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Interview with Carol Thompson

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Columbia College - Chicago

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1 Marcia Monaco
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5 Anti-Apartheid Interview Collection
6 Columbia College Chicago
7

8 MARCIA MONACO: Hello, my name is Marcia Monaco, and this is my interviewee,
9 Carol Thompson. The date is April 16 and the time is 10:05 AM. So, thank you for
10 coming here today Carol and agreeing with meeting with me. Um, I'm going to start the
11 interview by asking you a few introductory questions about your background, life and
12 then we will move into your activism and then some reflective.
13

14 CAROL THOMPSON: Ok
15

16 MM: So, to start off, where were you born?
17

18 CT: Uh, I was born in, in Chicago.
19

20 MM: And where, who gave you your birth name?
21

22 CT: Um, my parents.
23

24 MM: And where were you raised?
25

26 CT: In, um, in Chicago, until uh, 1959. We moved out to Palatine as a part of white
27 flight, uh, situation in Chicago where there was a lot of changing neighborhoods.
28

29 MM: Great, and, where was your father's place of birth?
30

31 CT: He was born in Chicago, uh, on the west side of the city.
32

33 MM: And your mother's place of birth?
34

35 CT: And my mother is also born in Chicago. And she is from the south side.
36

37 MM: And what nationality, nationalities is your father?
38

39 CT: Uh, his parents were both, uh from Czechoslovakia, and they were immigrants here,
40 so he was first generation.
41

42 MM: What nationalities is your mother?
43

44 CT: And my mother's, uh, family were, her mother was German, she was, came from
45 Germany and her father was Irish, but he was born here in Chicago as well, so his, he was
46 second generation

47

48 MM: What was your

49

50 CT: She, she was second generation on her father's side.

51

52 MM: And what was your earliest memory?

53

54 CT: Earliest memory. Gee, I don't know. I suppose uh, just living, we lived in a two flat
55 on the west side of Chicago, I just, just suppose I remember the house, my parents. I
56 mean, you know, nothing distinctive.

57

58 MM: Who influenced you the most growing up?

59

60 CT: Um, I suppose you know, the parents influence you quite a bit, you know when you
61 are very young. And then uh, they use school; I went to a Catholic grammar school. Um,
62 I don't remember too much about my school in Chicago but once I moved out to Palatine,
63 I remember, you know, going, going to school there. I was seven, at that point. Um, and
64 teachers, the nuns who taught me there. You know, I suppose uh, instilled some sort of
65 moral, uh, structure to how we think about your life. And whatnot. And that was, that was
66 formative in those early, early years. And then in high school, I think it more, more
67 specific, at points.

68

69 MM: Who did you dream you would be when you grew up?

70

71 CT: I really, I really had no idea. I mean, I, I, it was still a time when girls were pretty
72 much raised to become mothers and raise kids and that was kinda the role model.
73 Although, I always had the nuns as an alternative, [light laughter] And that was oddly,
74 was not a negative so for so many people that's a negative influence, but for me, it really,
75 really there was an alternative that you could see women being teachers and um, uh—
76 and committing their lives to something they believed in.

77

78 MM: Tell me about your favorite subject in school.

79

80 CT: I don't know if I had, really had a favorite subject, I think um, uh, in terms of school
81 uh— I mean I, I enjoyed Social Studies kinda more than Math, although I was ok with
82 Math actually. Uh, in theater, in mean a, high school I got really involved in theater and
83 that's what I wanted to accomplish.

84

85 MM: Tell me about your first major academic or extra circular accomplishment in high
86 school.

87

88 CT: Well, in high school I got very involved with the, with the theater there. And, and uh,
89 then also other extra circular things and became uh, one of the student council student of
90 the month, I guess that was uh, uh, an accomplishment and member of what they call a
91 thespian society which was a, a high school theater association.

