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Interview with Clarice Durham

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LAUREN ALEXANDER: this is so high tech (laughs)

LA: ok so today’s date is Tuesday March 30, my name is Lauren Alexander and this is Clarice Durham were in her apartment at 2625 S. Michigan. (umm) How long were you active in the Anti-Apartheid movement Clarice?

CLARICE DURHAM: I say maybe, maybe ten years.

LA: ten years ok, and you started in?

CD: in the early 70’

LA: ok, the early 70’

LA: um, and you were born in?

CD: Mobile, Alabama

LA: in Mobile, Alabama and where you father and mother born there?

CD: yes

LA: and you told me you moved to Tennessee when you were eleven?

CD: No, I moved to Tennessee when I was about four, four or five, I moved to Chattanooga Tennessee, and we moved there because my father gotten a job as manager as an insurance company, branch of the insurance company—

LA: ok, alright so like I said I’m just going to start with some biographical questions, then (umm) a narrative, and then your activism work with the Anti-Apartheid
LA: what is your earliest memory of your parents Clarice?

CD: when I was a child in mobile, we lived (umm) in a house that still stands, and I can remember going to church with my parents, I can remember Christmas celebrations and so I have had very early memories of them—

LA: Right and it was you and your brother?

CD: Well two brothers, and a sister

LA: Was Christmas your favorite holiday growing up?

CD: As with all children (laughs)

LA: (laughs) right, do you remember what your favorite toy was growing up?

CD: Dolls, yes and I can remember my mother going to great lengths to try find some black dolls Christmas time.

And I didn’t say that I had a third brother who was born in Chattanooga.

LA: so, are you the oldest, so who is the oldest out of your siblings?

CD: a brother, I’m the middle

LA: ok and you are the only girl—

CD: no I have a sister

LA: what kind of rules did your parents have?

CD: they weren’t strict I mean they gave us freedom, freedom you know to play and to have friends, but they did have rules I guess like the ten commandants. To be kind to one
another, and they really stressed family loyalty. They also were very proud of who they were as black people and taught us about people in our race that accomplished things, (uh...) I think instilled that in us a feeling of belonging to a proud group of people.

LA: who did you consider to be the disciplinarian growing up (laughs)?

CD: (laughs) my mother, my father he might have been called a workaholic (laughs) the work took him out of the home a lot (uh) she would sometimes defer to him but she was with us all the time so she was the disciplinarian.

LA: how were you expected to behave as a child?

CD: to be honest, to be kind, to respect elders, and uh to do as well as possible in school, education was quite important to them—

LA: --did your dad and mom both go to college or graduate from--?

CD: my dad did he went to Bradley University I don’t know if he got a degree, but I know he attended my mother just went through high school but she had a lot of training in music and domestic science because she was a wonderful seamstress.

LA: what was your memory of Mobile from your youth?

CD: it was a place where we had the freedom on our own, in our own home; I was small so there wasn’t a lot I remember going about in town. I remember going to church, going to visit some cousins who lived close by, to visits a great aunt who her sister was my great grandmother, my great grandmother had moved to some of the family to Chicago but her sister stayed in Mobile, so we visited her.

LA: was your neighborhood segregated in Mobile?

CD: oh yes—

LA: -- what was that like?

CD: in fact I didn’t realize it we went back to visit several times, and our house was not
too far from the city dump. (Laughs)

LA: (laughs) (uh) was there certain neighborhoods your parents told you not to visit or--

CD: no because we didn’t go unescorted expect for these visits I talked about because
they were close by but as far as going to the main part of town we would go for Mardi
Gras, I remember the Mardi Gras parade. And we may have gone downtown section to
shop but I was always accompanied by my mother.

LA: what was the hardest thing to get used to like from moving to Mobile to Tennessee
was there a difference?

CD: yes, because we were able to be more independent we had more school friends
because we went to school in Chattanooga. My older brother had started in mobile, but
my sister and I and my younger brother started in Chattanooga. (Uh) we were enrolled in
a program YWCA so we made friends there, and in church we went regularly to Sunday
school.

LA: Do you remember some of your dreams growing up as a child?

CD: it’s funny I thought I liked a dancer (laughs) we had a playground instructor who at
the end of every season would have some type of program and she taught us some simple
dances, and then we had a friend who was really beautiful dancer and I liked the way she
moved, also liked music, but I wasn’t too serious about it, that I regret to this day.

LA: -- not being involved in music?

CD: yes, Piano lessons because I didn’t practice which is absolutely necessary. (Laughs)

LA: well did you take any dance classes?

