, and you slid down a
203 hill and had to swerve the sled before you uh flew into traffic.

204

205 KM: Uh where did you go to school, when you were young?

206

207 AP: Elementary School I went to George Washington Carver Elementary School. Superb
208 school. Uh those were the days of so called separate but equal and uh in my school my
209 principal was adamant about you made me have the separate we- you will give me the
210 equal. So we had everything, we had French and art and um advanced math and theater
211 everything you could think of -

212

213 KM: Wow, in elementary school?

214

215 AP: Yes, yes.

216

217 KM: Wow.

218

219 AP: So when the schools desegregated we were more than prepared.

220

221 KM: And how old were you when they desegregated?

222

223 AP: Umm I don't remember I just remember that we were the fourth class, fourth or fifth
224 class of black students to enter Shortridge High School which was, I don't know if you're
225 familiar with the major schools in Illinois but it was like uh- a New Trier of it's day or a
226 Walter Payton or a- a superb, even more so probably. This school had an art gallery along
227 one entire corridor on the second floor that could rival any small museum it had, we had a
228 daily newspaper we had a radio station--

229

230 KM: Wow.

231

232 AP: We had uh at least five languages taught um people went of- uh- incredible theater
233 the uh- people would come from Yale and so forth 'cause they were major drama
234 schools, they would um send recruiters to see the students and um these students went to
235 um Ivy League schools went to um – ya know were very sought after uh. Where are you
236 from where is your home?

237

238 KM: Uh, New York.

239

240 AP: Okay well I don't know if you're familiar with the name Senator Richard Luger but
241 that was his school. -

242

243 KM: Oh, wow.

244

245 AP: Yeah, U.S. Senator Richard Luger and to forth. So a lot of the uh- most of the uh
246 barrens of industry sent their kids there.

247

248 KM: How did you feel about going there was it intimidating because it was so big or
249 were you comfortable?

250

251 AP: Not at all. As I said we were very well prepared and as I said prepared not only
252 academically but to right injustices, as there were many of them as the school had to
253 adjust to having black students um for instance uh we had a- theater was taken very
254 seriously and we had a rule that um if you- you had to audition for- the- the senior play
255 was a big deal And uh if you made third cut which was the audition if you went though
256 three auditions and made it then you were automatically granted a role in senior play.
257 Well there were three of us um black women class mates who made third cuts but the
258 director called me and I don't know why she chose me to tell me that uh she was sure I
259 would understand but the play was a family play therefore we three little lack girls
260 couldn't be in it. I went to I said oh okay. I went to the the phone and called my mother
261 and the next thing I knew I was called down to the principal's office and bless his heart
262 the principal was a Quaker and so he was uncomfortable with it in the first place and
263 there sat my mother with her legs crossed had a shopping bag beside her she said sit
264 down to me she said I have just told um uh forgotten his name now the principal that uh I
265 was a um graduate in theater at Denver University I have brought a bag of plays here and
266 I'm sure that they can find one that will be appropriate and they won't have to worry
267 about it being a family play what could he do? Ya know he called the director down and
268 said she would have to choose another play so of course I was punished so I didn't get
269 any lines in the play--

270

271 KM: You were punished by the school?

272

273 AP: No by the- the director who was furious you know that um I-- she expected me to go
274 quietly into the night I guess but uh that was a lesson and what happened was uh hey I

275 didn't get any lines but my two fiends did and we had broken it open so that was did the
276 good so what if I didn't get lines.

277 So, yeah. There were other instances of having to. I remember when uh Emmitt
278 Till was killed and word, there weren't a lot of us black kids, the word went throughout
279 the school, walk out two o'clock comes walk out. And they were terrified, we all got up
280 and walked out no violence, no anger, no anything, it was just it was time to make a
281 statement.

282

283 KM: Mm-hmm. Umm what were your favorite subjects in school?

284

285 AP: English. Umm History. That was a lesson also, um about History, um Lisa Brock an
286 so forth and Prexy will appreciate this. Um freshman year in English, uh I was always in
287 AP classes, as I said we were very well prepared, and we were doing a- a paper on the
288 French Revolution well I was just enthralled with Marie Antoinette and I wrote this
289 flowery, well I was- I could always write well so the teacher gave it back to me and gave
290 me a C and I wasn't used to getting Cs but she had written on it she said never
291 romanticize history and I thought good f- you know that- bingo I understood and I kept
292 that with me for evermore. Never romanticize history.

293

294 KM: So interesting, and did you rewrite the paper and make it less dramatic?

295

296 AP: No, not that paper. But from then on I- I understood one researched history one
297 researched, one did not romanticize.

298

299 KM: Uh what views of race were you raised with?

300

301 AP: None.

302

303 KM: Can you expand?

304

305 AP: What do you mean? Nobody talked about race, you just grew up. Uh, If you ran into
306 issues um it was a matter of how dare these people treat me or mine or whatever but it
307 was never I don't ever remember anybody discussing race I mean I knew who I was. It
308 was fascinating to me that when I come to Chicago and I hear my husband saying he
309 never had a black teacher until, good grief Im not- I think he only had one black teacher
310 well see I wasn't raised- I grew up in a we heard Marion Anderson sing every morning
311 on PA or Paul Robeson we read Langston Hughes and so forth as a matter of course. My
312 grandparents received the uh Ebony and Jet and uh so forth magazines every week in the
313 mail the Pittsburg Courier so. I- I being a black person was who I was it wasn't – and
314 there was no- no problem with that and so when I went to- and Indianapolis is very
315 interesting and I think new York was like this too even more so, Chicago because it has
316 such segregated pockets of how people live that when a group moves in i.e. black people
317 in this area whites flee even in commercial areas we in Indianapolis they left the housing
318 but they did not leave the commercial areas. So, in my grandparents neighborhood um
319 there was a black man who was um who had the drug store, a Jewish man had the dry
320 good store, and Irish man had the grocery store it was no big deal. So, it wasn't as if I had

321 never interacted and because my grandparents were people who served the community
322 you know people you know could come and be waited on by my grandfather and charge
323 them you know, got hurt anything. Sometimes he was paid with bushels of tomatoes so
324 you know if I went to the store and I said who I wanted the food for then oh well yes you
325 know but nobody ever talked about race as race we were raised as a- who you were no
326 problem—proud to be--

327

328 KM: And even when you got to school and started facing more, different ideas-

329

330 AP: Umm, But see we had- we had always had uh a cross section of literature in my
331 home growing up. I- I knew who Shakespeare was I had read, my mother bought 'Tales
332 of Shakespeare' from the time I was a little girl so there was no, I didn't have to be
333 introduced to something it was all of a piece, grounded in being a strong black person,
334 with a strong black family surrounding me and a neighborhood and a family and a
335 community.