92

93 MM: Why did you decide to apply for North-Northern Illinois University?
94
95 CT: Well, I was the first person on either side of my family to go to college. And um, for
96 my parents, it, they, there were six children and it was sort of why wouldn't you go to the
97 school closest to home? And um, and that was the one that was closest to home.
98 (laughter) And they didn't have money to think about private colleges, state colleges,
99 why would you do anything else, you know? (light laughter) Because they really didn't
100 have any perspective on that. So that's where I landed.
101
102 MM: How did attending Northern Illinois University influence your academic or social
103 life?
104
105 CT: Well, um, as a theater major, I mean, you spent a lot of time in the theater at the
106 same time that was right toward the end of the Vietnam War, and so there were some
107 demonstrations on our campuses. It wasn't a particularly politically active campus but
108 there were some. I also was very interested in politics at the time uh, and was involved
109 with some of the discussion groups with the libertarian society, which is more of a right
110 wing group. But very kinda, um classical liberal kind of a on social, social issues. And
111 um, so I was involved in those discussion groups and we caught a little action right at the
112 end of the war of are demonstrations on campus. And so, um, we were apposed to the war
113 in general but coming more from a right wing angle than a left wing angle. Than later in
114 life I kinda made a 180-degree political turn, but you know, but I was interested in those,
115 in those things.
116
117 MM: What year did you graduate from college?
118
119 CT: Uh, 1973
120
121 MM: What was your dream job fresh out of college?
122
123 CT: I had no clue. By the time I graduated, in fact, I spent my last semester in Europe, uh,
124 because my boyfr, then boyfriend now husband, was drafted in the very last Vietnam
125 draft class and he was expected to go into the military and then due to some paper work
126 snafus he didn't go and they called off the draft before he was called again. So um, and
127 he graduated a year ahead of me. So, I signed up for a study a broad um, in, in Austria.
128 Um, and graduated already not thinking I was going particularly do something in theater,
129 I did, I had no clue. I really didn't.
130
131 MM: Where did your life lead you after college but before your involvement with Anti-
132 Apartheid Movement?
133
134 CT: Well, I had done that study abroad, that last semester and because um, Kevin didn't
135 get drafted, he came over Europe and we ending up working for um, the US Army in
136 hotels they had a recreation center in Germany. Um, so it was an interesting way to get to
137 know about the military without having to be in it and that was interesting um, that went
138 to Kevin taking a job with American Express bank, in Frankford, which did the military

139 banking. And the, the important connection there is that while working at that bank, he
140 met a woman from Baltimore, an African-American women, who, who was married to a
141 German um-uh seminary student who was studying to be a Lutheran Pastor and, um, they
142 were very progressive. And um, after we got married I came back to the states for a year,
143 and then we, I got married and we went back, I went back, to Germany for a couple of
144 years and we got involved with them socially and met a lot of other students in Germany
145 and that was part of our whole political transformation, was um, being involved with
146 them. Um, he was studding uh, black liberation theology, although he's white, uh,
147 German student. And he had come to Baltimore as part of a um, uh, his a selective
148 service here, off his alternative service because he, he claimed to be pacifist, and so
149 therefore he, he could avoid military service by working in Baltimore, where he met this
150 African-American women, and so anyways, we got involved with a lot of uh that kinda
151 of, those kind of ideas and ideals and uh, were able, while through that relationship to
152 also go to uh, Switzerland to the World Council of Churches for uh, seminars and on
153 Orthodox Theology and some different things, so it kinda took us into the, into the realm
154 of kinda political um, religious political activism. Which was uh, kinda the core element
155 for our future.

156
157 MM: How did you first learn about Apartheid?

158
159 CT: Um—I suppose, if, if, hum—I don't know exactly. I mean we, I remember talking
160 about it in Europe, at that time, that being one of the, one of their interests. Were as in, in,
161 because of close encounters, these friends in Germany and their, their interest in racial
162 politics and racial, uh, issues. And getting out of the United States I mean, you know, I,
163 your education in the United States is so insular that you could, at, at that time, that you
164 really didn't know much about the rest of the world. Other than, I mean, going back to
165 World War II, perhaps you knew some of that, but you didn't know anything I mean,
166 that, and you didn't have the kind of communications you have today with the internet
167 and uh stuff like that, where you might stumble onto (light laughter) more um, interaction
168 with the rest of the world. I mean, you, it really was much more insolated. So living in
169 Europe really made a big difference because you, you had just a totally different
170 perspective on the world. And uh, and through these friendships and through their
171 interests, I think that's where I might have first heard about it but, we, they were not
172 active, they uh, they were still students, I mean, on the student level themselves,
173 essentially. And um, uh, this women was actually a, a singer, she was practiced singing
174 opera singing, it was very complex relationship we had with them because we had that in
175 common, an interest in, in classical music and so on. And uh, and but, through those
176 relationships we explored, began to explore, some of our own racial politics, personal
177 politics. And, and I think that, that was formative and then uh, I, I think when I went to
178 Switzerland, actually I met some, uh, students from, they weren't from South Africa, but
179 some African students, there, and just, they enriched that, that whole discussion and ideas
180 in our heads. I wasn't particularly involved in South Africa then.