CD: no

LA: so you would say that religion is an important part of your life what religion did you
guys follow?

CD: it was Methodist Zion
LA: what role did it play in your life; it was very significant you guys went to church—

CD: well it was a part of our life, a part of our routine. Until we came to Chicago I continued a church but not at AME Zion at Good Sheppard Congregational it’s the Church of Christ now, there we became involved in a young person’s discussion group that met after church services and I met a lot of my real long friends there but at some point I stopped going to church and I don’t have a church affiliation now but I feel like I live a Christian life.

LA: what would you guys discuss at these discussion groups?

CD: current issues, yes not religion but community issues and-

LA: --and this is when you were in Chicago?

CD: yes, in Chicago

LA: why do you think when you came to Chicago you religion you weren’t into religion as much?

CD: well, because we came to Chicago because the death of both of my parents and we came to live with my maternal grandfather and his family and at that time it was depression and families lived together and in this one house there were I guess four or five different branches of the family. One was a minister he actually was a worker in the packing house industry but got the call to the ministry I don’t know what kind of training he had for it but he founded a church and that was an AME Zion church which still exist today ST. Mark AME Zion church. We had to go to church service every Sunday, morning service, evening service; weekend services (laughs) because we were the congregation. (laughs) so I think I had my fill of church.

LA: (laughs) I understand what was your favorite thing to do with your friends growing up you know any games?

CD: (um) we play softball, we never did skate I never learned to skate nor ride a bike till I was a teenager ,we would just go to the beach, go to the park, go on walks anything that didn’t cost money if we had money we go see movies.
LA: what was your worse childhood memory?

CD: I guess the death of my parents, in fact I’m sure and then the death of my youngest brother once we come to Chicago both sad memories—

LA: -- do you mind me asking how did your parents die?

CD: they both had turbulent, my father died first and my mother died a year later.

LA: and how old were you?

CD: I was eleven when she died eleven when I came to Chicago.

LA: ok with your brother?

CD: yes

LA: and how did your younger brother die?

CD: I’m not sure but he had always been a sickly child I remember when he was born the first time I heard a specialist for you know children the physician you know who took care of him so he was always fragile and I don’t know if it was meningitis I’m really not sure.

LA: it’s ok, how did you feel it was such a young age was it hard for you and your brother moving to Chicago and trying to move on?

CD: it was hard because of the atmosphere my parents created for us was quite different what we experienced when we came to Chicago in fact we referred to the uncles and aunts to being old fashioned. You know, They had stricter rules, and were I guess more church-orientated then my parents, you know it was like a culture shock come to live with them although they were good people, kind people but just different.

LA: who were some of your role models growing up?
CD: I guess I would say my brother, my oldest brother, in fact think he had the most
influence on my life as an activist, he was quite bright and he had met friends who lived
in a settlement house, Lincoln Center which is know the center for intercity studies, but it
was settlement house where a lot of social workers and artist people who had very
progressive ideas lived and talked. He made that connection and brought me and my
sister and then my brother along with him and we became interested in the same kind of
organizations and events that he was interested in, he became our family leader I guess
you would say.

LA: ok, what were as a teenager you would be attending high school in Chicago what
were some of your expectations of high school, were you nervous?

CD: not particularly because, I went to Doolittle Elementary school in sixth grade and I
was there just for a semester really, then I went to Wendell Phillips for supposedly
seventh and eighth grade, and I expected to graduate and go into to Wendell Phillips High
school but there was a transfer made so there was no graduation of my class, so I just
went to gasohol but being in the High school building there was no fright. And again
my brother paved the way for us he would let the teachers know. (laughs)

LA: (laughs) so you had a connection did you like high school?

CD: I did (laughs)

LA: what was your favorite subject?

CD: I liked Zoology, and a one time I thought I would be a zoology teacher but that was
before they combined botany and zoology and it may have been because the teacher,
another thing I liked was extra circular and that was working on the school newspaper
and I liked the two sponsors of the paper and that was again following the footsteps of
my brother who was the editor of the paper.

LA: was there any other clubs you were involved in?

CD: well there was one kind of a hostess club where we would set up the lunch room
with center pieces and acted sort of as hostess for the groups that came in for lunch which
made lunch time a pleasant time. And I also belonged to the student council that had
input into activities and issues around the school.
LA: what was your role in the student council?

CD: just as a member I didn’t hold office.

LA: ok, ok what was your first job Clarice?

