

Voices of Feminism Oral History Project
Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College
Northampton, MA

MARIAN KRAMER

Interviewed by

LORETTA ROSS

February 1-2, 2014
Detroit, Michigan

Narrator

Marian Kramer (b. 1944) has been involved in welfare rights and civil rights activism since the 1960s. Kramer's activism centers the experiences of poor women and families. Recently, she has led the charge against the privatization of water in Detroit, Michigan. Kramer, along with other organizers, was arrested for disorderly conduct, trying to physically keep city trucks from shutting down citizens' access to water. Much of her work has gone towards defending victims of unjust claims of "welfare fraud." Kramer is the co-chair of the National Welfare Rights Union, and, over the years, has held key positions in a number of other activist and non-profit organizations.

Interviewer

Loretta Ross (b. 1953) became involved in black nationalist politics while attending Howard University, 1970–73. A leader in the anti-rape and anti-racism movements in the 1970s and 1980s, she co-founded the International Council of African Women and served as director of women of color programs for the National Organization for Women and program director for the National Black Women's Health Project. After managing the research and program departments for the Center for Democratic Renewal, an anti-Klan organization, Ross established the National Center for Human Rights Education in 1996, which she directed through 2004. Also in 2004, she was the co-director of the March for Women's Lives. In 2005 she became national coordinator of the SisterSong Women of Color Reproductive Health Collective. The Loretta Ross papers are at the Sophia Smith Collection, and the Voices of Feminism Project also includes an oral history with Ross.

Abstract

In this interview Marian Kramer talks about developing an understanding of injustice and racism as a young girl growing up in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, and Dallas, Texas. Kramer remembers some of her early experiences organizing and participating in successful economic boycotts. Her drive for activism led her to drop out of school and become a full time organizer with the Congress of Racial Equality, as well as talking in detail about her first arrest. Kramer talks about the development of social, class, and racial consciousness in young organizers, and provides invaluable insight into the successful strategies and lived experiences of a lifelong organizer. Kramer details her transition to advocating for Welfare Rights, and her introduction to water access work.

Restrictions

None

Format

Interview recorded on miniDV using Sony Digital Camcorder DSR-PDX10. Ten 60-minute tapes.

Transcript

Transcribed by Susan Kurka, March 2014. Audited for accuracy and edited for clarity by Loretta Ross and Ellice Amanna.

Bibliography and Footnote Citation Forms

Video Recording

Bibliography: Kramer, Marian. Interview by Loretta Ross. Video recording, February 1-2, 2014. Voices of Feminism Oral History Project, Sophia Smith Collection. **Footnote:** Marian Kramer, interview by Loretta Ross, video recording February 1-2, 2014, Voices of Feminism Oral History Project, Sophia Smith Collection, tape 2.

Transcript

Bibliography: Kramer, Marian. Interview by Loretta Ross. Transcript of video recording, February 1-2, 2014. Voices of Feminism Oral History Project, Sophia Smith Collection. **Footnote:** Marian Kramer, interview by Kelly Anderson, transcript of video recording, February 1-2, 2014, Voices of Feminism Oral History Project, Sophia Smith Collection, pp. 23–24.

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Transcript of interview conducted February 1-2, 2014, with:

MARIAN KRAMER
Detroit, Michigan
Office of the Michigan Welfare Rights Organization

by: LORETTA ROSS

ROSS: It is February 1, 2014. I'm in Detroit, Michigan, at the office of the Michigan Welfare Rights Organization, interviewing Marian Kramer. I am doing it for the Sophia Smith Collection of the Voices of Feminism Project. My name is Loretta Ross and I'm privileged to be talking to Marian Kramer. How are you doing, Marian?

KRAMER: I'm doing quite well today, because you're here.

ROSS: Well, thank you.

KRAMER: And I haven't had the opportunity to visit with you in such a long time. It's interesting, and I want to put this in, I was just talking about you prior to you calling me.

ROSS: Why was that?

KRAMER: I was giving one of the young women a little history lesson, and one of the ones that stuck out in my mind was the role that you played in fighting in the interest of low income women at the NOW convention in Philadelphia and it was such an impressive move and it just stuck in my mind because it was very educational.

ROSS: Well, thank you. One of the things that you understand as a woman of color in general, and a black woman in particular, is that we're only one paycheck away from welfare anyway.

KRAMER: That's right.

ROSS: And NOW needed to really work on not only low income black women but low income white women.

KRAMER: White women.

ROSS: They have such a class issue, but this isn't my story, this is yours.

KRAMER: You got that right.

ROSS: Why don't you first start by giving me your full name, your name at birth, where were you born, when were you born.

KRAMER: Well, my name at birth was Marian Jeanette Bernard, and I was born in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, at the Lady of the Lake Hospital, which still exists in Baton Rouge, in the same place where I was born, and that was June 16, 1944.

ROSS: And who are your parents?

KRAMER: Sam Bernard, Senior, and Viola Hill, who was Bernard at the time. Both of them have passed away and I sure do miss them.

ROSS: What did your parents do for a living?

KRAMER: My father, at the particular time that I was born, was in the service. He didn't get to see me for a year. In fact, I guess I was walking when he finally came home from the war. My mother, at the time, was generally staying at home, taking care of — well, when I was born there was two of us; my older brother, Sam, who has passed away just recently, and, you know, the newly arrived me. She was living in the home of my grandparents, her parents, Alberta and Isadore Hill.

ROSS: So, how many siblings did you end up having all together?

KRAMER: Oh, my God. My mother and father ended up with four children; one girl, me, three boys. Once they separated — and this gets into another story -- once they separated and divorced my father remarried and ended up with one boy, three girls. My mother finally remarried and had one girl, one boy. So all together there were ten of us and let me tell you, on both sides of the family -- on my father's side as well as my mother's side -- those two grandmothers, who were very close to one another, made sure that we understood, not only theoretically but practically, that there was no division in the families, because those two families were close. So, you know, my father's second set of children, as well as his first set of kids, were always visiting one another and being with one another, as well as growing up. My mother always told us that the problem that exist, that laid the foundation for her and my father to divorce and what have you, had nothing to do with all of us, and that we needed to respect my father and also respect my stepmother once he remarried, because she was not the person that broke them up. That's between her and my father. So that's how we were raised, as a close-knitted family, and we're still close today.

ROSS: So basically, who reared you, who raised you, your primary...

KRAMER: You know, I was a grandmama on both sides, I was a grandmama baby. My mother's mother, I always stayed with her, because I never — and my grandfather worked at night. I never wanted my grandmother to be alone. So basically my grandmother, although my mother, oh Lord have mercy, my mother made sure she was in all our lives, when it came to going to the school. So, it was my grandmother and my mother in essence.

ROSS: And what was that grandmother's name again?

KRAMER: Alberta Hill.

ROSS: Now, what education did your grandparents have, as well as your mother and father?

KRAMER: My mother finished high school, my father also. My father though, once he returned from the Army, started working with the rest of the family in the work of carpentry. Some of them did the carpentry and some of them did the electrician and some of them were the painters. That was my family and it was interesting that they came from both sides of the family, working together.

My mother, on the other hand, once she began to work, that little dynamic woman was amazing. She learned to be a nurse's aide and worked as a nurse's aide, and she had two — she would always hold down two jobs. She also did housekeeping, because she was going to make sure that her children, her four children at that time, were taken care of. That's where she was after the divorce, but prior to the divorce she was a housewife.

ROSS: Did her experience as a housekeeper have any effect on your consciousness, as you did work for low income women later on?

KRAMER: I always had a lot of questions, because we were raised in a church in Dallas, Texas and -- I'll tell you about that later -- that made us aware of the conditions that black people were living in. Well, it was real for us anyway because I lived in Louisiana and I observed some of the problems that existed, even at a real young age, and I understood. I didn't like the fact that my mother had to work two jobs, because I loved being with my mother, as well as my grandmother, and I felt that it was keeping her away from us.

So, you know, I would listen to them as they talked about the conditions of black people and that made me very angry. I don't know, I just grew up with that in me until our church began to participate in the Civil Rights Movement. So, you know, I just was — the life was real for me, because I'm the steward as a young kid. There were certain rules and

regulations for blacks in Louisiana, as well as in Dallas, and my grandfather always tried to make sure that we understood we could get hurt if we didn't obey those rules. So I always had those kind of questions -- why? And the question was, we're supposed to be human beings also. Why we can't go to the Dallas big parade? Why we couldn't — why they had a special day for us. All of it was why, why, why? And my grandmother would always say, "We came from the slaves," in essence. She didn't like that she was a fool. My grandmother didn't like it, she didn't like it one bit, and she didn't like the way—and then my parents was the type of people, my mother and grandmother in particular, always wanted us to experience stuff.

Right down the street from where we lived, in Port Allen, Louisiana, which is West Baton Rouge, and the theater was up the street from us. There was the picture show, as we used to call it, and blacks could only go in the balcony, and we could only go in after the whites paid their money and went in the main floor. My grandmother and my mother would take us to the show and I would say, "Why we can't sit down there?" They said because you're a Negro. No, they wouldn't say Negro, they'd say colored -- "There's rules, there are laws against us mingling or being down where whites were." And I knew that if I couldn't read, I knew to look for that letter C that meant for coloreds. You know, if I went to the restroom or anything. I knew when I got on the ferry boat, because my parents taught us each step of the way, to cross the ferry from West Baton Rouge to East Baton Rouge, that there was this one little room that we could — if we walked onto the ferry -- one little room that accommodated the colored folks. I knew that if we wanted something to eat on the ferry boat, there was a little snack bar, there was one little room we could go in to purchase our stuff. So, you know, that was stuff that I was taught the whole time, and I knew a lot of people that did household work and didn't get paid that much at that time. I didn't know where I was going to end up, but I knew one thing, I didn't want to be nobody's maid.

ROSS: This was in the 1950s?

KRAMER: Fifties and the late '40s.

ROSS: Late '40s and 1950s. It seems like your grandmother and mother imparted a lot of dignity to you. Talk about that.

KRAMER: Oh, mercy, not only my grandmother on my mother's side, but that grandmother on my father's side, who worked diligently too. She was a housekeeper too. My grandmother, her name was [Lilly Lebeaux?].

ROSS: Very Creole, very French.

KRAMER: Yes. That was her marriage name. Prior to that it was Lilly Bernard. She was married to my great grandfather. I'm trying to think, I knew her name even prior to that and it goes away from me, but we called her Mama [Biss?]. Mama Biss was very proper. As I would play in the house and do certain things, Mama Biss would tell me, "Now little sister..." -- that's what they called me -- "young ladies don't act that way. I'd say, "Okay, Mama Biss," she said, "Lord have mercy..." I could hear her, "I don't know if I'll ever be able to teach that one to be a young lady." But, you know, she would always try to teach us how to eat at the table, teach us how young ladies carried themselves. That was my grandmother on my father's side. But it was interesting, when she and my other grandmother would get together, or her only sister, my grandmother's only sister, they would be at the table like always, in the kitchen, drinking that strong coffee in Louisiana, or in the evening, drinking their beer, they weren't acting so proper. They were talking about the news of today and what was going on in the community and stuff like that, and smoking. My grandmother was still proper and holding that cigarette in a certain way, and I'd be trying my best to listen to what they were saying. Those were some interesting conversations at that time. But they did, both of them had a certain way they wanted to mold us and nurture us, to be able to survive in society.

ROSS: What were some of the example of the mother wisdom they passed on to you?

KRAMER: I sit back and laugh a lot of times. My grandmothers would always say, "What you want to do, darling, is get a good education and grow up and find you a wonderful man and let him take care of you. And you remember he is head of the household." Now that was contradictive to me in the sense that, like I said, I was in essence a grandmother's child, because I would be up under them all the time. And I would look at who was running the household, not understanding really, but it looked like both grandmothers were running the two separate households that they were in. So I would listen and it was ingrained in me. I said, well I've got to sure get me a good husband, where I can at least have a home, and he have a good job and take care of me, and I raise the children. But see, I was raised with my brothers and my mother would say, "Do this, do this." I'd say, "Why? My brother's not doing it." She said, "Lord, I don't know what we going to do with little sister."

ROSS: What were the differences between how they raised you and your brothers?

KRAMER: Well, girls had certain chores that needed to be performed. They thought that I had to be responsible eventually, when I got of age, for the dishes. Now mind you, I didn't have to do dishes that much because generally, when I got home from school. Like different from some of my cousins. They had to clean the house, because their mother, as well as maybe

where their father might be still at work. Not me. I get home to my grandmother's house, meals were already ready for all four of us, my mother might be off to work, and the house was spic and span. My grandmother, as well as my other grandmother, or one of my aunts, would make sure that I had some chores on the weekend; dusting, learning how to wax, they would teach me. Oh, those floors were spic and span. And I would ask sometimes why my brothers are not doing this and they said, "Boys should mow the law. They're going to learn how to do carpentry work." That's what they were being geared towards. Because I was a girl, I never was taught that I need to learn how to take care of the dog. See, my father and them not only were carpenters, but they were into their hunting a great deal, and my father had — I used to say my father raised children and dogs.

ROSS: And had guns.

KRAMER: And guns, plenty of them. And my brother's chores were to make sure that those dogs were fed and that they didn't try to make those dogs into their pets. We had a pet but that was their chores, they had to do that, and so they didn't do quite a lot. They didn't have the chores that we would end up -- you know, later on my other sisters --that we would end up with as much, because they were being groomed to be the male dominant role in the family. I heard that all the way through life -- "Young ladies don't do that. Young ladies don't sit like that. No, you cannot wear pants to church."

My mother was always particular that I had to have my big bows. My hair was just right. Everything had to be just right, you know, when I go out to church -- basically to church, because that was your recreation, church and what have you. She had my brothers neat and all that stuff, but with boys they always say, "Oh, boys will be boys." But they wanted me to get an education. They wanted my brothers to get an education, so they made sure equally, that they taught us that we need to continue in school. On the one hand, I didn't have to do as many chores as a lot of other folks, because I told you, I was a grandchild baby, and so a lot of those things were done prior to when I go to school and come back it was done. Before I left Louisiana, my other grandmother, some days I'd go to my grandmother's house, and I would be there with my other cousins, first cousins, and stuff like that. The boys would be outside climbing trees and stuff like that, and at that particular grandmother's house, because I always loved to climb trees too, she'd say, "No, you're not going out there. You're going to stay right in here with your cousin." She said, "Go in there and play in my makeup." Oh, that's all I needed — "Go play in the makeup," -- and she said I would stand up there and be in the mirror all day long, until naptime, messing with the lipstick, messing with the powder and everything. So she knew what to do with me, but my dream was to go outside and make mud cakes with my brothers. There was this thing, that we would throw these

mud cakes onto other people's houses and see how they could stick. We would get in trouble, but we had to do that. That was fun. And I guess I was corrupting my cousin too, because she didn't like that at first, until we convinced her how much fun it was.

So, you know, I wanted to hang with my brothers, but a lot of the time, they wouldn't let me hang with my brothers. The one grandmother on my mother's side began to teach me how to wash in the old ringer, and I started feeding the little chicks, until we killed all the little chicks, my brothers and I.

ROSS: You all raised your own chickens?

KRAMER: My grandmother decided to, to be an experience for us, but we got in the backyard with our neighbors and we wanted to test the chicks and see if we shot them with a BB gun, would they still be alive. Because my brother had received a BB gun for Christmas. We just knew they were not going to die and all my grandmother's chicks came up dead. Well, I mean we were children, and we paid for it dearly. I mean, my little behind was hurting too, because I was one of the ringleaders, my brother and I. We were on punishment a long time. It was three of us. My younger brother was too small to do anything, and the brother next to me --if he sat on the back porch generally or stand out there and look at us, but he would do nothing -- but my older brother and I, along with our neighbors, we would be into everything. But she at least allowed me to climb onto the trees. I could climb up a chinaberry tree. She would let me do that, and so, you know, as they said, I was a tomboy for a while because I would be with my brothers. People don't understand, that's all I had were my brothers, until I get with my cousins. I had an opportunity to be with my other female cousins and all that type of stuff, fingernail polishing, you know. That was great, but I was taught the whole feminist part of life.

ROSS: Now you mentioned going to church. What religion were you raised in and how did that have an impact on what you were thinking about and did your church have a role in the Civil Rights Movement?

KRAMER: Oh my God, yeah. You know, during that period of time, the church really was the place where you met. The church was your activity. In Louisiana, I would always go to church with my grandmother or my mother.

ROSS: What denomination?

KRAMER: Baptist. Shiloh Baptist Church. In fact, Shiloh is still there, but at that time it was this little white church, and I remember standing up on the pew and clapping my hands along with it, and going to a lot of musicals; especially when they would have these musicals and have quartets at the

church. I remember attending a lot of that and enjoying that and clapping my hands and having a ball. When I left Shiloh I was six-years-old and then we moved, after a while, to Dallas, Texas.

ROSS: Why did you move to Dallas?

KRAMER: My grandfather, Isadore Hill, who came from a huge family of seven. It's interesting, let me take you back on that. Isadore was the baby, a twin at that, of 15 children. His father was a Frenchman. His father and his aunt, his father's sister, ran away from France, and what my grandfather and all them taught us is that my great-great-grandfather ended up with my grandmother -- great-great-grandmother -- who was a slave, and they said, well they married.

Well, marriage at that time. they couldn't marry each other legally. I guess they jumped the broom, you know, and they produced 15 children. There's none of them alive now but I knew a great deal of them. A lot of them migrated to California. A great number of them stayed there in Louisiana, and so that family is huge on that side. So my grandfather, who was known throughout Port Allen and what have you as a great cook, he would take my grandmother with him on those ships, or some of those boats, and cook for the workers and all that type of stuff. And Daddy began to work right across the street from our house, at the tavern, which was being operated by this young white kid, and he treated Daddy as his private property.

ROSS: What did that mean?

KRAMER: Meaning that he could treat Daddy any kind of way he wanted to because he was black. Daddy was a great listener and follower of baseball at the time and Daddy had adopted the concept, three strikes and you're out. This young man had slapped Daddy a couple of times and he told him on the second time, "There's a saying, three strike you out. In other words, don't do that no more." And the young man sooner or later did it again and my grandfather retaliated and stabbed him. So, in leaving the tavern, because we lived across the street, went in and told my grandmother. My mother got on the phone and called my other grandfather, my father and -- it was seven of them. My brothers and sisters on my father's side, but one sister, the older sister, lived in New Orleans, and one lived in California, so the rest of them, five of them, were still there. They all came up to the house, and then some of the relatives on my grandmother's side, my mother's mother, came to the house, as well as my mother's siblings who lived in Baton Rouge, they came across to the house.

I was, at that time, about four-and-a-half-years-old, and I remember this, because all these people at the house at the time, let me tell you, our house was a typical home at that time that people owned. It was two

bedrooms, a living room, a kitchen and a bath that no plumbing ran into it because plumbing, you didn't have plumbing at that time. You had to go out to the outhouse and when you took a bath, you took a bath in one of those big, you know, aluminum tubs. They were iron I think. I forget. Aluminum tubs. But we had a bathroom in there and Momma and them kept that bathroom spic and span, waiting for the day that they could have plumbing. So, my mother and my father had the front bedroom and, like I told you, it was four children. Two of us, if I can remember, slept in the same room with my father and mother and two of us slept in the same room with my grandparents.

So all these people in the house and the meeting was around my grandfather, getting him out of there, because you didn't retaliate against no abuse by any white at that time. They decided -- and,,you know, I couldn't understand everything of what was going on, but I knew they took my grandfather out of there, and my grandfather ended up in Dallas, Texas, where his sister lived with her husband and her daughter and her granddaughter. He ended up with a job and everything and that summer my grandmother and I took a train -- my first time on the train. Never been on a train before in my life. -- took a train from Addis, Louisiana, as they say up the road, to Dallas, Texas. I'll never forget the chicken and the shoebox and all that type of stuff. When we got there, it was her role and my grandfather's role, they were selecting a home for us to move and when we were going to move up there. It ended up being the next year, and that was in 1955, I think. Let me think back. I think so, around that time. Well, wait a minute, I was born in '44. It was the beginning of 1950, somewhere around there, because I was in the first grade, because I went half a semester, to Cohn Elementary School, the school they have there.

I remember all the outhouses they had for us and behind the schools, in Louisiana, and this was — and before I left, as they were preparing for us to transfer to Dallas, Texas, my mother — every year we would go out and watch the parade in Port Allen that was part of the Mardi Gras in New Orleans and that particular year before I left, I was the little queen, and my momma made my dress. It was so pretty, my momma could sew anything for you. She made that dress, and the float for us was a big truck, on that back of that truck and everything, and it was hurting when they packed us up. Late in the night, my grandfather and our extended family that we had got in Dallas, snuck back in there, and all our stuff was packed up, and we mounted dad's car. They had three children in the back with my mother, because my mother and father had separated at that time, and my grandmother and my grandfather and one us in the front. Then the truck that they had asked the Cox that helped my grandfather, who became part of our family, going out late at night, Highway 80, into Dallas. I remember they had to make sure we had toilet paper. They stopped one or two times for gas. If we had to go to the bathroom, it was behind some tree or something like that.

My grandfather, like my grandmother, taught us, had to really play their role, because they didn't want them to know, to alert or anger none of the highway patrol, because of my grandfather, you know, they had been looking for him in Port Allen. We made it to Dallas.

ROSS: You made a reference to chicken and a shoebox. Maybe you need to explain that.

KRAMER: Oh, let me go back and talk about it. That was the best — Loretta, that was the best chicken. My grandmother made — the way you travel as blacks at that time, there was a black car attached to the other trains, and that's the car that all blacks had to travel in, and you could not go to the diner so therefore, you had to prepare your lunch. Well, I think they wanted our lunch more than they wanted that mess on that train, because oh, it smelled so good. Everybody had their chicken boxes. That was a shoebox that they would pack, according to how far they had to go. They might have had two or three if they were going to California. A box of chicken was packed, fried by your family. They had something to drink. They had made up these little bottles or something like that, because you know, we had those milk bottles at the time too, that you usually turned back into the milkman when they delivered milk to your house in the morning time. But they would have drinks for us, and that was the best trip because it was like it was a picnic too, because that chicken tastes so good on that train, and being able to enjoy that chicken. There was nothing like riding that train. That was a great experience for you. So that was the chicken in the box. It looks like we're going to almost go back to the chicken in the box on the train too, because it's too expensive on the train, but that was my first train trip, going from Louisiana to Dallas, and we took a train back, because the first time we were only there for a week, my grandmother and I.

Dallas, being larger than Baton Rouge, was something to see. We, quite naturally, moved into another black community in Dallas, right in fact, in the next block over from my aunt and all of them. The church, Golden Gate Baptist Church, was located up the street that my aunt and uncle and all of them attended and, quite naturally, one of the first things that happened that Sunday when we moved to Dallas, is that we attended church. And the next couple of times, my mother and my grandmother joined. They didn't get my grandfather in church at first. Dad said no and so it was all the children and my grandmother and my mother, and eventually -- I was still six years old at the time. I'm trying to think.

Well, eventually I joined and we had just changed pastors at Golden Gate, from Reverend Lockridge, who had helped build the church, to Reverend Smith. His name was Clarence Booker T. Smith and I was the first person that he baptized, -- and I would never, never let him forget that. In essence, "I was your first experience." And so it got to the point,

Reverend Smith, every time that it was time for us to go visit another church in Texas or something like that, I reminded him that he had to take the youth, because he was a great person involved in the youth. And then like I said, the churches at that time, when we were in the community, the church was where our activities were. That's where we would get to know people. In Dallas, when I first got there, there was only two black schools; Booker T. and Lincoln High. Eventually, when I went to high school, they didn't integrate, but they got another schools for blacks; James Madison. So, at our church, you had students from all three schools in essence. So you got to know all the gossip going on at the school, and the church was always busy, keeping us involved.

(End of Audio File 01)

ROSS: You've given us so many wonderful details Marian, but you had just begun to talk about how your church influenced your activism in the Civil Rights Movement. Tell me about that.

KRAMER: Well, you know, when we moved to Dallas, the terrain, you know everything was kind of different, culture-wise, than what exist in Louisiana. This place was huge. Instead of us going to the theater down the street from our house, we had to catch a bus and go to downtown Dallas. My grandmother was one, like I said, she always wanted us to experience everything. She'd say, "Come on baby, you and I are going to start having a shopping day." I said, "Well that's fine with me." We would sneak into the movies -- she said, sneak into, my grandfather didn't know -- and it would be at the theater downtown. Again, we had to go into the balcony.

Well my church, you know, Reverend Smith had a talent. You know those good ministers that could integrate today's life and what we have dealt with historically, and how it is not what being a Christian should be about. At that time, a lot of people that had been put in prison, particularly black folks, were facing not so much the lynchings in Dallas, but they were going to the gas chambers. Every time one was facing that, we would be told quite a bit about that situation. And that was a large church compared to the church I'd been in, in Louisiana. This church had a balcony and everything, although they didn't let me go in the balcony that much, as long as I was seven and eight. My cousin and I, we had to sit on the front row, and who was sitting behind us was her aunt, who helped raise her, because her mother had passed away and everything, and if we do anything wrong, either they would, I would say ring my bell. We had the long braids and they'd be pulling our braids or popping us on our heads, you know, and I said, "Oh my God, we'd just better be good, because I don't feel like getting hit today." So we learned how to sit up like proper young women and listen to the sermon, until we get sleepy, and you would see us on the front

row like this. They didn't seem to care about that, but at least we would listen.

You didn't realize that you were learning a lesson, listening to reports of the violations of our civil rights. We didn't understand it, but to hear that people were going to the gas chamber and it was based really on the fact that they were black, was something to see. Because I was sitting up there imagining a gas chamber. "Now I wonder what that looks like and I wonder if that's something I'm going to face because I'm black," and that type of stuff. So you'd wonder all that stuff in your mind, and the fact that we again, we were —

ROSS: Could you hold on just a minute. The snow removal outside is making so much noise.

(pause in recording)

ROSS: I'm sorry we interrupted the tape because of the snow plow outside, I think he enjoyed us getting eight inches of snow.

KRAMER: Yeah, he's still out there too.

ROSS: But anyway, you were telling me about the civil rights activism of your church and I'd like you to talk about not only what happened but why do you think it was important that it happened.

KRAMER: Well, during that period of time, there seemed to be a lot of propaganda going on around, in Dallas in particular, about every time someone had to face the gas chambers. I mean the news would make sure that this was worthy news for folks to be able to hear, but at the same time, it was like to me, a whipping board for us, that understand that as a black person, if you don't understand the law and what your role as a black person has to be in society, you can face this also. Because like I said, a lot of the people that were lynched at that time, I mean there was no proof that they had committed the crime that they had been charged with. Some of the parents didn't even know where their children were, and the tension was beginning to increase out there, because when I got to high school, even prior to high school, we always had to ride at the back of the bus. In other words, you get on the bus, because we had to ride the bus to go downtown, you would stand behind the line. If you were asking for a transfer or something like that, and you'd go past those front seats, the ones facing each other, and the two leading to the back, two or three leading to the back, and should it get crowded enough with whites, that they needed more seats past those seats, we were not asked in a proper way, we were told, "Get up and move farther back," in a very disrespectful way.

And so a lot of this stuff was building up in people at the time, and it was at the same time some of these soldiers were coming back from some of these wars, and they had become more conscious, they had been over there. Like my father told us -- and he drilled us about that -- I remember him telling my young brothers that one time, you went and enlist and went into the Army, saying now look, he said, "When I was drafted, I had to go. You went and gave yourself freely to go fight for this country who don't even care about you." So, you know, on the one hand, it took me a while to understand what he was talking about, and the church, Reverend Smith, seemed to be -- as I look back and stuff like that -- he always would make sure we had a little bit of history as he preached also, and looking at some of the current events, because you could see that it outraged him. He was the type of person that was trying to have programs -- and my mother was a pusher of that type of stuff -- for the youth to be involved and not to keep us in the closet on a lot of stuff. And so, you know, he was trying to knock down, he had to knock down some barriers.

The interesting thing, on Sunday sometimes, I started noticing there was this white couple, another minister and his wife and children, at times would attend our church, which was unusual in the black community. Reverend Smith would always welcome them and they became friends and what have you. Now, as I go back to Dallas and stuff like that, I see that. step-by-step. that is happening. But he was the type of person to try to keep us all informed and to try to counteract some of the backwardness that was in the church also. He, step-by-step, started introducing even stuff in the Bible, around women obeying -- I'm looking at some of the things -- obeying your husband. He would say that stuff but he also would talk about the role that women have played in the church and keep it confined and that type of stuff. So he would always be encouraging the youth, as the women, to become a part of the makings of that church, because they were the bigger part, majority wise, in the church.

But it was the atmosphere at that time, I want folks to understand there was an atmosphere that was developing in Dallas. Folks were beginning to listen to the radio all the time, as well as TV started coming into the community also. You could see some of the news clippings when you would go to the theater, so they were becoming much more aware, and my grandmother was one that always got her newspapers and read her newspapers. I read the comics. I mean I read the pictures of the comics for quite a while, but she would always discuss that stuff and especially when we got a TV and could see the news.

ROSS: Could you repeat Reverend Smith's full name again, in case someone wants to look him up in the future?

KRAMER: Reverend Clarence Booker T. Smith.

ROSS: And what do you think made him different from other ministers who weren't so caught up in current affairs?

KRAMER: Well, you know, I only knew -- at that time, my knowledge of different ministers was very small,-- but he seemed much different than Reverend Lockridge, who I met when I first came there, because Reverend Lockridge was one in the Old Testament. I didn't understand that at the time, teaching from the Old Testament and the old period, where Reverend Smith looked like he was going ahead, talking about integration, talking about that type of stuff. It was in our church where my art teacher, my elementary school art teacher and her husband, came to our church, and he invited them to talk about the case that they were involved in against the school board in Dallas.

She was a teacher in public school, her husband was a salesperson, door-to-door, for women's girdles. The teachers, the blacks had been told at that time that — because integration had begun to threaten the school and Superintendent White -- that man's name always stuck in my mind, told — and I heard it on the TV, I heard it on the radio and everything, and my grandmother was angry about it. He told all the teachers, the black teachers, that if you move into Skyline Heights, which was a part of Oak Cliff section of Dallas, if you move there you will lose your jobs. Well, Skyline Heights had begun to open up to blacks being able to purchase homes up there. You could lose your job. Who tested it? My art teacher and her husband. I cannot remember her name. I used to know it. Ms. [Lowlett?]. Yeah.

I don't know. When that was announced in our church, I was so happy I didn't know what to do, because she was such a wonderful teacher, and now that she and her husband took the stand -- and I understood what the stand was because of my grandmother telling us about the integration of schools, being able to have a better education and the same education. Separate but equal was not separate but equal, and that she's have the same education that whites have and opportunity to have. She took that stand, lost her job, but turned around and challenged the board of education in the State of Texas. Our church was the one of the first churches to join the activity to support them and get the word out. I don't know what all the stuff we had to do, but Reverend Smith was strong in that. That was the first time I knew about the NAACP [National Association for the Advancement of Colored People] and began to understand who they were.

My mother was a strong one for getting us involved in stuff, and we had heard about the youth, starting a youth chapter of the NAACP. Then I began to learn from other young folks, that the youth were having problems with the adults in the NAACP. All this stuff coming at a time, and the increase too, at the same time, of the state of Texas executing people. And I'll never forget in bible school in the summertime --

because in the summertime, for two weeks, some of the activities that we attended, and we looked forward to that because we learned a lot. We went to bible school from nine o'clock in the morning to about three o'clock, and it was a lot of fun. I'll never forget us talking in one of our classes about this young man that all of us had become very familiar with, that was being executed. And I mean it always was in your face. Is this what we were going to grow up to face all the time, execution as a black person, lynching as a black person, and stuff like this? So, you know, I was proud of my teacher.

ROSS: She sounds like she was very influential in your life.

KRAMER: Oh, yes, yes, yes. She and her husband. That's how we met her husband, through that case.

ROSS: So now that we've moved to education, why don't you tell us about your education, your educational experience. What did it mean to you, to follow your grandmother's and mother's advice to get an education?