181
182 MM: What was your first reaction to knowing about the issue of Apartheid in South
183 Africa? If you can't recall a first reaction, just something along your first thoughts

184

185 CT: Well, I, I, yea

186

187 MM: of Apartheid

188

189 CT: I didn't really, you know, I mean like I said, I really didn't learn about it in school,
190 but it's kinda like, I was always amazed that, I went almost all the way through college
191 never knowing that there had been Japanese Internment Camps here in the United States
192 during World War II. And, and even though I went even as a Girl Scout to camp, a camp
193 that had been a German Concentration, er not a Concentration Camp, but a German
194 Internment Camp, here in Illinois. I mean, then they were used as Girl Scout Camps
195 afterwards. Um, but, never really understood the full implications of that. Um, uh, but my
196 growing up, it, I mean, Apartheid was very familiar to me once I learned about it.
197 Because of my background, um, in Chicago, and, and um, my mother's family in
198 particular, I mean, my father didn't haven extended family in Chicago, but my mother's
199 family from the south side lived in a neighborhood that was white and very hostile to
200 neighboring black community. And when they build uh, the projects in the fifty's, sixty's
201 mostly in the sixty's, uh, along the expressway on the south side, they lived on one side
202 of the expressway. And it was a very clear demarcation and um, and a lot of racial fear
203 and um, uh animosity. But then I, that was the atmosphere, at that time that I grew up in.
204 And particularly when I visited that neighborhood, and I spent a lot of time there. I was
205 the older grandchild; my mother was the oldest of seven children and so my grandmother
206 still lived in that neighborhood for many, many years. And I kinda grew up spending a lot
207 of time there. And, and um, where, when they, they built the um, projects on along the
208 expressway, they ripped up the viaducts and built parks there, so, that you know, people
209 couldn't come through. And, I grew up playing in those parks. And knowing that that's
210 why those, you know, those streets have been blocked off is to keep black people out of
211 there. I grew up in that pretty hostile area when uh, when Martin Luther King was in
212 Chicago. Uh, my experience, I mean when he was here and doing some fare housing
213 work and stuff like that. I mean, I know more about it historically than, now, than I did at
214 the time. But all I knew, I mean that was a big bugaboo, (light laughter) you know, a big
215 scary thing that you were suppose to be afraid of. And, and I know once I started learning
216 about Apartheid, all those things were ringing true in my mind, I mean, understanding the
217 injusticeses of it, having kinda lived that out. Always knowing there was something
218 wrong with that. Now, I'm going back to a pretty early childhood. And, and just having
219 experienced that. I lived in Palatine, it was all white, there were no black people at my
220 school, I had no interaction with black people whatsoever. Um, when I got to college, I
221 had a black friend in college; a girl in the dorm. And not that it was uh, it wasn't a, a big
222 deal, but it's just that, you know, learning about Apartheid, I understood that apartness
223 from my own experience. And I understood that sort of bitterness of racial division
224 having experienced that in my family. Uh, I mean, hearing it all my life. The word nigger
225 was common, in my family. There was no high-mindedness about (light laughter) when it
226 came to racial stuff. And yet, I knew that there was always something wrong with it. I
227 mean, it was, and whether that was, came from the Catholic nuns who had a little more
228 high-minded notions or whatever, um, you know, that was there. Um, and in high-school
229 I had a, actually it was my drama coach, who was also my social studies professor, who
230 got me reading King, Martin Luther King, and Malcolm X and stuff like that. Which, my

231 parents were ok about it, but my grandparents, thought this was horrible, (light laughter)
232 you know what I mean, that I was reading this stuff. And yet, so that, all that was
233 formative. Um, but you know, always on the back burner of my life, it wasn't really on
234 the front burner. Um, until we came back from Europe, and I think that that was pretty
235 much _____