CD: it was in high school the NYA under Franklin Roosevelt National Youth Administration and I worked in the office of the school psychologist just helping with clerical work. I think my pay was six dollars a week, not a week a month. (laughs)

LA: (laughs) as a teenager how would you say you were affected by the civil rights movement?

CD: I was very much aware of the inequalities that existed the segregation I can remember passing leaflets related to the Scottsboro case, these were young men who were arrested they were hob being from Chattanooga to some other place and there were some girls on the train and the girls claimed that they have been raped by these young men and so they were arrested and sentenced to dies and there was quite an outcry and campaign to save their lives and to get freedom for them and so I can remember that as being one the first cases I was involved in. before that I can remember there was a discussion group that met in Ellis park which was close by to where I was living and they were called reds, well at that time people were being evicted from their homes because they couldn’t pay the rent so when these guys would hear about it. They would go put these people back into their living quarters and almost dare anybody to come and put them out again. So my folks you know kind of looked down at them with distain. But they were heroic as far as I was concerned and I met these older relatives I had.

LA: describe the time; you said you and your husband met in high school—

CD: no, it was much later it I had finished junior college when I met him, again my brother (laughs)

I didn’t realize how much my brother was in involved (laughs) I met him through my brothers because they were both writers and they were in some kind of writing group.

LA: describe the time when you guys first met?
CD: it was at the office African National Congress I had decided to do something you know related to the Civil rights movement and so I thought I could type and do some type of office work, and so I had gone to the office to offer my services and it was just coincidence that the two of them my brother and my husband to be came into the office and we met there.

And I might say there is another person who was influential in my life and he was in charge of the office and his name was Ishmael Flurry.

LA: what was the name, do you remember the name of the writing center or group?

LA: you were involved?—

CD: no my brother and my husband.

LA: what was the writing for?

CD: they were writing poetry

LA: ok ,why did you decide to go to the college you chose?

CD: I went to Junior college because it didn’t cost as much as a regular school; I had gotten a scholarship to Fisk University. But I wasn’t able to go the scholarship didn’t cover all of the expenses at that time I was living with an aunt.

And I didn’t mention that the fact my grandfather died soon after we came to Chicago and so we went to go live with my mother’s sister and she had been able through the people at Lincoln Center to get some aid for us it was called Children and Family services, so she was able to get assistance. And we were just in poor circumstances, you know we were never hungry or without clothing anything like that, but extras were out of the question. She just couldn’t afford the expense of me going away to school, so I went to Wilson Junior College.

LA: how did going to Pestazolli Forbel teachers college influence your academic and social life?

CD: I went there for evening school and I had always wanted to be a teacher I had in the meantime gotten a job with the state of Illinois unemployment compensation office and I
knew I didn’t want that kind of job. So I decided I better get into school and be trained
for what I want to do. And a friend of mine was interested in early childhood education
so the both of us ended up in Pestazolli Forbel College.

LA: so why did you decide to become a teacher?

CD: I had in Chattanooga I had a teacher that I had admired very much and in high
school there was a chemistry teacher I wasn’t that proficient in chemistry but he was just
good person he seemed down to earth and really supported children and encouraged so
I liked that.

LA: I was going to say that’s my next question who was the teacher you learned the most
from?

CD: well the teacher in Mobile and that was when I was in the primary grades I think
she taught me in the third grade and her name was Barnette and she was from a family
that was very close to my family in fact we kept in touch with some of the younger
members of the family who moved to Chicago and were still in touch and they were the
last family we were with before we left Chattanooga. So we had a connection not only in
school but in our social life as well.

LA: why did you decide to go to Roosevelt University for your masters?

CD: Roosevelt had a reputation of being a liberal school that encouraged African
Americans students again I was earning more and could afford to pay the tuition. Just I
could not afford to go to Northwestern nor the University of Chicago, I had gone to
Northwestern for a seminar and I like that but I couldn’t continue graduate school. So I
got to Roosevelt and a lot of friends have gone there.

LA: so you taught nursery school, what was your favorite part of nursery school?

CD: well I liked the openness of the children who were receptive for the most part there
were some trouble makers (laughs) even in nursery school but for the most part they were
opened to you know whatever you had to offer and really honest in their reactions and
relation with you.

LA: did you teach anywhere else?
CD: yea, I taught at Crispus Atticus that is at 39th and state st. its subsequently closed now but that was the first job I had at public school and that was a traumatic experience.

LA: how was that?

CD: I think there were about 75 children in the class and what happened is that the principal assigned two teachers per class in order to keep some type of control to teach whatever we could but it was such a change from preschool where the class load is limited and you get to know all of the children very well but this was terrible. (laughs)

LA: (laughs) how long did you teach there before?