KRAMER: Well, that's interesting. The school I attended in Dallas, well, you know, we knew nothing about -- not kindergarten, nothing like that, when I was growing up. I attended school in Louisiana, like I said, for a half of semester. The one thing I loved about school in Louisiana, I loved the lunches. The lunches were great, because we had red beans and rice, everything that my grandmama and them cooked. They were delicious. And I was just beginning to learn really, because we didn't have the books at home. They were teaching us Sam, Dick and Harry, you know, and Jane, at school, but once my mother began to bring them home and she would read them to us and what have you, I would always say, "These children don't look nothing like us." And you know, you were thinking that you had to end up looking like them to be able to get anywhere. You'd look at the comics in the newspaper, they were not looking like us, and then the TV started and nobody on there was looking like us, and so you began to get — you know, certain ideas were molding our minds and stuff like that.

So, I attended school in Louisiana, which I said earlier was Cohn Elementary School of Port Allen. In Dallas, I attended N.W. Harllee School. In Louisiana, we rode the bus to school. In Dallas, at N.W. Harllee. My mother at times would take us to school but, mainly, we walked to school. It was interesting, there was a lesson there too, because we would walk up through these little woods and it was a lot of fun to get to our school. I was in the first grade there and the classes were different in the schools in Louisiana. Some of the basics that they began to teach me, we didn't have the equipment in Louisiana to even begin to touch some of the education that I got in Dallas and what have you. But it was N.W. Harllee that my brother and I started going to. Then, when we got in the second grade, it was interesting. My mother

felt like the school was not — we wasn't getting the education she wanted us to get. And so she put us in Catholic school. Now mind you, putting us in Catholic school, which was not too far from N.W. Harlee, Father [de Fievre?], who drove the bus and who was the priest for the Catholic school, would pick us all up in the morning time. There was three of us going at the time -- my young brother next to me and my older brother and myself. Her main purpose for putting us in Catholic school was not only the education part, but she felt that it would stop Sam from — Sam, as young as he was, had shot hooky from school a couple of times..

So, we went to Catholic school and that was a new awakening for us. Now remember Louisiana, if you ever know any history of Louisiana, all the counties are called parishes because of the high influence of the Catholic Church at one time in Louisiana. So, a great deal of the blacks were Catholic but we were not. We were Baptist, and we were Baptist in Dallas. But when we went to that Catholic school, here are all these nuns that I wasn't familiar with and all these habits they were wearing. So it was an education to try to figure out what those nuns had up under those habits that they were wearing. I was in the third grade and that was a big deal for a lot of us children. In Catholic school, they didn't have as many classrooms as we had at N.W. Harlee, to accommodate all the kids that were going there, so there were two different classes in the classroom. The classroom was big enough to hold two different classes. So I'm in the third grade and the fourth graders are sitting right across the aisle from me, so Sister Burke was teaching two different classes. But I tell you, I came out of there knowing my math, because those nuns would tell us, when you come back tomorrow you have to know your six-times tables. So in other words, rote memory, right? And I'll never forget, I missed six-times-four. Jesus Christ, why did I miss six-times-four, because I had to write it a hundred times. Not only write it a hundred times, the sister would tell you, "Hold your hand out. One, two, three, four, five, six," Then say. "times one, two, three, four, what is that?" "You eventually knew. You wasn't going to miss that from now on the rest of your life. Six-times -our is 24. I never forgot that. If any one I would never miss for the rest of my life, it was that. So those nuns, we learned all our times tables, our addition, our subtraction, our division. So in the third grade you knew that.

Sam seemed to stay in Catholic school, but it got to be too expensive for my mother. My mother couldn't keep up with that. My youngest brother got spoiled like hell. When we would be on the bus, father would let him sometimes sit on his lap and guide, caught himself guiding the bus, because he was one of the youngest ones on the bus. And I said oh my God, are we going to make it to school or not. And the other thing was, the sister and father and all of them, would always get out, in those habits, and play with us in the school and stuff. The thing that got me finally was when it came for the day of the saint, or whatever they used to call it, they still have it, when all the Catholic

schools would turn out and you had to march downtown and stuff like that, in your crispy little uniforms and your little tams and your rosaries and all that stuff. I noticed all of us were segregated. It never dawned on me in the school, because we had all white — in that particular school, we had all the white teachers, but when we went down there, we were segregated, so you know, I made note of that in my mind. I asked my mother and she said, “You have to understand, all schools here are segregated, all schools, private and public.” Well I didn’t realize the difference in the two until she explained, one you’ve got to pay and the other one, you know, and that type of stuff, but she finally pulled us out of that school and put us back at NWR, and we noticed we were a little advanced than what was happening in public school at that time, because of the way — the teaching methods were a little different. I don’t think that within the black school in the public school, the teachers were not getting the support, as I look back, that the other white schools were getting, to be able to disseminate that education at the time.

My mother was a stickler for trying to get those — despite the fact that they never cured Sam shooting hooky from school. The other thing too was that the teachers didn’t mess with him too much because Sam would shoot hooky the next day and knew more than all of us in the class, because the school, we finally found out, that the education was boring to him. He needed to be in a higher class, because he was able to capture that knowledge much quicker than the rest of us. But I was so angry at him. I said, I studied all night long almost and this nut come in here and knows more than I know. But that’s why he never stayed in school, until eventually, he got put into one of the juvenile homes and stuff like that. Sam, even to his death, Sam could catch on to things.

Sam was in prison, juvenile, as a teenager, in and out, and then in his older years, once he reached 18, in and out of prisons. And it wasn’t nothing as far as killing nobody. Either he had — (chuckles). In our neighborhood here was the levy, behind the park, there’s the levy in Dallas, Texas, and Sam would go back behind that levy and ride. This man who owned some horses that he grazed back there, and Sam would always get on those wild horses and ride them, and ride those horses. He would either get picked up for something like that, or for the fact that he had taken something or something like that. Sam was the type of person, he didn’t want to go to school, he said it was boring. He was a quick learner on everything. That boy, at one time, was cutting more black’s hair in Louisiana than the regular barber. But he finally came out of prison. He would have been in there almost 40 years or 50 years. Two days before that, he had been in Oklahoma -- not all the time in Oklahoma. He had been in Ohio. He had been up here in Texas -- and so Sam was an organizer even in prison and very political. In fact, if you hear some of those old — about the signified monkey and the coconut tree and all that stuff.

ROSS:

Pigmeat Markham.

KRAMER: -- from the prisons, the prison rapping. General and I was listening to it and he said, "Whose voice is that?" He said, "That's Sam." I said, "That is, that's my brother's voice!" They taped them and Sam knew all of them, because he used to quote them to us all the time. He'd memorize that stuff so much and he was captured on those tapes. But Sam would stay in trouble in prisons because he was forever organizing. He organized to the point, in Ohio, that there was a prison break, and he helped get the guys out, but when they shot down, they shot in his head. Well he died with that bullet in his head, but the other guys got away. They ended up getting him, but he organized the break.

ROSS: What was Sam's full name?

KRAMER: Sam Bernard, Jr., And in fact, I've got a picture of him and I'll show him to you.

ROSS: OK. Because I mean, when you tell stories like that, we increase the possibility that someone would want to maybe write up his story some day.

KRAMER: His story, Sam got — if I could find General, my husband got involved with that. We had pictures of how they had beat him up so bad in prison in Ohio and everything, but my mother --I had a mother that stuck by us. She didn't tolerate no nonsense. My thing was, just like my kids would tell — my daughter here, used to tell them up at the high school, "If I'm in trouble, if there's something that I got in trouble about, don't tell my momma. Tell my daddy, call my daddy. But if it's some trouble that I was fighting against with my teacher or something like that, call my momma," I said. Well, my little mama, she stuck by my brother. I was always there with her, going to juvenile court. Our family would be mad at him but they would go and stand up for him. The community would stand up for Sam, but Sam was a kid that was — he wasn't going to take — as he used to say, "I ain't taking nothing from the white man." I mean, even in prison, although he demanded respect from them and they would call him Chico, because that was my older brother, stepbrother's name, and I'll tell you about him. But he was the type of person, he would tell me. If they accused my brother of something, Sam would tell me the truth, and I generally knew when he committed a crime and when he didn't, when he had nothing to do with it. And so he ended up in prison a couple of times for something that he didn't do, but he was on the scene. They got caught and he ended up being on the scene with the person that really committed the crime.

ROSS: Being in the wrong place at the wrong time. So, tell me more about your own education. You went to elementary school. Did you have to deal with desegregating, any school experiences, or did you just go to black schools?

KRAMER: In Dallas, when I was growing up, from the time I was in the first grade, all the way to the twelfth grade, I attended all black schools, because they had not --

ROSS: -- desegregated.

KRAMER: No, no, we were still fighting that at the time. I'm trying to think, when did I attend? And so when I graduated from James Madison, and in fact, as I was in high school, my mother got me a job at the show, at the theater, and it was an all-black theater, nothing but blacks attended this theater, and it was only open on weekends. So I worked there from the time I was 14 until I graduated from high school.

ROSS: What year did you graduate high school?

KRAMER: Nineteen sixty-two, and at that time, I was being recruited by Spelman and a couple of other schools, but I wasn't about to go to an all girls school at that time.

ROSS: Why not?

KRAMER: I didn't have that kind of experience, you know? I was used to going to a school with both sexes being there, so I could not visualize nothing like that. I was so used to being around my family, for one thing, and Spelman, being in Atlanta? This woman was trying to recruit me hard too, and I was wondering, "Why is she trying to recruit me?" I had already made up my mind, I wanted to go to Southern University, because a lot of my cousins who I grew up with too -- because although we moved to Dallas, my family was one that have always kept Highway 80 -- it's not 80 no more, it's 20 -- heated up, going between Dallas and Louisiana. So therefore, they went to Louisiana. I mean those that were living in Louisiana, attended Southern University. And then in my last year at James Madison High, it was all on the news about the students at Southern University demonstrating against the administration of Southern University not getting the same type of funding or the same amount of funding that LSU, Louisiana State University, were getting. Why were we getting a separate amount than they were getting? Southern University students began to stand up, and then my cousins had participated in the march from — if you know where Southern University is located, in Scotlandville, Louisiana, a little suburban area of Baton Rouge, all the way down, all the way to -- they marched all the way to the state capitol, which is located in the center of Baton Rouge, protesting the conditions at Southern University and that they should have the same facilities or the same amount of money that LSU had. By the time they got back to the school, President Clark had instituted a punishment eventually, for them, that they would all get put out.

But prior to that, you know, they got back — let me tell you, once they got back after the march, that didn't go into effect right then and there, but once they got back, he began to have released his staff to go out and speak to some of these parents in these rural areas and say, "See what your children are doing with your money? They're up there demonstrating." And so the parents began to retaliate against the children, and then he instituted this thing of not only that they get expelled from Southern University, some of the leadership, and some of my cousins, but they could not -- with the State of Louisiana, who stepped in also -- could not attend no schools in the State of Louisiana.

ROSS: Now, how did that affect your own education at Southern?

KRAMER: Well, I wanted to go to it, I wanted to go to Southern.

ROSS: Because of the activism.

KRAMER: This is my cousins. My cousins, some of them had faced that type of stuff. And so, you know, my mother was proud for me to be able to go. I was the first one, because Sam wasn't going to no college at that time. So I went to college and I went to college — see, my mind, on going to college, had changed a little. I had graduated from high school, successfully graduated from high school with some good grades, but my main objective at that time was to go and participate in the movement that was developing, because I was angry about what was happening in this country. People were picketing in Dallas and I had been in a couple of the lines -- my momma didn't know it -- picketing in Dallas. Here every day, "American Bandstand" was on TV. Well damn, we knew how to dance, why — this was in Philadelphia, supposed to have been an integrated city, and they did not let blacks dance on American Bandstand.

ROSS: Wasn't your first arrest in Louisiana?

KRAMER: No, no, let me think. Let me think. I have to think back on those arrests.

(End of Audio File 02)

ROSS: At the time we changed tapes, you were telling us about your own educational experience, your decision to go to Southern University, but I get the sense that your grandparents also influenced your thinking. Tell us about that.

KRAMER: Oh my God, did they influence it. My grandfather worked so hard, because his thing too was just like my mother, you could see him in her. His thing was to make sure that we didn't want for no food, no clothing, and to keep a roof over our heads, although my mother had married and I had a new stepfather who was the same way. But my grandfather —

ROSS: This is the one that knifed the white guy and slapped him.

KRAMER: Yes, Isadore Hill, the one we call “Daddy Peewee.” My grandfather always supported me. You know, I didn’t realize how much support he had given me until I went off to Southern University. Let me back up. He got angry at me once. My hair, you know that whole thing, having long hair. Well, when I was in high school, particularly my last year in high school, I wanted my hair cut to about up to my shoulders, because all the girls were wearing their hair flipped over or flipped up, and I wanted mine to be able to flip over. But you know, if you have a hair a little longer, that’s a little too long to flip that stuff over, and I wanted to make sure I could wear the French twist and all that stuff. I looked at my momma, her hair was cut, why couldn’t my hair be cut?

I finally convinced my mother to cut my hair up to my shoulders, because my mother had become a barber. I mean she was good. She had gone back and got a barber’s license, and my aunt was over the only black barber college in Dallas. She had gone back. Right after she got her barber’s license, my other cousin, who just passed away too, convinced her to go get a real estate license. So she ended up with those two jobs. So, my mother cut my hair. She became a good barber. My grandfather came home and said, “What’s wrong with your hair?” I said, “Oh, don’t you like it daddy? I got it cut a little.” He said, “No.” In essence, “Your hair was your glory.” He said, “No, you should have never cut your hair. God gave you that.” And I’m saying to myself, you’re talking about the Lord? I didn’t say nothing to him. He said, “But you should never cut your hair.” I said, “Well daddy, did you want it?” And that’s it. I’m getting smart then. He said, “All right, watch yourself,” I said, “Because if you want it daddy, I’ll go get it for you. I’m telling you now, Dad, I’m tired of that.” So eventually he began to like it, but he was very angry about the fact that my mother let me get my hair cut, because there still was that whole thing and the whole question of what a woman should be like. As my father taught my brothers, the role of a woman was the kitchen, the bedroom and the nursery and that the boys were a bull and all these heifers he can have, you know. And as I began to understand what that stuff meant, I became more and more rebellious, on washing dishes, on doing a lot of things they expected me to do, so I ended up on punishment a lot.

My grandfather though, like I said, was a person — yes, I left to go and stay with my dad the summer prior to going to Southern. I had been accepted into Southern University. I was told by my mother first of all, you are going off to school, you’re going to be living with your father, because that was much cheaper for us, if I lived at home and commuted to school, than staying on campus. You would be going to Southern University and mind you, registration at that time was 30 dollars, 30-

some dollars, but it still was above what they could pay a lot of time, because you had to end up getting the classes also.

But I ended up moving to Louisiana. I'll never forget riding that bus by myself. I was 18-years-old, going to Louisiana, and my daddy met me proudly, because the last time I'd seen my daddy was like a month prior, because he and my mama, my stepmother, Leanna Bernard, had come up for my graduation, and this was his first child graduating from high school. I got home to my other home there, and some time that week, he decided to give me the rules and regulations of the household, and I sat down and I listened out of respect, and he came and he said, "In this household, I expect everybody in by eleven o'clock." Now that means, I'm talking about the young kids are not going to be out that long anyway, but I'm talking about something like you, you're supposed to be grown now and blah-blah-blah, but you're under my roof and the rules is, your older brother and all, to be in this house by eleven o'clock." I heard but I don't agree, so I didn't say nothing the first time.

Now here I am, back in Louisiana, living in Louisiana. The only time I generally would be in Louisiana, when I would ride down in the summertime with my grandparents or my mother, to visit for a week, and I'd spend the time really with my grandmother, not with my father. See, because I was still angry with my father for, his-self was going to beat my mother one night because she would not give him the money that he had given her. He wanted to go gambling. My mother had a knife in her hand, she was making us a chocolate cake. I called myself mopping and Sam called himself sweeping at the time, you know, we were having fun with my mother. Alan was crawling around on the floor. This is when we were living in Louisiana, this is in my mind. I remember, we were enjoying ourselves when he came in there with that anger and kind of drunk, because this was on a Saturday night. Charles, the baby, was in the baby bed, and he said, "Well look here, you're going to give me that money, or else I'm going to have to..." In other words, the indication was they were going to have to tangle. My mother told him, "Well, Sam, this time, I'm not taking no hit on for you. You can try to hit me..." And she had that knife. "... but I'm not taking it." Before you knew it, Alan, who was about this high back then, was able to get up to my father. My father felt him pulling up and stuff like that, and he bit my father in the butt. At that point, I hit him with the mop and Sam banged him with the broom and he got out of there. He was not going to hurt my mother. We hurt him. He was not going to put his hand on my mother. My grandfather heard about it and he came back there that week, to Port Allen. Like I said, we were still living in Port Allen, it was before we moved, and said, "Sam, I need to speak with you." He said, "OK, Mr. Peewee."

Now my father, not thinking that my grandfather was about to talk to him about the incident between he and my mother, my grandfather said

— and I told you, I was a good listener. My grandfather told him at the time, and my mother explained it to us more and more, that, “I only have one daughter and I don’t whoop her. I want you to know, Sam, and I have gotten along with you all the while, I’ve never interfered in your marriage, but when you’re talking about you’re going to hit my daughter or you think you’re going to hit my daughter, then you’re going to have to deal with me.” He said, “I’m back here now to get her and the children and I’m asking my daughter to come with me,” and my mother said, “I am going with my father.” And we moved back up to — see, in Louisiana, where my father and them were living, they call that The Back, and where we were living, by the levy, they called that The Front. That’s how they divided the two neighborhoods, although the whites lived on another section of the town,. And so he took us back home with him and my grandmother and never again was my mother and father together again.

My father waited a long time before he got married. My stepmother, who we loved dearly, he had been going out with her, but he waited, thinking that eventually, my mother would come back to him. That never happened. They became friends, real good friends, but that was it for them. But I never forgot my mother at one time getting real sick at the house. She told me to go across the ditch and get my grandmother, and my grandmother told me to go down the road to get my great aunt, who was my grandmother’s aunt on my mother’s side, and my aunt saved my mother. My mother had a miscarriage and she would have been dead if my aunt and my grandmother hadn’t got there. They were angry with my father.

ROSS: And you carried this home when you had to live with him.

KRAMER: I was there with my momma that day, I remembered all that. And so, you know, when he was trying to get me to come home, he never knew that’s what I was angry about, because he didn’t think that as a child I had comprehended some of the stuff that was going on. He don’t know I was listening to my grandmother and all of them, what was going on, and the people that were so angry were my grandmothers, because the two of them were so close. They used to talk about it, my grandmother Biss, Lilly Lebeaux, which said that Alberta Hill and I are closer than my sister and I. She said, “And you know how I love my sister Edna.” My aunt Edna was a pistol too. That was the only sister she had and they lived right next door to each other, and the three of them were something else together. That made them so mad with my father. You know, he got back in their grace and stuff like that, but not in my grace for a long time. So when I went to live with him, I said to myself, I’m going to have to eventually get along with him. I loved my daddy but at that time I couldn’t forgive him for that.

So, I stayed with him. My grandmother was happy that I was there, because she felt that my father and I needed to get along, and she said, "One of you and your daddy's problems are, the two of you all are too much alike." I said, "Well, I didn't wield that, but at this time I can't stand your son." She said, "Now, now, now, you're acting common." I said, "Ma Biss, you know he's been wrong." She said, "I'm not going to say that he hasn't been wrong and I'm not going to uphold him for nothing like that." But you know, my momma had told me, and I could hear her talking, that was not your business, that was between Sam and I. So eventually I forgave my father, but it took a long time even after that, but I stayed with him that whole semester. Was it a semester? Yeah. I went to Southern in 1962 and in 1963, that semester, and I went home after that, and I entered that September -- because I told you how I was behind my grandmother and them. I entered Arlington State College, the first time going to an integrated school.

ROSS: What was the name of it again?

KRAMER: It was Arlington State College, and guess what it is now, the name of it?

ROSS: What?

KRAMER: University of Texas. The thing that made me go to that school — well, let me back up. I went to Southern for like a year and a half, but it was in between that, the Civil Rights Movement had happened. No, it was the last of that -- I'm trying to get it straight. Nineteen sixty-two, that's how it is, 1962 I went to Southern. Nineteen sixty-three, that semester, I decided to stay in Dallas, because I was missing my grandparents and all them. Some of my girlfriends had come back to Dallas too, and we decided to go to Arlington State because they had integrated it. Arlington State -- prior to us entered then, to that school -- had been an all boys school, but not only did they integrate fast, with women attending that school, but it integrated much faster than other schools with blacks integrating the school. We had to commute quite a ways every day, because it was in Arlington, Texas.

ROSS: Arlington.

KRAMER: Ah-huh. What did I say? Arlington.

ROSS: That's all right. I was just getting over your Cajun accent.

KRAMER: You be quiet. (both chuckle) Texas. Oh my God, oh that was a rude awakening. When I first started attending school there, I could see how the blacks would stay to themselves. Some of the whites would try to come over and be with us, and how, you know, you could feel the tension on that campus. I would go to the gym and the teacher would have us out learning tennis. There was a huge tennis court. The school

was so big. Now, I done attend Southern University, a beautiful campus, on the Mississippi and all that stuff, beautiful campus, but this place was like a city. Girl, all these fraternities and sorority houses. Now at Southern our fraternities and sororities at that time didn't have any special privilege, but they didn't have no fraternity and sorority houses at that particular time. LSU had it, if you see the way LSU is around this lake and everything, all these fraternities and houses and sorority houses and stuff like that, but no blacks at that time, and I'm trying to compare what I knew. I said, look at this campus, it's huge. This huge tennis court, and there was no tennis court up at Southern University at that time. Golf, you know, and all that stuff. Southern was beginning to get it sooner or later.

But then, the attitude of some of the staff towards us. I'm sitting in class and here's this teacher and this huge class I was in. I think it was social studies or something like that. He made the statement, "I don't understand why Negroes want to come to this school, they have their own school." And I'm looking around to count how many Negroes were in that class, including me. You could count us on one hand. And I said, "I'm not going to say something. Yes I am."

ROSS: What did you say?

KRAMER: I raised my hand and I was surprised, it took him a while to call on me. And I said, "Because we've got the right to come to this school. The answer to your question." I knew he was mad as hell at me, and then it was time for us to leave the class.

So, the blacks would always meet in the student union, and the other thing that they had there was this huge bowling alley, and we didn't have that at Southern. We had a two-lane bowling alley, that's what we had. This was huge. We went in the bowling alley and some of the whites started coming down there and learning to play 'bid whist' with us, because they played bridge, and would hang out with us. And then some of them started approaching us about coming to some of the rallies that were happening around the school. I said, "What you talking about?" They said, "We're sand-boxing," and I said, "What is sand-boxing, what are you talking about?" Thinking they're playing in the sandbox. They said, "No, we're getting up to speak about what needs to happen on this campus and we're developing a movement." See, we think that if you talk about integration, that means also that these fraternities and sorority houses, that blacks should be able to integrate into that also and stay in those houses. I said, "Well, I'm not interested in any fraternity or sororities," because I didn't like the sororities at Southern, you know, and what happened there, I said, "But you're right." They said, "Would you all come to it?"

And then I had found out that at the time, right before that I found out some of the students I graduated with also were having some of the difficulties when they were going to some of the schools that they were attending, like Tennessee State University. We would write each other all the time. Carla Thomas was singing up there at Tennessee State and her daddy had been up there, and we all was talking about doing the dog. We learned how to do the dog, and at Southern University, we were doing the dog, and then the announcement came out and said, if I catch any of these students — this is Clark again, President Clark — doing the dog, you will be expelled from the school.

ROSS: Expelled for dancing?

KRAMER: For dancing. They thought doing the dog was not becoming to Southern University. So, the person that attended Tennessee State said, “What do you mean?” And we were writing back and said don’t they know Carla Thomas is a 4.0 student? This woman has a business and everything now, the young student, they ought to be glad that they have the opportunity to dance by her music, and her daddy’s music. So, you know, we were becoming more aware and began a little retaliation on our part. That was my girlfriend at Tennessee State, she has passed on.

Another person who came from — we grew up in the same neighborhood and attended the same schools, his father was one of the ministers that would be with my minister. They were from the church across the street from N.W. Harllee School, Alvin White. He had got involved on his campus. I think he had attended, I don’t know for sure, Lincoln University. So, you know, all of us showed up for the sand — (laughs) to be able to find out what’s going on, and they said, “Don’t you all have something to say?” I told about what the teacher had said in the class, about all the Negroes attending the school up there. They said, you know, in essence, that he shouldn’t have said nothing like that, and the students that were there said we’re proud of the fact that our school took a stand and began to integrate this school.

So I felt good, but then I had to end up attending my tennis class. Lord have mercy. I had a young lady that I grew up with, Joyce, was in this class. She graduated a year after me, and we were partners, because we were the only two blacks in the class, because none of the whites were going to team up. We didn’t know how to play tennis anyway, but we knew how to bat a ball. I said, “Joyce, you know this is not going to be fair, so we better get ready.” Those girls started batting those balls and so, until we got the hang of it, and I said, “Joyce, if this girl hits me once more with this ball it’s going to be all out.” The girl hit me and I got the ball and I said, “Well I got it now, and I hope, like she dishes, I hope she can receive it.” And I made sure that ball went for either her head or her arm, and then she got it. She was angry. I said, “Oh, it’s OK for you to hit me but not for me to hit you?” You know, so good thing that was the end of the class, because it looked like we were about to get into a

fight right then and there. But she understood from then on, she couldn't get away with that.

We went to that school only one semester, because we ended up in an accident on that highway. We had to move up there. My parents said, you all can continue and find a place to move to, and once we finished there, I went back to Southern University because my uncle on my father's side was very ill and he was calling for me. I went back to Louisiana -- my grandfather told me about it -- I went back to Louisiana and it was the same summer that the march on Washington was taking place. They were preparing in Plaquemine, Louisiana, in places, to go to D.C. I could have gone but I wasn't leaving my uncle. So we watched stuff on TV and we were very proud to see that march on Washington.

My aunt, who owned this café, her name was Gert — Lord have mercy, my brain is really gone now — Murray, who had three children, and the three children were two boys and a girl. Her daughter, who was like six years older than me, always felt that she was like my mother's sister, and her brother is the same way, because their father was my grandmother's first cousin. They always, if you were the cousin to someone, you were like brothers and sisters. So, I was glad to be back in Louisiana, because the movement was heating up. I told you about my cousins, they were still out of school, some of them, and at that time, with the Civil Rights Movement, my cousin, we called him Hank -- his name was Henry -- he worked at the port. They had formed a little organization in Port Allen to take on some of the problems that people were facing around integration and stuff like that, because they had been on with the merchants and had gotten some of my cousins and other young blacks hired, integrating the place. The grocery stores where we shopped and all that type of stuff, the hardware store, places where my father and them lived in, right, they had hired some of the blacks. All this is going on during the march on Washington and stuff.

So what happened was the business community got together one night in Port Allen, while I was there in the summertime, and decided that no, no blacks are going to tell us what to do. Let me tell you, there was so much going on. It was at the same time there was this black doctor that all of us respect was going back to Plaquemine and there had been an accident on the train tracks where a young white woman's car had been hit by the train. She tried to outrun the train. He was going past it and saw it and he stopped and well, he's a doctor. He had to think in his conscience, and I remember telling my aunt, "Should I treat her, touch a white woman, or should I go on?" He said no, my ethics said treat the patient, because if he hadn't have treated her, she would have died. And so he did and they arrested him, and it turned Port Allen out. I was so proud of those folks coming out in his defense. See, Plaquemine, Louisiana, and Port Allen, Louisiana, are 17 miles away from each other. Then you had all these other little communities, Donaldsonville

and all that stuff. So, all of them began to turn out to support this doctor. At the same time, in Plaquemine, Ronnie Moore, who was director of CORE, CORE had come to Louisiana.

ROSS: What is CORE?

KRAMER: Congress of Racial Equality began to hold rallies in Plaquemine every night, and they would hang out a lot of time at my aunt's café. And the civil rights workers would come there, because they had a contract with my aunt to feed them. So I would get to see them and know them, but I was living around the corner with my father still. When my uncle died, I was trying to — kind of wanting to, I'm going to go, I'm interested in the Civil Rights Movement. I'm trying to think back, and you and I will have to go back and look at it, because I went to Southern, I'm trying to think, about a year. I did go back in that September, I did. I went back to Southern that year, in September, and went a semester. But then I began to get to the point, I was going to go for it. I got mad, I was going for it, in the Civil Rights Movement, because what began to happen, a lot of events after that. I started even organizing on campus; passing out leaflets and stuff like that, what meeting is coming up.

The way I got to school is I either rode a bus, which either went across the Mississippi Bridge — there was only one bridge that went across at that time and it was by this chemical place -- and Dow Chemical had blew up one day, I'll never forget this. See, as you go down the highway into Plaquemine and stuff --Dow Chemical had relocated in that area. And I'm sitting at the table on a Monday, and the reason why I know it was a Monday, because every Monday, our stepmother cooked red beans and rice. And I'm sitting at the table, we're eating - we always had to sit at the table. It wasn't like now, that you could sit in front of the TV and all that, no. -We're eating and everything started shaking, and my mom said, "I bet it's that chemical company."

Well, after Dow Chemical blew up that time, they decided that they were going to build another bridge sooner or later, away — because the other bridge was closer to this chemical company, and so eventually, over the years, they did build another bridge between Port Allen and East Baton Rouge, because they stopped running the ferryboats. But this one bridge, if you're ever down there, you've got to go across this bridge. On one side you had traffic going a different direction, and in the middle, there are the train tracks. It's huge too. And so I had to either ride the bus from Port Allen to Southern, or ride the bus that would take me to the ferryboat that was still running at the time. I could walk home then, from the ferry, if I wanted to walk, you know, grab one of my cousins or something like that, and have them take me home. That's how I got to Southern University.

There was so much stuff going on. Ronnie and them having rallies, meetings at my aunt's café as a result of the meeting that was held in the front -- because the show had been turned black, that was not integrated at one time, so they would use parts of the show to have meetings and stuff. And the merchants decided, and when they decided they were not going to let no blacks dictate to them, they let all the blacks go.

ROSS: Just fired them all?

KRAMER: Mm-hmm. Port Allen organized. My cousin and them organized. They began to call folks, saying they were going to boycott all the merchants in Port Allen and when it was time for folks to go to the grocery stores, they were going to get buses and cars on Saturday, take you to Plaquemine, across the river. That was successful. It was so successful, Loretta, until there was stew beef in the window of this grocery store -- and I remember as a kid, going in that grocery store -- for five cents a pound. They came to my aunt's café and pleaded with her, "Can you please talk to your husband and the rest of them, and tell them pull this boycott off of us, please pull it. We're ready to rehire our people and more. We have learned our lesson." She said, "No, I'm not going to promise you that, I have to take this back to them."

Now I'm going to tell you about Gert. I want you to get an understanding of these women that have played a role in my life. There were my two grandmothers I told you about, my mother, my step-mother, that have motivated me. I have my aunt on my grandfather's side, Lilly Bynum, and that's B-Y-N-U-M, her granddaughter and her daughter. And then on my father's side, his sisters, and my cousin's mother, Aunt Martha. But then, and I'm talking about these real strong women, was my mother, my two grandmothers, my daddy's sister, Frances, who had relocated long before that, to Louisiana, from New Orleans, and that's on my father's side. My mother's side, Mama Gert, we called her, and my father's sister, her name is Marian, the baby.

ROSS: Were you named after her?

KRAMER: I was named after her and my cousin. There was two Marians in our family; one on my mother's side and one on my father's side, and so I was named after both of them, and my name is Marian Jeanette. And they say I look so much like my aunt. I thought I did, the one on my father's side. But those women began to really set forth in the Civil Rights Movement in Port Allen too. All the meetings would be held down at my aunt's café. At this time, the students at Cohn High School, began to take a stand, I mean that itching beginning to get to them, and they asked my aunt if they could have a meeting at her café. She said yes. They had a meeting and I'm telling you, they devised a plan -- and we'll talk about it afterwards.

(End of Audio File 03)

KRAMER: Are we ready?

ROSS: We are ready. Now, when we left off, you were talking about the way the campus you were at, at Southern, was responding to the Civil Rights Movement happening nationally, and what role you all were playing in it, but you haven't got quite to where you got arrested.

KRAMER: Boy, you really want that arrest. Well, you know, at Southern, we began to have these little soapbox — that's what it was, I was saying sandbox. Soapbox, on every occasion that we could. After we'd pass out leaflets. The people, some of them was from Plaquemine, that was going to Southern. We would run into each other on the bus, we'd do a leaflet and that type of stuff. And it's interesting, as I was thinking, some of the people that ended up being in the movement stayed in, are still in the movement, doing some of the soapbox at Southern University and trying to get people involved, not just on campus but also in the communities and stuff. We were able to get a few of them, but I think the fear of what happened before was still there.