236

237 MM: What key events lead you towards apartheid activism?

238

239 CT: Well, its actually very, just a very conscious movement when we moved back from
240 um, from Germany, we move, one of the reasons we moved back, is that it was not easy
241 for an American to become politically involved in Europe. At least at that time, or for us,
242 you know. And because we were working for the army there was just, it wasn't, it wasn't
243 like it wasn't allowed or anything like that. It just, it wasn't natural. It wasn't a natural
244 thing to be at. When we didn't speak German, we spoke German well enough to live
245 there, but not well enough to become fluently involved. When we came back to the states,
246 we um, we were, wanted to make a conscious effort to become more politically involved
247 in, in the world. We mostly got involved with a group called Christians for socialism
248 which is um, uh, which was uh at the time was organized mostly by people who had
249 come out of central America, the central America experience and um, were involved with
250 these base communities, who were doing um, sort of like reflecting on the bible and in
251 terms of current political involvements there. Particularly, in El Salvador and uh, coming
252 out of, of, the experience in Chile and um, at the time, which was, which was very hot
253 politically. And, and a lot of these friends, continued to work on that, I didn't have that
254 orientations toward central America, but my, I became, began to look for ways to be
255 involved in multi-racial um, activities in Chicago. I was a little to young for the Civil
256 Rights Movement, especially living in a white suburb. And, I mean I, kids didn't have the
257 interaction in the movement they have today as much then as far as a high school student.
258 So, I was, um, but I, I was a little young for the Civil Rights Movement, but I kinda
259 studied it through this professor in high-school. And um, that was always interesting to
260 me and especially based on my childhood experiences. So coming back to the states after
261 having had other relationships in Europe, um, that you know, I wanted to be involved,
262 find a way to be involved in a multi-racial uh, activity in Chicago. Er, er issue in
263 Chicago. It not as easy as it sounds. There isn't, there wasn't that much, those boundaries
264 are very difficult to overcome, uh, it's a very segregated city. So at, at the time I got
265 involved with coming back with um, clergy and _____ in Chicago. Which
266 came actually, was partly started by Martin Luther King um, coming out of the housing,
267 fare housing work. But, but it kinda took on the uh, the anti-war element that King was
268 into at the end of his life. And it kinda took a back, more than anything, um, I don't know
269 how I stumbled on it, on to it, through like this, you know, Christian Socialist stuff which
270 was much more radical than clergy _____ they were more of a liberal group. Um,
271 but, you know some good books, and one of the things they were doing at the time were
272 they were demonstrating, at the conciliate once a week, for years. You know, um, two,
273 three, four people with flyers or with just a poster, whatever, um, and studying about
274 what was going on in South Africa, and that was my interest. And I did that for a couple
275 of years, um, and I was working at the time for a bookstore, downtown in Chicago, and
276 met a South African author, Donald Woods, who had written a book on, about his own

277 experience he was, he was a white journalist, uh, who had left South Africa. And, and he
278 came and I met him, and told him of my involvement there, and he hooked me up with
279 um, some other South Africans here in Chicago. Dennis Brutus, who was a professor who
280 had a lot of trouble with his, he was being faced with deportation, um, he'd been involved
281 in anti-sports uh, kind of a, organizing against uh, South Africa being allowed to
282 participate in international sports, issues and whatnot. He was actually a, a, literar, he was
283 a poet, and a literary uh, professor to, to this day. Anyway, but he, and we got involved in
284 supporting his case not to be deported. And he, and it was successful, ultimately, but that
285 was part of the Dennis Brutus defense committee, was how I was involved with that. So,
286 that was kinda was the first South Africa issue that I got involved with. And then,
287 everything changed when Prexy Nesbit came back from, he had been in Switzerland and,
288 and he got hooked up with me from the clergy lady concern um, I don't know how in the
289 world we got together. But I remember distinct, sitting down, having a cup of coffee and
290 talking about all the strange connections we had internationally because of our
291 involvement in the World Council, (light laughter) and his involvement, and we were
292 involved with a church that had supported the program to combat racism, which is this
293 sort of radical program through the World Council of Churches, where they were actually
294 having, was mostly Protestant churches mostly, supporting liberation movements in
295 South Af, in Southern Africa. And, which was controversial because of arm struggle
296 issues. So, and my church happen to be one of the two in the whole United States that
297 was supporting this program. (light laughter) So, we had a lot of little strange
298 connections, and uh, he, when he came back here he wanted to revive, um, some, there
299 had been some pervious African liberation support groups, going back into the seventies,
300 and he had been involved in. And um, and he, so he was the conduit to all of those kinds
301 of, uh, those kinds of uh, organizations and that's when we formed CIDsA, which was
302 the issue of the day was the Illinois, divestment from South Africa. Divesting corporate
303 and institutional funds from companies that were doing business in South Africa, that was
304 the, the movement at that moment. And so, we started that group and that's how uh, I got
305 involved with Lisa Brock and all the other cats and characters that went on for the next
306 ten or fifteen years.