CD: I taught there from 58, yea I didn’t realize it was that long from 58 to about 65 and things got better yes, I must say.

LA: what happened?

CD: just better children in the classroom. And I guess I made an impression on the principal because when the Board of Education decided to open some head start classrooms she recommended that I be one of the head start teachers and I was, one at Dodge school, and one at (uh) Drake elementary school, and one at Dugella School but I was at Drake School and that was in 1965.—

LA:-- and that was better?

CD: oh, yes

LA: tell me about your most profound or evident academic achievement you have or what do you feel like has been your most rewarding academic achievement?

CD: well I was valdictiroian of my high school class and I did well and subsequent classes again as a head start teacher I was recommended for this seminar at Northwestern University, and it was a seminar about teaching in urban areas, and I enjoyed that very much we were connected to communities we would go out to visit organization in communities. Just to get a feel of what was happening in various locations so that was quite of an achievement.
LA: how has your education help you become aware of the Anti-Apartheid movement?

CD: there was a teacher in high school who name was Mary Herrick she was a civic teacher and she was an activist in fact I think she was on the founders of the Teachers Union and also the League of Women’s Voters but she exposed all her students to government and how government functions, and field trips were made to court rooms although I never went on one of those field trips, those were things she did, she had a tremendous memory you can see her years later and you might see her and she would remember your name. and I don’t know if you’ve heard of Tim Black but she took a special liking for him and made it possible for him to teach at Dosbal High School and he has gone on to do greater things but she was just a wonderful influence.

LA: she helped you become aware of the Anti-Apartheid movement in South Africa?

CD: no because that was back in 1937 when I graduated so that was not an issue at that time.

LA: ok, we’ll tell me about your first time dealing with racism?

CD: indirectly in Chattanooga because the schools were separated and just upfront we had to pass some couple of the schools white children went to and they were in much better conditions than the one we had, but we had wonderful teachers that tried to give us everything we could and tried to help us along the way. But I can remember that feeling of put down.

LA: when did you first become aware of the Apartheid movement?

CD: it was the early 70’s, because I became a member of NAMSAL maybe around 1974 or 5 and there was movements to give sanctions against South Africa there were movements against the (don’t know what the interviewee is saying) based on the polices of south African government. There were certain things going on that I was aware of, and I don’t think in fact I know I wasn’t in any particular group at the time I worked in the NAACP and concerned then was around segregation here in Chicago and nationwide, but the Chicago branch was worried about what was going on in Chicago. So I was always aware of what was going on in terms of civil rights.

LA: what other activist work did you participate in before 1980?

CD: NAMSAL I guess that was it.
LA: what was your first reaction to the Anti-Apartheid movement, what were some of your feeling and emotions that came up?

CD: well I was applaud and I felt you know that this was something that should just not happen, I think when the students protested and some were killed and that was in 1976, and these students in the Soweto Community and might say I was aware of the fact that black people were being uprooted from their homes and made to move into these communities for strictly south African blacks. These students were protesting that they had to learn the language of the Dutch. What was that language? (long pause) anyhow they wanted to learn in their own language or English but not in Dutch language, so they protested and several of them were killed and then that just aroused feelings of really feelings of enrage that something like this can go and the feeling that something had to be done to stop it, I might say also that I began to see the connections I felt that if Africa became free it would mean a lot for the black people here in the united states and vice versa if we were able to reach equality it would mean a lot people in Africa so I saw an international connection.

LA: what interested you the most about this movement compared to the civil rights movement versus any other movement?

CD: well I seen changes you know in both places I was thrilled when Nelson Mandela was free from prison and was able to become you know president of the South African government I was thrilled when Ghana gained its freedom and all of the other nations, I had visited Africa at the time the country was called Zaire and it was where Muhmmhead Ali fought George Foreman and so I went there for the fight and the reason I went was because my husband was following a lead around the information so he could help him write his autobiography, so I went along as a part of an entourage. (laughs) just the feeling I got when I got off the plane and steeped on the ground—

LA:--yea I was going to ask you about that

CD: it was something that was just hard to describe, but I also saw the conditions that people were living under there.

LA: why did you decide to become an activist?

CD: I always felt like I had a responsibility that if I knew that there were wrongs being
done that it’s just wasn’t an option to be quiet about it and I just wanted to be involved
and develop any changes, and I don’t know how I developed that feeling but that is the
way I felt.
LA: was your husband ever involved in your activist work?