My aunt's café was still a gathering place for this, so I decided, instead of going back to Southern University, I'd been there for three semesters. Anyway, I wasn't really interested in school no more, because I was not getting from that what I needed as far as where my attention was, and that was to be able to eliminate injustice, that they had kept their foot on our necks for how long. The key thing, teaching people how to become registered voters and knocking down Jim Crowism at that time. And the only way I could come directly involved in that, was to get involved more and more in what my uncle was involved in, as far as the boycotting that took place, the students that had approached my aunt about meeting at the café. All this stuff is happening.

Not only did that happen, but here's a little store in the neighborhood, who had shot -- this man had shot a young man in East Baton Rouge. He owned two or three grocery stores, one in East Baton Rouge, one in West Baton Rouge, where he was, and he made a statement that the newspaper ran. This is a white man. Because a picket line had started in East Baton Rouge against him getting off on shooting this young black kid. He said, "Well that's OK, I have a store in West Baton Rouge." Well, when he came to work the next day, he looked out and who was there but us, a bunch of folks from Port Allen, picketing his place, and I was so happy to be out there on that picket line. At the same time, where his store was located, it was right deep in the black community, and if you stayed on that same little street where it was located and kept going, you went into the white community. Some land that had been stolen from one of my cousins, in the court, stolen from them. They had developed this division over there for them. And the whites were

turning down their street and coming down there real fast, to try to agitate us at the time, and that little aunt -- let me get back to that little aunt, Gertrude Hardy, that's her name, and her husband's name was Henry Hardy. That's the one we called Hank, that worked at the port.

Mama Gert had—I'll never forget this car — a Buick, pink and gray. I don't know if you remember those cars. No, you're too young for that, pink and gray Buicks. She drove that car, parked it on one side, and sat in that car watching us, making sure that nobody was going to mess with us. This woman came by there and yelled something out at us and almost hit me, and all of a sudden Mama Gert took off and ran her down and told her — I said, what did you say to that woman? I told that woman, "When you come down the street from now on, you'd better come slowly down that street, and you see that little one you just almost hit, that's mines." And she pulled a pistol out and said, "And if not, you're going to have to meet this." Honey, those people started respecting that picket line, see because they weren't going to mess with Gert too much, some of the white folks, because they know Gert would put a bullet in their ass and probably would walk free. She looked like any other white woman herself, but Mama was out there protecting us. And who else started coming down there with her? My mother was in Louisiana at the time because she was selling my grandparents' house. My momma was down there. You had the two of them down there watching us and making sure. And we won. He had to close that store because we boycotted that store.

Once they began to discuss what Mama Gert had reported back to them about what these folks said, they sat down with these white folks about who wanted to apologize, and they had learned their lesson and they were ready to rehire folks. And they got the folks. And not only did they rehire those folks, they hired some additional people. We won that victory and it was through -- like I said again, the people still wanted to go to those stores. You know how people do, some linger on and go in there, but people started standing out and had names of folks going into those stores. They put a little fear, and you talk about fear, well then you live around us and you're going to have to face us.

I was so proud of my uncles, my aunts and all of them, and then this meeting that the young people held one Sunday, at my aunt's café. They wanted to boycott school because they should be integrated, and we said we support y'all, we support you. And in walked my cousin, who I loved so dearly, and another friend of ours, the guy that owned the mortuary back there, and his son was attending Southern High, which was a school located on Southern University campus, really like a private school. He was talking against, which was hard for him, those kids talking about integrating the school, saying we can get the same funding the white schools can have. They said no, it ain't like going to their schools, to Port Allen High and all this. These young people were

up there and I was surprised that my cousin was supporting that at the time. So, he was interrupted in the meeting, my Aunt Frances and them said, "OK, you were not invited to the meeting, you're going to have to leave, is that OK with you Gert?" Gert said, "It sure is, sure is, get out of here." That's all she said. Then, my Aunt Frances said, "You can meet down at my place," telling the adults let's meet down there, because we're not going to allow him to call nothing off. These young people, they made their decision, let's meet down there tomorrow night. Lord have mercy, we did. This was next door to my grandmother.

My aunt used to live in that house next door, and then my Aunt Frances moved in there once she moved to Baton Rouge. It was my Aunt Frances, it was my brother's sister, older sister. It was her younger sister, Marian, we called her [Tanook?]. It was my mother, mama Gert, and who else was there, somebody else was there. My aunt Lilly, who has passed away also, in fact all of them have passed away. And my Aunt Edna came up to the meeting, little pistol-packing Edna, I'll tell you about her a little later. They began to have a meeting, talking about how to support these young people and planning around that, and that type of stuff, and I was honored to be able to be in that meeting.

ROSS: I notice you only mention women though.

KRAMER: That's all. In walked — knocked on the door and here's my cousin again, along with the person that owned the mortuary — I'm trying to talk and think about his name, as much as I know his name — trying to interfere again. My Aunt Frances said, "You was not invited to this meeting, so you're going to have to get out of my house." I said, "Yeah!" And he got mad at me. (laughs) Because my thing was, get it on. He knew, for one thing, particularly these women wouldn't take no mess from him, and he turned around and left, and then it was a long time before we kind of spoke to each other any more -- because he finally got back in the family and everything, you know, that type of stuff. But he had opposed those young folks. I don't know what he was going to get in the process, if they did not boycott, but they decided to do that and the schools, as a result of their action, the schools did get integrated. And so it was really good because the motion was beginning to get higher, as far as going towards taking a stand and not taking that nonsense no more.

So that summer, I decided that I wanted to be a full-time civil rights worker. CORE had these taskforce workers, but you had to be -- just like Rosa Parks -- you had to be trained. So we went into training in Plaquemine. I told my mother and she said, "I don't know, I just don't know. I've been watching what's been going on and people getting hurt. I just don't know if I want my daughter that involved." I said, "Well you have taught me and I have to go in," -- you know, it's like going into the Army — "I've got to go, that's the decision I have made, that I

need to do this.” So she said, OK. But it was Hank who stood up and said — and he was real ill too. My uncle had died and he had started getting sick also, and he said, “Sis, go do what you got to do, and know always, your uncle and your cousin would always be there to support you.” And I did and I only came back because he called me. We were losing him, his kidneys were shutting down on him.

But as far as men go, my grandfather, Hank, and my uncle that died, they supported me in that movement. And you know it’s like my grandfather said, “I had to hold my head down when I come around white folks. I had to shuffle my feet in order to get through and that type of stuff, but you don’t have to.” He said, “You stay involved.” And so I went to a training that summer and I was assigned to Monroe, Louisiana. We had people in Monroe, Louisiana, we had people in Jonesboro, Louisiana, we had people in St. Francesville, Louisiana, we had people in New Orleans, in Port Allen, in Plaquemine and -- I’m trying to think where else. All civil rights workers. We were paid \$44.89 every two weeks, but we didn’t get it every two weeks, but the community took care of us and we were assigned to Freedom Houses.

In Monroe, there was four of us, two females and two males, living with Mama — I have forgot her name, I have to get her name, she played a hell of a role. She fed us every morning. That’s the first time I started really drinking Louisiana coffee, strong coffee.

ROSS: Chicory?

KRAMER: No, I hate Chicory. Chicory, I have never developed a taste for. But the strong coffee, the way they make their coffee. The coffee in Louisiana, was at one time made like they make the coffee and sweetened, but I guess from the French or something like that.

ROSS: French roast.

KRAMER: Ah-huh. You put it in the little strainer and you pour hot water over it the whole time, until you got that strong, I mean strong coffee. And we drank coffee in those little French cups, the little bitty cups, because you couldn’t take a lot of that coffee. So I got hooked on that and boy, those people fed us in the morning time, at the café, and they fed us for lunch and for dinner. But I was in Monroe, Louisiana, and I got assigned to the office, and I said, “I don’t want to be in the office.”

Claudia was from North Carolina and Claudia had joined the movement during the Freedom Rides and stuff, and she had gotten beaten up in North Carolina. And this was the first time I was working, and I had a lot of respect at that time, for the Black Muslims, because the ones I met in Monroe, Louisiana, had a barber shop next door and another shop, and they were kind of watching over us. What was interesting is that

because in our staff there in Monroe there were blacks and whites, and I remember the brother said, "Yeah, we're going to protect the blonde, blue-eyed devils too, because they're out here for us too." And they did. They watched over us good.

I remember manning the phones, where Joe would call us and tie up our line all the time. The [Ku Klux] Klan were paying him like ten cents a call, and negotiating and I was negotiating — "Look, tell them that we said you're doing a fine job, they need to up your pay." And Joe got so familiarized with us, I said, "Joe, do you have any teeth?" He said, no. I said, "You should tell them you need some benefits, that you need to be able to get some teeth from the fine job that you are doing." And Joe said, "I see you all are going on a demonstration tomorrow." See, we had set up the kids, and Jonesboro was so great. There was a guy that they said, "This is nothing but a snitch for the sheriff department and the police department." They said, "We saw him down there talking at the park with them." And we followed him and that's exactly where he went, and he probably was a snitch for them. And he came in the office one day. He said, "What you all doing, Marian?" I said, "Oh, we're getting ready for a demonstration." Somebody else said it too. And we weren't thinking, we were kidding, we was about to — and then we didn't say no more, we forgot. And within an hour, the sheriff was calling us and he asked to speak to Claudia, and he was bawling Claudia out, saying, "You all haven't told us, you hadn't called us and informed us that you all was having a demonstration tomorrow." She said, "What are you talking about?" He said, "We heard you all was having a demonstration and you can't be doing that." She said, "I don't even know what you're talking about." He exposed his ass.

Those kids were tremendous. They began to learn, because all the training we had, we gave to them. We taught them how to fall out in a demonstration, how to protect themselves from teargas, how to do all that type of stuff. What to answer if the police comes and everything. But we did not know how much the work that we were doing was being appreciated by the people in Monroe. Where I stayed, at Mama Sevino's house. No, Mama Sevino was Chicago. I'm trying to get this lady's name, this little Italian woman that wanted to go to jail with me. Where we stayed, it was a single older lady, a senior citizen who had a couple of dogs, and you know how they, in the south, keep those houses spic and span. You know how in the south you've got houses in the alley.

ROSS: Right.

KRAMER: And they keep those alleys clean. At the end, where we would come into the alley -- there were a couple of houses, and I would generally walk down there in the evening, when I didn't have a meeting or something like that, and sit on the porch with the couple that lived at the end of the alley, listen to some jazz or listen to Dakota Staten and all

that stuff, and just be enjoying all that. We had all those records. We'd be enjoying that and one of them told me one night -- I said, "Well I'm going to bed." They said, "Yeah, go get you some sleep because we know you've got to be at breakfast in the morning at eight, you've got a heavy day tomorrow." So they knew what we were doing and always supported us. She said, you know, "As you all sleep, we set up." I said, "What you all doing setting up?" They said, "We're watching over y'all." We be down here with our shotgun, on this porch every night, not just me, but the people across and the people at the other end, and whites in Monroe, except for the whites like Mike and Dave Kramer and all this stuff, not the civil rights worker, whites in the city, no they cannot come up in this alley at night. I said, "What?" They said, "Oh yeah, they done tried to sneak up in here but they won't try it no more because we're armed and ready." I was like this, "What?"

But we are being protected because people played their role in the Civil Rights Movement. You might have been on the frontline, but there were other people doing things in the background that you knew nothing about. She said, "They cannot come up in this alley." Anybody that is doing housework, like the lady where I live, she is let off at the end of this alley, because they cannot come up in this alley. Or over where the guys, a lot of the guys were staying, that house was watched by the neighborhood, they said, "Because we appreciate what you all are doing." I said, "Well thank you, we appreciate what you are doing." But that was in Monroe, Louisiana, and every morning, we checked in with Jonesboro, our people in Jonesboro, and gave a report to them, and they gave us a report, and we gave reports back to Baton Rouge.

Then we started noticing somebody on the line listening, so we started coding that stuff, and so it was stopping them for some time. And the Muslims was watching, this is what we found out too. Everybody couldn't come in that building, because they were watching folks that came in that building and if you looked strange, you wasn't coming in. They were watching over us also, because the tension started rising in Monroe, where when the people would come in from the fields, after they had gone testing, because they decided, young people and all, said we want to go test the Civil Rights Act. And they'd go test those acts. They'd go to these restaurants and places and sit up there and test them. The retaliation that started from the community, the white community, one woman had gotten beaten by a chain and they had a chain wrapped, beating on her legs, by some young white folks. Two young black kids, there was this — you know, with the parks, public parks, they had colored and they had whites. You could not go over there where all the good stuff was, on the white side. Two young men came up to our office and they pulled their shirts off, they had been bullwhipped, gashes in their back from these folks. They were going across the park to buy — you know, you could buy cigarettes for a nickel. But these whites stopped them and whooped them with a bullwhip, and said, "Go back,"

you know, they're trying to get us to stop doing what we were doing. But you would think, after those folks had gone through that, then you thought they were gone and they keep doing it, keep doing it, until we broke Monroe and broke down a lot of the antagonisms and the support for Jim Crowism.

We would call Jonesboro, Louisiana, also in the evening time, find out what was going on, and the Klan activity had increased there. Once a month, we would go to Baton Rouge for a state meeting and an up-to-date and reports, and get to see each other again. Because you know how, when you come together, you feel good. That's the medicine to send you back out. Well, we would travel in the upper part of Louisiana, like up here, and you know Louisiana is a mitten. We would come through the area up there and drop into Vicksburg, Mississippi -- and Vicksburg is beautiful, it is just simply beautiful, and that's where they fought a lot of the Civil War. Well, it got to the point they knew -- they would find out over the phone -- when we were coming through that area up there. We would look at all the fillups stations, fillups service stations, that was some of the Klan's hangout. We would look back there and we would have four cars, because Jonesboro would have met us in Monroe. We'd take out and we put the best drivers under those wheels, and we said, when we look back and see those lights, we know, those that were the drivers, watch the front car, pick the speed up. Do not stop for police or nothing -- because let me tell you what some of the people that were doing the fundraising for CORE at that time had done.

The workers from the year before had put out to them a request -- Look, this is life and death out here on these highways and in these woods and stuff, and we need some fast cars. We need two-way radios, we need all this in order to survive. These people fundraised in St. Francesville, the people themselves. St. Francesville, is like the capital of sweet potatoes. The community came together and fundraised and got us a Ford station wagon and had them put in a Mustang motor -- said, "We're tired of you all getting your butts whipped," because one of the civil rights workers, Jim Van Matre, who was from Florida, a white guy that joined the movement, got whooped real bad, because someone from down there wrote an article and the news got back up here, but it was sent to Florida. That was a rule, that we couldn't go out at nighttime, and we knew, because it was dangerous, you go out with a crowd.

ROSS: Right.

KRAMER: "Jim," we said, "this is Louisiana." We said, "Jim, you too." He ended up being good, but he was hotheaded too, hotheaded. Jim went walking and this white crowd got him and said, "That's him," and beat the hell out of that kid. That's how we ended up with that car. I mean, it was a station wagon with a Thunderbird motor. Now outrun that sucker. And

the other cars, they put some very good, fast motors in. So we were able to outrun them, and they would run us right into Vicksburg, and we'd go through Mississippi, back into Louisiana, and that's how we would get around. In-between there, between Monroe and Vicksburg, there was a place where we could stop — I would have to look on the map — and there was this black priest. We always stopped over at his house, and the Klans would lose us, because they never thought -- He had a place where we could park the car, and we'd run in. He always had Coca-Colas ready for us and he'd say, "Relax." and "They've got to leave." And they would give up and we'd go.

But, you know, there were people that joined -- and I love it, because it was a lesson to learn, to see how people would do what they could and they were leaders themselves. No one had to tell them what to do. They joined the movement from what they could do, like this priest. I think about my ex-husband, Dave Kramer. He was supposed to be there on a leave of absence from Ford Motor Company. This boy come from a mother, a single mother, that put him through college, because his mother and father had divorced. He went to Tuskegee -- not Tuskegee, he went to Carnegie Tech. He got a break because his mother was a secretary there and she put him through that school. He ended up with a job at Ford Motor Company, and that was during the time too, they were beginning to design cars in clay. He began to see the civil rights stuff on TV and he felt bad. Now he comes from — his mother had moved out of the house and moved into a trailer house. His brother had succeeded and got a big job, but he was supposed to be helping with him too, but she didn't get no help. She got help from her ex-husband, Dave's father, and sometimes the father would put something -- so Dave made it through school. He took that leave of absence. Dave never did go back. He resigned.

ROSS: So how did you all meet?

KRAMER: We met at the Civil Rights Movement, years later. I said, "Oh, no, I can't be messing with you. I ain't never messing with no white person," You know, going through your mind and stuff. But Dave, you meet him and he's the nicest thing you could meet. One thing I love about — you see, I've had two nice guys, two wonderful guys in my life. This one just, you know --

ROSS: Well, how long did you all stay — where did you all get married and how long did you stay married?

KRAMER: Well, we came up here in the winter of 19 —

ROSS: Up here meaning Detroit?

KRAMER: Yeah. I'm trying to think of the year. Sixty-four. We couldn't get married in Louisiana, the miscegenation law was down there. Not miscegenation.

ROSS: Miscegenation.

KRAMER: Yeah, that miscegenation law existed. We would have been in prison. Another couple came with us. They were going to New York and they rode as far as here and then they took a bus to New York. I met, for the first time, Frank Joyce, who was here, and Frank said, "I'm going to give you all a reception." I met all these people when I got here. It was my first time ever coming north, you know. I had been in the Civil Rights Movement, direct action, out in the field for a whole year. This was his first time being out there, and then when we came up here, Dave Niederhauser and all of them, had started the West Central Organization Committee and was fighting against urban renewal and that type of stuff, and a lot of stuff in the community convinced Dave that he needed to come back up here. They needed his skills as an organizer and they said, "We need you," to Marian and I said, "I don't know about that."

So once we got back to Louisiana, we got married and left, and got to Cincinnati. I had to get in the back of the car and lay on the floor, because we was about to go through Mississippi. Well, no, that ain't where you go through Mississippi. It was in --

ROSS: Kentucky?

KRAMER: Not Kentucky. Alabama, that's where we were, or somewhere in there, I forgot where it was. We was about to go through Mississippi, and for all that time that I rode through Mississippi, I was under a blanket. It was that bad down there. And so we finally came back up here. We had to convince Ronnie and all of them that we were going to move back up here, because people needed us up here to help organize. But it was hard, because I had been in Louisiana. I was in Monroe. Dave got arrested in Monroe, Louisiana, but he got arrested again, because he wanted him to come to an area where — what's his name wanted him to come to an area where they were integrating a swimming pool. You're going to test a swimming pool. If you're a civil rights worker, you've got to know how to swim and know how to swim good, but Dave, with that camera -- It was dangerous to have a camera, and to be white. -- They beat the hell out of Dave Kramer. So, we promised, made a promise to Ronnie and them, that one of us would come back for the summertime -- because we had to help train the new civil rights workers. It ended up being me -- that I would stay down there and make sure that we help take it to the next phase.

ROSS: So when did you get arrested?

KRAMER: I'm coming to it now.

ROSS: OK. You've only got a couple of more minutes on this tape.

KRAMER: What happened is I came back and the Civil Rights Movement was changing. It was the whole question on what the tactics, the strategy need to be for the summer. Was it voter registration? Not in Monroe and Jonesboro, because in Monroe and Jonesboro, we registered practically all the people, in the woods, everywhere. What's interesting about those woods is that we knew how to get back up — we had learned how to go back up in them and the Klans would not come back there. You're going to have to turn it off for a minute.

(End of Audio File 04)

ROSS: Just tell the story of how you got arrested.

KRAMER: All right. I went back to Louisiana, after I had been out with WCO, and as soon as I got there...

ROSS: WCO?

KRAMER: West Central Organization. When I got to Louisiana, the person that picked me up from the bus station in New Orleans, started telling me about all the problems that existed. I said, "Oh, no!" She was telling me about the changing of a lot of the strategy and what we were supposed to be accomplishing, how they were assigning people that were incorrect from what we knew and that type of stuff. So I said, well we're going to have to get this stuff taken care of. So we went straight to Waveland, Mississippi, to go back into training again for the summer. A lot of folks started bringing me up on what had happened, that I had been in the struggle with for a while, and I said, "Have you all talked to Ronnie?" They said, "We can't talk to Ronnie."

ROSS: Ronnie who?

KRAMER: Ronnie Moore, who was the director at the time. I said, "What about some of the other directors that are down here?" They said, "They won't listen." I said OK, I've got a good idea. Why don't we, in the morning, all us old workers that they need sit at the same table and refuse to eat our breakfast that morning, and that's going to make them wonder, 'What in the hell is wrong with y'all?' Then we could sit down and begin to voice the complaints that you all have had, about the assignments of sending new workers. See, they didn't want to send an integrated group into a new area, because they had learned that it brings too much attention in the beginning. Just slowly do it. Or sending a new person in, two new people into an area. You can't do that. You need to

send somebody that have had the experience working out there -- and there were some legitimate complaints.

So we got in there and we all got to the same table, pulled our tables together, and people started noticing, saying, "OK, what's wrong?" I said, "People have got something to say to y'all." And they began to talk and they talked about how they didn't like their new assignments, they didn't like what was going on, and that if anything, the people that was doing the assignment, that had never been out in the field, need to consult with the people that have been in the trenches. One of the people told me he said, "Marian, I know you're involved," and I said, "Me? I just got back here and heard the same thing that you all heard and I think they're right." So we won that fight. I got assigned to Jonesboro, Louisiana, heading up the Jonesboro, Louisiana section. When we got to Jonesboro, and like I said, the whole question of voter registration, we had done a lot of that. I wanted to see about the need to have a meeting and find out how should we be moving now. And we had a couple of meetings with the people in the community and they wanted to start testing some of these facilities also and start getting some of these jobs for folks and what have you.

Prior to going to Jonesboro, when I left, I didn't tell you that the Deacons for Self-Defense had been formed, you know, and they had learned a lot of that from Robert Williams and what have you -- and Robert Williams being the person that had left here during the '50s, after being president of the NAACP, and coming back from the service. They tried to say that Robert Williams and them had kidnapped a white couple, which they hadn't. They had given them some protection because they were all in the black community at the time. But that was the way to try to attack Rob and them, and they ended up in Cuba after that. Rob, they were mad at Rob, because Rob had pulled all these veterans together to stop the Klans from riding down in Monroe, North Carolina, and that type of stuff. And so the Deacons for Self-Defense had formed, with "Chilly Willy," and a lot of them, and started protecting the civil rights workers. Because what was happening, they were riding through the area prior to when we were in Monroe and intimidating the community and trying to separate the community from supporting the civil rights activities. Once the Deacons took a stand, they couldn't even come through the community. Then they were the catalyst, the Deacons for Self-Defense was the catalyst for the Deacons for Self-Defense being organized in Bogalusa, Louisiana.

So those same Deacons, when I went back down there, -- you know, several of those folks, were the ones that was around the Freedom House and making sure that we didn't get hurt -- and who walks in one day but the sheriff, who got his leg broke the summer before for coming over there, visiting us at the civil rights place. The Klansmen -- and the head of the Klansmen at that time down there was this lieutenant from

the police department -- they said that he had been making too many visits, they broke his leg. But he started coming back around and I told him, you better watch out, because they're probably going to break your other leg.

So, we found out that each night the Klansmen was trying to move on us, and there was a lieutenant that was in the reserve, right next door to our Freedom House, right across the street. He shot one of them in the butt, because they were trying to burn the Freedom House down, we in there sleeping. So they made sure they were out there. They tried to arrest the lieutenant but, honey, they brought the Army down on them, on that one, and so they left them alone. But what happened in the community -- here we're running into another store just like in Port Allen. This store had hurt one of the young black kids in -- oh, I forgot the name of the area. Not too far from Jonesboro. They came to their store, the young people got together and said they wanted to confront this man and they wanted to boycott the store, and we said that's fine with us. I said, "You all can lead it and we'll be out there with you, right with you." That particular day, I said, "Well, it's so hot. I know I took a shower last night, but I'm going to take a shower again this morning, and I'm going to wash my hair and everything, before we go out here. And I'll put on a little -- this time, I'm going to put on a little summer dress, because it's so hot." Because we're used to wearing fatigues. Now, we were having those overalls where we would split up the middle where the pants legs were, and we would sew them and make them into jumpers and put on our t-shirt.

Well this particular morning, I decided to put on a little dress. We get out there, I'm sitting on one of the civil rights cars and singing along with the young students, the young people that were standing in front of the store. Now that Saturday prior to that Monday that I'm talking about, we had successfully closed that store down. The whole community came out. It was beautiful. People came from the other area where they were having problems and enjoyed this demonstration and everything. The police has to escort the people that evening, out of the store. Monday then came and we were back there. We looked up, here is a fire truck pulling up, here come the police, but the Deacons for Self-Defense said, "Don't worry Marian, we're going to be out there." They were out there too and they brought their dogs with them and you know they had their shotguns, and their thing was, "They better not harm a hair on you all heads." When they put that fire truck up there, we said oh, they're going to open up the fire hose on us. I don't know what happened but they retreated from that and the fire truck left, but then they backed up a garbage truck, and that was one of those garbage trucks that spins around and stuff, and the first person they said take was me. They threw me behind in that filthy ass garbage truck which had just been unloaded. You talk about stinking, that thing was stinking. Next thing, they threw in a whole lot of other folks and, you know, we

had a hard time holding on to anything, and they took us to jail. They put all the women in a cell that was like from where you are to where that, to the table over there. And that's what, about eight inches. Eight feet, is it about eight feet?

ROSS: About eight feet, yeah.

KRAMER: And it probably went down to the end of that black cabinet, about 12 feet, and they put all us women -- I mean there was a lot of us, and we didn't hardly have no space. They had about four bunks in there, so we had to sit up to sleep. They put the white civil rights workers, the males, in the white area, they put the black males in the black area. So we knew that the white civil rights workers were in danger. That first night, we said we're going to fix their butt, because one of the women that were in there with us — not the women, trustees told us, if you run the water, it will run right down into the courtroom. We ran the water all night, so the next morning they decided to divide us up. They took me first and threw me into solitary confinement, what they call solitary confinement. This was where there was no bars, you know, just the little bars in the little window and stuff. They took the other civil rights worker that was in there and put her next door to me. So, I couldn't see nobody hardly.

I was in a cell by myself, a little small cell. There was a wool blanket on the bed and it was hot as hell. It was 97 degrees that week. Early that morning, the jailer came up, a little white jailer and his wife, came up and took me to get a shower. I'm looking around, trying to figure out what's going on, myself and the girl next to me. We took a shower and that's the first time I had had and discovered Dial soap, and I felt so good, girl. I didn't have nothing to put on, so I just got wet and everything. I had washed everything. And I felt good because it was so hot in there, but I had to eventually start sleeping under that blanket, because as hot as that place was, there was mosquitoes up there, and the people that had been in there before me, and it was only one woman, had knocked that window out. So I learned to survive. The girl next to me that was a civil rights worker, she was from California, a young black girl. She was just crying and everything. She said, "I just want to get out of here." I said, "We got you ready physically, I see, but we didn't get you ready mentally for this."

We were in that jail eight days, seven nights. The ones that were in the pen where we had been before kept the momentum going, it was good, but then they could hear from the guys in the white pen. Two of the white guys that was in there, that was our people. They put in a guy that was acting like he was drunk. In some kind of way, they tried to make like he had stole it. He had a iron skillet and he hit one of our guys, and I mean the lasting effects on him were something else. This particular civil rights worker, I'll have to find out his name, I done forgot his name. It's interesting, because he had a speech problem after that

incident, I mean they would really — the civil rights workers would catch a lot of hell in those cells. And they called me and I said, “Let’s make the noise,” and we kept making noise until we found out the only people there were the jailer who was helping us, sneaking up there, letting us get showers, sneaking up pop to us. The trustees was doing that. Then they took the trustees. The lieutenant found out about the trustees and he locked them up at night, so they wouldn’t bring in messages back and forth.

Finally, that Sunday, we felt so good because we could hear the demonstrators out there, and when we got out on that eighth day, they asked us, “What do you want to eat?” I said, “I want some peas -- you know those Crowley peas -- some corn bread, some grease,” because in the jail, trying to get people ready mentally is so much different physically.

ROSS: Right.

KRAMER: And that is that. See, I knew. See I was contented, because I asked one of the trustees to get me a pack of playing cards. I learned to play whist four ways with myself, containing myself. I learned to talk to people, we sang songs, but this young lady just couldn’t take it. I really got her ready after we got out, and I said, “You’ve done what you could, you did well,” and got her ready to go back to California because she could not survive this stuff too much. She was one of the same young women -- and she tried -- that went scouting with me one day, and I told her, “When we get into this area to go scouting for a new area that we needed to move into, drive slow, and we’re going to walk up into the registrar office and ask for a registration form and see what happens. Let’s try not to cause any attention being brought to us.” I said, “There’s going to be enough just going in there.”

We walked into the courthouse, we went to the registration place, and she was just, the poor child, she was shaking. We got back in the car and I told her, I said, “OK, they made us, because they’ve probably got our pictures out everywhere.” I said, “What I want you to do is still drive slow going out of the area, but once you get over that hill, put your foot into the gas. Do not stop. Keep going.” This is this young lady I’m describing to you. She started panicking. This man was almost on our tail. I said, “Push it!” She started going faster. Come on now, don’t panic on me, I said, “When you get over that next hill, pull over to the side and get ready to jump out, and I’m coming around and drive.” I ain’t never drove before, other than somebody trying to teach me. Girl, I drove that car. I drove that car until I got to the interstate highway, saw a house, went behind that house, and I told the men, “Help us, help us.” What was happening, he said, “Pull your car up farther, I know how to hide it.” And he ran in and did that and he said, “Y’all go in this room, don’t say nothing, just sit there.” That sheriff deputy came to his house

and asked him, "Did you see a little white car go past here?" He said, "I kind of did but I really didn't notice it or nothing like that." He said, "So it didn't stop here?" He said, "No, sir. No, I don't know what you're talking about," and so the man left.

We called to headquarters in Baton Rouge and they said, you all going on up to Shreveport, spend the night and then come back to Jonesboro. We did that. I drove -- no license, no nothing. I became a professional then. I mean I knew how to drive, then all the fear that I had had driving a car before, I didn't have no more, because this was life or death. If he had caught us, had us at gunpoint, we didn't have a pistol. He would not have taken us back in town. He would have called the Klansmen. This young lady, I had to send her away, because she would have been — I mean, she couldn't take no more. But we got out of that jam and they had a huge rally for us, and the trustee that had been bringing stuff to us back and forth, they killed him. Killed him. And I told him, when he would bring us stuff, I said, "You better watch yourself because they don't like you being with us." He was just in jail at times because he was selling liquor illegally, because see Jonesboro and — what's the other black school up there? Gremlin, -- was a dry county, and they would sell illegal stuff in those other counties. He was bootlegging, so he would get time. He said, "I want to do my part," and he did his part, but these suckers killed him.

So, you know, I learned a lot, but that was my first time in jail. Look, I reserved myself. I didn't know when we were getting out. I didn't know what was happening, because they wouldn't let us have no visitors. So it was really a rude awakening for me but after that it was like downhill. But, you know, I'm going to tell folks, if a person tells you they wasn't afraid to go to jail, that's incorrect. Every time, right before I get arrested, I get nervous of the unknown, but once they put me in jail, I tell them leave me alone for a minute, let me get some sleep, and get some rest and then I'm ready for you, I'm ready to, you know -- I've been in jail so many times for welfare rights and on civil rights and for housing. It's usually a planned thing, but I've been thrown in jail and I wasn't one of the ones they were supposed to throw in jail. I was thrown in jail in New York. I'm out there as welfare rights, we're out there supporting the different services that were being cut, multipurpose services that were slated to be cut out. The police said, "None of you all better step off that curb." Hey, I'm obeying like everybody else and somebody — you know how the crowd mount up and you get shoved off the curb? My leg went down, he said, "Get her." I said not me again. They throw me in the police car with two other police in the back, sitting next to me. They said, because they asked again, are you going in to clock out? They said yeah, let me catch her, and he had two more in the front. I said to myself, I looked around and I said darn, I see what a big criminal probably feels like.