307
308 MM: So, why personally, did you get involved with the Anti-Apartheid movement?
309

310 CT: Well probably like, like I said, I, I was a little young for Civil Rights Movement. but
311 I always was interested after studying that it, it resonated with me because of my own
312 childhood experiences. And that, and I saw that as an injustice, I thought, needed that be
313 addressed. I thought, as another leg of the, of the Civil Rights Movement and um, and in
314 a way to work interracially uh, on an anti-racism issue. I didn't, I never articulated it quit
315 that way, in those days, but that, I think that those what, what I was interested in doing.
316

317 MM: So, I know you kind of started to talk about it, but can you give me an, a more in
318 depth explanation of how you became involved with Anti-Apartheid once you started to.
319

320 CT: Right, well, if, if, I don't know if you've met Prexy Nesbit, but if anybody has you
321 know, you, you, you get taken along on that trip. And, and I was already involved
322 through Clergy and Lady Concern, but if, Clergy and Lady Concern was largely white

323 organization, um and wasn't um, a mass movement kind of thing. And we needed to turn
324 this into more of a mass movement kind of thing. Uh, in order to have any real political
325 effect and so, we did. And we, um, worked, created an organization here in Chicago, in,
326 in Illinois that would move to be passed, state laws and city laws sanctions against,
327 divestment in South Africa. And that's pretty much what we worked on, so um, uh, it was
328 slow in getting started, um, we started setting up kinda a educational meeting, pulling
329 people together. I was, I was not a main player. I was a behind the scenes. I was the chief
330 cook, bottle washer you know, who wrote newsletters, did mailings, made phone calls.
331 You know, creating boxes of literature to have available for people. Um, all those kinds
332 of support; baked cookies, yea, uh whatever, made the coffee, you know. Um, did all that
333 kind of uh, organizational support; the books, the you know, money, the deposits, and all
334 that kind of stuff. So that was more my role, even though we were all involved in the
335 strategizing and the planning and whatnot. And, and looking, and outreach and I did
336 particularly outreach with uh, kind of a mainstream Protestant Churches.

337

338 MM: Who was the person that inspired you early on in your activism?

339

340 CT: Well, uh Prexy certainly was, was an inspiration, but also Sheryl Johnson Odium, but
341 and, Lisa Brock, I mean, those two. And there, there were a number of women, uh,
342 African-American women, who got involved in this, very early on and um, who were,
343 um, brilliant (light laughter) and, and inspirational in there perspectives in there a,
344 historians and attorneys uh, who were a, just very um, you know, very committed to this
345 campaign and also had a lot of more knowledge about South Africa than I did, so I would
346 always learn so much from them because I really was kinda a novas on, I was not an
347 Africa scholar or (light laughter) anything like that but they exposed me to many Africa
348 scholars over the years and, and so I've learned a lot more.

349

350 MM: When did you get married?

351

352 CT: In 1974, so I was out of college for a couple of years.

353

354 MM: At what point of time did you and your husband decide to have children?

355

356 CT: Well, we decided to have children, long before we got them. (laughter) I had a hard
357 time getting pregnant, so uh, probably when we moved back from Germany, which
358 would have been in about, seventy-four, about seventy-six, it might have been seventy-
359 seven, um, but my son, I didn't have my son until 1985, (light laughter) so, it took a long
360 time.