336

337 KM: So do you feel like most people who grew up in your community had that same
338 upbringing, or do you feel like it was special to your family.

339

340 AP: Nope, yeah I- I think most of them did. Most of my- the people that I knew did,
341 absolutely.

342

343 KM: Um so what do you think your first experience was with racial discrimination was?

344

345 AP: In terms of looking at it was racial discrimination?

346

347 KM: Uhh, yes.

348

349 AP: Okay, 'cause as I said I saw injustices, but we- we addressed those. Where people
350 may have said you can't do this, but I didn't put it on that context in any real way. Umm I
351 think uh let's see I think the first one where it was really, it really hit home was when we
352 drove to Tuskegee. Grandfather was to be honored at Tuskegee again. And they were
353 older by then and so my grandfather hired someone from the neighborhood to drive us
354 down there; instead of- um well I didn't know any other way, I never-. And um the first
355 hint of it was that night in Nashville, Tennessee. We had left fairly late, and pulled in, it
356 was dark, and um my grandfather told him to stop at the drugstore in a black
357 neighborhood. He came out and directed us to what amounted to a juke joint. And it
358 turned out that uh that was my first introduction that um black people could not stay in
359 hotels in the south; that you had to stay with a family or whatever well that, it happened
360 that that night all the respectable black homes were filled. So my brother and I had to
361 sleep on a pool table in a juke joint in Nashville, Tennessee. So my eyes were wide open
362 then. So I was- then we went on and we got to um, right outside uh Tuskegee. And it was
363 about to be I think it was a Saturday. And no respectable little girl in those days would
364 appear on Sunday without a hat and gloves. I was I think eleven. And my grandmother
365 had them stop the car on the square. And she grabbed my hand really tightly and marched
366 me into a department store And she marched up to a table with little girls hats, and she

367 put one on my head and put her hands on her hips and just stood there and glared at all
368 the sales people in there. And I thought oh my god you now, I didn't know what was
369 going on I had never- because in Indianapolis things had integrated by then, there was no-
370 I had never experienced it. And she took the hat off my head she went up, she paid for it,
371 grabbed my hand tightly again and marched me back. It wasn't until years later that I
372 learned that it was against the law to try on hats, to try on clothes for black people to do
373 this. So my grandmother had preceded Rosa Parks in that kind- as I'm sure many had in
374 that kind of defiance.

375 And um I think also during the same period of time, I would visit a classmate of
376 mine at the elementary school her grandparents lived in Nicholasville, Kentucky. So we
377 would go with her sometimes on spring break. And I loved- I have always loved movies
378 so I begged let's go to the movies. She said are you sure, and I said well why wouldn't
379 we? Get to the movies, I'm about to walk up to the uh the booth you know in front of
380 where you uh- ticket booth she said uh-uh, uh-uh we had to go around the back, climb
381 these stairs, urine soaked stairs. And that's when I learned that black people could not sit
382 on the first floor of the movie theater in the south. So I was so infuriated that I marched
383 around the streets in that town. You know, I'm young and foolish. But I was so angry
384 'cause that- those were the first kind face to face with uh that kind of stupid racism. And
385 you know there were other things along the way, but that's when the eyes open ah-ha you
386 know this is what this is. But um I just uh you took it in stride and dealt with it.

387

388

389 KM: So who did you ask questions to? Or did you just-

390

391 AP: I didn't ask questions. I really didn't. Umm, I don't ever remember asking questions
392 about it.

393

394 KM: You just, accepted it and-

395

396 AP: No it wasn't accepting it; it was saying no this is not right and when the moment
397 comes I will do something about it.

398

399 KM: Uhh, what views of politics were you raised with?

400

401 AP: Hmm, I- I don't think anybody ever talked about politics per-say either. I realized
402 years later umm that I was- that my grandmother must have been a umm one of the
403 people on election day who sit there and ta- because I remember going with her and
404 sitting under the table with crayons and so forth; in the basement of some church. So I
405 assume that's what she was doing. But other than that, it wasn't so much people talked
406 about politics it was just the nature of the people who passed through our home that you
407 got a sense of big things stirring. Umm the national president Phyllis Wheatley
408 YWCA, um the umm presidents of this and that and so forth and so on; there were
409 always during World War II umm the wax in and um soldiers, black soldiers in the
410 house; and my grandmother, very active in the one of the founders in fact in 1906 of the
411 colored, Indianapolis Colored Improvement Club. Umm and so lots of- lots of
412 organizations where you knew you were supposed to give back. Uh the METAFAR

413 Guild medi- medical, dental, and pharmacists, the wi- wives and daughters and nieces;
414 you raised money. Uh, the Flanner House, umm my two girl friends and I had to be junior
415 hostesses at uh international teas where you raised money to support umm help women
416 who were umm you know who were poor. Nobody talked about politics it was again a
417 way of life.

418
419 KM: And what about national and world events, how ere you informed about those
420

421 AP: I didn't really I wasn't focused in on any of that probably until its funny grammar
422 school. Um Again the segregated schools and many of us had moved out of the
423 neighborhood where George Washington Carver Elementary School was so the system
424 provided buses to bus us back to the black school. We could not to go to the school four
425 blocks from our- where we lived. And so every morning there would be lots of little
426 black children standing on corners waiting to be bused back aga- which is and irony to
427 me. You know you have to laugh at how stupid this stuff was. And I mention that during
428 the uh Eisenhower - Stevenson umm election period. And my family, you know black
429 people were republicans in those days and really in Indiana I mean you know the
430 switchover came in general when uh FDR was president up to that time because of
431 Lincoln and so forth back people, largely- well in Indianapolis lots and lots of black
432 people were still republicans so I remember we didn't know what we were talking about,
433 we just heard what our families were saying. I guess my father was for Eisenhower and
434 my friend one of the thr- two friends lived right down the street from me, her family was
435 for Stevenson. So here we are little girls on the corner waiting to be bused back to the
436 black school having an argument about Eisenhower and Stevenson neither one of us
437 knowing what in the world, we wouldn't have known them if they had walked up to us,
438 but there we were.