When I was arrested in New York, I could have walked out of there and they would have never known. They didn't know who I was, but I wasn't taking a chance. But they finally let me go. When I was arrested in Chicago, protesting a (boat?) display, and the people in CORE wanted to protest the display from Alabama, with Wallace on it saying, "Welcome to Alabama, the friendly state." This is what their display was all about. We decided that we were going to resist that day, meaning going limp -- and going limp for the audience that don't know what it is, is if they tell you to get up, you just lay out. Who was the first person they picked up in the process? Me. They threw my butt into the paddy wagon and was throwing bigger people, these big guys. I said, "Wait a minute, hold up, hold up," and I'm handcuffed. My thing be, when I get in jail, let's have some fun -- if I'm not sleeping, because usually, when I get thrown in I'm tired and I need some rest. There's always some kind of way I get the rough end of the deal.

I remember one time, Patricia Allen and I got arrested in D.C., around the Welfare Reform Bill at the Capitol. When they finally arrest us and took us outside, away from the crowd, and they started using that new plastic cuff. That stuff cuts into your skin. This young lady kept pulling it on my — look at these little arms. I'm a small-framed person. She kept pulling on it and it was cutting into my skin, and I saw the officer that was in charge, I said, "Officer, could you please loosen these up, because I'm not going nowhere." And she looked at that other officer and she said, "Take those off of her and put some new ones on and don't put them so tight." I said, wow, somebody that's got some sense.

But, you know, being arrested is always — sometimes you go and you're not part of the people that have been slated to get arrested, but they know who you are. I've been taken in because of -- I've been out here in the trenches a long time but that first time, there ain't nothing like that first time. Once I got over that, hey, take me, and if I have to go to jail or to prison for what I believe in, to fight this capitalist system and what is happening to people out here -- it's criminal, what we see out here. It's a shame that folks have to — that are homeless, and we can be homeless in 45 minutes. I mean, we can build homes in 45 minutes on the assembly line. People shouldn't have to be without transportation. We can have mass transportation for everybody. But no. Who rules the world? It's the auto industry and it is not the workers that's working there, because all they've given up is their ability to work. It's these suckers that are able to get bailouts and everything else, at our expense, and they refuse to bail us out. So on the one hand, from the Civil Rights Movement, when I was down there being arrested, down there getting hosed and everything, or whatever was happening, and hoping and praying the next day, I make it to the next day.

I appreciate the lessons that I have learned from the fact that the community will fight back, the working class as a community will fight back. They might take a long time, because we're so impatient at times,

but once they start moving, either you're going to move with them or you're going to move the hell out of their way, because you the one who been out there talking, you've been out there agitating and stuff like that, and then you're going to tell them, n\`”Not at this time, you'd better have a plan. You better have a plan because they're going to look at you.”

Look, when we gave the word in Louisiana, we got to knock down the way people got to register to vote and get everybody to sign. We'll help them to sign those cards that they have to fill out to become a registered voter, and we took all those cards, even from the nursing homes, everywhere. People felt good. They're being able to have an opportunity, thinking that they're going to be having an opportunity to vote. We took them to the Federal Building in New Orleans and drop it at the foot of government. That was a long, tedious campaign. Finally, people got the opportunity to vote -- and here today, they're taking it away from folks?

ROSS: All over again.

KRAMER: All over again, on the emergency managers, on all that, and damn it, from Washington on down, people are not protecting our human rights. It's not civil rights, it's human rights. The ability to be able to have a standard of living where we're not living below the poverty level. The same thing here. You know, I don't care how—I do care that we were able to live and see that someone our color was able to become the president, but we're on a new plateau now. Yes, racism still exists, yes a male supremacy still exists, and we've got to kick it every time it raises its ugly head, but now we're talking about protecting our human rights. We're talking about the fact that we should be able to live in a society where what we've been fighting for here in Welfare Rights, that we know we can nationalize education -- and education being nationalized not for the benefit of the rich, like they did the trains and all the rest of them, for the rich, and where they bailed out the banks for the rich, but we're talking about for the working class, -- being working, unemployed or whatever, disabled or whatever. We're talking about for society as a whole. Why should we be sitting around here? They've got computers, making computers and everything.

When I had an aneurysm, it wasn't that they cut me and got rid of it. They sent a probe up me and corked that aneurysm, and I was able to walk out of the hospital the next day. Now there are some side effects if it ends up happening, but I didn't have it. I walked out the hospital the next day.

ROSS: You know, I need to get towards the end of this tape. When did the National Welfare Rights Organization get founded?

KRAMER: The first National Welfare Rights Organization was founded — see, I'm thinking back — in 1967, or something like that.

ROSS: Sixty-six, I think your records say.

KRAMER: It's up here, yeah, here we go -- '66, in '66. It was on the heels of the Civil Rights Movement and some of us that had been civil rights workers — and see, I was going to complete some of that tomorrow. We went to—when I came up here finally.

ROSS: When did you move to Detroit?

KRAMER: I got married in 1964 and I moved permanently to Detroit in 1965. There was a conference plan, a Poor People's Conference plan, in Syracuse, New York. And West Central Organization, we took a busload, a Greyhound busload of people, to that and I'll never forget it because we went through Niagara Falls, and when we left here, it was snowing like it is out there now almost, but not as much. At this point, we took a lot of — it was a great bus ride, because it was people from the community, people I remember, some of them are gone, that really fought up here against urban renewal and stuff. When we got to Syracuse, here was some of our old civil rights — it was like a reunion - - civil rights workers that was in Louisiana with us. Not James Foreman == You're going to have to stop for a minute, because I can't remember folks' name. What was his name, over at Welfare Rights at the time? As much as I know his name, he was in the Civil Rights Movement with me.

ROSS: Not James Orange.

KRAMER: No.

ROSS: Faith Evans?

KRAMER: No. Lord, I ain't talked to Faith Evans in so long.

ROSS: He died.

KRAMER: When?

ROSS: About ten years ago.

KRAMER: Faith used to come in here and stay with Jan and I, and nobody ain't called us and told us that. Faith had kind of left away from a lot of folks, because Faith had made a lot of folks mad too. No, not Faith Evans, not Faith. I was thinking about—no, Faith and I stayed together all the way to the end. Not Faith, I was thinking about somebody else. I can see him too, not Faith. Faith stayed good all the way, that was our buddy. Girl,

that hurt us so when Faith died, because they called me, and I got ready and went right on up there. I'll have to get it together, my brain is gone.

ROSS: Trust me, when we tape tomorrow, a lot that you couldn't remember today is going to come to you overnight, and you can put it on the tape tomorrow. We've got about five minutes left on this tape, and so why don't you tell the story of how you met Fannie Lou Hamer, the end of this last five minutes.

KRAMER: That's a good practice too. When I came up here to get married in '64, and they were trying to convince us to come back and everything, and I'm looking at the weather and saying, "Hell no, I don't want to come back here, it's too cold." Well, I got approached by Dave Niederhauser at that time, who was one of the organizers for West Central Organization. Dave was so dedicated. He said, "Marian, some of the community has come together and Ms. Fannie Lou Hamer is going to be in town tomorrow, she's visiting her relatives." Fannie Lou Hamer had a nice size family. And she will be speaking in several places on the Freedom Democratic Party, and supporting John Conyers, and they would like to know if the two of you could team up. I said, "Who are 'they'?" And I'm thinking, why would they want me, you've got Fannie Lou Hamer. I said, "Oh, that would be a great opportunity, because I could learn a lot from Fannie Lou Hamer."

That Sunday morning I was picked up and then they picked up Ms. Fannie Lou Hamer. I was so glad to see her. With that smile that you have, you make me think of her. She was a warm woman and she said, "Yeah, I heard you in Louisiana," and I said, "Yeah, you all get the publicity and we don't, but I'm so honored to be in your presence." She said -- OK, she gave me the schedule again, where we were going, and what she was going to do and speak on. And we went over to Franklin's church, remember Franklin's church? The place was packed. The ushered the two of us down to the front and I'm saying to myself, 'Please, Lord, I'm just escorting her, please don't let me have to say nothing, not behind no Fannie Lou Hamer, no, Lord. (chuckles) What can I say after her?' Fannie Lou got up there and blew, she blew, and I was hoping she had time to sing. Then he said, Reverend Franklin, "The next..." — he told Fannie Lou and I -- he said, "The next offering is for the broadcast for the church. Anything over a hundred dollars, I'm going to give to the Freedom Now Party." And Fannie Lou looked over at me and said, "That's interesting. I didn't come here to ask for no money." I said, "I know." I said, "But let's see what's going to happen." Reverend Franklin, I mean he was something.

ROSS: When you say Reverend Franklin, you mean Aretha Franklin's father?

KRAMER: That's who I'm talking about.

ROSS: Right.

KRAMER: This church used to be packed. Packed, packed, packed. He got up on that — you know the table that say in remembrance of me? They put a chair up there and people started bringing money all around him and everything. Girl, and then he came and he said, “I’m going to bring it over to the rally that evening.” Fannie Lou looked at me and she said, “Don’t believe that.” She said, “But I didn’t come over here for money.” Well, I don’t know if she ever got it but I didn’t see it. Fanny Lou. I was quite proud, because I hung with her until she set off, the different other places she had to go, and I learned a lot, because that woman could preach. She could preach, she could sing, and she can hold her own to anyone, and she made you be in tears too, from the joy, just to hear her speak about the Civil Rights Movement. She described how she had been beaten and almost died, because of them trying to beat back the Civil Rights Movement, and how those young kids were made to beat her, and how Harry Belafonte and his wife came to our aid, to save her eye, where she had been beaten. So, you know, through the spirit of Fannie Lou —

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ROSS: My name is Loretta Ross. It is February 2, 2014. I’m in Detroit, Michigan, doing the oral history of Marian Kramer, with the Michigan Welfare Rights Organization and the National Welfare Rights Organization. Thank you, Marian, for being willing to do part two of our interview.

KRAMER: Let’s correct one thing, it’s the National Welfare Rights Union.

ROSS: Thank you, National Welfare Rights Union. It’s always important to get those names right.

KRAMER: Yes. Where we are now is talking about what happened when I first came here.

ROSS: When you first came here to Michigan you barely missed a step in terms of your doing community organizing. And it seems like the city was using eminent domain to claim people’s properties. You were starting to tell us about that at the end of the last interview.

KRAMER: Well, the city had rezoned certain areas, and in particular, over here on the West Side of Detroit, around the Wayne State area. They had divided the city over there in five different areas. They called it University City One, Two, Three, Four, and Five. Now, all those places had some real nice homes over there, and some nice apartment buildings

that were over there, and it was close to the John C. Lodge Expressway, which is US-10 and what have you, and Highway 96, which is the freeway close to the factories and that type of stuff. Well, WCO was informed, -- West Central Organization -- that we had set up, that they had asked my husband and I to come back up here around and work with -- and it was an Alinsky type, Saul Alinsky type organization. Within those five University Cities, there were a lot of different block clubs, well organized, and we finally were informed that the city was talking about, you know, the city was moving on these various areas. University City Number One was the beginning. We began to canvas the area, WCO was consisted of whites and blacks. We were located within the area, close to the Teamsters Union and what have you, and we began to take information around to the community.

ROSS: Can I interrupt you and ask, what was the gender balance of the organizers in the WCO, men to women?

KRAMER: Good question. I was volunteering at that time, because I ended up with a job over at Hotel, Motel and Restaurant Workers, in the clerical department, which was interesting because I had never worked for a union, never been a part of the union, coming from the south, right? But in the evening and on Saturdays, all my attention went to WCO. And as far as the gender breakdown, all the staff -- let me see it was four organizers -- they were three white males. The director was a white male and there was one black male on staff, as well as the secretary/office manager was a Polish, white. Then there was a lady that was finally hired from the community, Mary Valentine, who was black. But, once we began to organize and began to use WCO for committee meetings, breaking down into various community housing, services -- whatever the community wanted -- then you began to see people learning and beginning to participate.

One of the concepts of the style of organizing at that time, was to let the committees determine what their jobs was going to be -- once they had talked to the people in the community, what they was going to focus on -- and at a convention, present that for the whole of the community that were participating within the geographical area, as part of the program. So, you began to see more and more black people come out. It was interesting, because it became very multinational in there. We were not only organizing and informing and being assigned to certain block clubs. What happened was within that geographical community too, you had a lot of Catholic churches, you had various denominations; Baptist, you go on and on. Within the Alinsky style of organizing, you organized the religious, faith-based -- they weren't calling it faith-based at that time, but the religious community -- and to a part of the organization, as well as the business community. Those businesses that did not want to participate as far as being a part of that organization, then the community would come down hard on them and they might boycott

them. So, it was good that a lot of those businesses began to decide that they were going to be a part -- as well as the Teamsters; whoever was located in that geographical area.

Well, the first thing we took up was this whole question of urban renewal within those five geographical areas. I was working at Hotel, Motel and Restaurant Workers, so they were a member of WCO too. You had a lot of hotel, motel, restaurant workers and all, and some of them lived over in that area. So it was good, you got to know the community. The school system over there even was a part of WCO. So it was multipurpose in the sense of dealing with stuff, but they determined what the order of priority -- the community -- what the order of priority that we were going to concentrate on from convention to convention.

Well that first year that we got involved -- not the first year. A couple of years later -- the urban renewal had reached the research area. This research area had been rezoned for Wayne State, as usual. All the areas were rezoned for Wayne State, but this particular area, as a research area, and the people over there had not been informed that they had rezoned that area and that Wayne State -- they had given Wayne State the right to build over in that area. So we had one foot up on them and went over there and started talking to people. What was left was about two streets when we first got over there, because the rest of them had received their money and left. They scared them away, right? Well, these two streets were left. It was Hobart Street, and the other street, I can't remember the name, but a lot of those people said they would rather just get out of there, on that particular street, but on Hobart Street, they decided to fight. They said, "Oh no, we've been here for too long, paying for these homes, for us to have a place to retire to and leaving this for our children." A lot of the people migrated here from the South, had worked in the factories and other places.

I'll never forget one little lady, one little black lady. All of us fell in love with her. She had just put in some four-thousand dollars in her home for remodeling, and it was a heartbreaking type of thing, you know. They were not offering her really, what the fair market value of her house should be, and she said, "No, I'm going to be right here with y'all, fighting." On that street was located a building where some of the workers were living, but the owner went on and so, you know, took the money, meaning that the workers got set out. You know, they had to leave. So who was left on that street? It was about, I think, about five families that was left on that street and they began to fight, and WCO brought in all the troops. I mean people from across, on the other side of the expressway, people in the geographical area, people closer to Michigan Avenue that was a part of WCO. These people didn't know each other, but some of them knew each other through WCO, because we always had a monthly meeting. They made the call and we came,

because we decided, in the housing committee, that we were going to put some stairs back on the house that a family had just moved out of. We had designated who was going to be arrested if there had to be an arrest, but Mr. and Mrs. Smith --I mean I'm just so proud of them, in particular Mrs. Smith. They were out there, they said, "We're not giving this house up." The other little lady that I talked about and there was one other family, was it the Childs? Yeah, they were around at that time, with ten children. They took a stand and we took a stand, and when you looked at all the people that showed up, on the one hand you had all these priests, on the other hand you had all these Presbyterian ministers. On the other hand, you have some Baptist ministers, you know, and all these people from the community, from different block clubs and everything, and the police came and they said that we had to take the stairs off of that — no. The men had taken, some of the ministers and some men, had placed the stairs on the house, and we were walking around, picketing and stuff like that, and the police said, "These stairs will be removed," and the people said, "We will put them right back, because you're not going to destroy this community." It went back and forth and back and forth, and then they backed up the paddy wagon and we knew what that meant; they were going to arrest people.

Well, there were people, like I say, designated to be arrested. I was not, but I was on that picket line and you could hear my mouth. Ms. Watson was on that picket line. Ms. Watson was just dynamite. You could hear her, and Ms. Shine and all them. Ms. Shine was in housekeeping, she was a member of the Hotel, Motel, and Restaurant Workers. Ms. Watson had been a housekeeper or something like that. I mean some dynamic women.

ROSS: So domestic workers were very much involved in this.

KRAMER: Oh, my God, yes. Ms. Shine was Hotel, Motel, and Restaurant Workers, working in the hotels and what have you, in the housekeeping department, and Ms. Watson, like I said, was doing domestic work somewhere. They were out there. I'm trying to think about all the people who were out there. The Murphys were out there. Quite a few people were out there, and when they started throwing people in the paddy wagon, I could see some of the priests I knew, they threw in. They threw in Peter Pillsbury, who was a Presbyterian minister; Dick Venus, who was the United Methodist minister, who housed me, he and his wife, when I first came here to get married to my first husband. We were all in that paddy wagon, Ms. Watson and I, and I think Ms. Watson and I were the two only women and the rest of them were men.

They took us down and said, 'felonious assault and battery,' and we said, 'What's the deal with this?' And our attorney at the time, Ernie

Goodman, well-known throughout the country, Ernie Goodman. Ernie was the attorney that defended the people, when you —

ROSS: Attica?

KRAMER: Attica. Ernie was instrumental in helping getting the lawyer's guilds going back and forth. I mean Ernie has been there. Ernie was our attorney and they had a felony on us. We were facing seven years in the federal penitentiary and I'm saying, 'I didn't even participate in putting the stairs on the thing, why me this time?' You know, you get in the paddy wagon and you've just got to laugh. They say, 'Marian, your mouth.' I said, 'Yeah, no I've been hanging out with you guys.' I was thrown in the paddy wagon, and I took off that day from my job, and when I got back to work they were just laughing. You know, this is Hotel, Motel, and Restaurant Workers. They were laughing and very supportive. I have never had that kind of feeling before. I was used to civil rights workers being white. You understand this and what have you, but here are some people, it was about three or four of us that were black, that worked at the Hotel and Restaurant Local 705 at that time, hotel workers. They were so happy to see me the next day and everything, I said, "Oh my goodness." They said, "We were looking at the news. We saw you," and, "What's the next move?" I said, "We go to court."

So we went to court several times and it's interesting because the judge was Judge Colombo and he was bad news -- bad, bad news -- because one of the things he mentioned at the court, he said that—when we attended court one day he said, "And you are some of the same guys that camped out on Commissioner Knox," who was head of the Housing Department for Detroit. I'm over there mumbling, "o what does that got to do with anything," and Goodman is saying, "Quiet, Marian," and I said, "OK, OK," I said, "but that don't have nothing to do with this case." He said, "Because if I was Commissioner Knox, I wouldn't have let you off." And I made another mumble, "But you're not." You know? But, after several times going to court, with support from the community and what have you, Attorney Goodman, after one time, got him to reduce it to a misdemeanor, but he really didn't want to let this go, because he was really angry with us upsetting, trying to stop the city from doing what they're supposed to do. So we had to go several times.

Finally, the case was dropped because the city refused to come and testify against us, because [James] Cavanaugh was looking pretty bad, the mayor. Mayor Cavanaugh was looking pretty bad and here we are, with all this urban renewal going on and how it was affecting people who had been long-time residents of Detroit, now getting pushed out. On the other hand, we knew, and we were blowing this all over the community, that Mayor Cavanaugh had attended a meeting out in Grove's Point. See, because the way we were getting funding, Alinsky

would give you a budget and say, "This is what you need to give me to counsel with you every month." And for WCO, given the terrain and all that type of stuff, how many people we had in the area, it was sixty-thousand dollars for a year. The thing about that is that was a lot of money for an organization at that particular time. So he even helped you to set up where do you get the money from. Well, you go to the archdiocese and ask them for a particular amount; you go to the various denominations and ask them; and you go to the unions; you go to the businesses and that type of stuff. The block club paid a much lower amount than all of them, and so when it was prior to trying to — before the organizers, my husband and them at that time could set up a meeting with the diocese, with the various priests and all that type, and with the bishop.

Mayor Cavanaugh had met with them and, see, he was a Catholic. He was not only a Catholic, the rumor in the community was, he was the mafia's attorney at one time. Probably so, because Detroit, it was heavy infected by the mafia at one time. So, he convinced him not to put nothing in the pot for WCO, that they would only give us twenty-five thousand dollars -- I think that's what it was -- a month. Oh, yeah, I'm wrong, it was sixty-thousand dollars a month. This would take care of not only money for Saul Alinsky, but it would be a budget for the organization to run every month. And we had some of the latest equipment.

ROSS: I was going to say, sixty-thousand dollars a month is good even today.

KRAMER: Girl, we taught the community how to use the Gestetner machine, when it first came out.

ROSS: Isn't that the old mimeograph?

KRAMER: Yeah, and it became electrical, you know? And the stencil burner and all that type of stuff. So, when Alinsky set up those industrial area foundation, would set up those budgets, it would take care of his account for advising us, as well as the budget would cover the staff and operation funds for the community, and that was sixty-thousand dollars a month.

ROSS: So how did you transition from doing basic land use and housing rights work, into doing welfare rights work? Where did that transition come?

KRAMER: Wait a minute, it just doesn't come overnight. You get in the trenches and you're there until its completion. One thing I have learned to do is stick and stay. You've got to go to the end. In the process of working for WCO, I learned all about the government, I learned about city council. I had never gone before a city council in my days in the Civil Rights Movement, it was a question of dealing with the Federal Government at

that time and the local municipalities, which ended up being rural. I was in the rural area a lot, except for Monroe, Louisiana. You would generally be in the court system like that, when you were in the Civil Rights Movement. Well this was different. Now, you take civics in school but it's not like being there, right? When we had to confront the city about these urban renewal areas, we had to confront city council, nine city council members, down in Detroit, all white.

ROSS: What years were this?

KRAMER: This was in — I came here in '64 and started doing that. Sixty-four, '65 -- let me think, let me think -- and '66. Well, the rebellion was in '67. So, what happened was, as we would — the people in the community at that time, began to learn about city council, because if you were assigned to them -- Now remember, I'm a volunteer, so I got to know the organization in and out. If you go into city council with them, you are learning about the city council, what their function was all about -- and at that time it was all white, one woman. You learned every city council member's name. We had ended up not only camping out at one time, for this white family, on Bob Knox's beautiful lawn that he had put seven-thousand dollars into it. Because they had, in the area, as they're doing Research Park, over here close to, going towards Downtown Detroit, closer to Wayne State, there was a whole strip of houses that were being urban renewal out, because the city had rezoned that area for Wayne State. This particular family said we're not leaving. He came to the WCO and he said, "I need your help." He said, "We want to stay." We said, "We will back you in your staying and would you be willing to—" We decided to take that whole family to Bob Knox's lawn and let them camp out. Since you can't come and meet with them or let them meet with you and blah-blah-blah, then here's the family. Bob Knox was so angry, his community was angry, because he had put all his money in this lawn and they then pitched a tent on this little lawn. It wasn't a big lawn, pitched a tent out on that lawn. But see what had happened was, the bulldozer in the community where this family lived, and they hadn't even notified them, came over there, the telephone company, and bulldozed the telephone lines and everything, you know, and was about to knock the house down. So, you know, we won the rights for them to get more money than they were offering them for relocation and stuff, and for them to have the ability and time to find a place to relocate. He was happy, but it was outright war with the city and what plans they had, their plans around rezoning this area and stuff.

So, it was not just that part. We had to deal with slum landlords. I was at the union for one year. I learned the union. Now, I'm working an eight hour job, I'm getting off and as soon as I get off, I rush over to WCO, which was around the corner from our house. I might be going to a meeting in the community, I could be doing all that. I didn't have no children, it was just my husband and I at the time. I was at block club

meetings, everything, and when it was time for the convention -- oh that was tremendous, because everybody in the community came.

ROSS: Now, tell me about the convention.

KRAMER: Everybody in the community participated.

ROSS: What convention?

KRAMER: The WCO convention for the year. The Teamsters would give their hall to be used. They've got this huge auditorium and everything. The community -- you had one section of it that did the cooking, and that was a lot of fun. So they might have cooked at a church, one of the Catholic churches or one of the other churches, and you know that was a lot of fun, being in there cooking for this convention. You had block clubs that had certain things that they wanted to present. You know, they all had their resolutions and things together that they were going to argue over at that convention. You had to make sure that the young people were represented, that all the people that had been participating in WCO was either there or they had been represented at this convention. It was marvelous, because you could see democracy at work really, there. And once they got their program together -- this is what the organizers would implement that year, and their executive board would implement too -- they would have these fundraisers.

There was one guy, a professor from Wayne State University, -- because we'd been having problems with Wayne State, and we had a lot of support on campus -- he wrote this play, *There's a Thousand Leaders Among Us*, and we used that play in the community, and he was showing that everybody was a leader. Oh, it was so great, because particularly the women came out; look, we're not just going to have a play, we're going to have a dinner and a play. And so they would turn it into an event. If it was in your community, then certain sections of that community would do different things, to be able to make sure this play was going to be successful. So, I might be on the cooking team, so that meant that I had to start helping clean chicken on Friday nights. But they would have it at -- like I said, one of the churches would open up their doors, and it would be so much fun and people would have so -- because they had something to come out to, they had something to fight for in their community.

The WCO community, the people got together. The city had said that they were going to tear down this library that was located on Trumbull and Grand River, one of the big streets in Detroit. We got together, took on the city council, and not only saved that library, that library is still there today and operating. That was because of the community. The block clubs began to feel their power and what they can do and stuff like that.

ROSS: Were they mostly run by women?

KRAMER: There was a lot of women in the organization, but there was a lot of men in there; but the women, quite naturally, outnumbered the organization. You could see, after three years, close to four years, it began to go down in the sense. But prior to that, I had worked there for — they brought me on staff as an organizer and I was assigned to, let me see how many block clubs did I have? I had the one on Butternut, and these were the women I hung with all the time after a while. That was Mrs. Shine and Ms. King, her sister, her cousin, and all these folks over there in this cluster, were from Lowndes County, Alabama. Ms. Shine was a woman that was the first black woman, black person that moved over in that area. This is over by the old Lion's Stadium, and when she moved over there, Ms. Shine had to be on her roof at night guarding her house, with her pistol. Did you hear me?

ROSS: I heard you. I'm trying to understand, because she desegregated the neighborhood.

KRAMER: It was heavy Appalachia and after a while, they broke that and Ms. Shine became one of the leaders in that community. And then her sister moved across the street, Margaret, and her sister-in-law lived around the corner, and it was a great neighborhood. So we got to the point it was like I was going home every time I would go over there. Or I'd go to Research Park some nights and eat over there with Ms. Smith and them. I didn't have to really cook. They just was spoiling me, but I did my job with them, you know.

Ms. Shine and them were leading the struggle in Lowndes County, Alabama, where they were setting up some type of business, with the unions, for people to get jobs and that type of stuff, you know, either up here or what have you. But they had an organization going, Lowndes County Alabama Association. I guess when you're in Alabama, you can even ask people about that, because some of the older people, they remember that. Ms. Shine and them were closely linked to that and some of her family, the family, is still living over there. So you had Ms. Shine and all of them over there and you had the Chows and those folks, and then you had Ms. Smith and all them over here at Research Park. Their issues were different. Over there, where Ms. Shine and them lived, there was an incident that went down when we were at WCO, where her nephew, Howard King, who is still around, and some other young men -- Italians, whites, blacks and all -- were out in the street playing football. The police came up and told them, "Why don't you get the hell out of the street." And see, Howard's voice carries -- you know, he's got a heavy voice -- and I was like six or something like that and Howard said, "Oh, we ain't doing nothing, this is the only place we can play is out here," playing basketball. Neville, or one of them, and I'm

saying that name because it becomes interesting further down, said, “Oh, OK, this is a smart one,” and they arrested Howard. Those young men wanted to tear that community up, and I’m telling you, they were Puerto Ricans, they were Mexican, there were Italians and blacks over there, and very few white, you know, Appalachia. They came to WCO and anything going down in the community, if you wanted to come to the WCO and say look, this is what has happened to Howard and them. Dave and them got right on it. They started organizing. They went up the street to the youth division and began to find out what the hell had happened and found out that Howard’s hand had been broken by these cops. In fact, when they got to the station, in the garage, and they pulled Howard out and he was pushed down -- now I’m telling you, he was a big kid -- they stomped his hand and broke some of his fingers and stuff, and one of the young black officers observed it and it got next to him, and he testified as to what had really happened. So that was a break for us but it wasn’t a break for him, because they started harassing him with this brotherhood type of stuff. “You don’t tell on...” You know.

And so WCO got on with the chief of police and started retaliating, you know, and letting him know, “No we’re not going to take this. This man told the truth, we’re going to support him, and you better — you need to transfer him out of there.” He came out one day and all his tires were slashed. So on the one hand, we fighting houses again, we’re dealing with police brutality, and it’s a constant occurring, the library and that type of stuff. So you had to have a division of labor at WCO. It became a center of operation for the community. So, we won that, and Howard was able to walk out of there free and everything, as well as people began to watch out more and more, for the harassment that was taking place in the community. And in fact, Neville was one of the people -- him and the other one, I’ve forgotten the other one -- that back in the ‘90s, shot this young black guy farther over from us, from their community. All he was doing was, you know, he was on Warren Avenue, walking, and they claimed that he gave them some — when they stopped to check it, he resisted. He couldn’t resist, he was just a little size larger than me. And they killed him, and so the community retaliated, painted his picture, a known artist painted his pictures on one of the buildings and we picketed for the longest time. This was the first time in the process that — and there was a cluster of incidents that were happening at that time, where they were involved. But what happened was, they was the first officers that were convicted.

ROSS: Nevilles eventually got convicted?

KRAMER: Yeah, that’s when Kim [Worthington?], the prosecutor, black woman prosecutor became famous, off those cases. But we stayed in the community, bringing forth what had happened to this young man and making sure that people didn’t — they went over there and jumped on another young man, and then they jumped on a young white guy. I

mean, Howard and them told us, said, “Marian, you might not remember, but they’re the ones that was reigning terror over there in our community.” And now mind you, that was in the ‘60s.

ROSS: Mm-hmm.

KRAMER: You know? Here, we’re talking about the ‘90s.

ROSS: So for more than 30 years, this same group of officers had terrorized the local communities.

KRAMER: Yeah. So, you know, all that stuff was interconnected, but with WCO at that time, you could see, as you look back and you examine WCO, the staff was willing to learn, willing to listen to the community. If there was some racism being perpetuated, they were willing to listen and correct it. And you had, like I said, some strong women in that community, some strong black women, some strong white women and all, in that community, that played a role in WCO. And we stopped Wayne State from being able to expand after a while over there, and I’ll tell you more about that and what they tried to do later, but it put a halt on Wayne State. We did.

ROSS: That’s a story of triumph at the community level, plus it sounded like you learned a lot.

KRAMER: I learned so much. I learned about city hall, I learned about condemnation court, I learned about the board of reviews. I learned about the trustee board at Wayne State, because we went over there and they were having a trustee meeting. Mary Valentine dressed up in her — because Mary was always petite -- She dressed up in her black hat, pulled down, with a white feather over it, and we had got this skunk that was someone’s — Saul Alinsky made the connection — pet in Chicago, they had debagged the skunk. We opened up the door where the board of trustees were meeting for Wayne State and Mary said, “I’m going to present to you, what the community thinks about you, because you don’t care about us. You think we stink? We’re going to show you how much you stink,” and she turned that skunk loose. You should have seen. The cameras were there and they were running all over the place. And so Wayne State started backing up, because they got tired of looking in our faces, they got tired of us being wherever they were, and we had organized their students, their students started coming over, participating. So, yeah, we backed Wayne State up for a while there and we backed the city, and we increased the amount that they had to pay if somebody was going to have to move out for urban renewal. We increased the amount if you were in an apartment, to give them more money for each room and for relocation and all that type of stuff, that you wasn’t going to get away with this. We didn’t care who the people were.

ROSS: I'm sorry that this comes to an end with that. That's all we got for this one, but I've got six more tapes.

(End of Audio File 07)

ROSS: So, Marian, why don't you tell me about what you learned from your activities as a civil rights organizer and a WCO organizer, what you learned that brought you into your next phase of work.