CD: he was involved but in a different way, he was a writer and he was a feature writer
for the Chicago defender newspaper and he was on staff there, until staff decided they
wanted a union and the administration at Dosbal wasn’t for that so he was fired from that
job but he had training with the WPA Works Progress Administration under Franklin
Roosevelt, he had training as a writer there but prior to that he had written poetry and I
had mentioned that he and my brother had been in this poetry group and he had poems
published in newspapers and magazines, so his work was not on the streets you know but
in his writing he was very much involved.

LA: I know you say your brother influenced you the most, who influenced you the most
to become involved in the Apartheid movement?

CD: I think it was Ishmael Flurry(??) because after my son was born and he was a
premature baby, and I had devoted allot of time to take care of him and I fallen out of
political and activism and I guess he, Ishmael Flurry(??) was someone who was always
encouraging people to get involved, and so we talked and I didn’t know what group I
wanted to be associated with so he introduced me to NAMSAL so I attended a couple of
meetings and I liked what I heard and saw and decided I wanted to become a member.
LA: what would they talk about at the meetings?
CD: they would talk about the police sanctions against South Africa and we also put on
several meetings and forums and events where representatives from the ANC African
National Congress would come to speak before the group we were also concerned about
what was going on on Rhodesia that is now Zimbabwe so we had several annual dinners
where these speakers would come to inform people about what was going on and
in-between these different discussions we would show some films about what was
going on, I can remember one but I can’t remember the title of it but it dealt with the
infant mortality rate in South Africa or Africa in general.

LA: how did that make you feel?

CD: just terrible

LA: I can imagine describe the structure of NAMSAL it was the Nationalist—
CD: -- Anti-imperialist movement in Solidarity of African Liberation and so that’s why
the acronym is NAMSAL (laughs)

LA: (laughs) that was long—

CD: (laughs) that was long too

LA: yes, did you guys just refer to it as NAMSAL

CD: yes,

LA: what was the structure like at NAMSAL?

CD: well there was the usual president, secretary, treasurer, I can’t remember if we had
particular standing committees but we have various committees that would plan the
meetings and dinners, and fortunately I held onto three of those programs, but
unfortunately there are allot of things I did not keep and I realize now how important it is
to keep those papers and make them available for future generations.

[CD begins to show dinner programs]

CD: this was one and the speaker at this dinner was a man by the name of Criupus
Inobolo (??) well you might look at if you want to see the spelling and also a
congresswoman from Chicago, but he was from Rhodesia and was one of the people
fighting there for the freedom of Rhodesia and that was in 1976 I think. And this one was
the 5th annual, and this one I kept some notes on I was the mistress of ceremonies so I
kept some notes on what I had to say, and this one the people who were honored were
Wesley South (??) who was a newspaper and radio journalist, and Karen Mosley Brown
(??) who eventually became senator, and at that particular dinner Harold Washington
spoke and Gus Savage and at the time both of them were running for congress,--

LA: so the dinners were very informative?

CD: yes, and they were fund-raisers as well

LA: so would you guys ask to make donations?

CD: yes well we charged for the dinner and then would ask for donations as well. And
this one, I was in charge of the committee and there was some misunderstanding because we had expected William Hatcher who was the mayor of Gary, we expected him to be one the speakers but for some reason he wasn’t able to make it but at that meeting Barbara Masckela (??) who was connected to the UN I believe she was the main speaker and the people who we honored then I don’t think are as quite as well known as Wesley South (??)(and Karen Mosley Brown ??) but one was a man by the name of Eugene Ford he doesn’t give enough credit for the things that he’s done but he was president of the Dosbal Museum board when they moved from Margret burrows house to the facilities they have now in Washington Park, so he has always been active in the civil rights movement but a very unassuming man.

LA: so you have a lot of the dinner stuff?

CD: just three

[LA/ CD ruffle through dinner programs]

LA: so you did the press releases?

CD: no it was a young woman by the name of Leona Kemmens (??) I think her name was given as the contact on the press releases

LA: yes, well yours is the contact

CD: mine

LA: yes

CD: that must have be the one where Masckela (??) spoke, ok so I was on that one but Leona on a couple of others.

LA: so what were some of your responsibilities in the organization?

CD: well I was treasurer for awhile and that was more than enough responsibility to have (laughs)
LA: well what were some of your jobs, tasks?

CD: well to receive any contributions that came in, and deposit them into the bank and keep record who gave what, how much we had, what we spent, and what little we had left. (laughs)

LA: how did your organization work with the African National Congress?