439 But there we were umm yeah so that's and then in high school of course being
440 introduced to umm world politics through my dear friend Wallace Terry, who became a
441 Neiman fellow, and um went brown and was the first uh black war correspondent for
442 Time magazine in Vietnam. Well he was a year ahead of me, and he was always very
443 focused. He knew from the time he was an infant I think that he wanted to be a
444 journalist. And so he at the high school he joined the Model United Nations and became
445 the first um black secretary general in Model UN in Indiana. And insisted that his
446 girlfriend and I come and join the model UN. Well you know at this time I'm dating, I'm
447 enjoying, he said you will come. We had grown up together; there was no denying Wally.
448 And um we ended up much to the chagrin of the woman who ran it because she really
449 would have preferred that here were no black folk in it. But lo and behold after he
450 graduated, the next year we continued with model UN, Gloria and I. And that happened
451 to be the year that British and French received their independence. Well the rule was that
452 Model UN had to follow exactly what had happened in the UN that meant that each of us
453 had to represent one of these countries and address the general assembly. So Wally sent
454 us boxes of material from Brown, he helped us write our speeches, the whole bit. He was
455 so proud that we had continued, and we had moved from being pages to being
456 ambassadors anyway that was you know an introduction and um I think the way French
457 was taught the way just the school itself was very much an international school.

458 Um, one other instance of lo- seeing a kind of racism and um tucking it away and
459 saying when the time comes I will see to this. I wanted very much to do a junior year
460 abroad, but and in the 50's in my school black kids were not allowed to. But there was
461 one Asian girl who got to do this and I remember and when the rest of us had to come to
462 the auditorium and celebrate her doing it. I remember sitting there and saying hm, we
463 don't look that much different what is this you know what is this? And I thought u-uh
464 okay I got it know I'm getting it I'm not gonna be mad about it but I'm getting it. So, I
465 said alright that uh when the time comes I will address this as well.

466
467 KM: And where did you wanna go?

468
469 AP: I wanted to go to uh Paris of course. Yep and I have been many times since then, yes.

470
471 KM: Uhh, what were your aspirations when you were in high school; what did you
472 wanna do?

473
474 AP: I don't know that I had any um, it was the 50's and I didn't, I didn't have any umm
475 like Wally I didn't say I'm gonna be this by ten years I didn't have any like that. I knew
476 that I was going to college. And I knew that I was going to major in English and other
477 than that I don't think I had though about it.

478
479 KM: Uhh, did your family have any goals for you?

480
481 AP: Hmm in terms of being some particular something, no, mm-mm.

482
483 KM: And did you always know where you were going to college or was that a choice?

484
485 AP: I had wanted to go to umm Anteock but we couldn't afford it so, I pretty much I
486 knew I would be going to Indiana University Bloomington the State School yeah.

487
488 KM: And what was your experience like there?

489
490 AP: Good, for the most part very good, yeah. Because an incredible President we had. I
491 will praise him forever um amazing man way, Herman Wells, well ahead of him his time.
492 Just as an example and this was before I got there, but I met a- um black man who had
493 been on the football team there in, I guess, the 1940s maybe or early, early 50s. And he
494 said he had gone into town into Bloomington, to a restaurant with a white um team
495 player. They sat at a table and the waitress came and she took the white guy boys um
496 order and just ignored him like he was invisible. And he said he and he looked up a little
497 while later and here came president Wells, sat down next to him called the waitress over,
498 and said why doesn't this young man have some food in front of him? And she said oh
499 you know why we don't serve them. And he said who are your main customers here in
500 this restaurant? She said oh, very proudly, oh from the University, he said yes that's true
501 he said now either he gets food and anybody who looks like him gets food, or I will make
502 this place off limits and you will be out of business. So that was the way that he was, an
503 um so when I hear these people uh at University of Illinois and that uh a line a wick or

504 whatever it is in the year you know late 20th early 21st century with that kind of craziness
505 then I think with even more respect of Herman Wells. And his- his home was in the
506 middle of the campus and any Sunday you could go to tea there. Very open, very um; he
507 did the same thing in there in the student union there was some you know little attitude
508 about serving black students and he said the same thing either all students served or
509 nobody's served. And he was an internationalist even then. Very active in the United
510 Nations we had an international house

511

512 (phone rings)

513

514 AP: Excuse me, my daughters on the road

515

516 KM: It's fine.

517

518 (AP answers phone – hangs up - dials phone – makes phone call)

519

520 AP: My daughter finished her masters; he's driving her in this truck and it costs \$75
521 every time you fill it up; Toronto to uh New Orleans.

522

523 KM: Wow, that's quite a trip.

524

525 AP: Yes it is.

526

527 KM: Umm, you were talking about the president of your college.

528

529 AP: Yeah, yeah that's it; just an extraordinary man well ahead of his time. A lot of these
530 presidents today, instead of saying they cant do anything about these anti diversity and so
531 forth should take a page out of his book, well ahead of his time.

532

533 KM: And, were you involved in activism while you were in college?

534

535 AP: not really, I was um active in my sorority and um-

536

537 (phone rings)

538

539 (AP answers and talks on phone)

540

541 AP: Okay, sorry.

542

543 KM: Uhh, your sorority.

544

545 AP: Yeah, very active in my sorority, mm-hmm. And my sorority was uh- 100 years old
546 two years ago, and it was the first um African American sorority in the country. So, there
547 was a grand celebration in Washington.

548

549 KM: And what kinds of things did you do?

550

551 AP: Uh again, um our- black sororities are not like white sororities. Um, it is a lifetime
552 commitment to service. And so you went to tutor children, you um raised money for
553 things. So you, of course had parties and so forth but it was- I'm still active, got my scarf,
554 uh still active. I'm on the scholarship committee in my chapter now. Raising money again
555 for young women so, it's a lifetime committment. I've been um-

556

557 (phone rings)

558

559 (AP answers and talks on phone)

560

561 AP: Why is it that I have to be in charge of all of this stuff?

562

563 [coworker2 enters]

564

565 Coworker2: You're great, you're just great.

566

567 AP: no, I'm gonna kill you.

568

569 CW2: You won't-, you don't know how to say no.

570

571 AP: Lord have mercy. 4- almost 40 years old, take care of your own business. Okay, I'm
572 sorry.

573

574 KM: Did you need to call someone back?

575

576 AP: No, I do not need to call someone back.

577

578 KM: You seem to be the very center of everything that's going on.

579

580 AP: Oh don't even breathe those words!

581

582 KM: Uh, you were talking about how you're on the scholarship committee for the
583 sorority-

584

585 AP: For my chapter, mm-hmm.

586

587 KM: And what sparked you to join in the first place?

588

589 AP: Hmm, well in terms of sorority; um my- I'm a legacy for one thing, my mother was
590 in the same sorority. My, so forth so, it just was assumed.