KRAMER: Well, you know, let me say term-wise again., in the Civil Rights Movement, when I was working directly for CORE, Congress of Racial Equality, we were called 'taskforce workers,' and when I was working for WCO, I was a community organizer. For one thing, I learned, making that transition from the Civil Rights Movement to becoming a community organizer, I hadn't learned as much in school as I had learned by being out there in the community and being in the Civil Rights Movement, because we were not taught all that. We were given theory. You know, you begin to learn that what you learned in school was theory and no practice hardly. So the world was just beginning to open up for me to understand not only what exists out here and what was going on, but at the same time there was a lot of familiarities between the north and the south, and that some of the things that were going on down south, when I came from the South, I knew, as a black person, where I fit when it was in relationship to racism or what have you, and I knew what white folks liked me and which white folks did not. I knew some of my family was passing for white. My parents taught me who they were, but when I got up here, there was a difference. In fact, this hidden racism, you know people would smile in your face and stab you in your back.

I'll never forget, one lady asked me one time, she said, "Marian, I know you're glad you're up here. Are you happy about being up north?" I said, "Well I do miss being at home and being down south, in Louisiana and in Texas and stuff," I said, "but let me tell you the difference. I knew how people thought about us in the south because we lived it every day until we began to break down that discrimination and all that stuff, and it took a long time and going to still take a long time, and I knew how white folks had been raised. But here?" She said, "Well, what do you mean?" I said, "People are so dishonest. They don't understand the racism that we be seeing when we get around them and that type of stuff, and all this patronizing that be going on." So, you know, it's not just that we have to learn, you have to learn a lot also and understand what kind of society we live in.

Now I didn't know I was making a step forward. That I didn't know, venturing into areas I had never been into before, because I started looking at the government more and the role that the government has

played in protecting these laws that was exploiting and oppressing us. When I was in the South, I began to experience and see, in Louisiana, around Grambling and places like that, how they were beginning to industrialize the South, building factories, and didn't understand until later years. It hit me, when I began to do some studying, and began to understand certain science and stuff, what they were doing down there, and that was that they were not only industrializing the South, but it was not profitable. Jim Crowism was not profitable for the capitalists at that time.

ROSS: And them recognizing that, helped them to say we've got to end this. That certainly happened in the city of Atlanta.

KRAMER: And Atlanta -- all of them now, because if you look back at Kennedy, and you know, they had all of us so in love with Kennedy and stuff like that, but Kennedy and them were members of the capitalist class, and he would call those meetings. They did some contributing, but it was to be able to make sure that they were going to be able to get a profit also. But what happened during that period of time, they would always call these meetings in D.C., with King, with James Foreman, with Russell and all the rest of them, several of them, the NAACP, who else? I don't think SNCC [Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee] participated.

ROSS: Vernon Jordan.

KRAMER: Vernon Jordan and all them, they would have the Civil Rights Six and stuff like that, that they would have up there. And see, they were dictating it to them as to what to do. King finally stepped beyond that and they never did call Malcolm. (laughs)

ROSS: No, I don't think they were interested in talking to Malcolm X.

KRAMER: They didn't call Malcolm, but they were pushing these folks out as the leaders, because you notice how fast they grew. Now, I'm not saying that they did not play a role. They played, some of them, particularly King and —

ROSS: (inaudible).

KRAMER: King played a hell of a role, more so than the rest of them, and in fact, they had to get rid of King because King began to grow beyond what they wanted him to be. He started dealing with the workers and stuff.

ROSS: Right.

KRAMER: So, you know, I look back now and I learned that—and that was through studying and through summarizing.

ROSS: What were you studying?

KRAMER: Let me see, what years were this? This was around the '70s and stuff, beginning of the '70s, and I'm beginning to pick up studying some of the science of Marxism and stuff, summation and stuff, trying to figure out what that was. Because I had been through the Civil Rights Movement and we still were out here fighting, I mean fighting housing, for housing, all over the nation. I had been through the whole quest, when I got up here from the Civil Rights Movement, beginning to understand that women had a better role to play than being subservient to the movement and anybody else. So I was getting angrier and angrier. Oh girl, I knew I was a little pistol to be dealt with. I got mad at the unions at one point because I got fired from Hotel, Motel, and Restaurant Workers, because I started reading those contracts. Martha [Raye?] would have me at one time, who was the president over there at one time, being on the contracts. And then they would bring me in there, in the clerk, dealing with membership dues and stuff, and I got to know the members pretty good, and I started learning what was going on. But I didn't like some of the things that the union president and secretary of treasury, what they were doing. I was in another union and I loved the fact that these older women were teaching me, and they were teaching me saying, "We all in another union, Clerical Workers, yet and still, Mark..." -- and I forgot her name -- "are not treating us as their union brothers and sisters." Although this was a different union. And I said, "We shouldn't have..." -- I'm young -- I said, "We shouldn't be having to take this. We wouldn't have taken it in the Civil Rights Movement."

And then Mark would call me in the office at times and say, "Marian, you go over to WCO right after. Can you tell them to back off?" I said, "Look it here, let me tell you something, let me make you understand something, Mark (inaudible), that I don't represent you at WCO. You have a member from your organization that represents you at WCO, so I'm not going over there and telling them not a damn thing."

ROSS: I guess I'm not surprised you got fired.

KRAMER: I got fired, yes, and it was time for me to get fired, because at that particular time, like I said, in the Civil Rights Movement, I learned -- oh Lord, I had so much respect for those people in the Civil Rights Movement, the ones that came forward, and they were like a beautiful butterfly that had been let loose, and they began to spread their skills and everything. And then, they were not the ones that emerged as the so-called leaders. You understand what I'm --

ROSS: Mm-hmm.

KRAMER: In those areas and stuff like that, but they maintained. The movement, as a community organizer, that was the unleashing of the skills and expertise of the community also. They began to see their power. They could back city council up when they wanted to and understood who city council really was, that they were not representing their interests. Because they didn't they know about these urban renewal projects? Why was all this rezoning going on? You know that we have fought and built these homes for the benefit of our families and yet, you wouldn't have no respect for us? So what's the difference in that and what did happen in the South? So I began to understand more and more, what the workers were saying. We go from the plantation, back into the plants, which is still the plantation. So I learned a lot in those little years, in my twenties and stuff.

I left the Hotel, Motel and Restaurant Workers and got picked up. Because Rennie became the director of — Rennie Friedman, of WCO -- and he said, "Do you want to be a staff member?" He said, "You've been over here all the time. You know everything that goes on." I said, "Yeah, I think I would." And at that time, my husband and I had split up also. I think he was going through this thing of searching internally of himself and stuff like that, and so he and I split up, but I stayed in the community. Every morning, during the week at times -- not every morning but once or twice during the week -- See, the Civil Rights Movement had changed and you could see the effects of it also up here. It had gone from voter registration and all that type of stuff, and it was entering into a phase of black nationalism. At the same time, Malcolm X was beginning to blossom. Dave and I had bought all Malcolm X's albums.

ROSS: Now wait a moment. Let me just make sure I've got my historical dates correct. Malcolm X was assassinated in 1965.

KRAMER: Mm-hmm.

ROSS: And Martin Luther King was assassinated in 1968.

KRAMER: Wait a minute, back up, back up, let's think, let's think. Where's my phone? When did Malcolm—because Malcolm came up here a couple of times. Malcolm's brother lived behind me for the longest time.

ROSS: I could be totally wrong about the dates.

KRAMER: No, you might be right because I can't remember.

ROSS: I mean, you could be influenced by his philosophy.

KRAMER: Yes, his philosophy. That doesn't have anything to do with — because Malcolm was coming about when I was even at WCO.

ROSS: Right.

KRAMER: Because at that time, when I was at WCO -- and let me say this. Not only were we maintaining the meetings in the communities and stuff like that, but the staff was changing. The staff had begun a black director, another staff woman, that was me, a black person, and we had still two other white staff members and the secretary. So it was really still a good staff in place, because all of us had been there from its beginning. So, Dave had gone back to school and at that time -- we still was together -- had gone back to school to get his degree in social work, his masters degree.

ROSS: You never finished college, right?

KRAMER: Never got around to it. I think I have about either a year or a half a semester, from having a degree in social work. Isn't that amazing?

ROSS: You've got honorary degrees, I'm sure.

KRAMER: I've got pretty much of those. I've got a lot of those, and have taught a lot of social workers and attorneys. But at that particular time, Dave and I was beginning to drift apart. WCO was still there and we still were maintaining. We were changing into — slum landlord was becoming a problem. People were coming over to WCO complaining about their slum landlord, and my thing was, "Now what is a slum landlord?" Now, mind you, I'd have done housing, been dealing with housing, dealing with all this stuff in the Civil Rights Movement, but I had never had no experience with slum landlords. So Rennie put me on that. I said, "Oh, my God."

I went one Saturday, I'll never forget, a child's eye had been poked out running from a rat. So I called Ms. Shine and I called some of the other women in the community. I had a little Volkswagen and they had another car too. I said let's go confront this, what do you call him, the manager for the apartment building. At that time, they were calling them — I forgot what the term was, they would call them --

ROSS: Building supervisors?

KRAMER: Something like that. So, we went over. We called and told him we were on our way and in the meantime, let me tell you, this was beginning to pop up all over the city of Detroit, in all these big buildings and stuff like that. And we went over there because this child's eye, she lost her eye because of this. Darn, this man had a gun, and I looked around, Ms. Shine and them had guns too. (laughs) And they said, "Speak, Marian, speak." I'm looking around and I said, "All right, we're here because one of the children of the neighborhoods were hurt and this building

cannot — these folks in this building cannot tolerate this situation no more.” So we began to organize against these slum landlords. We would find out -- and Alinsky told us -- find out who is the owner of the building. He taught us how to cross track and all that type of stuff, taught the staff and they had already taught us. We would find out that a lot of them were located in Grosse Pointe. Now, understand Grosse Pointe, I don't know if you heard about Grosse Pointe. Grosse Pointe is a suburban area of Detroit. At one time, you had to have a certain points system to get in there. So, if you were rich and Anglo Protestant, you had the most points, because you look at the fact that you're rich, you're Anglo Protestant, and you're male, blah-blah, you got the most points. Then it goes from there. Jewish were at the bottom but no blacks, no Mexican national minorities neither. Many out there were Italians. I'm thinking about the nationalities that were out there. But you could not get into Grosse Pointe.

I wish I had the time to take you out there and see this. This is where Ford Motor Company and all of them live. I mean, here's the Detroit River coming up into some people's backyards and all that type of stuff. You drive out there and you look around and you might be in someone's driveway. That was Grosse Pointe, but some of these slum landlords lived out there, and we learned a lot of that because in WCO, at one time, some landlords, they had to go out there and confront. And here we are, these women. We took the community on the bus, we got a school bus, and took them out there, because the landlord had turned the heat off. Didn't like that. OK, you want to get smart, I'll show you how smart I can be. We took them out there and we didn't do it just with them, we did it with the rest of them too. Went out there, had some leaflets, in the evening. Had some leaflets and began to knocking on the doors and passing the leaflets out. And you know how the community was reacting? Peeping from behind the — what is this? And they didn't like that idea, all these black folks and some of these poor white folks out there picketing this landlord, and they called the police and the police would come out and say, can we help you? I said, “No, you can't help us unless you can make this landlord come and take care of his building. Otherwise, we're going to come back out here.” “We promise, we promise he will be out tomorrow,” and we said, Oh, no, no, he's got to turn the heat back on.” And they told the landlord, “Can you do this?” And the heat came on that night. Those tenants felt so good when they got back to WCO. We felt good, you know, when we got back to the WCO.

I remember going out one time with, at that time, Reverend Dick Venus, who was the president of WCO, a young white guy. Dick was wild, he was so funny. Dick was on the wild. They come and they're talking about some slum landlords. He said, “Let's go.” We went into a building and as you walked into the building, in the walls, you could hear the rats, and I said, “Oh, Jesus, don't let these rats come through

these walls.” And see, some of those supervisors in those buildings, you know, that was over those buildings, had turned some of those women — those women were being used as prostitutes too, because I began to learn that through a young man, that at one time had been a pimp and everything else, down on 12th Street, where the rebellion started. He became one of our organizers. That’s the other person that became one of ours. Took him off the street, organized with WCO and Lord, when I’d go out with him, they didn’t mess with me, and they knew he wasn’t pimping me neither. I ended up with my brother going out with me at times too. Here’s an autoworker. Here’s a used-to-be pimp, but then it come turn to be community organizers.

ROSS: Which brother was this?

KRAMER: This is my brother Alan Ray. And we went into some of those buildings, and it became a rippling effect. You know, they knew WCO was coming. We would send the landlord a registered letter and tell them that the tenants wanted to meet with them at WCO. The first time they did that at WCO -- my ex-husband had done that -- and the guy that showed up, showed up in a limo, a long stretch limo, with bodyguards.

ROSS: What?

KRAMER: He was part of the mafia and he wanted to hush this stuff altogether. He sat up there and they told me they — I was out of town at that time. I went back to the Civil Rights Movement at that time, and I was back and forth. He said that -- look, he sat up there and agreed to everything, because he didn’t want that type of stuff to hit the street. Well, when we became the organizers and sent those letters and they showed up, hey those tenants would be hanging from the rafters almost. They knew they had the power then. And those landlords would be so afraid when they come over there, because yeah, you can get your butt kicked, but the people wasn’t interested in that. They wanted them to end up taking care of their responsibility in a lot of these buildings. Out of that grew the Tenants Union. Fred Lyles came to WCO, who was a postal worker, and said, “Can you help me to build the Tenants Union?” He had heard about it because it had started in New York and places like that and I said, “I’d be glad to help you, Fred.” I said, “But I want you to understand one thing I have learned from the workers,” -- because at the same time we had pulled a rent strike in public housing, and I’ll get to that. -- I said, “Look, the UAW has a henchman that might come out and try to convince you of certain things.” UAW [United Automobile Workers] stepped up and helped Fred and gave him some money. I said, “You go get a 501-C3 and make sure you keep that money in the Tenants Union, and don’t be going through nobody else.”

There was so much stuff going on at that time. We had got an office. General and them, they got an office on Grand River, further down,

across from TULC, Trade Union Leadership Conference, and that's where we were putting an inner-city voice together. They had approached Rennie about a couple of us working with them, right? Because General and Glanton would come to the office.

ROSS: You keep using the name General. Who is General?

KRAMER: That's my second husband.

ROSS: OK. His full name is...?

KRAMER: General Baker, General Garton Baker, Jr. He was named after his father. But we were not dating or nothing like that, at that time. General was with his first wife. General would come to the office, along with Glanton Dowdell. They were putting together — there was a paper that was put together.

ROSS: Was that the *Inner City Voice*?

KRAMER: It was the *Inner City Voice* and there were some struggles. Now, I wasn't involved in that but I was glad to read that paper and we got it out to our community. They began to learn that we had a Gestetner, so General and Glanton would always get on the schedule saying, we need to do these leaflets and we need to do this, that and the other. So one of us had to stay at night, to help them get those leaflets together, and who would it be? Me. But we enjoyed those papers, and so as they're staff dwindled for the papers that they were putting together because a split came there also, he asked for a couple of us to help out. Well, Rennie assigned myself and someone else to help them, as well as carrying our other load. Like I told you, I was young, I had plenty of energy. The only thing I had at home really, was a Doberman Pinscher that my brother made me keep in the house for protection for me and a cat that didn't back down from no dogs. The community over there, the young kids, they watched my house. So I could be out late at night. I was forever — in fact, General and Glanton used to get on me about being out late at night. I said, "I've got more protection than you guys got. Look at that Doberman Pinscher out there." So, you know, I began to know General and Glanton at that time, at the office, and I was beginning to work with them also, on how to put a newspaper together. It was the *Inner City Voice*. I learned how to justify -- you know, when you used to justify those newspapers?

ROSS: Mm-hmm.

KRAMER: I began to see all these meetings taking place there, which was different than what I was having down at WCO. Later on, I was approached by a young man -- he's passed away -- that was part of WCO, and said, "Marian, what you doing in March?" -- or some time, March or

February. I said, "I don't know." He said, "Put this date down, because we want you to come to this meeting." I put it down and he said, "I'll tell you about it later." So I went on, kept organizing, and I told General at the time that the Tenants Union was looking for an office and Fred needed space, and since they had that place down there. And General said, "We can get him some space." I asked him one day, I said, "Go in there. I just talked to Fred yesterday. Could you please go and talk to Fred about getting a 501-C3, and if any funds come from the UAW and him, where they can be in control of those funds." He said, "I will do that. When that happened, General finally got some time to go speak to Fred. Now mind you, Fred and them had been organizing all these slum landlord places and getting them into the Tenants Union. I even connected them up with the attorneys who were right across the street from us, that was Legal Services. That was Ron Glatter and all of them, who had been some of our attorneys. Ron and Buck Davis got involved, you know, helping the Tenants Union to develop.

We looked up, that same evening that Gen went over to talk to Fred, and there was this gunshot. I didn't even know it had gone down, until they called me. Gen called me and said, "We've been trying to get you." I said, "What done happened?" They said, "Fred got shot." I said, "Who would shoot Fred?" Somebody had been paid. We didn't know if it was for Fred. We do believe that bullet was for General Baker.

ROSS: Your husband.

KRAMER: My husband. He was not my husband at the time. He was a good friend and I was learning, respecting him and everything. General and them had started organizing in the factories, where they were working -- him, Chuck Wooten, a couple of other folks and stuff like that. And see that was interfering not only with the unions, but they were taking a stand against the racism in there. They were taking a stand against the unfair labor practice that was happening in there and they didn't like that. So I do believe that — and from what Gen and them investigated -- that that was a setup at that time.

I'll tell you, things kept happening. Police brutality began to increase. I told you about, at one time, what happened to Howard King. Well, as Howard King got older and stuff like that, and we had beat the case. His mother and all of them had participated, and the community. Howard was walking to get some orange juice or something like that, he and another young man. Like I tell you, they were tall. They're still tall. Some young man walked up to them and asked him if he was Howard King, pulled out a knife and started stabbing him. The police had put — somebody put him up to that, to kill Howard King. The young man, he testified, he said these people knew Howard. Now his brother, Quentin, I went by the house to check on him and he said mama — he was crying, and he said, "Mama been looking for you, Marian." I said,

“What done happened?” Now this is all in the same week. Did you hear me? In the same week this is happening. I said, “What done happened,” and he said, “Howard has been stabbed. He’s at Receiving Hospital and they don’t know if he’s going to make it.” Well, I rushed down there to Receiving Hospital. Here’s Howard Junior, laying up in there, “Hey, Marian, I’m all right,” and he told me what had happened. He said, “But look it here, guess who’s in here?” I said, “Who’s in here?” I’m worried about you and you’re talking about for me to guess who’s in here? Who are you talking about? He said, “Fred Lyles.” I said, “Fred’s in this hospital?” He said yeah, I said, “Where?” He said, “Come on.” And he walked me around. You know, he had been stabbed and they sewed him up and everything, and he had on one of those gowns. I went in there and talked to Fred and Fred is laying down there and he’s paralyzed. He said, “I’ve been trying to get in touch with you.” I said, “Fred, how are you doing?” He said, “I’m going to be paralyzed for the rest of my life.” I just didn’t know what to say, what to do or nothing.

Fred tried his best, even when he got out of that hospital, to keep organizing and stay in touch. I talked to Fred a couple — he must have lasted two to three years after that and he had said, “I want to do something.” But he passed away after that. This man, a postal worker, done a tremendous job in the movement and organizing all these tenant organizations, and fighting against these slum landlords. Here was a hero in the movement that a lot of young people needed to know about, and I hope one day somebody sits down and writes a book on Fred.

ROSS: Fred Lyles. I hope so too. And now we know it will be in the archives because you told the story. Thank you.

(End of Audio File 08)

KRAMER: Well, you know, Mr. Lyles, as well as the tenants that ended up being in the fight against these slum landlords, I learned a lot from them because I began to learn landlord/ tenants rights. And based on that struggle that we were involved in, guess what was created?

ROSS: I have no idea.

KRAMER: The landlord/tenants court.

ROSS: So Detroit now has one.

KRAMER: Oh, we’ve had one ever since that period of time. Mr. Lyles and all them, as well as us at WCO, played a role, I guess. It was getting to be a little too much for the other part of the court system. They started spreading and more and more tenants laws and stuff like that started getting passed, that could protect the tenants more. It’s interesting

enough, years later, when I did get evicted from a place, my attorney looked at me and said, "Now they're going to use the landlord tenants court against you." I said, "Let's make them suffer." (laughs) I said, "Just get me 30 days. I don't need 30 days, let them sweat for a while," Because the landlord was terrible. But Fred, that was a hell of an education, participating in that.

ROSS: But something you just said speaks to the financial uncertainty of being a community organizer. Tell me a little bit about, how did you keep your personal life together while you were dealing with the public struggle.

KRAMER: Well, you know, when I came here, I told you --

ROSS: With Dave.

KRAMER: Well, yeah, but I ended up with a job at Hotel, Motel and Restaurant, and I was getting a decent salary at that time, and pretty good benefits, and vacation and everything. That was only for a year. Then after that, we lived off of Dave's salary at WCO, and he was getting paid pretty good, given they were community organizers. We were not a couple that lived high up on the hog or nothing like that. We were pretty modest and there was only two of us, you know, so we were doing OK. My rent, after I had moved out of the apartment that we had at first, that became rat infested, we moved into a two family flat, and we lived on the main floor, and this lady was a member of WCO. Guess how much my rent was? Fifty dollars. A big place, fifty dollars. I said, Lord, today -- Well, at that time, that was kind of expensive in the sense when you look back. This was in the '60s and I lived there for years, on Lincoln Street, not too far from here.

So, when Dave left, when we split up, I was getting a salary. I was by myself and I was getting a salary from WCO. I had the same landlord. My brother and my sister in-law moved upstairs, so we shared a lot, you know. And my cousin was living around in the area too, we found my cousin in Detroit. So again, we shared that, and the community tended to share a lot. And just look at me, I didn't have to cook that much. Ms. Shine and them, said "Come by here, I got something, what you like." You know, they knew what I liked to eat and stuff like that, and Ms. Smith and all of them, by the time I got home, a lot of time in the evening time, I had already eaten. I was doing pretty good. I already had a car that Dave and I purchased, a Volkswagen, when we were together, when I was working at the union, I got it through the credit union. The women that were over the credit union, and the vice president of the union, they said, "I love your spunk and you got problems paying on your car..." -- Guess what my payment was at that time? Thirty dollars a month. -- "... let us know." I got good with some of the ones in the

credit union, so I could go a couple of months without paying, but I finally paid for that Volkswagen.

ROSS: Let's move from the '60s, into the '70s. We've still got a few more decades to go.

KRAMER: I could go on and on and on. But understand that we still was moving from the slum landlords. In the meantime, when this was happening, Welfare Rights was being born, on the heels of the Civil Rights Movement and everything like that. What happened was, a couple of the women came over to WCO and said, "Marian, we've got some problems over in public housing, Jeffries Public Housing." I said, "What's wrong?" They said, "There's one person having problems with the Welfare Department." I said, "I don't know nothing about that." I said, I know at one time my mother had us on welfare and I know my aunt fell into the Welfare Department in Louisiana, she had some raggedy clothes on, and one shoe on and one sock on. And he said, because they were treating black folks so bad, and when it came to the Welfare Department and not being able to get any support, back in the '40s, '50s and stuff like that, I said, "My aunt fell into the Welfare Department in the '50s." My grandmother had us crying, laughing about my Aunt Mary. And she said, "I'm hungry," and she came out of that with some help. I said now, my mother was forced to get on welfare at one time and we were not ashamed. I said, "In fact, I used to like that peanut butter they had. We're not ashamed." She said, "You're going to have to learn something, because we have some problems over here with these welfare workers and stuff." I said, "Well, let's find out what we got to find out."

But when I was at the office, one of the Appalachian men came in and he had lost his job. He asked me, he said, "Is there any way, or do you know where I can get some food for myself and my children?" I think he had about seven children. I said, "Have you gone over to Father Kern and all of them?" He said, "I'm a member of that church." I said did they give you? He said, "Yeah, he gave me some cornflakes and stuff," and I said, "Let me call Father Kern." I couldn't get Father Kern, but I left a message for him to call me, and that was my beginning of advocating for people, right? For people forced to live below the poverty level. I said, "Look, you attend that church, that church should be helping you. Let me get him on the phone." Father Kern, he was so sweet. Father Kern was a little short priest but well respected by the police department and everything. I said, "This is Marian Kramer, Father Kern, over at WCO. I got one of your members of your parish over here that needs some food. Let me start explaining to you." I said, "He came over there and all he received was some cornflakes and stuff." He said, "Send him back. Send him back." I said, "Thanks, Father Kern." And I told the young man what he said, I said, "Not only that, let me know what happens." So I knew, I'd better start, you know, I

started thinking about what Ms. [McCarroll?] has said. I said, "It look like we'd better start as the arm of this housing committee we have a welfare committee, and begin to understand what's going on here." Ms. McCarroll and I, you know, I found out about West Side — I was a member of CORE, the Congress of Racial Equality, and Gloria and Selma [Goods?] were doing an organizing campaign at that time, to organize a welfare rights organization, and I said to Gloria, "What is that?" And they told me about it. And then I found out, I said what — and they broke down to me. They were working over at the citywide — these were two women from CORE, where I had been at, and they broke down to me what citywide welfare rights was about. She said, "Guess who's the director, the organizer, the leading organizer for this national movement we're trying to do?" I said, "Who?" She said George, George — my brain went dead. Excuse me, stop it for a minute.

(pause in recording)

ROSS: What was that name again?

KRAMER: George Wiley. George and I had been together in the Civil Rights Movement in Louisiana. George was the assistant director to the national director of CORE, that was formed. George was the type of person -- this man had graduated from Syracuse, New York, University of Syracuse, New York, as a chemist. This man took time out and start organizing, and George was the one that approached, later on, at WCO, when we took all these people up, the poor people, as I think I mentioned. We went up there and George was trying to convince us to come on staff with the Welfare Rights Organization, but we couldn't at the time. But see, I had to end up being there to form a committee, and I called George in Washington, because every once in a while we'd call him to find out what was going on. He kept me informed, Ronnie kept me informed about, would keep us informed about when King was killed and what happened after that, in New York and in D.C., and all the stuff that was happening.

ROSS: Did Detroit riot after King was killed?

KRAMER: Oh, my God, that's another story. Did they riot? Yes. But George Wiley asked me, he said, "Marian, are you considering coming on as staff now?" I said, "George, no, because I'm still at WCO," and good thing, I'm at a phone that the other women can't hear, because I said, "I don't think they want me as organizer," because you know me, my thing is that the decision on a lot of things needs to come from the membership. We're the ones that carry those decisions out. That doesn't mean that we can't participate, but at the same time, this organization is their organization, and if we're going to be on staff, you know me, I'm going to make sure that that membership runs this organization. So he said, "I don't care, I need you and Gloria House."

Gloria was from the friends of SNCC up here. Not Gloria House, Dorothy Dewberry, although Gloria is still up here. Dorothy Dewberry, to be on staff there. I'm going to talk to Gloria and them and see if they would hire the two of you, because you all need to be out there building those welfare rights organizations. I said, "Good luck." He called me back the next week and said, "I had a rough time." I said, "Leave that alone, I'm still going to build this." He said, "I want you to do this for me. We are having this meeting in June." No, no, he said, "We're organizing around the country. We're having a meeting. There was two meetings being set up and he said, "I sure want people from Detroit to come, why don't you come?" I said, "No, I'm not coming, because if I come, I'm going to leave this other stuff I'm doing right now. But I promise you one thing. If Gloria and them organize a bus, I'll make sure some of these people here are on that bus." And they did. They went to the meeting in D.C., and they went to the meeting -- What was that other meeting? Was that New York, or something like that? And that was all around the formation of the Welfare Rights Organization, the beginning of the movement. And at that time, he told me, "We are organizing for people to walk from Cleveland, Ohio, to Columbus, Ohio, fighting against the injustice of poor people and how they are treated as third class citizens." And I said, "What are we doing here?" And stuff like that. He said, "Talk to Gloria and them, because you all got one of the biggest organizations." The thing was, if people couldn't come to Columbus, when the marches got there, they were asking everybody to go to their state capitols. Now here I am again, beginning to learn something different. I've been dealing with the local, then dealt somewhat with the fed in the Civil Rights Movement. Now I'm about to deal with — didn't know it — the state.

ROSS: And the state budget.

KRAMER: And the state budget. We mobilized some of the people in our community to go. I didn't go, I stayed back there in the trenches. But later on, Lord have mercy, what I did do? As I helped Ms. McCarroll and them, although Gloria and them did not hire us, I did not back off. I helped Ms. McCarroll and them in public housing. I said, we done learnt what's going on. We build a Welfare Rights over in Jeffery Public Housing, and it became the Jeffrey Public Housing WRO and honey, those women had had the experience of working in WCO, see, which was different than some of the women that were joining welfare rights around the state. They had had organizational experience, so therefore, they wasn't going to take nothing on for nobody, internally, from the organization, or externally from the Welfare Department. So, that organization began to build, not only with women in public housing, but Ms. McCarroll emerged as a hell of a leader because, eventually, she became a part of helping, because she came and got my behind, put me right out front, helping to organize a rent strike in public housing when

the rent went up. We ended up almost breaking Detroit. We had organized practically every public housing.

This was like in the '70s, beginning in the '70s. The Black Panthers had come in, and they came over to the place where we produced our paper, to see General in there. They had asked Gen and them to help them to build, you know Mike Hamlin and General Baker, a lot of the people that were hanging out over there, about building a Panther Party here. Gen and them said yeah. They called me and they said, "Look, we need to meet." I said, "What is this meeting about?" No, they didn't call me at first. I was out of town. I had taken a vacation. My ex-husband and I was trying to see if we can bring our relationship back together. We went up to upper Canada, to see some friends, and when I got back, I'd get a call from General, "Where you been?" I said, I took a little vacation, and that type of stuff. "We need to talk to you." And I went over to the ghetto, we called it, and he said, "Look, this is what happened while you were gone. We got a visit from the Black Panther Party." It was Bobby Seale and who else? There was someone else that came in there and talked about the need to build a Panther Party here, and that people were interested, and they asked if we would help out, to build it. They had heard that we had started this movement here. I said, "Well that's good." He said we decided — see, that's why we was trying to get you. We decided, while you were gone, that you and a couple of other folks were going into the Black Panther Party. I said, "Wait a minute here." I don't know nothing about the—other than what I'd heard about the Black Panther Party. He said, "Yeah, but we can't just take their organization and give it all to the Black Panther Party. I figured that you, with your organizers, you can go in..." Well, there's a couple, you know, two or three other people, my brother and all. And so my brother was working in the factory also. He was working in Uniroyal, this huge, huge tires. That's where he was working. Alan.

Several of us went into the Black Panther Party. It was myself, John Williams. In fact, John had become—this is interesting, because you know how the movement was. John and my first husband had been good friends, John being black and Dave being white. They had gone to school together, at the School of Social Work. John was married and Dave was married, and so occasionally, yeah I would see John, and I'd be at meetings and stuff like that. John went into the Black Panther Party, I went in. I'm trying to think. My brother Alan, Cass Smith, several of us went in, because all of us were around the area, the ghetto and everything. I became the deputy minister, vice deputy minister of education. My brother was over security and all that type of stuff. John and them were over some things. The key thing was, we were much older than some of those young people and the General, I appreciated the wisdom of General and them, because they didn't want these young people to get hurt. I guess I didn't know nothing about organizing.

We went in and we built the Black Panther Party. Not only did we build it, I took some of the young people, because at the time, we were still organizing in public housing. I said “Look Ron,” Ron Scott, I said, “Look. You live in public housing and there is a split between the senior citizens and the youth. You’re our youth, we’ve got to get this split together, to be able for y’all to advance in this rent strike that is taking place. And you young people need to play a role in the struggle.” I took some of the young people from the East Side that I had been working with at some point, and some of the young people over here, took them out when it was time to go and leaflet. I tell you, our days were long. Leaflet at dark, meant at four o’clock in the morning, passing out the drum paper. Not only were we helping with the workers, to teach them how to do that type of stuff, because we had to learn too, I went in one time and I will say this, you talk about learning. I went in one time — I appreciate the movement, because I learned a lot.-- I went in to one of our offices we had, because the people got to the point, they would give us offices in places. I said, you know, I’ve got to make this leaflet out for this upcoming meeting. He said, “Get over there, we’ve got all the equipment and stuff, go on make it.” See, because I was used to the secretary making the leaflet, if I needed some. I went in there and I had wrote this leaflet, I had typed part of it. He said, “Oh, no, no, no, Marian, you can’t give that out to the community.” You need to go over there and take — you remember those stencils — and do that. I must have been at the office half a day, just getting that leaflet together, because Baker was insisting that I do it right. Do it right and respect the community.