361

362 MM: And, tell me what it was like to start your family.

363

364 CT: Well, we, we wanted to have kids for a long time, and we even looked into adopting
365 as an alternative, but that was also very complicated, um, uh, partly due to, you know,
366 some, like I said its, I, we didn't feel that we could be open to an inter-racial adoption
367 because of family, we just felt that would have been very difficult at the time. I think it, I
368 think probably that was more of a fear at that time, than (light laughter) it would have

369 been today. But you know, that's how families are. And um, we just didn't feel like that
370 would be a good thing for us to do. Uh, it, it was great, once we, once we had kids, and
371 we really tried to um, have them have a different racial relationships, therefore, they each
372 have black god-parents. They each, you know what I mean, they have people who've
373 known them all their lives. And, and now they went to a, a magnet school, which is,
374 which is balanced racially. They went to a primarily black high-school. They, you know,
375 uh, it was a good high-school, but it was a tested high-school. But it was like, forty or
376 fifty percent black um, students and we felt that just really important informative thing to
377 just change the world in that way too.

378
379 MM: What did your family think about your activism?

380
381 CT: They didn't get it. They still don't get it, completely. Um, they thought it was
382 idealistic. But they didn't support it, they weren't supportive of it in any way, really, you
383 know.

384
385 MM: What impact did your family have on your activism, if any?

386
387 CT: Not much. Other than um, other than that because, I, I mean it's not like they were
388 against what I was doing. But they didn't really understand it. They didn't understand
389 why I would spend so much time doing it. And um, they always kinda commanded a, a,
390 you know, a lot of a very traditional, ordinary time, (light laughter) you know, holidays
391 and this and that. And so it was, so in that sense there was always a bit of a, a strain for
392 me to meet those expectations, as well as, I mean, I always and I still do have a good
393 relationship with my family and I love them. But, but, we never really have seen eye to
394 eye politically. And, and my family, um, really went from being kind of working class,
395 uh, working class uh, democrats, to fairly wealthy republicans. And so, and I stand out
396 from that considerably. (light laughter) I may have not made as much money as my sibs,
397 or my parents, and um, but that all developed in my, you know, when my, when I was a
398 child my parents didn't have any money. By the time, they had, I had five brothers and
399 sisters who were spread out over twenty years. By, by the time the younger ones came
400 along they had quit a bit of money. So, that was always kind of a tension. But I always
401 had one foot, in that sort of, normal white world, while trying to, still to do something
402 different by, even just by living in Chicago, was uh, to not, even though we live on the
403 north side, its not, was not a particularly a mixed neighborhood but

404
405 MM: Briefly, what kinds of groups, collations did you work with, regarding Anti-
406 Apartheid?

407
408 CT: Well, we formed, like I said, starting with Clergy of Lady Concern, and then I felt
409 the need to move away from that, even though Clergy of Lady Concern considered,
410 continued to do some work, sometimes, I felt almost in competition with (light laughter)
411 but I felt that it was so important to establish this multi-racial coalition that was
412 multifaceted and, not just a church group, doing its little church thing. Um, and um, so, I
413 put all my eggs in the other basket and we formed CIDsA, was uh, the uh, Coalition for
414 Illinois Divestment from South Africa. And so, that, that was, and then after we passed

415 some divestment legislation, and, in Illinois, and then um, then they finally in the end,
416 passed some in uh, in a, federal legislation. Which was vetoed by the President and then
417 overwritten uh, by the congress, which was a big victory. Um, uh, then its what's next?
418 So we, we, we kinda segwaied into this CCSA, which was the Coalition, of uh, um,
419 Chicago Committee and Solidarity for South Africa. Which just expanded a little more,
420 from working strictly on divestment to uh, trying to re-raise money for uh, various
421 projects in South Africa that were related to liberation movements which probably today
422 we'd all be in jail _____ but at the time, because they, they considered the ANC
423 and uh, Mandela and all they considered him a terrorist and, and uh, the ANC a terrorist
424 organization, but we were in regular communication and uh, literal financial support of
425 projects related to them. Mostly on the ground, uh, we didn't raise lots of money like the,
426 they were using for, to, to establish military, you know, uh groups, you know, outside of
427 uh, South Africa, but we were, we were supporting projects on the grounds in South
428 Africa; developed a sister community relationship with Alexander Township in South
429 Africa. That was another, piece of that work. Uh, so those were the main, those we kept
430 going through the first elections in South Africa.

431
432 MM: Give me an overview of your responsibilities in the movement.