591

592 KM: Let's see, uhh, tell me about your memory of Dr. King's assassination. You were
593 telling me on the phone.

594

595 (phone rings)

596 AP: Oh, what is it now, Yes?

597

598 (AP answers and talks on phone)

599

600 AP: Umm, Dr. King's assassination. Um, I was supporting Bobby Kennedy for president.
601 And he came to Indianapolis several times during his campaign. And this particular night
602 he was going to appear and speak to people at a, uh public housing uh parking lot. And I
603 had uh it was after school I think it was on a Friday night it was raining, this miserable
604 day- night. But people really wanted to hear him, so we went to the parking lot we're
605 stand there in the rain, waiting for him to arrive. Time kept passing and passing. They
606 had set up- I think it was a flat- bed truck, or some kind of platform. And this lone car
607 pulled up, and he got out of the car bare-headed and walked up to this platform and of
608 course people were cheering and so forth. And you could see that he was very somber.
609 And then um without pulling any punches, uh he announced that uh Dr. King had been
610 assassinated and of course the crowd just couldn't believe it. Could- and I just I could
611 believe it and so the next, that must have been a Friday because the entire weekend of
612 course everybody was glued to television sets and watching this unfold and that was how
613 I found out about- and of course shortly after that he was also assassinated. It was a very
614 terrible period.

615

616 [Coworker3 Enters]

617

618 Coworker3: Hey, how are you?

619

620 AP: Hi there.

621

622 KM: And how was that experience for you, how did that make you feel?

623

624 AP: Hmm it was um, up close and personal introduction to the violence of this country
625 that uh- there are those who are willing to turn race into uh violence. But it steals you
626 again just like in high school, that's what that is deal with it when it comes

627

628 KM: Was that a shock and it changed how you viewed things, or was it just kind of
629 reinforcement?

630

631 AP: It was a shock but it uh it just reinforced didn't change things. See you can't afford,
632 as a black person, you can not afford to get mired in anger and um. You cannot become
633 the enemy. You have to think strategically, you have to think rationally. It doesn't mean
634 you're not passionate but it just means you don't waste time or energy on um- you have
635 to figure out how to win it; not- not how to be angry about it.

636

637 KM: And how did you learn that philosophy?

638

639 AP: As I said, you heard me describe how I was raised. That was the way I was raised.

640

641 KM: Just ingrained.

642

643 AP: Absolutely, a way of life.

644

645 KM: Um, how did you first learn of Apartheid?

646

647 AP: Umm, I think it was through, it was through one of the black magazines that my
648 grandparents subscribed to, it might have been Ebony. In which, I remember an article ad
649 I was in I was young then, I remember an article that talked about um hair texture as
650 some kind of measure of whether one was colored, these rankings in South Africa
651 whether you were, which was a nasty word, if you were a Kaffer meaning about the same
652 as nigger, a colored or a white person and something about hair texture and- but it was
653 such- so far removed from me at the time I just read it. And then um, uhh I guess later on
654 at um, when I was at North Western and we began to organize, well actually before that
655 because, as I had mentioned before, my friend Fannie Rushing was active in the anti-
656 Crugerand campaign so I joined her in that and that was before I became active in the
657 anti-apartheid movement.

658

659 KM: And was that the first organization that you were a part of?

660

661 AP: It wasn't an organization, it was just people um trying to stop the sale of the
662 Crugerand in the United States. And I think I mentioned that; I think it was on Clark
663 Street there was a coin dealer who was trading in um Crugerands. So there were
664 demonstrations in front of that store against the Crugerand. But it- that wasn't a
665 movement.

666

667 KM: Right.

668

669 AP: Mm-hmm

670

671 KM: And- so there was that, before that, were you active in any other sort of way, against
672 anything or-

673

674 AP: Hmm lets see, yeah umm school stuff, education stuff. Things like that, yeah.

675

676 KM: I'm gonna kinda reiterate this question a little bit but; why did you become an
677 activist?

678

679 AP: It's a way of life. It's ingrained.

680

681 KM: And how did your family react to your activism?

682

683 AP: But they're activists too, so.

684

685 KM: Was it openly discussed or was it-

686

687 AP: Well, when everybody's an activist then you just talk about what you're doing, you
688 know there's no; it's not separate from who you are.

689
690 KM: Um, okay which-what organizations were you a part of?

691
692 AP: When?

693
694 KM: Um, during the Anti- Apartheid Movement.

695
696 AP: Um, well several of us put together the uh Chicago Free South Africa Movement. So
697 That was um that was the organization under which a lot of things took place. But now
698 that wasn't the only one, you know there were other- other people who put other
699 organizations together, kinda flowed in and out of each other. But that's the one that I
700 was particularly; and at North Western um opposing the um the boards continued
701 investment in South Africa. That preceded putting the Chicago Free South Africa
702 Movement together. And the Chicago Free South Africa Movement came on the heels of
703 when um Randall Robinson and others um sat in at the South African Consulate in
704 Washington D.C. that uh week whatever that day was. That kinda set off a domino effect
705 across the country where it kind of galvanized what had already been in motion. And um
706 we several of us met at a hotel on North Michigan Avenue across the street from the
707 South African Consulate, that was the embassy I meant Randall Robinson they went into
708 the embassy, across from the consulate in Chicago and laid out our plans for what we
709 would do in similar to what Randall Robinson and Mary Frances Barry and others had
710 done, and that was the launch of it.

711
712 KM: And what was the structure of that organization?