ROSS: Can’t be raggedy, coming before the community.

KRAMER: Could not be raggedy. And I finally learned how to deal with those stencils, and I began to learn how to put that stuff together. I had already learned how to put the newspaper together and everything, but it was a joy learning that. That’s the type of knowledge we would impart also, in each worker that would come from different factories and want to build another room. They had to learn how to obtain the information and the problem in those factories, and we would teach them how to put those leaflets together. And if they needed backup, we would get the students, as well as ourselves, and go out in the morning and help them distribute those papers. But the first one that we distributed was at Dodge Main, one of the largest factories that Chrysler owned. Several floors. I done forgot how many baseball, basketball teams they had in that place. I would be typing those drums and I would be cracking up laughing, because listening to what the workers were saying about what was going on in that factory. The workers would come together on a Sunday. It got to the point you couldn’t get into the room it was so packed. They’d be talking about the problems that existed in these factories and each one of them would finally get together with their little teams and they’d put those leaflets out, we would help them put those leaflets out. You know

who were the backbone eventually, of getting some of those leaflets together?

ROSS: The women.

KRAMER: Yeah, we started learning. If I can get you tonight, (inaudible), you'll finally see us, but you won't see us that much because we were boycotting the company, at that time, that was doing the movies and what have you. In fact, they'll say on there who they were, I forgot the name, but they used to be located in New York. News strip or something like that, but I forgot the name of them. We finally took over their place here because they owed us some money. I was pregnant as hell and I was called one day --

ROSS: Now, you mentioned pregnancy. This baby didn't come from nowhere. Had you and General—

KRAMER: General and I had not been together. We were still friends.

ROSS: Who the baby daddy?

KRAMER: John Wiggins. He had been separated and we got together. At first, I was kind of up in the air, should I have this baby, what should I do?

ROSS: What year was this?

KRAMER: This? When was Jackie born? Jackie is 43 now, now what year was that? Nineteen --

ROSS: Seventy-one.

KRAMER: Mm-hmm. All those years. I was 26-years-old. Finally I decided. I went home trying to think, am I going to have this baby, because I was unsure at that time, about the —

ROSS: What choice did you have? I mean, this was two years before *Roe v. Wade* made abortion legal.

KRAMER: I know, but still, there were ways to abort those babies.

ROSS: What did you know about those ways in 1971?

KRAMER: I knew those older ladies knew what to do. You know how it is, so much go through your mind. I flew out of here for the holidays. I had found out that I was almost three months pregnant, and my doctor was funny as hell. He said, "Oh, Lord have mercy." He said, "Would you believe it, you pregnant." I said, "Doctor, you better check again, because you might have the wrong person." He said no. Dr. Chipoco.

He said, "You are pregnant." I was in another world then. I said, "How am I going to take care of a baby, I'm just managing myself."

I went home and I talked to my mother and my grandmother and they said, "You can always come home." I said, "I'm not ready to come home." I'm just trying to see if I'm about to have this baby and stuff, and people from Detroit -- I had told a couple people here and they all started calling me. 'Marian don't worry, you ain't got nothing to worry about and blah-blah-blah.' But when I got back, I had made up my mind.

I'll never forget, Ken Cochran told me, he said, "Damn, Marian, if I'd have thought at that time, maybe that could have been my baby." I said, "I don't play that." He had me cracking up laughing and I said, "Ken, you be messing with too many women, you know, but I said I don't play that." I ended up having my child. I was quite happy, and I had such support. I had some of the women that were in WCO that became my sisters, and we still are like -- three of them have passed away -- we was four sisters. They really helped take care of me. You talking about sisters away from home, and then there was Cass and all of them, we all were close. Jen and them kept telling me, "Say look, that baby ought to have a father." I said I wasn't worried about that, that baby is going to be loved anyway.

My crazy brother told me once I had that baby, "Well sis, I told them I was the father of the child. "I said, "You are out of your mind, Alan why would you do that?" And the nurse came up there and said, "Ms. Kramer, we got too many people coming here talking about they the father of your child, especially your crazy brother." She said, "I had to tell him, you can represent your mother." That was at the time that you couldn't have all that. And I looked up, here was one of the young kids — at that time, Carl was much younger — from the Black Student United Front, because we built this whole apparatus, the young kids did, based on the drum movement and stuff. We built this whole organization to the Black Student United Front, and Carl came in there and told them he was the father. I said, "Why would you all do that?" "Well, I wanted to see you and make sure you were OK." I said, "You all get out of here, get out of here." But, you know, you could see that my brother and my sister-in-law that he had met in the Black Panther Party, and they got married. But that was a little further down, after we got in the party, the Black Panther Party. I knew we were OK. So let me back up. We all were in the Black Panther Party.

ROSS: For how many years?

KRAMER: About a year and a half. But we started noticing something. We said there are — all of a sudden — you know, we began to take these young people and not only deal with landlord tenants problem and got them

involved in the struggle in public housing, where we almost broke Detroit, but they got involved when we had to get those little leaflets out at Ford, out at Dodge Main, even some of the clinics and places. Those young people helped out and then they started taking them to their schools. If it was Mumford, it was Mumford Black Student United Front. They were taking over those schools, walking out, just like the workers in the factory, when it got too hot. And so the league grew. The WCO began to disintegrate and die away, but we ended up with WCO for a while there, the office and everything. Let me tell you, Jesse Jackson, none of them, could come to town, unless they came to our office. We began to notice, and we didn't like what we were seeing, what was happening in the Black Panther Party. We tried to warn them, watch out, there is not only some conspiracy going on against the Black Panther Party, but they'd sent in agents.

ROSS: COINTELPRO.

KRAMER: And that's what was beginning to happen at that time. How can I walk into a party that somebody's giving from the Black Panther Party, and there's a big bowl of pot sitting there? I said, what is this? Somebody done brought this in here, to be able to set us up, because these young folks didn't have no money for that. Do you understand what I'm saying?

ROSS: Mm-hmm.

KRAMER: I would tell them "Look, I've got to leave. You guys need to get rid of that because you don't know who's here. It's something that you better watch your back." And then one of the young men that had become president had found out what we had warned them about, because all of us began to get out. What happened was, all our pictures began to appear in the Un-American Activity booklet. Look, they had more information on us than our parents did, I said but they could at least used a better snapshot of me, with the snapshot they had of me in jail. So, you know, we knew something was happening, and the conspiracy that was happening in the factory, because as we organized in the factories, as we organized -- and the community was participating -- as we organized in the schools and at the clinics and places like that, what we began to see, that General Baker was being more attacked, they were coming after General. He found out one day, and you need to talk to him some time on it, that King called him and said "Man, they coming after you." He had overheard it. And he said, "What do you advise me to do?" He said, "Get the hell out of here."

So, Gen went to Cleveland with some other friends of ours, other workers and stuff like that, and went underground. That night, as we were out at the factory, they started serving all of us; not our names, but

they were looking for General Baker. We demonstrated our behinds off and they just started throwing this stuff at us, you know.

ROSS: Subpoenas?

KRAMER: Yeah, they started trying to do that. So, you know, the movement was getting at its height, so as you come out of one struggle, something else would develop, and that movement started taking. We started getting visits from all around the world, people coming here to talk to folks from this movement that had taken place in the factories, in the schools, because at times, we could shut this place down.

The students were beginning to understand how to run their movement too. They had even organized some elementary schools and some junior highs. I was so proud of them, I didn't know what to do. So, it got to the point -- this whole thing started with James Farmer, around going to these churches to get money and stuff, to the big places and stuff like that -- and that began to start some kind of riff with the committee. Who was running the League of Revolutionary Black Workers? On the one hand, we as women, we're not even on the executive board.

ROSS: Now, tell me about the League of Revolutionary Black Workers, or should I wait?

KRAMER: Well, I'm coming there. First, it was loosely -- in the sense that we had DRUM [Dodge Revolutionary Union Movement], FRUM [Ford Revolutionary Union Movement], ELRUM [Eldon Avenue Revolutionary Union Movement], all these different factories of Chrysler. We had Ford, FRUM, we had UNIRUM, which was Uniroyal. We had these clinics and all that, and we even had a basketball tournament on certain Sundays, between the social workers and the workers in the factory and all that stuff. All this stuff was developing, and then we laid the foundation and we were building the International Black Appeal. You know how you have the United Way going into the factories and you getting hired, and you've got to donate to them, then they wouldn't put nothing in your community. So we were backing them up also, so we had all these different fronts going on. Eventually, they kept coming to the women for certain things. We had got to the point, we had built a printing apparatus, *Black Star*, and we had sent Cassandra Smith and Jeanette, who was my sister-n-law -- she has passed away -- to IBM school, to learn how to do typesetting and how to put those papers and print stuff. And then we had Helen, who knew how to run that multi-lift machine and stuff. I learned the hard way. I went out and acted like I knew how to run it, and my cousin had taught me how to run the multi-lift machine by showing me what all the different parts were on a picture, because I needed a job. And so I started working for these part-time places, and they would send you out to GM and all that type of stuff, because the people were going to show you

how to use the machine anyway. So we learned how to run these machines and if you look at the movie, you will see the women working these machines and putting those papers together.

ROSS: Now, what's the name of that movie and that will be the last thing on this tape.

KRAMER: *League of Revolutionary Black Workers*. DRUM, baby, DRUM.

ROSS: I'm going to ask you about that on the next tape. Thank you.

(End of Audio File 09)

ROSS: OK, Marian, when we left off, you had just started telling us about the history of the League of Revolutionary Black Workers.

KRAMER: The movement, the objective situation was moving so powerful, as well as the subject, the minds of people in the sense that as they talk about their economic situation and they see the need for the organization, because they saw DRUM, FRUM, ELRUM, and all that stuff -- it got so big. One thing the General had fought for was the women's committee within that circle, because he said what they were experiencing as the men leave the factories, walk out, they were catching hell from their wives, to take their behinds back in there. So that was a lot of pressure. So he was saying, how can we have a women's committee to be able to talk to those sisters, can see the need to be involved. Well, when you know when you're keeping a certain organizing effort, watch out for the repercussion, because not only was the women in the league that was in DRUM and all the rest of them, we were doing those newsletters. The students, some of the women. I was still understanding. I was still involved in the community. We were doing those newsletters, the *Inner City Voice*. Oh, we were getting out all this stuff. It got to the point, Gen was still out of town and they came to us to do something, they had asked us to do something, the guys there, and I said look. And I knew Arlene and them were getting angry too, the General's wife and everything, all of us had got mad, Gracie, all of us. Gracie was the wife of Chuck Wooten and all that stuff. Then there were some other sisters like me, organizers and stuff. Cass Smith was working that there. We said darn, this mess, every time something goes down, they want to come back and ask us to do all the work.

ROSS: And to clean it up.

KRAMER: You know, and all that type of stuff. No, no. I know I told Gen, I said we've got to have an organization. An organization, we told Mike Hamlin and all of them, we've got to form an organization. That organization, we had it and let me tell you, Ron Marsh, who was a part of the DRUM movement, Ron was on the executive board and he was

chairing it that morning, and when we called that meeting, it was over in our area, in our office, that Papa Odom -- and that's another thing, I'm putting that name out because you need to know about him. Papa Odom and Mama Odom own this building, and they were running a place for young men and young women that had been in the drug situation, but part of it was our office, on the other side, that he had given to us, and we had this big meeting. I mean, it was packed on that Sunday. Girl, I'm sitting up there and my stomach was out here. I was afraid I was going to have that baby and Ron and them said, we better have quick because it's looking like that basketball going to come out of Marian soon. I said, "Don't get smart now." We had that meeting and we formed, after talking and all, the League of Revolutionary Black Workers; and it was the women that had demanded that.

ROSS: What year was this? You were pregnant with Jackie.

KRAMER: That was, what did we say?

ROSS: In '71.

KRAMER: In '71, that was that year, yeah that was the year. We formed the League of Revolutionary Black Workers and it was amazing because we had all of us under the same umbrella; the students, the ones working in the hospitals and stuff like that, the social workers, the ones in the factories, all under one organization and it was great. And at the same time, Welfare Rights was still going, and they were into still taking on — I'm telling, you they were turning out the Welfare Department. And here I am, I done worked at Unicon, another community, I was the assistant director over there, and once we ran out of funds and all that stuff, as a community organizer, you're always facing that type of stuff. I needed to be off for a while, because I had to have the baby, and so I made a decision, I'm going to get on welfare.

I went to the Welfare Department -- now this was after we had formed the League of Revolutionary Black Workers, and feeling good about that, and I went to the Welfare Department -- and I said, "Wow, look at all these people in here, how am I ever going to get served?" I knew some of the tricks on welfare rights, I mean some of the tactics of welfare rights. And I'm looking and I sit there for a while, my big self sitting there, and I got up and I went back up to the counter, I said, "Now I asked you earlier, if I could see someone and make this application for aid and stuff," and she said, "Well you're just going to have to wait." I said, "No, I'm not going to wait. I'm going to stand up here at this counter," big as I was. "I'm staying right up here at this counter and I'm going to see somebody today," because, see, I knew I could back up on my organization. I could call the Welfare Rights Organization I was a part of, I could call Gen and them in the League of Revolutionary Black Workers. So, you know, when you've got

organization, you think different. I said, "Let me see your supervisor." Now I said, "I demand to see your supervisor, bring your supervisor out here," and I said, "I want to talk to you, because I've been sitting here about 30 minutes and I don't think it's right. Look at my legs, how they done swelled up." My legs were going to swell up anyway. I said, "Look, how you treating everybody else in here. This is ridiculous." The woman said, "I'll call you next." They were trying to get my behind out of there, and they did, and they told me a woman was going to come out to my house to verify my house.

So, Mrs. McCarroll and them told me what to expect, and my sister-in-law was upstairs. I said, "I don't need nobody here with me, just wait a minute." My brother, at that time, had got two Dobermans. There was Black Power, the female that would be with me all the time, and there was [Dove?] that we couldn't let out among people. The dogs, they would either go down the back stairs, go through the basement, and go upstairs to my brother and them house, or they'd come back down and come to my house. Usually, they come down there, running from my brother, because he be screaming at them half the time.

So, when the woman came to visit me, Black Power was sitting out there. I said, "Oh, don't worry about the dog, the dog listens to me." She was scared and you could see that she was scared. Her name was Donna — I have to think, because she became a good friend of mine. She came in there and she told me, eventually she said, "I was a little afraid to come to your house. I saw you acting up in the Welfare Department." She told me what I had to do and that I would be probably eligible to get welfare, and I did. So that was enough for me to pay my rent at that time and deliver the baby and everything. Then, Jackie and Carolyn and June and Shirley had talked me into — I told you those sisters I had met, said "You're getting too close. You need to come stay over there with us." I said, "I can't leave my place." They said, "Oh, yes you can, because Alan lives upstairs," talking about my brother. And I did, I went over there and stayed with them, where they could watch over me. All of them had to go to work, but they would be back in time, where they didn't want me to be alone in case I go into labor.

It was amazing. Donna became one of my friends, my worker, because I would go in there -- It got to the point, "I love to see you coming into the welfare office, because my supervisor," who she said was no good, "she'd be so afraid every time you'd come in there." It was something. She said, "I was just having a ball." Donna worked for the Welfare Department for a while and then she left there herself because she couldn't stand it no more. I met her husband, who was — they're not together no more, but he's a good friend of Gen and I now. It was amazing, how you made friends like that. You know, I started being a part of Welfare Rights at the same time that I was working with the

League, but a lot of my times, I noticed, began to still be in the community. I would not leave that.

And there came a day that Mrs. McCarroll and all of them, we had a meeting, and the decision was made, because they were angry with the citywide welfare rights. They said look, we have learned that we — you know, they learned through WCO. They were the final decision-making for the direction of the organization, not the staff, you know, and that type of stuff. And they said look, we're sending dues into the national, we have no qualms with the national, but with the citywide, we do, we will pull out of it. I said, "Y'all sure you all want to do that?" They said yes. I said, "Whatever you want is OK with me." And so we were one of the first organizations in the National Welfare Rights Organization citywide, for Detroit, that pulled out, because those women said, no, we should be the final decision making of the direction of the organization. I'm talking about all the Welfare Rights in the city of Detroit. At the same time too, we had had — Michigan Welfare Rights had begun and some of the whites had started building welfare rights. I was growing and I had to give it to some of them. They were really organizing that. This one here and some of the welfare rights, even was a part of when we had the old League of Revolutionary Black Workers, during that period of time when the New Bethel incident went down. I don't know if you ever heard about that. Well, there was a meeting over there, at New Bethel, that was Reverend Franklin in that church, and again, these FBI's was looking for General Baker, we do believe it, because they were really behind General Baker. Something went down and they went in there shooting.

ROSS: Into Reverend Franklin's church? Aretha Franklin's father?

KRAMER: We heard the shots over at our flat on Dexter Avenue and everything, Cass and all of us, yeah. The next day, all these people had been arrested and we all got summons in the League, you know, they called us from our organization. Kenny said, "Meet me down at the courthouse, we've got all hell." We heard something was going on and the rumor was going around, they had arrested all these people in there. What was the name of the organization? I would have to get it from Gen and get it to you. The African — and I forgot what group it was, that was meeting at the time. See, General Baker was not in there, General Baker was at work.

ROSS: For the FBI, they didn't actually act like the FBI. They should have more intelligence than that.

KRAMER: Loretta, he would have you laughing how we — look, the FBI was on the wow, oh lookie here. They went to my daughter's childcare provider and began to question her, her husband, and some of the neighbors

about me. They sent me a letter at one time. Excuse me, I do need a Kleenex.

ROSS: Look in there, look in the drawer.

KRAMER: Oh, right here. They sent me a letter. They were doing some dirty stuff. They sent me a letter saying, "Dear Marian Kramer, I don't know why you think that John Williams wants you, when he has a wife." Well, he and his wife were not together at the time, and he has a beautiful girlfriend in Ann Arbor, named her and everything. Why would he want somebody like you that's uneducated in the sense that you didn't get a degree. This is what they were pushing, and blah-blah-blah and the other. I said, well you no good son of a guns. If they thought that this was going to break me down, they had another thing coming. I was telling Gen and all of them, I said all the mess we'd have been through? Ain't no way a letter is going to make me think, I'd fall to my knees and say, 'Oh, woe is me.' They were harassing all of us. They were going to different people's houses, trying to get information and everything, but it just made us stronger.

The League, like I said, became a powerful entity out here. We closed down — those workers, particularly in the summertime, it would get hot in that factory, and they won't turn it down. We began to understand the interconnection of some of these factories, that Chrysler only had a couple of plants that they needed to make certain parts, and one was here and one was in South Africa. So if they couldn't get it from the one here, they had to wait for it to come from South Africa. So that was a new adventure for me, not only learning, beginning to understand the policy of the Welfare Department and learning that, but learning that, I began to understand. In listening to these workers, about this was a different union -- because I had worked with the Hotel, Motel, Restaurant, and I knew about the Cooks Union and all that type of stuff -- but these were different contracts than what I had been experiencing with the other union. It was a rude awakening, because some of the older guys, I tell you, it got to the point, even the killing of — trying to kill General Baker and all that stuff, and the losing of our brother that passed away as a result of that, Fred, and all that stuff. We said, we're beginning to understand the power of these workers out here and beginning to understand what they're going to give you and everything.

Then, Martin Luther King was killed. I was at WCO. Let me back up on this. I was at WCO when King was killed, running the office that day.

ROSS: April 4, 1968.

KRAMER: Mm-hmm. I had taken you a little further, let me back up on this. That phone, because we had about four or five lines, lit up. They started calling saying listen, this school is walking, that school is walking.

These kids are coming down the street and everything. It was something else, and some of them were looking for General, and all of us reporting what was going on, they were tearing this city up again. Because here we are out here fighting for housing, here we are, out here fighting for better public quality education. Here we are out here fighting for jobs, here we are in your darn Vietnam War, and see that was a danger too, because these, like my brother and Jerome and all of them, had just gotten back from those wars and stuff like that, and they were in the factory. You know, here we are, out here learning all this stuff, and darn it, you're going to turn on a peaceful man and kill him, and kill him! And what was he with? The garbage workers. Girl, it took a while to cool this place down, because these young people, they were so — now remember, we had the Black Student United Front. They were in so many schools it was something else. We were the first ones, through the building of DRUM and all of them, that helped the students when they first held a freedom school up here. The young man that held the freedom school ended up on staff with us at WCO, after he graduated, and Charles and them, we brought them over to the church next door, at Northern High School, and all the stuff I know I had learned down South from Freedom School, we turned this — this was amazing, and then other students were walking. It was something else, but this thing around King was something else. At that time, in the movement, there was those that were striving to be black nationalists, and we were at one time, and those that were striving to be, you know?

ROSS: Civil rights.

KRAMER: Civil rights. And there was a big split that had developed. Well, we began to see ourselves kind of different after a while. Now, let me tell you, we wore the dashikis, we had the big afros. My sister was the one that was doing a lot of the sewing of the African clothes, and they were exploiting the hell of her too. Gen and them had taught them how to make those cones, and they got rich off of that stuff. Then we started seeing that hey, here are some blacks exploiting the hell off of us too. So, you know, you began to get a lesson that you began to treasure and saying look, we have to see where to throw our cloth again. And eventually, even within the league, we started noticing there was some problems, because some of the people on the board was thinking that they were the leaders of the League. I tell you, my husband is so modest until he get mad. He and the workers were beginning to split with that contingent. Now, these were folks like Hancock [Lowell?], Mike Hamlin, John... I done forgot John's last name, not John Williams, John Williams was on — we were all on the same side. They split from us. Gen said fine.

Now, I had been in the hospital at that point and I came out and [Eben?], who's a big artist around here, but he worked at Dodge Main. Eben came by the house to check on me, because I had got back from the

hospital. I said, "What done happened?" He said, "Lord have mercy, we done have a split." I said, "We had what?" A split. I said, "What do you mean, who, what happened?" I said, "They ain't told us nothing, the women nothing." I said, "Wait a minute, what is this?" He said, "General Baker got up at the executive meeting and said the hell with you all and he split, and all the workers went with him and the students went with Baker." I called the General and I said, "You could have at least told us that you was..." But he said, "I didn't know I was," he said, "But these guys are going crazy." He said, "I'll tell you more about it and you go on and get well." And it was, it was a big split, and we retreated. We had over a hundred and some people that went with us. We decided that we wasn't going to put the business in the street. They did and tried to act like we were the bad folks, right? We said leave it alone, let the rumors go, and we sat around the table at our headquarters. We had this house. We had put all our money together. The guys were making good money. The women in the factory were making some good money, and we had some students that were leaving U of M, coming down here, you know, and all that stuff, making good, you know, all of them, being a part of the League of Revolutionary Black Workers. We were sitting around and we said, we need a retreat. We've been going at this stuff, bang, bang, bang, for the longest time. We need to retreat and see what type of organization we need now. We realized, we had won every reform there was to be won in those factories, in public education, even in healthcare. Look it here, we had Maria [Fenoff?], a white woman, and Dr. Crockett, who was Senator Crockett, wife. He had been a judge, Judge Crockett. Judge Crockett, when the New Bethel incident went down, the next morning we was in his court. He let everybody go, and they started attacking him, and we were the ones that organized pancake things and everything, to support Judge Crockett. Crockett was something else, and Judge Crockett finally ran for Senate. But his wife was a doctor. Maria Fenoff was a nurse. Now, the League of Revolutionary Black Workers was just what it was, black workers, black students, people in Welfare Rights, all that. But, here we got Maria Fenoff, and some of the white nurses. I would call Marie and say, Marie, we taking the kids to the hospital because they got an asthma attack. Now, Leslie Dowdell was Glanton Dowdell, who painted the Black Madonna. We had to get him out of the country, so it was the underground thing that got him out to Sweden.

ROSS: Why did he have to go?

KRAMER: Let me footnote on that. After the rebellion here in the '60s, in 1967, Glanton had a gallery on Dexter and it wasn't the people rebelling that threw a rock up in Glanton's gallery, it was the police. After the rebellion, they tried to frame Glanton for something. Now, Glanton had been in prison years before, but Glanton was a figure that had brought something in the League that we didn't have. Glanton had brought in, he knew the streets, and not only that, he protected us. Glanton was like

our father and stuff. Glanton used to get on my back, “Go home. I don’t want to see you out on the street this late at night.” I said, “You with your old self, go home.” I’d say, I got a dog and I got this. He said go home. But Glanton, he was a good guy in the sense that he watched over us and everything. Glanton had a wife named Leslie, and Leslie is still around. She’s in Arizona. As we got Glanton out of here, when they came to attack him and was going to mess with him, he was able, through the underground railroad, that we — you know, that was my first time learning about it, that he was in, what did I say?

ROSS: Sweden.

KRAMER: Sweden. This was during the end of the ‘60s and stuff. He had been there and these people took care of him. Glanton ended up with a job and a diplomat for Sweden. We would hear from him all the time but his family, Leslie, with two young girls and three boys, we got a concert together. What’s his name, he talk about me and Mrs. Jones?

ROSS: Billy Paul?

KRAMER: Billy Paul gave us a concert and Thelonious Monk, you know and all that stuff, gave us a concert, to help get Leslie to Sweden with those children. And so they were raised in Sweden and they learned — in fact, we just lost his youngest son, one of the sons, but he ended up having two more kids once Leslie got to Sweden. I said Glanton, you’re old now. But his sons had left here, Lance just recently died in Sweden. But Glanton would call us all the time and check on us, but like I said, he brought another element to the movement.

We had brothers that had been in prison and stuff like that, and they joined the movement. So, you know, the FBI, yeah they were going crazy trying to keep up with us, and they were dangerous as hell, because once we retreated and said we needed to start studying, we decided, said hey, sitting around a table, a whole bunch of us, and said look, we need to go get this guy in California that look like he can teach us some of this science. Now mind you, let me back up, we had tried to hold some classes and we did, on Marxism, Leninism, because we done been through everything else. Can you imagine taking this room and pushing it back, about the size of the dining room downstairs. Once a week, a one hour community organization, we would hold a political education class, and folks would come in there and it was all these people from the factories, all these students and everything, and we were saying, oh, we’re going to learn us some Marxism, Leninism. And some of these same people that split with us told us no, some of you will and some of you won’t be able to. You know, you tell some of these workers in the factory, I said, “Who in the hell died and left you all in charge? What do you mean, some of us will and some of us won’t?” So, from the back room somebody said, “We don’t need you all asses no

more, to teach us nothing.” So eventually, we sent away. We told Chuck, sent Chuck.

ROSS: Was that Chuck Wooten?

KRAMER: Yeah, Chuck Wooten. Chuck has been dead for about a year and a half now. Sent Chuck and was it General? It might have been Carl, from the Black Student United Front, out to California, to talk Robert Williams to coming here and being our teacher. He didn't know what he was taking on, because here is all these workers. We went and retreated and every day, girl we studied and had classes for eight hours. These workers would get out of the factory, like my brother. He would come out of the factory in the morning, and come right on over there [Cordlin?] and be in that class and get a couple hours sleep, go back in the factory at night. We were thirsting for education but this time we told them before we went into this and we started reforming the organization, I put my hand up at a meeting prior to all this starting and I said, “Look. We've got to change this organization. We're not going to tolerate an executive board being all men and leaving off the students and the women.”

ROSS: Mm-hmm.

KRAMER: And they said, we agree. I was shocked. I said, Lord, they took the wind out of me. They said, “Who do you recommend?” I said, “We should nominate somebody.” Somebody said, “How about Marian, y'all?” I wasn't trying to get no more responsibility, I really wasn't, and Kay. Kay was a senior citizen. Kay, she was getting to the point to retire from Wayne State.

ROSS: Do you remember her last name?

KRAMER: Yeah, Kay Struthers. She was the most beautiful little black women you want to see. Her hair was all white. Kay was something else, and she and her sisters and them had been in the movement and what have you. And so Kay said, well I'll try, and stuff like that. You know what? I said to myself, what have they got me into? I did not want some more responsibility. Well, I ended up on the executive board, Kay and I, and Kay said, well I can't keep up with it that much, because she was working every day. Girl, I was meeting from sunup to sunset. Furthermore, they had this whole thing on criticism and self-criticism. Oh, my God, I mean it was heavy, but we were able to take it. That's when Maureen and her husband was coming around, everything, because Maureen, with her little behind, she had been one of the organizers at the Highland Park Community College, all up on the roof. They would become a part of the Black Student Union, the 94th, although her husband was working at one of the factories. I tell you, it still was expanding, and so after a year and a half with all this, about a year and a half, we were getting sick of it. I told them one day, “I'm

quitting,” because I said, “This went too far, as far as going to class every day and we ain’t doing nothing.” Because I was the — remember, I was a community organizer. I needed to be out in the community. Gen and Mitch came and got me and said, “You ain’t quitting nothing. If the rest of us are not quitting, you’re not quitting.” My sister in-law and another one, Diane Bernard, she’s passed away, came over and said, “Sis, come on back.” And we had been wearing fatigues and all that stuff. I had went home, put my earrings on, everything. I had changed clothes and said, “I ain’t thinking about you all no more.” I looked around, Gen and Mitch came by and had a bottle of wine and I said, “You all know I don’t drink this stuff.” What happened was, they had just got off from work. They said, you need to just bring your little old behind back because none of us are leaving, and we’re sticking in there and we’re getting rid of Robert Williams and sending him back to California.

We had before that, he had told us about the Communist League and Nelson Peery, and asked us about coming in. They did come in. There was about almost ten of them, I think, that came in, from California, from Watts. Nelson said, “We’ve been watching you all for years and we had been getting the *People’s Tribune* and throwing them to the side.” Everybody was sending us something, you know, but I enjoyed that education that we had learned. For one thing, we understood, and summarizing our work through analysis of what Marx was talking about, and that type of stuff, that if we were going to do something, we had to make a revolution here. Not the revolution in Russia. You could not import that here. We began to understand what the folks that used to come around us was not telling us, and that was, we didn’t need to go to no Russia or import no Russians, or nobody from Cuba, to come over here and teach us about a revolution. If there’s going to be a revolution here, it was going to have to be the working class here that was going to lead that revolution. And so it was a new time for us, a new time, and so we joined the Communist Labor Party. We took everybody into it and from there, a new day started.

ROSS: The communist what?

KRAMER: The Communist Labor Party. And we got on with other organizations and talked about the need to build a third party of a Marxist, Leninist. I ain’t never seen some of these people before, but I knew I had to do a lot of study to be on the planning committee.

ROSS: OK, we’re going to stop right there.

(End of Audio File 10)

ROSS: So, Miriam, you all had just joined the Communist League at the last taping. What happened after that?

KRAMER: Well, after joining that, and organizations going back, we began to form these committees to get ready to form another party. Not another party but a party, because we felt that we needed a party for the workers and stuff. So, we had these planning parties all around the country, of different left groupings and stuff, and I tell you, I was booking it every night, because you had to learn all these other organizations that you had to sit down with. You had to learn what their lines were and how to deal with them, and we negotiated back and forth. And I said oh, my goodness. So, you know, we finally came together. The place was huge. I forgot how many people we had, because it was in this huge auditorium in Chicago, about a year later, and formed the — was it the Communist Labor Party? Something like that, yeah.

As soon as I got back home, after being at that convention -- it was really interesting to be there and see the workers glad to have something. Not the Communist Labor Party, that's not the name of the one. The Marxist-Leninist Community Party, that's what we formed. So you see, we were way out there then. So, we got back and the first request, we get this call from Chicago. General got the request because — was it him? He was still heading up the stuff there. Can you hear me?

ROSS: Yes.

KRAMER: Heading up the area and the request was for me to go to New York, to help reorganize National Welfare Rights Organization. I said wait a minute here, for me to go to New York? And they said, Beulah Sanders wants you to come. I said, I know a Beulah, because Beulah had been one of the national presidents. So, Nelson and them showed up back in Detroit again, to see if they could get me to go to New York, because they had got this request. How they got the request is, Bob had been speaking at a national meeting and Beulah — and they really enjoyed what he was saying — had approached him and said, we need some young people like y'all in our organization. What had happened, the National Welfare Rights Organization, at that period of time, doors had been closed by the government, for taxes.

ROSS: Really?

KRAMER: Yes. So the National Welfare Rights Organization ceased to exist.

ROSS: So that's why you all reorganized into the National Welfare Rights Union.