CD: well, primarily by having speakers from ANC come but also supporting there exile groups and there was one, we got a letter saying they were very much in need of supplies for babies, and listed you know the things that they wanted among the list they call them napkins but their diapers, so we had a quite successful diaper campaign and a lot of people asked why are sending them diapers, well we said this is what the people asked for and this is what they need, you send them what they need you know not what you think they need.

LA: right, exactly what was your organizations main concern during the Anti- Apartheid movement?

CD: that the laws be changed that the blacks south Africans have the same freedoms and rights that any other citizens of the country have, that the political prisoners be freed, and I might say that towards the end of existence NAMSAL the free south African movement was organized and I think we just sort of merged with that movement and discontinued any work with NAMSAL there was never a formal disbandment of the group, but remembers became involved in the free south Africa movement.

LA: you became involved as well?

CD: yes

LA: what impact did you have on your son, your family at the time during your activist?

CD: well it’s my son he has not join groups such as I he has always supported the movement he has had a great understanding of what was going on, he makes his contribution through music, he’s a musician in fact he going to appear at the dinner or group that I’m connected with now, with another long name which is the National Alliance against racial and political oppression.
LA: what are you doing in this group?

CD: well I’m co-chairman of the group in Chicago

LA: well what's that about the National Alliance against Racial and Political Oppression about?

CD: well were concerned with the criminal justice system, the organization was formed around the movement of the freeing of Angela Davis so its mission is to free all political prisoners, but it has extended now we are concerned with police brutality, and with treatment of prisoners the fact that the system now seems like a system of punishment rather than correction of I’m trying to think of the word but anyways, does nothing to teach people how to better citizens, you know to give them the education and skills that they need when they come out of prison ready to be contributing members of the community, we are also concerned with the lack of inadequate healthcare the prisoners get, and we are opposed to the death penalty.

LA: describe your first demonstration you participated with?

CD: I really can’t remember (fire truck alarm)

LA: ok, was there any demonstrations that were given in the school or maybe when working with NAMSAL?

CD: I can remember going to meetings being involved in 1948 in the founding of the progressive party, when Henry Wallace was the candidate for President I can remember going to that convention that was in Philadelphia, I didn’t go as a delegate but as a observer, on the heels of that there were several mass meetings held in Chicago that supported that party and election and those were really exciting meetings, I know one Michigan Jackson (?) sang, and Paula Ruthson (?) and you know others, those were meeting I guess you would not call them demonstrations and such but mass meetings.

LA: how did you stay informed? (fire truck alarm)

CD: through the organizations I was involved in, through reading, and I guess I read the daily work the publication of the communist party, and various pamphlets I don’t remember the titles but through readings and discussions. (fire truck alarm)
LA: Have there been any other movements you have participated in besides the Anti-Apartheid, and free South Africa?

CD: well there was the desegregation of the Chicago public schools and I worked on the education committee and the NAACP and I can remember a demonstration by the community where they boycotted classes at the schools, and I was a teacher then at Crispus Attickus a kindergarten teacher, and I remember wishing that I could be out there with the people out protesting there but I had my job to keep, and I had my fingers crossed that no children would come to class that day (laughs), and they didn’t it was quite a successful boycott.

LA: what was that like being a part of the boycott the feelings and energy was it--?

CD: it was dramatic, I have a good friend now who actually stood in front of a bulldozer I think they were trying to build a foundation for mobile unit you know rather than the children going to empty classrooms in white communities they would put up these mobile units, so they were getting ready to construct one and she stood in front of the bulldozer to try and stop them. (Laughs) and then of course we passed out leaflets and information to within the community.

LA: would a lot of people show up to these boycotts?

CD: yes, and I belonged to a group called teachers for quality education because we felt that sometimes neighborhood compositions did not allow integration of school within those districts without busting up some kind of thing, and so we felt wherever these schools existed there should be quality education, so I was in a group like that which was not really a long lived group.

LA: what do you think was the hardest challenge your organization faced?

CD: the challenge of change, of people acting change, people accepting the fact that some have to give up what they have, and have on the basis of unfair practices and everybody has to sacrifice if there is going to be change and that people can’t be silent and can expect somebody else to do that they have to become apart.

LA: what was the biggest contribution your organization made towards the Apartheid
CD: making people aware I think of what was going on in a small way but as they say every little bit counts, so I feel like we did make a contribution we were able to attract audiences to come to the events we had and hope for these stimulated people to themselves to become involved.

LA: Were there ever tensions or conflicts that arise among anti-apartheid activists you worked with or, were everyone peaceful and got along?

CD: in the group that I was in yes, there might have been confusions you know in broader groups but I’m not aware of what those were.