713
714 AP: We didn't have a structure we had a focus on what was to be done. And that was that
715 we were going to demonstrate and get more and more people engaged in demonstrating
716 in front of the consulate every week. And um to do so until they uh- Apartheid ended.
717 And you know other kinds of things, I think I mentioned to you um my friend Fannie and
718 I in particular challenged the uh pictures in the south- in the Chicago Tribune showing
719 how wonderful it was for little children in South Africa and we organized particularly
720 against the Tribune, and brought in um a member of the um women's division of the
721 African National Congress and we just had her read the names of the children who had
722 been killed and uh we had a coffin, built a coffin and we just walked up and down. And
723 this- the Tribune is also across the street, catty-corner from where the South African
724 Consulate in Chicago was. At first people thought it as hilarious, that we were doing this,
725 they'd come out of the building, laugh and point and so forth but we kept it up, day after
726 day. And finally it got to be embarrassing to them. And the- then I don't know if he was
727 the publisher, editor happened to know my husband, the men stood on the curb, that was
728 my husband, um Donald Mosbey who had been the reporter for the Defender for a long
729 time, Slim Coleman, maybe somebody else I don't remember. Publisher, whoever it was,
730 knew my husband, and he said why don't you come on in, my husband said no, no, no,
731 you talk to them they're the ones that. So Fannie and I, and I'm sad to say I don't
732 remember the sisters name who was from the ANC, we were invited in and taken up to

733 board room for the Tribune, sat down. And I don't know if we were supposed to be
734 impressed or what but, they said well what is the problem don't talking to Fannie we said
735 uh-uh no don't talk to us, tell her why you are publishing photographs saying how
736 wonderful in the midst of Apartheid; tell her this woman represents the mothers and,
737 sisters and, daughters who were murdered tell her. So that was the end of that they never
738 printed any more of those photos and we shut down the demonstration.

739

740 KM: How long did that take?

741

742 AP: Uh it took uh about a week or so, it might have been longer, memory is not serving
743 well, yeah it was not overnight by any means.

744

745 KM: And how did you encourage people to join you?

746

747 AP: Um, well as I said lots of people were in motion at that time, and so we happened to
748 be the ones who mounted the- the demonstrations so folk could come and join 'cause
749 there we were you know it was very clear and the culmination of that-

750

751 (phone rings and continues to ring)

752

753 AP: -the culmination of that um part of it was on January 15th, 19- was it '84 or '85. It
754 was after Harold Washington had been elected, yeah January, 1985. When we had about
755 a thousand people in front of the consulate including Pete Seager, um members of the
756 African National Congress and so forth. And we had had we had decided that just like in
757 Washington we were going to have a sit in. We had had one earlier attempt that had been
758 um batted down, um we had, again we're still meeting in this hotel across the street. So
759 we had asked umm what's her name um- hmm Jackie Jackson, Jesse Jackson's wife, then
760 Congressman Gus Savage, uh State Senator Richard Newhouse, and yeah I guess the
761 three of them and it might have been somebody else I don't recall. We asked them if they
762 would sit in and they had agreed to do this, so a, one of our group of organizers uh Aura
763 Shoo, who's an attorney and very active and had been active in this for quite a while, is
764 now at Northwestern I think in some kind of law institute. Anyway, we asked her to go in
765 and act as if she were going to get a visa to go to South Africa. This is a, you know, it's a
766 business building. And we had alerted the press, I think it was Art Norman in fact, so she
767 went in and her- her task was to go in and then hold the door open so that these three
768 could come in, which she did brilliantly. Art Norman was there he had his- his camera
769 from whatever channel he represents. And indeed they were arrested, but the consulate
770 refused to um charge them you know these were tree notables so they refused to charge
771 them. so that fizzled we said well we better do this again this time we organized um as I
772 said on January 15th, 1985. we had about a thousand out there and we had selected or we
773 asked in the crowd so we're not looking for notables we're looking for those who are
774 willing to go the whole distance.

775

776

777 KM: Mm-hmm.

778

779 AP: So about fifteen people agreed to this. And they went in just before the doors closed
780 in the building, and they went upstairs, they sat in. They were arrested and this time they
781 were indeed transported to the uh the jail I think it was on Chicago Avenue wherever.
782 And uh they were asked if they wanted to bail out they said no. There were notables but
783 the arresting people didn't know there were they had I think Addy Wiatt, there were
784 fifteen people, Bob Lucas, my husband, Heather Booth on and on. And they um chose to
785 stay in jail for the night. And then the next day my husband went down to see umm um
786 Mayor Washington and um you know it was a minor infraction really when you came
787 down to it my husband said no, no, no we want a trial on this one because that's the point
788 of this.

789
790 KM: Mm-hmm.

791
792 AP: And so we had a trial. We brought in Marge Benton, the late US Senator Paul Simon,
793 um all kinds of folk to testify to the heinousness of Apartheid. And the defense that we
794 used, I think I mentioned that to you before, the law of necessity based on the British, um
795 and I'm certainly not a lawyer but this is how it was explained to me. Um way back in the
796 dawn of time sailors, British sailors, were adrift at sea, three of them, one of them died
797 the other two ate him. And when they were rescued and they were of course charged with
798 murder or whatever. And the courts found them not guilty based on necessity, because of
799 their circumstances. And that's the defense that we used. We had brilliant lawyers who
800 raised this defense, and we had a- a jury. And they acquitted these people and said yes
801 that this was so heinous that they had a right to um object and to um sit in and do what
802 they needed to do. So and one woman in the jury in the front row leaped over the fence
803 said she wanted to know where were marching so we could- she could join the- the
804 movement. Now that pretty much ended um my particular work in that phase of it. The
805 demonstrations were continued. Dr. Conrad Rural in fact he's a member of the board here
806 where is his photo, somewhere up here, uh where is Dr. Rural where is he, oh there he is
807 with the dreads right there.

808
809 KM: Oh, okay.

810
811 AP: He and his group continued the demonstrations for several years in fact, at least a
812 couple of years, day in a day out.

813
814 KM: And why weren't you involved in those?

815
816 AP: Um, I was busy with other stuff by that time. Mm-hmm, it didn't mean I wasn't you
817 know I wasn't uh I was still because at North Western as I said we had this issue of uh
818 the board umm investing – so the investment thing became an issue. And Carol Braun
819 who was then a State Representative, she was out and about challenging the um then
820 Governor Thompson here for using South African steel in building the State of Illinois
821 building those kinds of investment kinds of issues.

822
823 KM: Uh, what was your reaction to um Reagan's election in 1980?

824

825 AP: Umm, well you kinda knew what- what was about to happen and if you had paid any
826 attention to his tenure as Governor of California, what he had done against um the
827 University of California system and students and the anti-free speech and the anti-
828 education almost. So it was not unexpected um at that time, I was active in um peace
829 organizations. And I what I would do if I spoke the congressional black Caucus had an
830 excellent, I don't know why they haven't continued this, they should go back to this, they
831 had developed an alternative budget. And I would use that budget as my uh the launching
832 for talking about what else we could be doing if we were not in the wars and the- the
833 stupid star war kinda thing whatever it was he was promoting you know that shield
834 you're gonna put up in the sky, so anyway that's what I was doing at that time. It really
835 was a brilliant budget, I wish somebody would be smart enough these days to bring that
836 approach back again. Particularly in this period of time, people were able to grasp how
837 their money could be used in very different ways.