KRAMER: Yeah, but it took a while. It took a while. So, I finally agreed to go to New York and started working directly with Beulah, to reorganize the National Welfare Rights Organization, and pull them back together.

Well, when I got to New York, and here are all these other groups that are there, welfare rights groupings and stuff like that, those that still exist, and here I'm walking in with Beulah, who they know had been their national president at one time. And their thing was — I know someone was saying — like some of them had me dying laughing. They said, who is this little heifer, you know? (laughs) I wasn't saying nothing, and Beulah told them how I had come there to help her organize the National Welfare Rights.

See, what had happened was Beulah and them were trying to get another person to come, and this person told them that you're going to have to pay me this amount of money, in order for me to come in there. Nelson knew how to get me. They knew how to get me. They said, yeah, they're going to charge all these poor women all this money before they come in and become organized. I said, "Tell them forget that, I'm on welfare here right now, until I get another job." I'll come in and if I have to get back on welfare in New York, I'll do that, because I'm coming in. And I did. I went to New York. It was General, Chuck, Nelson, had me in a bus, the big yellow bus. We went up to the hills of West Virginia, to see one of our older comrades and stuff, I mean that had worked in the coal mines; [Joe Door?]. Joe was always fussing, he and his wife. They were saying that the younger people wouldn't let them go door-to-door no more and stuff. But Joe was something else because he had a hell of a history of being back in that — and taught us so well. Had been back in that history of the coal miners struggle, as well as had fought in the Spanish Civil War. A little bitty guy, and he was bent over because as a child, he was used to separate that coal, and if they wasn't moving fast enough, they would throw coal in their back. But Joe and his wife, we finally convinced them, the organization finally convinced them, to move from there and to move — because Joe was getting sicker and sicker — to California, to L.A., and it was a good move because Joe lasted much longer. So we visited them and then we went on to New York.

I was in my new place (inaudible), and I said, "Oh, Lord, am I going to get used to this? Because, you know, we were used to homes in Detroit. I was used to a home in Dallas, a home in Louisiana, and here I am, in a small apartment, and I had one daughter and stuff like that, about to meet a bunch of new people, and I met them. But see, I wouldn't be a part -- you know, I was in an organization. I was a part of the Marxist-Leninist Party, but I was working with Welfare Rights, and I was learning more from Beulah and them, how to have these things set up and what they wanted to do. In Brooklyn, we would meet more in Brooklyn than anywhere else, because they had more of the strength there, began to start going back to some of the welfare office, because some of the main problems they had was — and we named this organization, Welfare Workers for Justice, the local one, because we wanted to knock through this thing. Beulah and I discussed knocking

through the possibility of people thinking that people on welfare were not workers.

ROSS: Mm-hmm.

KRAMER: Damn it, they worked every day just to survive. A lot of them had been domestic workers. Real quick, I'm going to put a little thing in here. The first domestic workers organized in Detroit came to me and I had to write their first proposal, to help them get together. They were a part of the League of Revolutionary Black Workers.

ROSS: Oh, my goodness.

KRAMER: So, when I thought about the domestic workers. The problems they were facing, was face-to-face re-determination; going back once a year to the Welfare Department and reapplying all over again. They would make you reapply, and a lot of people ended up being pushed off the welfare rolls, because they couldn't remember what had happened a year ago or nothing like that, you know. And people were lining up, some of them at three o'clock in the morning, early in the morning, and it was cold out there, to be able to be taken, to get on public assistance. So, I said OK, I've got to go through this. I went out there, in Brooklyn, the Welfare Department, the Human Service Department, that serviced my place. When I was in New York, I had to put my child — find a school. Eventually, she turned of age. I was trying to find a place, to put her in a childcare facility, because she had been here in childcare. So, she had to stay with one of the people in the organization as I went out there early in the morning, and stand up. It was cold out there and I noticed how the people that were standing in line was taking those garbage cans, you know the ones with the holes in it, and building fires for us. They said, watch, watch the fire department come out here, and that costs money, to put this fire out, every time they come, but we're going to build a fire every time, to keep everybody in this line warm. I said, "I'm in it," because I was freezing out there.

I finally got in there and I finally got my application, standing in the line from three — I don't know if I got out there at four or three o'clock in the morning, to eight o'clock in the morning, to be selected to go in that welfare department. And that welfare department, I'm looking around, it was huge. I filled out my application, got all the necessary stuff back to them, and this time I took Jackie with me, and I took some leaflets, saying we're having a Welfare Rights meeting. And this young Puerto Rican girl says, "This is your first time getting on it?" I said, no. She said, "Well, honey, if you're waiting to see this work that I'm seeing," she said, "Let me tell you what she just told me." She called me back there and she said, why don't you go out there and do what you were doing before? She said, "What I was doing before?" So she figured that — she was talking about saying that she had been prostituting. She

said, you're a wonderful looking young lady Are you married? She said yes, she melted down and stuff. She said, to a good man? She said, yes. She said, well then make sure when you leave here, tell your husband I'll be waiting on him when you get out of this job. Honey, that woman was going to — she said, don't you ever talk to me that way, and I said oh, Lord, I need her; but she got out of there quicker than anybody. But I knew one thing, she had buttered her ass up for when I went back there, and I got on quite quick in New York.

But as we leaflet and all that type of stuff, people started coming around. We had a place that we could use as the operation place, had one of the multipurpose centers. In the welfare rights movement, the poverty movement and stuff like that, these multipurpose centers and all those places, a lot of the staff helped organize within Welfare Rights, and under the Un-American Activities Book, they got cited too. My cousin in Louisiana, that helped organize the Louisiana Welfare Rights Organization, along with Annie Smart and all of them.

ROSS: You mean the House Un-American Activities Book?

KRAMER: Ah-huh. What happened was, they put all their names in that because they were working for these poverty organizations, and cited them as being some of the organizers for welfare rights. My cousin, Charlie Grainger, he played for the Dallas Cowboys and everything, and once he stopped doing that and went back to Louisiana, he had one of those jobs and got involved with Annie Smart and all of them, and he had ran her — they had ran, when the old Welfare Rights said, we're going to run folks for office, we ran Annie Smart for senator, against Senator Long. We got 55,000 votes across the state of Louisiana.

ROSS: Against Huey Long?

KRAMER: Against Huey Long, because they knew what to tell the people. Annie didn't win but she did, because then she had been with 55,000 people that felt that — I mean that's an honor. When poor people decides to vote for you, that is a hell of an honor, because they've been abused and everything else out here. People said, Marian, you've been at Welfare Rights so long, I say, "Yes, I have." I say, "And that, at times, is some of the most lonely places to be. You talking about women being abused. They're abused by the system, they're abused by their spouse, they're abused as workers, and if you're black, you're abused again. So you're exploited three times as a woman, as being black, being a part of a particular nationality, being a part of the working class, right?"

ROSS: Mm-hmm.

KRAMER: And being a woman. I said, this is my home, this is where I got to be from now on.

ROSS: How long did you stay in New York?

KRAMER: I stayed in New York, I told Beulah and them I'd give them two and a half years. I was there, we built that organization, the Welfare Workers for Justice. We were all over the place. There are five boroughs. We concentrated in Brooklyn, Manhattan, the Bronx, and I had to go up to Queens for a couple of things. We were trying to rebuild the citywide, because they had over 100,000 people in their Welfare Rights at one time there, before they were attacked by the government.

One of the first things we organized was against these cuts that were coming down in the city of New York, besides all the other stuff we were doing. Beulah said, "We're going to march against Wall Street." Now mind you, I had been in New York but I ain't never went to Wall Street. Here we are, women in the main, walking down Wall Street where that big bull is and that butt in your face. Here we are, at the foot of capitalism, at Wall Street. We got up on these big pillars and was speaking and everything, and afterwards, we marched back to our place. See, Beulah had marched down there one time with a lot of people in Welfare Rights, and at that particular time, when she had marched, they had so many people, they stopped the traffic and everything else there. Now, we were able to stop some traffic on our way, because you know, when you're down there on Wall Street, there's always a lot of traffic. But quite naturally, we didn't have enough folks, like at that time, when welfare rights was really out demonstrating under the National Welfare Rights Organization. We were just beginning to rebuild.

ROSS: Mm-hmm.

KRAMER: For two and a half years, I was there, and what happened? We built in the Bronx, we built in Manhattan, we built in Brooklyn. We got a call. One of the members called me one night, one of the old members that had been in Welfare Rights all the time, and said, "Marian, did you see that stuff on TV about Attica Prison?" I said, "No, what happened?" Actually, I'm just getting home. She said, "Turn the news on." This young Italian man was talking about breaking out because his son had got hit by a car. Now what happened? He's sitting around playing cards in the prison. The priest comes and calls his name, he in this booth, and he said, "Yeah, your son just got hit," just like that. Well, this man, he don't know what happened to him. I mean, wouldn't you be upset if somebody talked to you like that? It's your child that just got hit, and you don't know how your child is. And he finally was able to call home, they let him call home, because his wife, when he was arrested, was the type of wife that he would do all the stuff as far as business and all that type of stuff. So, he was saying, "I've got to go home, I've got to go home." And he came home and he found out —

ROSS: How did he get home, out of Attica?

KRAMER: They let him go for a couple of days, to check on his family, and they said he'd better be back, because they were watching him. They gave him a leave, because he had been pretty good in prison, but when he got home, his wife didn't know what to do and I said, "OK, let's tell him to meet us. Can you call him?" She said, yeah. I said, tell him to meet us at the welfare office in the morning, and we're going to get this case opened and we're going to say this guy, from being putting more time onto him, because, you know, he needs to be secure enough in his mind that his wife is being secured out here. She don't know nothing about the Welfare Department, nobody's telling her nothing. We found out that his child was doing OK. We met that next morning, maybe it was about four, five of us.

Now you have to understand, these women were not small women. They were tall. Beulah was six feet something. I was a little short thing, but the only people that were short was myself and another member, older member. She and I had been the short ones in that. We went in and told them that look, we're here representing him and his family, and he needs an application now. We want to see them turn us down. Now! And we want to get this application processed today. We did. Not only did we get the food stamps, we got everything done that day. This man was in tears. He said, "Marian, we got all those people in prison worrying about their families. Can I connect them up with Welfare Rights?" I said, "Talk to them. Talk to them. (laughs)" I said, "Oh, Jesus, talk to them, don't talk to me." Girl, he finally got out and he came to see us and everything. He was so happy, still, you know, with that. But we were so happy that we could do that and stop him from — because he was going to lose out. He was slated to come out soon. He was going to lose that. So it made the news and everything. I said, there we go, a bunch of women, out here making the system do what they're supposed to do.

Girl, we were in Manhattan, and started getting on with these younger white women, downtown welfare advocacy, that had been a part of the hippie type of stuff. There's a book out, I'll have to look at these books, I've got some of them at home. We helped them. They were running like an emergency phone type of thing, and so Beulah and I went over there and visited them and said this is wonderful and y'all doing a good job of trying to answer people's questions, but we've got to do something about these cutbacks that are coming and we've got to get rid of face-to-face re-determination. We've got to get rid of some of this stuff that is happening here in New York. So, they began to join in with us. Here we are now, a bunch of black women. Now we've got not only some Puerto Rican women out of the Bronx, but look here, we've got some younger white women that have joined. We had met also with Frances Piven and Richard Cloward, because they had been a part of us,

and Richard and Frances kind of backed away. A lot of them did at that time, because here were the women of Welfare Rights, running the stuff. The women wasn't mad at all. They still respected them and stuff but they left them alone, and we kept building that organization. We took over.

I tell you, these women... I think back and it makes me cry. These women were something. The social workers that were there too, each year all these agencies come together and have these big dinners and have the governor or the head of the Welfare Department come and speak, and all that type of stuff, but you have to buy these tickets, right? So, we were meeting, a gang of us, and the social workers and Welfare Rights and stuff like that, and they said, "Look, we're going to see if we can get some tickets." They called me and they said, "We got the tickets, Marian. Got some tickets." They said, "We got about ten, and stuff like that." I said, "But we're going to get in there even with that ten." Beulah said -- and Beulah was truly a general. All of them were -- she said, "When we get in here, just sit at the table for a while. Just sit at the table and as they come to ask us for our tickets, say we're sitting here waiting for the person that has all the tickets." People left us alone. You know, somebody had one ticket and we was waiting on somebody.

We had covered about four big tables and the plan was, Beulah had got us together and said look, let's do this; just move slowly to the side, leave a couple of people at the table and say, oh, everybody coming back, they were getting their tickets, and just move slowly. We got some of the social workers too, to join, these two lines, in this huge place, and just slowly move towards the stage. And once they get all these people up there, and how they bring the people up there, the new head of the department and all these dignitaries? They march them up there, they coming in, you know, and stuff like that, so just follow them right up there. And we did and they looked around and looked at us; what you all doing up here? We said because we want to speak. We want to speak. We had that stage packed. They said no, you're not on the agenda. We said, we're going to speak.

See, the other people that was left, the other social workers and all the people that was in the audience, started hitting the table, "Let them speak! Let them speak!" They couldn't get off the stage because our people had blocked the stage. And so Beulah said, "All right, Marian, get up and tell them what we want." I'm supposed to? I don't know how I always got myself in that situation, but I got up there and talked about the cuts, and how we had sent a letter to this man who claimed that he's only being paid a dollar a year to run this department. And I guess so, when you got all the money that he has. And out of respect, looked like he would have sit down with the organized section of low income people. Here we had to come to this festive occasion, to be able to speak to you, and you knew you were coming because you knew that

we didn't have enough money in our grant to even come to this thing, but, ha! We're here! And the people jumped up and were clapping and stuff like that. We said, we still got something else to say, and the president of this said, "I want you all to sit down and have lunch on us, and when it's time to speak, who ever is going to speak, I want you all to send them back up here and they can speak. Or else they can stay up here." Beulah said, "I'm going down there and eat." And we went and ate and delivered our message; took over that whole dinner. That's their affair they have every year; they have one here and everything.

It really taught these young women that you've got to go beyond those deficits in the downtown advocacy. I understand what you're doing, but you've got to go into the community and that type of stuff too, and you've got to go to some of these meetings that these people be having.

ROSS: You certainly, time and time again, show the importance of direct action.

KRAMER: Oh, yeah, and I learned more and more tricks in the game because, honey, they taught me so much stuff. The time that I was in New York, we not only took over stuff, but we went to a lot — they didn't think we would make it up to the Upper Bronx, where people were fighting over — it was when the Bronx looked like a bombed out city and that type of stuff. We ended up getting a Welfare Rights up there. So after two-and-a-half years, I almost died in New York. I got real sick and found out, in the beginning, when I got there, a couple of weeks later, that I was pregnant in my tubes. But see, they had said I could — even when I got pregnant with my daughter -- said that I could never get pregnant. Found out differently, because I had some fallopian tube problems.

ROSS: Like fibroids?

KRAMER: Mm-hmm. What happened at that period of time, I called my two doctor friends and told them that I was really sick, and they got over there. And I don't know how I got down the stairs to let them in, because I was so (inaudible). He came over and helped get my daughter together and get me out of there, and rush me to King County Hospital. The doctor that examined me said, "How are you walking?" I said, "I just walk like this," because I couldn't straighten up. He said, "You shouldn't be walking because you're on the verge of going into shock, because that thing is in you, and your fallopian tube is on the verge of bursting." He said, "I have to get you upstairs quickly." I told him I wasn't going up there without the doctor that was with me. On the way over, we had to take my daughter around to my other friend, and what happened was, when I got on the table, when they took me up to another examining room and another doctor examined, he concurred that they had to go in. They brought in another doctor, three opinions, and the white doctor said well, since we're in there, let's take everything out, and before he

knew it, he turned back and I said, “Come here, come here.” I said, “What did you say?” He said, since we’re in there, madam, we need to take — before he knew it, I don’t know where I got the energy from, Loretta, I grabbed him and pulled him down. He could not even move. I said, “Look at this face.” I said, “You go in there and take out something that’s not supposed to be coming out, and without waking me up and getting my consent on it, I’m going to perform a rectal abortion on your butt.”

ROSS: He was threatening to sterilize you.

KRAMER: Yes. And we had just — see, because Welfare Rights, at that point, had been invited to a lot of different conferences.

ROSS: So where did you hear about sterilization abuse?

KRAMER: I had just got this report at a meeting with a lot of Puerto Rican women in New York and everything, and that was that the Federal Government, at that particular time, was paying these hospitals to either give young women tubal ligation on them or to sterilize them altogether.

ROSS: Do a hysterectomy.

KRAMER: A hysterectomy, yeah, I mean hysterectomy altogether. And they were getting paid good for this. At that time, they were focusing, in New York, on Puerto Rican women. And I quoted that to him, I said, “I’m going to tell you one thing, you’re not going to use me. I know that you’re getting paid 100 percent from the Federal Government, to perform a hysterectomy on me.” If it’s not a hysterectomy, then tubal ligation and all that stuff. I said, “Don’t you touch a damn thing in my body other than that fallopian tube.” Now, ever since a child, I had been diagnosed wrong, because I did have problems at the time that I was 13, and that was they kept saying it was my — they would always say the egg and all that stuff, that I was having some problem. The first time I went to the hospital and it looked like they were taking forever, and I was in a lot of pain, my mama said, “Where are you going?” I said, “I’m leaving here, because they ain’t doing nothing.” She said, “Oh, this child is grouchy,” and she took me to my doctor and they took care of me. But, you know, if I hadn’t been stubborn from the time I was 13 to the time I was 30-something then I would have had a hysterectomy that I didn’t need, because I found out it was my right tube that they had to remove, not my left, so my chances of having kids were every other month.

I stayed in the hospital. I looked up, here come Beulah and all of them. I looked up, here come General and them, back to New York, and they looked at me and I said, “What’s wrong with y’all?” They had tears in their eyes. They said, “Girl, if you could have seen yourself, you were

on your way out of here.” I said, “Yeah, they said that.” So, they came up there for a week and helped take care of me, and then I get a call from Johnnie Taylor, the singer, and he said, “Baby sister, what is this about you being in the hospital?” I said, “How did you know I was in the hospital?” He said, “I called your house and somebody told me, and Jerry and I are up here.” He was up there for a concert. He said, “Does your mama know you’ve been in the hospital?” I said, “No, and don’t you tell her right now.” He said, “I’m going to tell you this much, your grandfather was just in the hospital.” I said oh, he said, “What are you all doing?” I said, “We don’t want to scare each other.” He said, “Well, we’re in town, do you want me to send a card for you and come on over, where you can relax and stuff?” I said, “No, I’m doing OK.” I said, “Send somebody tomorrow,” and myself and another friend and Jackie, we went over the next day and spent the day with Johnnie and Jerry and them. It was good to see them because they were friends of our family.

ROSS: Mm-hmm.

KRAMER: But I told him, I said, “Don’t worry, right now I’m doing fine, you can tell I’m doing fine.” My thing was to get back to work. I was laying in the bed, organizing in the hospital, being an advocate for the patients. Beulah’s son was killed right before I left for New York. Her son, she had one son, two daughters. The son and the middle daughter were twins. That kid, he was a good kid, and he was killed.

ROSS: How?

KRAMER: Somebody shot him, I never found out who, but not too long after that, I had to leave because I had said I was going to leave New York. But prior to that, at least I had enjoyed his company. He would come over and say, “I’m coming to get Jackie,” because he and his sisters and all of them, they would spoil the hell out of Jackie. They would say for me to bring Jackie over there, mama wants Jackie over there. I had many babysitters, I had a darn good community. I moved from one place to another place and I ended up one night, in the community, at a dance, and there were 12 people sitting at our table and all of us were from a different country. So, you know, I was beginning to even learn that, and I want to tell you who joined the Welfare Rights Movement also; some of the Hasidic Jews.

ROSS: Well, I want you to definitely tell me about that on our next tape. If you don’t mind, we’re going to pause this one and pick it up.

KRAMER: We’re through already with that one?

(End of Audio File 11)

ROSS: So, at the end of the last tape, Marian, we had just gotten to the end of your stay in New York City, and you're about to head back to Detroit. Why don't you tell us about that.

KRAMER: Oh, let me say this. While I was in New York, we got a call from California. Johnnie—and I've got to think of her last name. I just hate the fact that I can't remember names and stuff, but the first president of the National Welfare Rights Organization, had called and said she wanted to try to reunite the organization. Beulah told me and I said, "Beulah, we should try, just give it a try, at least you can say you tried." Johnnie Tillmon. I said, "So you should come on and let's get you ready to go to California," -- to this conference she called on welfare. Now mind you, we had attended a lot of conferences and stuff, and the thing that I was pushing more than anything, letting attorneys know, as well as the so-called well-educated person, that look -- see these women, they know how to run their lives and they know how to organize, because they done survived with less than what you have ever had == and to tell the attorneys, you tell me more about the law, don't tell me what to do, because we'll decide what that is all about. So, we get to this conference. I get to it She refused to go.

ROSS: Beulah?

KRAMER: Beulah. She said, "I'm sending you." She said, "Let me stay here, because it will stop any arguments coming up." I said OK. So, two of us went and heard a lot of stuff, saw people, people hadn't seen each other in years and what have you, and Johnnie was talking, and it seemed like they was constantly watching us. Now, I didn't know what I was going to pull, you know, and then somebody said, "Johnnie Taylor is in town." I said, Lord have mercy. So, some of those women — now this place, again, this was packed with folks who wanted to do something, and Johnnie kept talking unity. Then all of a sudden, it looked like it wasn't the kind of unity that Beulah and all of us really wanted. You know, it was like drifting back to some of the old period that we didn't need, and we told them that we'll let you know about this. We stayed for the conference, got information and everything like that, and some of those women went to see Johnnie one night. I called my mama and I said, "Call Jerry, and tell Jerry to call me," and I said, "I've got a gang of folks that want to go see Johnnie." And we went to see Johnnie, and Johnnie said, "Baby sister, what you want to hear?" I said, "You know what I want to hear." *Who's Making Love*. I said, "That's it." And we enjoyed ourselves, but that was after the conference, because that unity did not come out of that conference. Johnnie's a smart woman. She was; she's passed away. I just hated that I couldn't get her and Beulah back together.

Johnnie had been the first president of the National Welfare Rights Organization, then Beulah Sanders, and then Frankie Jeter from Pittsburgh. When they split, Frankie's name was still on there. And these were some smart women, but that never did materialize again. So, when I got back here to Detroit, Gen drove up there to get me, Gen and his first wife, they split. He drove up there to get my daughter and I -- but we were coming back here every six months, because a lot of my stuff was still — I was still coming back here every six months and at least be here for the weekend, drive sometimes, and that's 12 hours from here. So, when I got back here, I told Cassandra Smith, who -- she looks just like me, we look like twins almost -- I said, "Cass. I don't know if I'm going to go get a job or if I'm going to back — I know one thing, I'm going to get on welfare until I get a job. I said, "But this time I'm going to join Westside Mothers and work at Westside Mothers too." Welfare Rights, once the national ceased to be, Westside still was going on.

I went to Westside Mothers and I had put my application in to the Welfare Department on the East Side, and I met Yvette Linebarger, my old buddy. Yvette Linebarger was the president. Westside always had a monthly meeting and it would be packed, and I was there and she asked me one day if I would take some minutes, and so I said, "Yeah, I'll take the minutes." I didn't realize the struggle that was occurring there at Westside; and I started volunteering to go in once a week. They had all these people that would volunteer, to keep the office going. I told Yvette, I said, "Yvette, we need to get some folders for all these cases, have folders for each members and stuff like that, and we need some manuals." She said, all right. That was a smart woman. I told you how smart these women were.

Yvette had went behind my back and she had said that when I went to a meeting, she said, "We're going to have to have a special election today." Now, I am not realizing what's going on. She said, "Because our secretary here stepped down." And I'm saying, "Don't, don't." She said, "I want to open up the floor for a nomination," and somebody nominated me and I said, "I don't want to be no secretary." Yvette had a plan, see. She nominated me, had somebody nominate me, and I was a shoe-in. Yvette and I started, ended up at the office together also, and I started seeing the riff between her and Selma. Selma was one of the organizers for Westside, but Yvette started reading a lot of the updates that came in there for those manuals. Not only that, she started giving it to the — I was on the executive board, and we started learning these policies also.

But Yvette had gone even further. She had, through the course of being around Selma, had Selma teach her how to do the food stamp budgets, and she had been put on a board, state board, to deal with policy of the Welfare Department. Yvette, a woman with eight children, was the one

that began to save the state monies. Because at that time, we purchased food stamps according to our income, and Yvette was the one that said if a person goes to the Welfare Department and apply, and they don't have no income, they automatically is eligible for zero-purchase food stamps. They looked at her as to say, 'She don't know what the hell she's talking about.' We began to win cases on that and getting back food stamps for people, because if you don't have no income and your family size is nine, you get all the food stamps for a person without an income, which is more money that you would get once you got that income, more food stamps. So they finally started implementing it and it was due to Yvette Linebarger, the president of Westside Mothers, they started doing that.

Yvette and I started teaching people. One thing we began to give to the members is showing them what their welfare grants were and how to figure out that welfare grant, and how to figure out your food stamps. We started teaching folks that if you become — and Selma was good at that -- if you become a member of Welfare Rights, you're going to learn these policies. We even went further. Yvette said "Look, Selma is going to have to stop running this organization. She can be a part of it and be a consultant, but not running this organization."

ROSS: And what was Selma's last name?

KRAMER: Goods. Selma is still alive too and still works with Westside Mothers. They're located right below us, and we always watch out for her, because I don't want nothing to happen to her. A little Jewish woman who works her tail off. So, Yvette and I became very close and was really training people at Westside Mothers. I think, you know, Selma was kind of getting angry at that and I hated that, but on the other hand, we had to go forward, because we wanted our members to also — Eventually, we got a job, Yvette and I did, with the Metropolitan Welfare Reform, which supported Welfare Rights also, and we built ten more organizations. Out of that, building those ten organizations, the state chair -- where Ella Braggs had been the state chair, out of Westside Mothers -- fell out with Selma eventually. But at the same time, we had traveled -- Let me tell you, in the Welfare Rights here, we had been traveling all around the country, going to different conferences, taking on Legal Services and making sure that the clients of Legal Services were not only getting their funding that was necessary, but that the clients was running their own organization, right? And opening it up for even Welfare Rights to be able to go places, right?

ROSS: Mm-hmm.

KRAMER: What happened was, Legal Services started using Yvette and I a lot of times. They have training for them here. Then the Federal Government got on them to hire more paralegals. They came and got Yvette and I.

Now, while I was in New York, the union was formed, for Legal Services workers, and one of the people that was in the organization of the Marxist-Leninist Party, was also an attorney there, and he, you know, he was in and out of the party and stuff. He was summoned to come to D.C. to work with the food stamp situation. I know he called me back, but at the same time, they were organizing Legal Services, and then I was invited, once I got here, to be the speaker at their founding convention, which they joined the UAW, Legal Services did, parts of them. The attorneys did, I know. They broke it up. The board of directors were instrumental in trying to break the union up, because what they were fighting for, that it be one unit; backup workers and everything, in one unit, for Legal Services. Well, they split them. So, this element joined the UAW and this one, they could never get it together, because this woman was in the back pocket of the administration that was heading up the section.

But they had to come get some more paralegals, and we were over at Welfare Rights. They talked us into coming. We didn't want that job, we really didn't want it. Yvette and I showed up for the interview, and they have a whole lot — and the way that Legal Services interviews you, there's a whole lot of attorneys, paralegals and everything, that sits around the table, and clerical folk and administration to question you. To show you how bad I didn't want that job, I did not want that, I took Jackie with me. (laughs) I took my daughter with me to an interview.

ROSS: OK.

KRAMER: And they said, 'We need you all, because you're trained.' Welfare Rights trains you, I mean it really trains you.

ROSS: What decade are we in now? You can't still be in the '70s.

KRAMER: End of the '70s, we're in the end of the '70s. What happened is, we tried to fail the interview, but we got a call from Director Johnson, saying, "You two have been hired." And he had asked us, 'When can you come,' and he told us, 'Can you come in the office tomorrow? We need to talk salary and stuff.' Well, we knew it was a good salary, because the union had been negotiating it. We had been out on the picket line with the unions and everything. And he said, "Look. You two don't have to come to no more board meetings," because the client committee can fight for themselves. And we looked at each other and said he out of his mind. After five o'clock he can't dictate shit to us -- excuse me -- to us. So, he said, "When can you come to work?" We said, "In 30 days." He said, "Fine." I said, oh my God, we'd got hired over here. But we were still — we were at Legal Services. She was downtown Detroit, I was in Highland Park. Who do you think we were also working for?

ROSS: Welfare Rights.

KRAMER:

That's right. We had an office located in Highland Park. At that time, we were beginning to downsize around in this area, but we still had offices out in other places. We had one in Highland Park and they knew they could call us all day long; 'Look this up for me, do this, do that.' We made sure they were included in every training. During that time, I got a call — let me speed this up-- There began to be this hunger problem that was existing in the country and FRAC, Food, Research and Action Center, would always have these conferences around hunger and stuff. I would never go, and so Legal Services told me one year, "You've got to go because that's part of your job." I began to meet other folks, and I knew other folks from Welfare Rights that would be there, and so we took an opportune time. We would attend those conferences, not only to get information but to meet with Welfare Rights, and we talked about the need to build another National Welfare Rights.

You know, we had come from up until the Carter Administration when I came back, under his welfare reform that we helped defeat it. What happened was, they started implementing certain parts of what Carter had introduced, programs that they were experimenting with, and one of the places was right here. They would have all these nice names of work programs, and they were beginning to introduce this mess of working off your welfare grants. We began to say, 'Ah-ah, no,' and we started talking about, 'Slave labor, that's what this is.' Before people had to — see, because even when I went to Legal Services, or when I went to the Metropolitan Welfare Reform, the way that they calculated welfare, the more I started probably at one level, you know, salary wise, and with the thirty and a third disregards and some of the other deductions and stuff, I might still be eligible for welfare, because the income still wasn't high. But as the income increased, the welfare decreased. So, there was an incentive, more so, for folks, to be able to work and still get some support that was needed. Because you probably were still eligible for Medicaid and probably eligible for food stamps. Because we would teach people what it meant to have a household concept and all that.

Let me say this. The unions here, when there was a big strike against GM, back in the '70s, they had to come get Westside Mothers to help the workers be eligible. And they were lined up at the state fair, to be eligible for food stamps. So, Welfare Rights, not only did we begin to train some of their workers, we even were the ones that began to fight back. Look, your first line workers and some of your workers need to know if a person is eligible, right off the top, for SSI, because we fought to get SSI and all that type of stuff, and stop being — Yvette's whole thing was, and she taught us this, that when she was on the training thing for the state, she fought to tell the workers, the trainers, when she was fighting for the zero purchase food stamps, she said at least people

could have some food, and you can implement this. Remember, there is expedited — they didn't know about it. These workers didn't know about expedited food stamps, and one of the workers on the training for the state, her thing was, 'They can drink water for three days.' And you know we tore her butt up, but we won in that particular thing.

You know, each step of the way, Michigan welfare recipients were getting an increase every year, because we would prepare the necessary — and that was a great education for me. Remember, I done went from civil rights to this now, and I learned what the policies are and how to read these, because a lot of folks were teaching us. Not only that, we would go before the Appropriations Committee every year and fight for an increase, along with folks we had collaborated in increase for welfare recipients, and then got to the point of fighting for an increase for the workers. They were so ignorant at the time that they didn't realize that they needed to be fighting for an increase, until they started organizing. We were out there on the picket line trying to help them on that. So, you know, this organization here got strong/ And then one day, as we got to be laid off at Legal Services with the cutbacks in D.C. ==

ROSS: By that time, we were in the Reagan Administration.

KRAMER: Oh, girl. Now mind you, we stopped Carter from implementing. Reagan came in talking about ketchup was a vegetable. This particular attorney, I told you, that went to D.C., he was successful in getting the campaign going about that we shouldn't have to pay for food stamps, and he made it through. But what they did, they went behind his back and our back, an increase, saying instead of 25 percent of your personal needs money having to be going with your food stamps, they increased it to 35 percent. Instead of using the last formula we used to use for food stamps, they changed the formula. Do you see what I mean? Figures don't lie, but liars can figure.

ROSS: Mm-hmm.