LA: do you remember the last project your organization worked on against the Apartheid movement?

CD: I think the last, was the last dinner that we had where we had Barbara Masekla(??)and she was quite a dynamic speaker and we were proud that she was able to be with us, but we had a speaker at another meeting and he had come to the united states to work at the united nations and his responsibility was to make people aware of what was going on and to create support for the sanctions against the government and I jotted down his name let’s see. [CD ruffles through his paper to find name]

LA: you’re so prepared (laughs)

CD: (laughs) his name was J-o-h-n-y M-a-k-a-t-i and he spoke at one of our forums but I’m not sure which one, another speaker we had was Dennis Bruttiss(??) he did speak and so we felt we were making a contribution by introducing these people to the Chicago community.

LA: how did you participate in divestment?

CD: I don’t think I had any direct, it was just general divestment movement but as far as calling on particular originations institutions I supported whatever was being proposed but I had no outstanding role in that.

LA: how did you react to Reagan’s election in 1980?

CD: ohh gosh I thought it was the worst thing that could have happened, he went to
Philadelphia, Mississippi, to announce his candidacy and Philadelphia, Mississippi was where three young freedom writers were killed Sherna Goodman (?) and Shanie (?) those might not be the exact names but they were involved in a campaign to get voting rights for people in the South and in Mississippi particular they were killed, and for Reagan to go there which meant he was appealing to people with this outlook was just outrageous and I felt like he betrayed what he once was, and I know my brother was an actor in Hollywood, and Reagan at one time was president of the Actors Guild and they were a progressive group so he betrayed that.

LA: how did you feel about Reagan’s administration polices towards South Africa?

CD: wrong, he was absolutely wrong because he was willing to go along with what was happening there not to raise any protest against it, and I think that’s when the free South African movement really came into being an opposition to his polices.

LA: how did you react to the election of Harold Washington?

CD: great, just wonderful (laughs) in fact I guess he actually came to the McCormick place after the election and McCormick place then is not where it was located it was on the lakefront and my sister and I remember we trenched over there to be with the crowd to greet him and celebrate his election, and I was able to go to his inauguration and hear his inaugural address it was just fascinating, uplifting.

LA: how did you react to the end of the Apartheid?

CD: with joy, my brother not my older brother but my brother next to him organized groups travel groups and we would go to different countries in Africa to learn about our backgrounds, and we would always avoided South Africa but once—

LA:-- why?

CD: why because of their polices, yea and but once Mandela was freed and elected President that was one our first trips you know, back to Africa we went to Cape town, Victoria (?), Johannesburg and the feeling was just great just wonderful and a lot of hope that things would changed.

LA: yea I was going to ask you how did you feel about the release of Mandela?
CD: to see him walk out of that prison you just glowed in happiness and the realization that had it not been the protest, action, and the voices of a lot of people it never would have happened so it was a lesson in being involved.

LA: so why did you decide to go to South Africa?

CD: to see how things were, and it had always been a place described as place of beauty and of course we wanted to see that and we went to a settlement when were in Cape town I can’t remember name of the settlement but there was a preschool there we made a donation and kept in touch with them you know individually for sometimes afterwards, but to see the contrast in the settlement of blacks and to see the adjacent of where white lived was like the difference between black and white you know (laughs) in the literal sense of the word (laughs) but to talk to the people there who were just thrilled that this had happened and with a lot of hope that things would change. We went to Durban where we saw people living in shacks improvised shelters and even as bad as they looked they were trying to educate their children, so you know there was still a lot of hope and still a lot of activity around making that a better country for everyone, we were able to go to a school there that had become integrated after apartheid, and there the children seemed to be happily involved and the instructors were open and seemed relieved that there have been a change in polices.

LA: how did going to South Africa Change your perception of the anti-apartheid movement actually being there and seeing like you said the working conditions how did help change your whole mindset of what you had in your head?

CD: well I think the realization that it was going to take some time for changes to be noticed the realization that not everybody was for the change and there would be some resistance, and I think there is a comparison that can be made in the United Stated with President Obama he is not going to be the sole savior, the sole solver of the problems that everybody has a responsibility if any difference is going to be made, and the responsibility to let him know whets wanted and to support him, and do to whatever we can and I think that’s a lesson for everybody who is fighting for progressive changes that they can’t sit back it’s a constant, constant, kind of struggle.

LA: describe what it was like to be in South Africa during the election were you at the election?