838

839 KM: Do you know why they did away with that system?

840

841 AP: Well you know, people. The people who were there changed, and the people who in
842 the congress in that period of time the black Caucus members were largely activists
843 coming out of the civil rights movement or some kind of movement. People who are
844 there now that's not necessarily so, some still are, but there are many who did not come
845 out of nay movement.

846

847 KM: Umm how did you feel about the Reagan administrations policies toward South
848 Africa?

849

850 AP: It was appalling but, he got slapped because umm it wasn't in South Africa so much
851 but it was um, was it Reagan or Carter I've forgotten which one was promoting uh
852 Boudelaisian so forth and yea it wasn't South Africa. But anyway you have to look at
853 South Africa as more than just- Southern Africa as more than just South Africa things we
854 happening in Zimbabwe, in um Angola and South Africa so that whole southern tip down
855 there. And uh some of the places were going to have elections and so they had the
856 boudelasian and all this and American uh government officials were supporting these
857 backward reactionary people and anyway we- we raised up against that and they had to
858 have a second election. So you know those kinda folk lost out in the end and that was a
859 good thing. All of these forward motions uh led to an ending or participated in um and
860 complimented I would never take uh you know that we were complementary to what the
861 African National Congress and others were doing in Southern Africa.

862

863 KM: And how did you feel when Nelson Mandela was released from prison in 1990?

864

865 AP: Umm joyous of course, but also saying wow I never thought it would happen in my
866 lifetime.

867

868 KM: Really.

869

870 AP: Yeah so just absolutely. Said okay, I'm so glad to have been a part of whatever it
871 was that- that helped umm; because his release was symbolic yeah. And what an
872 extraordinary man to have endured twenty-five years of that, and prior to that the
873 oppression and all the rest of it; and to step out of there to being a fully formed um world
874 figure umm diplomatic, tactful, knowledgeable, all of that extraordinary.
875

876 KM: Do remember where you were when you heard that he was released or?
877

878 AP: No I don't, and it's interesting, I remember where I was with Kind, Bobby Kennedy,
879 JFK. I don't remember where I was, I just remember watching him walk out of the
880 Robbin Island they opened him walking out tall, elegant, erect man.
881

882 KM: And how did you react to the Truth and Reconciliation Report and Conclusions?
883

884 AP: Well ya know you- this goes back again to what you asked me earlier. About
885 growing up and so forth now, as a black person, as a person who experiences racism,
886 oppression, whatever, you have a choice. You can figure out how to be vengeful, or you
887 can look at it and say now where do we go from here uh King asked that question in one
888 of his major books. Where do we go from here? Chaos or community. And uh while
889 there's a part of you who would like to uhh you know that's angry and would like to take
890 it out, does that move you that doesn't mean that you don't want to put some things into
891 place that punish some of it at least. If you spend your time wholly focused on that you
892 can't move it forward. And it's strategically, politically everything else. If you want to
893 take hold of the power, if you want to take hold of it and do some things for people who
894 have been left out all this time you gotta come better than that. So of course you have a
895 certain ambivalence because you know that some regard its smoke and mirrors as a
896 thorough political person, I understand why it was done that way.
897

898 KM: Um you had told me on the phone that you were Dean of African American student
899 affairs at Northwestern. You talk to me a little but about your experience in that position?
900

901 AP: Hmm, in what way?
902

903 KM: Hmm, well let see, how were you active with the students?
904

905 AP: Oh yes very active yes.
906

907 KM: How so?
908

909 AP: Oh there were always issues coming up. Um, one in particular I recall the- the black
910 student athletes put together an organization, the acronym was pronounced BAUL and it
911 the acronym said Black Athletics United in the Light. And they were particularly um
912 unhappy about their treatment, you know, Northwestern is a top light school and so
913 athletes are considered scholar athletes they were particularly unhappy about their
914 treatment in the athletic department as a whole; um and so they were meeting in the

915 living room of the black house. And uh I you know would just shut the door that was
916 their business to deal with it.

917 And one day they asked me to come in to the meeting. And they said to me that
918 uh they were going to march on the administration building on campus. And I said okay
919 and I said do you want we to go with you? and they said you would? I said yes I would
920 be happy to march with you. I said now let me tell you what I'm going to do I am going
921 to call ahead and tell them we are coming. And they kinda you know, I said no trust me
922 that is the best way to do this. So, before that, that was a little later meeting, before that I
923 had called my friend, my husband's and my friend, very noted black journalist Vernon
924 Jared who had a column I think at the time in the Chicago Sun Times. I told him what as
925 going on and asked if he would be interested in interviewing these young men he said
926 absolutely. So he came in and did a column on these athletes then uhh- that situation and
927 I-

928 I knew that that's the way it should be done because when I had been appointed to
929 be Dean of African American Student Affairs, my predecessor had said to me always
930 keep Vice President Carlton informed. He was Vice President of Student Affairs, no
931 matter what it is you do not- don't blind-side him. He had the only black secretary in the
932 administration building, lovely woman, terrific woman so I knew that was the right thing
933 to do.

934 So I called up I said this is Alice we're marching on you. She said fine I'll clear
935 the way. And so we marched over there no police no nonsense. We got right up to um
936 Vice President Carlton's office. Sat down, he had been a football player um I cant
937 remember Oklahoma or somewhere. So he had already a sensibility about um athletes
938 and so forth. And these young men were scholar activists um you know scholar athletes.
939 And their spokes-person was indeed very well-spoken, Ben Butler. He explained to Vice
940 President Carlton what kinds of things had been happening to them. Vice President
941 Carlton listened very carefully and said I will look into this. And the next thing we knew
942 the um, athletic director had been fired. Whole new crew brought in.

943 And this is how Dennis Greene, and I don't- you know he's a big time coach now,
944 black football coach. This is how he got his big time start he was brought in to the new uh
945 athletic department at Northwestern.

946 And I was um I was really pleased because years and years later, I was invited
947 back to the black house for some celebration they were having. Fifteen years later twenty
948 years later after this. And one of the athletes walked up to me, has got his son with him,
949 you know, growing up. And he said dean the brothers have not forgotten. I said well that
950 you I appreciate that.