KRAMER: So we had to start fighting all over again. Now, all this taking place and we're going around the country to do some conferences, and we're still talking about it -- my phone used to light up -- building a National Welfare Rights. In the meantime, in 1980, I got laid off from Legal Services. I fought but Yvette stayed on, because General and I, we had married. We got married in 1979. We've been married 37 years. He had three girls, I had one girl. Later on, we had another girl, when I was 36, and we not only took care of them, all five of them, but we also took care of the girl's — his first wife's sister's daughter. Yeah, her daughter, her sister's daughters, who we were raising. So there was six girls at the house, can you imagine? Plus two more girls. My godchild, who Yvette had got tired of when they become a teenager, and our other godchild, who's mother is Esther Mauricio, was dynamic in organizing houses

and stuff like that. I said, Lord, today, what do we have going on over at this house? They said we have 'General Baker's school,' because he'd get off from work and made sure they had their homework done. We bought a house for all those kids, began to buy a house, and I was still working in welfare, Yvette and I.

Eventually, in 1980, I became the state chair. Ella Braggs and them organized around me again and got some of the — see, there's a section in Welfare Rights, friends and all the people that are at a higher income. My minister and all of them were in there and always played a good role, to help fundraise, everything. And then the Friends of WRO, along with the members, because they helped to get people to the state meeting and all that type of stuff, they got together and finally Ella called me and said, "Look. I want to nominate you for state chair." I said, "Where are you going?" She said, "I'm stepping down, I'm tired, baby." I think Ella had got sick. I said, "Why me, why not Yvette?" Yvette said you. I said, "Oh, Lord have mercy." I said, "Ella, but I can't be state chair because I'm married now." You know like that, I'm married now, and I'm still drawing unemployment and that type of stuff, and that puts me a little over the state. She said oh, no, no, no, it's time to change the bylaws. The conditions have changed out here, we have to change the bylaws to fit the condition. I said, "What is that?" If you've been consistent in Welfare Rights, like you have been from day one, paid your dues and been active, then you can hold an office in Welfare Rights, and there can only be one or two people on the board like that and you're one. We won that election. I didn't know they had organized Flint, Oakland County Welfare Rights, Flint Welfare Rights, and some more of the Welfare Rights around the state, and we would meet in Lansing, the state capital. The person from Flint said — and these were some women that were coming from Flint that had been laid off out of the factories and stuff -- They said, "We want to hear from the two candidates." Because what happened, Westside Mothers ran a woman too. She had been a friend of mines and everything, and said we want Helen, you know. And so the person from Flint got up and said, "We want to hear from the two candidates." I said, "What the heck am I going to say?" So I got up and talked about the need to change Welfare Rights, not changing our mission to eliminate poverty and all that stuff, but we need to look at the objective situation and what is happening out here today as far as low income people. Not just organizing people on the welfare roll, but we need to look at the whole question of the unemployed and the low income people out here. That has changed from the time that we began to organize the women on welfare. And there's a few other things we need. We need to look at the disabled community and helping them into some more type of organization. We need to expand our horizons and we need to talk about eliminating poverty. Helen got up and she said, "I ditto everything Marian said." These women won that election and I looked around and they were crying. I said, "What are you all crying about?" They said, "Do you

know how long we've been under the leadership and the domination of certain people in here?" I said, "Whoa." They said, "We're leaving now, we're going now."

And so some of the first things I did, I made sure that the treasurer was really the treasurer and over the money. The secretary of the organization was not — there were certain members that was not attending the board meetings and stuff like that, and these new members, with this new enthusiasm, said we're getting rid of them. I said, "Oh, house cleaning." And they were, and we changed Michigan Welfare Rights.

ROSS: When did Maureen come in?

KRAMER: Maureen came in years later. I came in 1980. In 1989, we built the National Welfare Rights Union, at Georgetown University. Look, they know I don't like — they teamed up on me once again and got me to a hunger meeting in St. Louis. Nita Donald, Nita and I had been working together. Nita had been a paralegal at Michigan Legal Services and Nita worked directly with us and had been in Welfare Rights as a friend of WRC. She's the wife to my minister. In fact, they married the year after General and I married. Nita and Annie Smart, do you remember Annie?

ROSS: Mm-hmm.

KRAMER: I said, you all had a conspiracy going. Annie told her, "Get Marian to St. Louis," Nita talked me into helping her to drive some of the people, Shirley Powell, to the conference in St. Louis; and that was a great conference, against hunger. It was all the hunger groups and all that type of stuff, and we had the Hunger Action Coalition here that went, and some of Welfare Rights. I said, "I'm not coming to no meeting, I'm tired. I'm not coming to no meeting." So, Annie said, then we had to go back and figure out how we was going to get you in this meeting. They got me in there talking about, 'Yeah, Ms. Smart wanted to talk to you and see you.' I said, I ain't thinking about Annie Smart. See, I had knew Annie from the first Welfare Rights — no, was it the first? The second Welfare Rights convention they had was here, down at Wayne State, and she and my cousins came and drug me out of the bed and said, "Why you not coming over to the Welfare..." I said, "I don't need to be there, you all can make the decisions," and drug me out to that convention.

So, what happened was I got to this conference -- Annie again -- and I looked up and I'd have been nominated to be on the board of directors for the Hunger Action Coalition. Then, I won. I said, "What is all this about, Nita?" She said, "Annie needs you to help her to clean that board up from all these providers." I said, "Can you all give me a break, a time where I can stop organizing?" She said, "You ain't going to have

to do that much organizing.” What had happened with the National Anti-Hunger Coalition, it had been mainly nothing but providers, you know, around the food programs. The way that they even talked to the recipients of the services were terrible. So it was time for us to clean it up. So, the first conference I went to I asked Nancy Amidei, who had been over at FRAC [Food Research and Action Center] -- and Nancy had caught hell at FRAC, for being a woman and a social worker at that, and not an attorney, being over FRAC. I had to go with Nita to pick her up one day, to come to a conference, and she said, “Marian, you’re going to like the new young lady I hired.” I said, “How do you figure that?” She said, “Her name is Michelle Tingling-Clemmons.” I said, “That’s nothing to me.” She said, “No, but she is a good back person that has been helping me deal with those attorneys.” I said, “Is she an attorney?” She said, “No, she’s not an attorney.” What was Michelle, a social worker? Something like that, I have forgot. She said, “She’s dynamite.” I said, OK. So she talked me into kind of coming to this first meeting.

Well, Michelle sent me a ticket and I said, “I ain’t going nowhere,” and I threw the ticket to the side. I didn’t even realize I threw the ticket in the garbage, and I forgot about the meeting anyway, and Michelle said, “Marian Kramer.” No, she said, “Ms. Marian Kramer.” I said, “Yeah, who is this?” She said, “Michelle Tingling-Clemmons.” I said, “Where do I know you from?” And I really had forgotten. She said, “I haven’t had no confirmation of when you’re coming in to this meeting.” I said, “What meeting?” She said, “Just a moment, I’ll call you back.” She called Annie (laughs) and Annie said, “Get your little ass ready and get ready to get to this meeting.” I said, “I don’t have no ticket. I don’t know if she sent it anyway.” Are you almost through?

ROSS: No, I was just going to tell you, you don’t have to shout that loud.

KRAMER: I said, “I don’t have no ticket, I don’t know if she sent it anyway.” Then it dawned on me, she did, and when Michelle called me back I said, “Oh, so you set Annie Smart on me huh?” She said, “That was my job, was to get you to this meeting, and I couldn’t convince you so I had to get Ms. Smart.” She said, “Now are you coming?” I said, “I don’t have no ticket. I just realized, I threw that ticket away.” She said, “I will get you another ticket.” Good thing I went. The first thing, when I saw Annie, -- and she and I sure was rooming together all the time now, because we couldn’t wait to get together -- we were not only going to build a new organization, we were going to clean this place up. We walked in there and when Michelle became the staff assigned to us, we had some good food, because when I said, ‘I don’t want to go up there and eat no —‘ I said, I like lox and I like cream cheese and all that, but darn, I want some real food. We are an anti-hunger coalition and our board should be treated like an anti-hunger coalition. The money is there for that, so we need to eat. So, Michelle changed the thing on us.

She got caterers from the community to prepare the food every time we came up there. We were so happy.

Then, we moved for a convention because Annie and I -- I called Annie one night and I said, "Annie, guess who's on this board?" After we had got some new people and had a convention and fought for this mess to happen. Annie said, "What are you talking about?" We had helped, this whole stuff we're doing, we were helping to build the homeless unit, the national homeless unit, and we had got Chris Spraw on the board. We had got Chris on the board and during this time, we had built the National Welfare Rights Union, coming to these meetings for the Anti-Hunger Coalition and everything. I said, you see what we got on here, we got the base of these poor people's movement on this board. Looks like we need to have a summit. Annie said you're right. Chris called me and I was telling him, I said — he was coming in and out of here. He would stay with Gen and I and stuff like that, organizing, and we were helping him to organize the homeless here. And he said, "I like that idea." Then, do you remember when they gave Mitch Snyder that place in D.C.? Mitch Snyder called me one day --

ROSS: The Center for Creative Nonviolence, I believe it was called.

KRAMER: -- Yeah. And said, "I'm coming to Detroit and I heard you the person to call." I said, "For what?" Because I like to at least speak to 50 people about some ideas that I had. I said, OK. Between my minister and I, we got 75 people for him to speak to, and he said, "I want to have this homeless conference and talk about taking D.C. and that type of stuff." We said, "That sounds good." And I told Mitch, we were talking about having a summit and we wanted him to be there and everything. I heard no more from Mitch after I had accomplished that. The next thing I knew, I'm in Philadelphia, Annie and I, along with Chris Spraw, with the vice president of the union, it will come to me, as well as — what's his name? If I recalled his name, you would know, that was in P-PEHRC. You can cut it off. Willie Baptist.

ROSS: OK. Well why don't we stop right there, so I can change the tape.

(End of Audio File 12)

ROSS: So, Miriam, at the end of the last tape, we had just started talking about the formation of the National Welfare Rights Union. Why don't you bring us up-to-date on what's happened since then.

KRAMER: Let me say, at the National Welfare Rights Union founding convention, there was 25 different states that showed up. Annie Smart could not come because her brother had just passed away, but she was there in spirit. I was elected as the national chair. Eventually, we started adding on to the board, with Dorothy Stevens as the vice president. Karen

Schaumann from here, as the secretary. I'm trying to think, I don't want to leave folks out. Cheri Honkala was one of the vice presidents, we had three vice presidents.

ROSS: She's from Kensington Welfare Rights Union.

KRAMER: Ah-huh. We had Annie Chambers, oh my God, Annie Chambers. Annie had been in Welfare Rights since its beginning, and Annie was from Baltimore. Annie was a little — and she still is. Annie had 24 children. This woman had been raped when she was 12 years old and didn't realize she had been raped. They didn't let her father know it, because they knew he would kill the man. A white man raped her. Her daughter knows her father now and knows the family. Annie, girl if you be around Annie -- she's a preacher now. I told her, I said, "If you can preach, anybody can be a preacher." Annie was the type of person that went out in the street at nighttime when we were organizing, organize the homeless. She was out there with them and the governor invited her to their ball. Annie showed up with the homeless. So, we organized the National Welfare Rights Union and we decided, at the National Welfare Rights Union one thing we wanted to do was hold this summit. It was organized here and the Local 600 at that time, where my husband was on staff, and Jimmy Settles and Bob King. Bob King is the president now, of International UAW, as well as Jimmy is one of the vice presidents. But they told me, "You bring that first founding convention here and we're going to help you," because we were struggling with folks at that point. Some people that we had been meeting with, had wanted to have it in D.C. We said, "We don't want to be in D.C., that's not where we want to take this fight right now. We want to take it right here." We had it right here and I mean, it was wonderful. We had it not only right here, we marched in the solidarity parade that year, and Local 600 made sure we had—and we had our own t-shirts and what have you.

At that time, we decided that we were going to take up the fight around welfare reform again. We built National Welfare Rights Union more in California, in L.A., in the Bay Area. Ethel was being very successful.

ROSS: Ethel Long-Scott.

KRAMER: Ethel Long-Scott. And a lot of people participating. The Mass folks, you know in Boston, were being successful. That Dottie is a genius also.

ROSS: Dottie?

KRAMER: Dottie Stevenson. Her and Annie Smart, there's some genius, you know? These people could come up with the — when it comes down to tactics and being out there in the trenches, these folks come up — Dottie brought to us, the Up and Out of Poverty Now campaign. She listened to

us, when we had gone to Chicago one time and we were still on the road to building Welfare Rights, and we held a conference around eliminating workfare. She and Diane and all of them, and there were students that were there, mothers that were taking college classes, and they went back and stayed with us, Dottie and them did.

ROSS: Diane who?

KRAMER: Diane Dujon, a black woman in Boston. They made a film of this conference we had against welfare, which we knew had some of those folks in there trying to break up the conference, and it had to be some Asians in that conference.

ROSS: What year was this?

KRAMER: In fact, I've got some taping of that. That was in the '70s. That was before the National Welfare Rights Union, because we was trying to get rid of workfare. But, Dottie and them made the film, they went back and start bringing the campaign that we had talked about, Up and Out of Poverty. Because we had said, look, people should not be on the welfare grants and living below the poverty level.

ROSS: Now, I need another help with the chronology, because I remember the Up and Out of Poverty campaign happening in the '80s and the '90s.

KRAMER: It did.

ROSS: Not the '70s.

KRAMER: Let me tell you, in 1979, we held another conference. We held the founding convention, first convention, annual convention of the National Welfare Rights Union, here. We decided that we would embrace and build this Up and Out of Poverty campaign. So we would go around the country to get people involved towards that. We held, in Philadelphia, a meeting with a gang of folks from the east coast. Yvonne Delk, from —

ROSS: United Methodist?

KRAMER: -- No, from UCC.

ROSS: United Church of Christ, that's right.

KRAMER: And Faith and all of them. Yvonne Delk was the one that said she would give us \$10,000 out of her budget, to help with getting poor people to this conference. She thought it was quite important. Jobs for Justice, was it Jobs for Justice? Jobs for Peace, said, we don't have that much money but we'll give you \$1,500 to help with that. Here, we put on a

\$90,000 conference with \$11,500, because what we did was we'd sit down. I would talk to everybody. I talked to practically everybody, they were coming from every state, and say you sit down and you work out a budget, just like you work out a menu. You know you going to need some money, you know you're going to need some transportation, you know you're going to need some money for when your people get there, and then call me back. And these people did. Chicago brought a busload after their fundraising. I looked at Maureen — and I sent them some money. Remember, I had \$10,000. I made sure that we brought some women in here from Mississippi. Here was some women coming straight off the Indian reservation, never been to a meeting outside the Indian reservation. We brought in all the folks from the south that had been participating in a lot of the voter registration down there in Alabama and stuff, and they were under attack. We brought a lot of them in.

I asked Maureen and Diane, because Diane, at that time, was head of the state Welfare Rights, and Maureen was a part of the Up and Out of Poverty coalition that we had set up in the state here. I asked Diane and Maureen, I said, "I'm asking you and I'm telling you, is it all right if I don't give Michigan no money and that we fundraise?" They looked at me and said, "We knew that was coming." The fundraising. Marie said, I'll take the fundraising; Diane said I'll take the organizing, and they organized two buses to come to Philadelphia; one with people from Flint and one from Detroit, and they had people in cars that came. We had people that walked, homeless, from — remember Casanova? He's dead, we found him dead. They walked from New York, homeless folks. We had a lot of people in Philadelphia that joined. We had people from Texas, Louisiana. I can't even remember all of them, but I know one thing, by the time they got to Philadelphia, I was so tired, I could not even talk. If you see — and I'm going to bring you that tape tomorrow and give it to you, put it in your hand. You will get a highlight of what it was like in Philadelphia. Five hundred people came together and we decided that the homeless should speak for themselves, because Mitch Snyder had had this conference, and they kept calling Annie and I back. Leona was the vice president of the Homeless Union, finally became the president. But they kept calling us back and Leona, when she went to that conference, she took what we had agreed on -- call a caucus of all of the homeless together and you all decide what you is going to do. And they decided we're going to go to this, we want to go to this march in Washington that Mitch Snyder is calling, but we're not going to take that nonsense that they're putting down.

So we came out of the Up and Out of Poverty and said we were all going, and we're going to make sure all the way up there, we were going to campaign, as all these various organizations -- Welfare Rights, hunger organizations, the Homeless Union; and we had a lot of workers

there, from different factories -- we were going to campaign, but the homeless had to speak for themselves.

ROSS: So, how did the Clinton welfare reform, TANF [Temporary Assistance for Needy Families] changes, affect your work?

KRAMER: OK, once we finished this, that was the target, it was still the target. When Clinton came in, before that, we took over Mitch Snyder's march, and after that march — and the homeless spoke, Leona spoke and a couple of the homeless -- and I told folks, the march is over-with now, they done spoke, let's go. My husband -- I love him -- my husband, my minister and all of them, the men were making sure that the kids were OK, and taking care of the kids. One of the men stayed back with us, with Diane, Maureen and I, because we had over a thousand homeless over there by the stadium in D.C., and held a convention. They released on us dope pushers, to try to break this thing up, dope pushers and everything. I just loved the women's leadership that was formed in this struggle at that time. It was Leona, myself, because I told her I was going — we shared co-chair of the Up and Out of Poverty. What happened, Leona, Dottie and all of them, Michelle, Faith Evans, Cheri Honkala --

ROSS: Was Sandra Robertson involved in that?

KRAMER: She came later on that. Sandra was in the hunger program at the time. We made sure that nobody was going to mess up that village that we had built over there -- and they refused to take the toilets and empty them. So what we did -- my van, and Willie had a van, and somebody else had -- and what we did every night, when it was time for people to go to bed, we'd take them in the vans and take them to that hospital around there, and they go through the emergency like they had an emergency, and they'd go in the bathroom and clean up. They'd go over there in the morning and so they finally left us the hell alone, and the police that they assigned over there started liking us and that type of stuff. But we took over the whole of D.C. What's the name of the building that have the representatives over there? Anyway, the man invited us into the restroom.

ROSS: The Congressional Office Building?

KRAMER: Yeah, invited us in there. We constantly was marching all over D.C.

ROSS: What year was this?

KRAMER: Bush said cut back, we said — I mean, it was amazing, and these women was leading this. We kept them all on target, because the young men wanted to break out and go smoke somewhere, want to break out. We said, "Not here brother, you cleaning up tonight, you are cleaning

up.” And that Faith Evans worked his butt off. He made sure we had other avenues, he and the other — what’s her name, that was on his staff? They were making sure we had enough food over there to feed all those folks and everything, but we came out of there still intact with our Up and Out of Poverty, and we said now, let’s spread it somewhere else.

When Clinton was elected, we started noticing certain things, because we started reading. I tell you, we read all that stuff, even that time when they came out with that fake book on the Nixon, the Omnibus Reconciliation Act and stuff, and we read the stuff. The representative and them hadn’t read it, they didn’t even know what was in that, but they passed it. Under the Clinton Administration, Clinton starts — I said, “Yvette, did you hear what he said?” She said, “He said he going to change welfare as we knew it.” That’s because, see, we were studying economics too. See, one good thing about studying it at that time, we began to understand economics and we understood how the politics sits up on top of the economics to protect the base. Change welfare as we knew it. We knew the history of welfare and how it came about and blah-blah-blah, and what they needed to regulate that section of the working class. And so what she and I was coming to the conclusion on, and we talked to Annie. We would get on the phone, a conference call, girl it cost us \$207 but it was worth it, talk to Dottie, all of them. We would have a whole lot of people on that conference call. And we brought up, look, this is what we looked at, change welfare as we knew it, it’s because the economic situation and how they’re producing is why they don’t need a reserve army of unemployed no more, because they’re about to create some permanent army of unemployed.

We started understanding what was going on and tell him, this crappy program you’re talking about, TANF, is not going to — this man is talking about laying the foundation for outright genocide out here. I wrote his wife a letter. I got on the computer for the first time, an old computer, and Maureen was laughing at the computer because it said, look at this thing, trying to correct us and everything. I wrote her butt a letter, do you hear me, saying that you worked with children at one time, for the benefit of children, and you let your husband implement and sign into law his welfare reform, that will create more genocide in the streets and stuff. And she wrote back and said how much she loved her husband and she supported her husband. We said, well we know what she is, and that type of stuff.

The idea was to get rid of his welfare reform, and we said the man is not dumb, he know what he’s doing. He’s going to protect these corporations and stuff like that and we said, look, they sure don’t want no welfare recipients talking like this. We would write, we ended up -- and then I came home one time, I had just gotten home from a conference, and I get this — who called me? Faith Evans, because Faith

was always on the phone too. Faith was a person we loved because Faith was a man that stuck in there and was always a part of Welfare Rights.

ROSS: He was a single parent with six kids. He understood.

KRAMER: That's right, and he raised his children, although we would whoop his behind a lot. Faith called me and said, "Marian, where you been?" I said, "I had to be at a conference somewhere else," and he said, "Look, you better get Annie on the phone." I said, "What is it?" He said, "Patricia Ireland from the National Organization for Women, would like to sit down and talk to you and your board." I said, "About what?" Well, she wanted to get to know you all, -- and he on the other line laughing his tail off. I said, "What are you doing working?" He said, "Look, I got a job with them because they needed somebody to help organize and identify low income people to come to this march," and I said, "Well, they came and got the right person. Did you tell them you were a member of the board of the National Welfare Rights Union?" I said, now what she want to do? She wants to even pay your way in here, I said, "You got to be lying." He said, "What number should I give her as far as the amount of people who can come?" I said well, since we're going to a march, let's bring our whole two boards. Let's bring in the National Welfare Rights Union board and let's bring in the Up and Out of Poverty Now board, which includes the homeless and everything. Annie said yes. She said, my problem is, where were those F-ers -- I tell you, Annie had me dying laughing. She had Faith on that thing screaming -- when I was having all these babies. Because, you know, Annie had 13 children. She said, "And I'm pro-choice," and I said, "Yeah, we all are, a lot of us in Welfare Rights are." I said, let's see what she's got to say.;you know, this is a good move.

Then we had the meeting, we came up there for the march, they put us up in — Michelle started working and got us set up in a hotel, Howard University Hotel. Oh, Welfare Rights felt like they were in a dream world, because they were seeing all these movie stars coming through there to get ready for the march, and it was the 100th anniversary of Howard University and that type of stuff. So, Patricia called and said, "I hope you all were OK getting in." We drove in, and the first speaker that wanted to meet with us was the women of color. Well that conference, I said Faith, don't even ask me about where I came from. You know I was at that women of color conference, and that conference was the conference that I told her, I'm sorry, I can't even unite with you on what you're talking about, because they don't have an opportunity to make a choice economically. Here, they're talking about even getting rid of that now. Now I want to tell you women something before I left, I told them before I left, "Look. You are some of the same caliber of women of color that turned your back on us and didn't really want to be around us, thinking that poverty was a disease and if you touched us you

would catch it.” And so we got the women of color, talked to them again, and this time I didn’t say nothing when they came up there to meet at Howard University. Patricia had sent some food over there and everything, at Howard University that day, and I just turned the board loose. Those women were in tears when those women got through with them.

ROSS: Mm-hmm.

KRAMER: They were in actual tears, the women of color, because they let them have it, and they had factual stuff about this is what happened, that’s what happened, Annie and all of them, and Dottie, with her little sweet self, she was pushing the buttons also. The next thing that day, that evening — did you come over there with Patricia and them?

ROSS: No, I had left NOW by that time and come to Atlanta to work with the Black Women’s Health Project. I wasn’t at the ’89 march.

KRAMER: The first one?

ROSS: I was at the ’86 march but not the ’89 one, or the ’92 one. I was at the ’86 and the ’89 one, I wasn’t there at the ’92 one. Ninety-two might be what you’re talking about, because that’s when Patricia Ireland was president.

KRAMER: Ah-huh. Patricia came over, I said, Patricia, I’m doing the same way, that we just meet with the women of color, that we sit in this meeting. I’m going to let Annie start out first. Annie Smart did her thing. She always used to sit just like that and she did her thing and by the time it got around the room to Annie Chambers, and even Annie Chambers’s daughters, Merry Christmas and Happy New Year. She got two daughters — she had ran out of names.

ROSS: After 25 children, I guess so.

KRAMER: Look it here, when those women got through with NOW, they were boohooing. I said, “Now you know why we’re hesitant in uniting with people now, because you always leave us with the bag.” And Patricia said, “No, I want to correct that. If we’re going to talk about women, we’ve got to be...” — I said, “The base got to be low income women, or else you not talking about nothing.” So, you know, she had us in the beginning, all up at the front of the march and all that time, and who do I run into? Jesse Jackson. Oh, Detroit is taking over, I said, “Don’t you say nothing.” ‘Cause see, Jesse had been in Detroit earlier and Jessie and some of these other men, they had fundraised off our backs, off the homeless backs, and we never got the money. But, you know, in going back and talking back to our members and stuff and convincing them that this was the way to go, you know, to start talking to NOW, working

with NOW, and then I was appreciative of you and Pat and all, because for one thing, the women's movement was beginning to change. The women's movement now is much different than then, because the base been changed.

ROSS: Mm-hmm.

KRAMER: And changed tremendously. And what do I look at, with this world court of women? We have to begin to educate folks out here, this is not the same women's movement that is developing now that was years ago.

ROSS: That's true.

KRAMER: It's being built on a base where we are not needed to even produce no more. I'm not talking about children; I'm talking about the work out here.

ROSS: May not even be needed as workers.

KRAMER: Not even needed to — and you're right, because eventually, it's getting to the point, they can produce without any labor power in the commodity.

ROSS: At least in the United States.

KRAMER: They can do it in Germany right now. There's a plant over there that you can see on the Internet, they use the just-in-time theory when delivering parts to the plant, and it comes in on the train, commuter train that people ride, and it's just as quiet. And you can order your car and follow them making your car, and the workers in there, which are few, have on white coats, working on this, and when you look at it again, probably in another year, it probably won't be all in there.

ROSS: OK, we're getting to the end of the interview. You've certain brought us up-to-date, and I wish we could spend another two days interviewing you, and I probably will make that recommendation, but in the last pieces of our time together, what are some of the things that you think are important in understanding your life experiences? What has really helped you look at your options and determine what course your life would take?

KRAMER: You know, sometimes I look at myself and I say — because I did go back to school twice; once in New York for a year and here for a year. I was approached by some of the professors and said, "Marian, go on and finish, because we need you to teach up here at Wayne State, because you could teach right now because you've been doing it for the longest time." I said, "I'm not interested in teaching up at Wayne State and no

other school. My school is out there.” And I’m not against schools, you know, I appreciate them, I said, “But my life experience has been one, I have had the opportunity, not like many people, to learn from a lot.” You’ve just got to open up your mind and listen. Everybody have something they can teach, but at the same time, I set a goal when I was — you know, when they got on and killed those kids in Alabama, but even with the three civil rights workers --

ROSS: Goodman, Chaney and Schwerner?

KRAMER: -- even with the fact that one of the civil rights workers that was on the civil rights thing, you know, out there with me, he got killed on the highway, a young black guy from California. We would tell him, don’t be out there by yourself; and we knew if they snatched you, they were going to wait for the loggers to come, and your butt’s theirs then. You know, they killed him. We didn’t find out until later. My thing was, we don’t have to live this way. We can produce enough food in this country just in one county alone in California, for enough people throughout the world, and wipe out hunger, but we know that this country uses food to make you walk by their music. You know, we know that working in these damn factories and what have you, that these companies are not only getting bailed out by money that the workers have produced, but they’re making record profit with less and less workers now. They don’t bail us out, and you know what we’re facing here? Fascism. When we’re made to live under an emergency manager that determines whether or not we have the opportunity to vote.

In all these years, in all this fighting, not just me. My husband, my children have been in it and everything, all these years, and fighting for people to have the right to vote. I understood that the government, the capitalists and all of them, utilized that the measure where the minds of the masses are. We have to do the same thing, but it is people like yourself, myself. What I have to do today, after all that experience —

ROSS: Is still fight for the right to vote.

KRAMER: -- not only fight, but at the same time teach, like they told me at Wayne State. I have to teach that we don’t have to live this way, we can live in a society that can produce enough food, enough houses on the assembly line in 45 minutes or less, that there should be no homelessness out here. We live with the advancement in technology. You see all that snow out there and how they use salt, which is big bags, really from the earth and all that type of stuff, they can light up the place out there enough. You notice how they have those little lights, string of lights? Some kind of way, I know in their mind, they can develop those and put them into the cement and make sure that that stuff is, you know, melting the snow and the ice. But it’s not a profitable thing for these folks that’s making money off of tar that is tearing up the street, and the cement.

So, you know, I've learned to — as an old friend said, who said it? I think it was Lenin who said -- you have stretch your — or Marx, I can't remember. Stretch your material several different ways before you cut. And when I saw that, I said that is true. When I used to sew a lot, you did have to stretch your material several different ways before you cut it, and it's the same way with understanding strategically, what we got to be about, and tactically, what we got to do. I'm not going to be able to live to see the working class be the — and I always like to tell folks, look, I'm not just talking about people working. The whole of the labor movement, be able to take this country, but then, I'm going to work my tail off to make sure that I'm around enough to help them go in the right direction, and in the process I'll learn more again.

You know, Loretta, I appreciate you being here, but I wish I had had the time to show you what we're living up under here. We think about fascism in Germany, this is a different type of stuff. They changed the culture and they think that killing and all that stuff, people thinking that's the way we got to live, killing one another, and not understanding who the real enemy is. We got to get to the point that we stop killing within the labor movement and understand that we got to fight for us all, against the real enemy. So that's some of the things I have learned. I look at people like Annie Smart, Beulah Sanders, there's a host of them, Thelma Eckels that used to be the president of Welfare Rights here.

ROSS: When did you start using the human rights framework to describe your work?

KRAMER: Oh, let's go back to that, let's please put that in. Dottie brought it to us, just like she brought the Up and Out of Poverty campaign. She called me one day and said, "Look, we're sending you a ticket, get up here." I got up there and she started explaining to me about the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. I said, "Dottie, you have won me over." I said, "Malcolm X talked about that." I said, "In the meantime, Dottie, since you brought it, you're going to have to lead it." And began getting folks, let's get this stuff going.

ROSS: What year was that?

KRAMER: That was in the '90s. I asked Dottie if she would convene a meeting on the East Coast, with the Welfare Rights group that was on the East Coast, and began to develop that campaign. One thing we wanted was to develop a campaign to take this welfare reform that was facing us under the Clinton Administration and, as it is being implemented, get statements from the folks on welfare, like the time limitation and all that stuff, and show how this, within the human rights, Universal Declaration of Human Rights, this is a violation of our human rights. So, you know, this whole question of human rights is the same thing.

Welfare rights, we got involved in the water fight in Highland Park, to stop them from privatizing our water. We won it at one point, now we're into it again, and we still have brought our Highland Park Human Rights Coalition. In that process, people are realizing what human rights mean, and that it's not just — it's not civil rights. I have to say this over and over again. I learned in the civil rights movement, I learned in all those other movements, but it's not that no more, it's our human rights that they are taking. Civil rights is on the book like — it was Malcolm X that said that, "On the books." We have to fight for our human rights, and this fight this time is a global fight.

ROSS: Absolutely. Now, I have one last question to ask you, at the end of a wonderful interview. Do you have papers, files, correspondence, journals, that you would like to consider preserving at the Sophia Smith Collection, and may we contact you in the future to talk about that?

KRAMER: Yes.

ROSS: Well, thank you.

KRAMER: I want you to forgive me though, because when we went to the Pan-African Congress in Africa, in Uganda, I was given a little booklet to log in everything. I was so busy with those women over there, I forgot to write the stuff down, but I can go back and rethink it out.

ROSS: Well, we can help you with that. This has been an absolutely wonderful, extensive interview, and as I said, I'm going to recommend maybe a second interview, because we spent so much time on the '60s and the '70s, I don't think we gave full attention to what's happened in the 21st Century, with your incredible work.

KRAMER: You're right.

ROSS: But you are an incredible woman and thank you for letting the Sophia Smith Voices of Feminism Project have your oral history.

KRAMER: How much time do I have?

ROSS: We have about 30 seconds.

KRAMER: I want to give to you, the eight points that Welfare Rights have been fighting about, and that's the question of universal healthcare, nationalization of education. I'll have to get that to you, because we fought diligently in designing that.

ROSS: OK, we would love to get that from you. And again, we will figure out another way to continue this conversation with you. Thank you again, Marian Kramer.

KRAMER: Thank you.

ROSS: This has been wonderful.

END OF INTERVIEW

Transcribed by Susan Kurka, March 2014.