CD: -- no but I watched on television the long lines of people waiting to vote and we had a friend Harold Rogers who had been in south Africa and had connections there and he was involved with the election campaign and he bought some examples of the ballads would look like you know a lot of people were literate instead of words illustration were used to help people with their voting, it was just very thrilling.
LA: I know you said the shacks, what were other problems you saw in South Africa?
CD: in Johannesburg which is a quite a large urban community there were problems of crimes warning not to go certain places, certain places alone, because desperate people and you just can’t deny the fact there are just people who aren’t good people (laughs) and who take advantage of others, and I think that living conditions have a lot to do with making them that way just like in Chicago you have to be careful.

LA: what was the most rewarding experience you had while being in South Africa?
CD: meeting well shaking the hand of Wendy Mandela we had gone to the apartment building in Capet won and had a discussion by one of the representatives, and for some reason my brother had run out into the hall and came running back saying guess who out here, and we all went in to go see Wendy Mandela and she was very charming and greeted us and thanked us for being there, and what had been done to help them so that was quite thrilling and then we went to Soweto and we saw Mandela’s home and we also saw her home which was a newer structure neither were there at the time. We went to Victoria (??) hoping that’s the seats of government we were hoping that Mandela himself would be there but he was out of the country at the time and we sat on the steps of the building and took pictures that kind of opening overlooking a park and this is where Mandela made his acceptance speech so we took pictures of someone standing in that opening and again just being a place with that historic significance was very good.

LA: did you do any work while you were in South Africa?
CD: No

LA: tell me about your post like after the apartheid movement and your activity work?
CD: well I know the NARRPR is the group I worked with since then and in between I wasn’t a part of an organized group but kept up to date on what was going on, and I met a friend on the bus they looking for a place to have a brunch for NAMSAL and I said they can come to my house they did and of course I was hooked in (laughs) and agreed you know to co-chair the organization do so as long as I had the energy to do so because I’m up there in age.

LA: how has being active in the movement changed your life?
CD: I don’t know what my life would be like I feel like a part of it is personal because
feel without connections with people who are doing significant things or with friends you just wither away and I don’t want that to happen.

LA: what are you most proud of in general, just life?

CD: of producing a son who gives me great pride, he is an administrative at Chicago State University in charge of Alumni Affairs he is a wonderful musician, he is a great husband, father and grandfather and there is nothing more I can ask for.

LA: is there anything you would go back and change?

CD: probably (laughs) but I can’t think of what it would be right now but I know there are things I would change.

LA: what was the biggest sacrifice you made while being an activist?

CD: time

LA: time with the family, or time in general, or you devoted a lot of time into being an activist?

CD: yes it takes a lot of time and concentration for things to do the things that need to be done, And I guess the things that I would go back and change would be that I would not take on more than I feel could deliver, so that drives you to the point sometimes there sleepless nights.

LA: how has being an activist made you feel about life?

CD: hopeful, optimistic, sometimes discouraged something always happens it seems to boost up your optimism and your belief that what you do makes a difference and bringing about the kind of changes you are working for.

LA: what was the most difficult time you endured during the Apartheid movement?
CD: I can’t remember any particular difficult time.

LA: ok, during the Apartheid was there any time you lost hope?

CD: No

LA: no, you always felt—

CD: I always felt and you look back on history, slavery I’m sure it looked like that system would never be ended but you had people like Frederick Douglass, Harriet Tubman, Mourner Truth, and Cripus Attickus and you know all those people who sacrificed and in the case of Attickus took his life, who did not live to see all the changes I know Douglass lived to see the end of Slavery I’m not sure about Sourjuner and Tubman when they died but realizing the fact they have been struggling for years and eventually changes came looking at the establishment of the NAACP and all of this being referred to the Civil rights movement which has been going on for years, it just takes time, time, patience and persistence and things cant continue, at some point something is going to happen to make things better or worse, hopefully for the better.

LA: what advice would you give to other activist who is fighting for injustice inequalities?

CD: the same thing to stay informed and involved.

LA: what problems do you think South Africa still faces today?

CD: from what I hear housing is still problem, land distribution, employment, health and there have been disappointments on how these things were handled, like the deny of the aids epidemic but always there are people there who have to fight their own battles and are doing so.

LA: what problems do you think America still faces today?

CD: racism, and the end of the economic disparity that exists, it’s just obscene that other people can make millions and millions of money of what other people do and moneys that they never in their lifetime can use, but at the same time people who are homeless without jobs those are things that need to be changed in this country, and this whole battle about healthcare was as much of a battle with Obama’s presidency and I think we
got to be careful like groups like the Tea parties take over the minds of many people.

LA: well that’s all I got thank you for conducting the interview (laughs)