951 So yeah, those were the kinds of things there were always that had to be dealt and
952 dealt with in ways that um could help the um student prevail. Um and there were we did
953 proactive things as well. Um we started programs that um we had Sunday suppers. Were
954 discarded because a young woman one day was said to me had said at orientation she had
955 been told never to go south of one of the streets near Evanston. And I thought okay I'm
956 not gonna argue with that so I got to bring Chicago to them. So Sunday suppers there
957 were four of us women in the house, and we would cook for them. And we would do it
958 thematically, journalism, engineering, so forth. And I would bring some prominent black
959 person there who would have supper with them and talk about it.

960 I brought Lois Martin for example, he was, most people never even heard of Lois
961 Martin. He was probably one of the most influential black people ever. He was a- an
962 assistant to four democratic Pres- US Presidents. Always worked in the wings, you never
963 heard about him. I brought Vernon Jared, Carol Braun, Harold Washington, on and on to
964 uh spend Sundays with them.

965 And we had um evening with our elders, one of our- our counselors started that.
966 He brought Alberta Hunter, he brought blues people little- little um Willy Montgomery
967 whatever, and to introduce students to their heritage in terms of music jazz and blues and
968 so forth. So yeah we did a lot and I joined forces with the women's department and we
969 would bring women to campus. Um, the alphas worked with them to have the Martin
970 Luther King lecture series each year. So yeah, a lot of stuff going on, good times good
971 times.

972

973 KM: Do you feel you experiences and what you learned from being an activist really cae
974 over into that position?

975

976 AP: Oh, absolutely always, it's a way of life.

977

978 KM: Exactly. Um let's think. Can you tell be about what the things that you do today
979 things that you're active with.

980

981 AP: Umm some of them I'm not doing now in a direct way, um but I was for years on the
982 board of, I such deep respect for them, Access Living. Which is here in Chicago its the
983 board that supports the independent living for people with disabilities. I just think that's
984 extraordinary. I remember being on that board, and this is just- I didn't have time
985 anymore for all of this. I remember being on the board with a woman who could not mve
986 more than one finger, and I thought this is- is really incredible no one should give up on
987 life. I such respect for the founder and CEO Marca Bursto amazing woman and amazing
988 work that she's done.

989 Um as I said I'm active in my sorority in terms of scholarship committee this
990 year. What else, umm stuff doesn't come to mind now, well here well here with BUFI
991 doing a lot in terms of education in the area. And also kind of solidifying working with
992 BUFI in terms of an acid based um way of looking and being in the neighborhood.

993

994 KM: You had mentioned something on the phone about reactivating relationships
995 between African Americans and Indians can you tell me a little about that?

996

997 AP: Yes and that's kind of on hold right now but a um a uh someone we got to know
998 fairly well was the um the um what do you call it umm he was under um Secretary
999 General Cofianon the head of the um public affairs for the United Nations. And we got to
1000 know him fairly well, it his cooperation and that of the Secretary General's office we did
1001 three things.

1002 Um met him by happenstance we were friendly with the European Union
1003 Ambassador to the United Nations. Once he invited us to his home in Washington DC to-
1004 in New York, I'm sorry, for lunch. And he wanted us to meet uh some of the other
1005 ambassadors. So when we were at lunch, this man walked in late and sat down and

1006 listened quietly my husband was talking about all the kinds of things we have been doing
1007 over the years and afterward he said to us I like what you're talking about you know do
1008 you think you can come and talk with me in my office? We said sure who are you?

1009 So that's when we found out who he was. So, we went there and we talked to him
1010 about um that W.B. Dubois and other black people who had been in at the beginning of
1011 the foundation at the founding of the United Nation and we were dismayed and there had
1012 not been that this relationship had not been kept up. And that particular time I think
1013 Cofianon was under tremendous pressure so he said um let me see what we can do to
1014 kind of reactivate that. And um so he said um well let he talk to um the S-G that what
1015 they call him, Cofianon, and see what he says about it.

1016 Got back to Chicago and he called and said S-G says can you, um we had
1017 suggested that we would bring journalists because then they could go back and write
1018 about it if they chose to. And they said can you do it in 10 days? My husband said hmm-
1019 hmm and, so he- he did. He got several Pulitzer Prize winners, we had um quite a few
1020 journalists um who came. And it was very interesting because they assumed that we
1021 wanted to hear about AIDS or something. And um Ellis Coast, one of the Pulitzer Prize
1022 winners, you know interrupted, politely, and said I wanna about- and he laid out. They
1023 realized this was a very well informed group so they them they went back hmm they
1024 changed it all together.

1025 We went to lunch with Cofianon and he was so enthralled with these 'cause they
1026 were you know, they were asking him very intelligent you know, informed kinds of
1027 questions. He was only supposed to stay with us about only fifteen minutes well forty
1028 minutes later these people got to go- go- go and he's still you know into this.

1029 And that led to two other events. The second one I didn't really have to do much
1030 with, it was more somebody else's work. The third one, we took uh well actually
1031 arranged for eighty-one civil society, people from civil society, umm black leaders to go
1032 and have a day at the United Nations, hey paid their own way. It was an incredible
1033 experience and um.

1034 So anyway all of this is the prelude, then he left. He- he was going to run, this was
1035 Shashi, ran for Secretary General after Cofianon's term was over. He did not win, Moon
1036 won, and Shashi went back to India. And lo and behold, ran for office, ran for the
1037 parliament, Moon won a huge amount. And because of that was appointed the um
1038 Minister for external affairs. So it's with him, that, it's kind of on hold. A lot of things are
1039 going on now, swirling around in India. So that's kind of on hold, but we are looking for
1040 an opportunity to take a delegation of black Americans in the same spirit as reconnecting
1041 black Americans in the UN as reconnecting based on um Howard Thermon's visits back
1042 in the 1930s with um Neru, and then um Martin Luther King's, I know Howard Thermon
1043 with Ghandi, and Martin Luther King's and Mrs. King's with Neru and they how all of
1044 that informed the civil rights movement and this is where the whole thing was a peaceful
1045 non-violent approach to it. You know have it philosophical groundings.

1046
1047 KM: Umm are there any other events we haven't touched on that you'll never forget,
1048 that'll be in your mind forever?

1049
1050 AP: Probably.

1051

1052 KM: They're in there somewhere.
1053
1054 AP: They're in the somewhere, yep.
1055
1056 KM: Umm, what challenges do you think South Africa faces today?
1057
1058 AP: Umm, in particular for all the people to realize um the benefits of having won against
1059 Apartheid. That means economically, educationally all of that. To share- and in other
1060 words to have for well- being for their lives, that is a challenge.
1061 It's not just exclusive to South Africa. I mentioned before, you have to look at
1062 what's going on in all of Southern Africa. You have to look at what's going on in
1063 Zimbabwe. I was in Zimbabwe and- you know what you- the reality of being in the world
1064 is a very difficult thing, because you may win- you may win the skirmish but then how do
1065 you actually deliver?
1066 And that is- that is a serious problem, I was in Zimbabwe. I've never been to
1067 South Africa, but I was in Zimbabwe. And I saw exactly what I'm sure is true in South
1068 Africa. That the people who are still the tellers in the banks and the this and the that all
1069 the money is still under the control of the people who were part of the Apartheid
1070 movment. And there you are, they knew how to manage the affairs of government. And
1071 it's a very- it's a dilemma, it's a dilemma. And um so it requires that you somehow in
1072 some instances you step in and intervene. At the same time –see ya- at the same time you
1073 also have lay the path for the education of people who will be the next generation to run
1074 things and be prepared so all this has so move forward at the same time. And all of that in
1075 the midst of, as you said, reconciliation, anger, horrible disparities, and so forth. It is um
1076 it's very difficult.
1077
1078 KM: What was it that you did exactly when you were in Zimbabwe?
1079
1080 AP: I was there for a conference, yeah. So I didn't- I happened to know someone and I
1081 was staying with that family that why I got more engaged than other folk did.
1082
1083 KM: When was that?
1084
1085 AP: Oh well that was back in the 80's, mm-hmm.
1086
1087 KM: Umm you brought up a lot how you were in touch with a lot of very prominent, very
1088 influential people in all aspects of what you did. How do you think- how did you have so
1089 many contacts? How did you reach all of these people?
1090
1091 AP: In terms of what?
1092
1093 KM: Umm, you were talking about the Sunday dinners; and how you got so many people
1094 to come in and speak. How is it that you had those connections?
1095

1096 AP: Well my husband was the founder of the Afro- American Patrolman's League so he
1097 knew people. I had been umm- well as I said active in lots of things so um, you know just
1098 in the course of the work and activism you come into contact with people.

1100 KM: And we've touched on a lot; and how much of a family business activism has been
1101 for you and how it is such a way of life. How has that um- how has that been passed
1102 down to your children and your family now?

1104 AP: It is, my son is here and he is um very active with BUFI, and in particular with what
1105 they call the mash unit. Where they work with um young brothers out on the streets and
1106 you know work to bring them in from the cold so to speak.

1107 My daughter is um just finished her masters in museum studies. And she, her
1108 work is on the um displacement of um- um Acadians in Canada and how they got to New
1109 Orleans and how they got to New Orleans and became Cajuns and all of that so. And
1110 when she was in high school in fact and what was that the- this was the first gulf war and
1111 she led a demonstration out of the high school and into the streets against the war. I think
1112 she was fifteen at the time.

1114 KM: Did you know that was going on?

1116 AP: I didn't know till later that she had done this, no, no.

1118 KM: Were you proud or were you like what he hell are you thinking?

1120 AP: No, I was, I was proud of her, said wow, who knew.

1122 KM: Did she get a lot of support from her classmates?

1124 AP: Yeah she did, mm-hmm. And she was dancer she was not- you know. She was the uh
1125 dance performing arts program; so I said wow okay.

1127 KM: Umm, how have you- how have you taught them about activism?

1129 AP: By example. Again just the way we were, you know we have the people who come
1130 to our home. Umm we during the um Anti- Apartheid movement we frequently and
1131 members of the ANC staying at the house; we had um the first uh fundraiser for Harold
1132 Washington was at our dining room table. First, you know, home kinda fundraiser. Paul
1133 Simon has been a guest. All kinda folk have been in that house. And have just been there
1134 you know, so the same way I was raised people would just- there they were.

1136 KM: Umm how to you encourage others to become active?

1138 AP: By example, mm-hmm.

1140 KM: And how has being active changed your life?

1141

1142 AP: No, as I said its always been, its away of life. So there was no change its just
1143 continuation.
1144
1145 KM: It is your life. Always been and always will be.
1146
1147 AP: Cradle to the grave.
1148
1149 KM: Is there anything you would have done differently in your experiences with
1150 activism, up till now?
1151
1152 AP: Mmm, I'm not sure that I could say yes or no on that because I always try to act on
1153 what I knew and the people around me that I respected. And to make decisions based on
1154 that, so I'm not sure that I could have, really.
1155
1156 KM: And what was your biggest contribution to the Anti-Apartheid Movement?
1157
1158 AP: Oh, I don't know, I don't look at it as being an individual thing. I look at is as being
1159 a part of a group of people who successfully put together the Chicago Free South Africa
1160 Movement. And worked with those who were in the Mozambique movement, in the
1161 Angola movement, the so forth and so on. That's what movement means. It's not you
1162 know, you aren't looking for praise and glory for yourself you're part of a movement,
1163 you movement to be successful and you want to win in the end.
1164
1165 KM: We had discussed on the phone about um the movement being form many different
1166 angles. Can you discuss a little about that?
1167
1168 AP: Well just what I was saying. You know, for example, Prexy while he was working
1169 on Anti- Apartheid in South Africa he was also very active in creating the Mozambique
1170 end of it umm- umm you know, the Anti- Crugerand the this the that.
1171 It was clear that this was a whole package that uh South Africa was maintaining
1172 this racist, oppressive form of government, because many forces were in operation at the
1173 same time. And so it meant being hydra-headed, if you will, being like an octopus. You
1174 know, you had to deal with it on all kinds of levels, because you had to chop off each arm
1175 of it in order to end it. That was- that's what a movement is.
1176
1177 KM: Is there anything else we didn't get to that you would like to add?
1178
1179 AP: No, I don't thing so, I never talk this much about myself.
1180
1181 KM: I'm very glad you did, very glad.
1182
1183 AP: Thank you for your patience.
1184
1185 KM: The archives are very glad you talked about yourself this much, for as long as you
1186 did.
1187

1188 KM: Ok that's the end of all my questions, thank you so much.

1189

1190 AP: All the best to you.

1191