433
434 CT: Well, like I said before, I did a lot of the back-round um, stuff. I was not, even
435 though I was not normally the public speaker, um, or doing that kind of thing, But I did a
436 lot of coordinating of events and um, um, you know arranging things, you know, setting
437 up stuff. Like I said, I, I often did the newsletter. Other people would write pieces but I
438 literally laid it out, got it printed, folded, mailed, uh, throughout those transitions of
439 technology. So, (light laughter) starting with, you know, very simple typing things up, to
440 computer layout _____ and my husband was very involved in that
441 because that's his expertise, so

442
443 MM: What was your source of income during your activism?

444
445 CT: Well, that is interesting um, we really started CIDsA, in around 1983, and at that
446 time I was working for, I worked with Community Organizations. I still do, uh, I uh, was
447 working for, at that time I worked for a community organization and a community mental
448 health center and I was working there until my son was born. And after that, I didn't
449 work for money, so uh, basically we relied upon my husband's income for the, for the
450 years from eighty-five to maybe ninety-five or ninety-three. And then I began working
451 again with community organizations. Uh, during that time I did the Anti-Apartheid
452 Movement, I also headed up a ward for Harold Washington during, uh, election of uh,
453 Chicago's first black mayor. And so um, I worked on eighty-three on his campaign and
454 then in eighty-seven I was award chair for that, so that was another big, big commitment.
455 So I, I wasn't working for money, but I was pretty much working (light laughter) In
456 addition to being the primary one responsible for two little kids.

457
458 MM: What liberation movements did you support in South Africa?

459

460 CT: Um, we were very much aligned with the African National Congress, um, and, both
461 in spirit and uh, their commitment to non-racial uh, non-racialism. And there always were
462 conflicts there, and here between that, those movements and the more black liberation
463 movements, which were more committed to um, it uh, to black controlled liberation,
464 black controlled government. And we, a, we, we understood the importance of leadership
465 and image and uh, and reality of power within those relationships. That was one of the
466 beauties of this organization, one of the things we all learned a lot about working together
467 in a multi-racial way that was respectful of the needs of uh, African Americans to uh,
468 have power, and that, and for whites to step back and, and uh, be supportive and learn to
469 follow sometimes, those were very important. So, the African National Congress it
470 mirrored that, that's what I, that's what I'm saying, there was a mirror of that they were
471 always white leaders in the African National Congress even though they totally
472 understood the importance of those racial dynamics.

473

474 MM: Why these organizations and not others?

475

476 CT: Well, there weren't, it wasn't like you could pick and choose between many, many
477 groups, uh, you, different groups did different work in, it was not a big, there were
478 national overall groups but they weren't, uh, it wasn't like a strict, uh real structured
479 membership, um, among those groups. So that in, in one city, the, it might be done
480 through the American Friends Service Committee, I mean, Anti-Apartheid work. And in
481 another place it was done through um, groups like our, that were unique to our city. In, in
482 others, it was something through the uh, American Committee on Africa, which is a New
483 York based organization that had some, you know, kind of a cells in different, in different
484 places. So, there, you know there, but in Chicago, for a white person, this is where you
485 did the work. I mean, could you lay in certain—considered, continued to, to do some
486 stuff. But, I particularly wanted to be involved with a board dynamic, a multi-racial
487 group, and that was the one. We also had um, a group in Chicago, called the Free South
488 Africa Movement, which was connected to Trans Africa, which is another national
489 organization; oh, uh, it I mean, it was not unfriendly relations, but they were, they were
490 more, the folks that got involved in that, in Chicago, tended to be the black nationalists in
491 Chicago. And so there wasn't much room for uh, for white folks to really be involved
492 actively with them.

493

494 MM: I know we talked a little bit about it earlier, but can you give me an explanation, a
495 further explanation of CIDSAs?

496

497 CT: Yes. CIDSAs was, like I said, was pretty much committed to passing uh, legislation in
498 the city of Chicago, and in the state of Illinois, um to, and in, and in other institutions for
499 divesting funds from corporations that were doing business in South Africa. There were
500 some international campaigns, specifically around particular companies, like Shell Oil,
501 that was one, that was, was, big and um, also, um, I so, specific campaigns I worked on in
502 regard, for example, the, the United Methodist Church, has a pension fund, ok, for there
503 pastors. And there was a movement to get, funds from that pension fund, taken out of
504 companies like Shell Oil. Oh, you know, and other companies that were doing business in
505 South Africa. Um, and so would, that, that's the kinda, that was what divestment meant,

506 and in the state of Illinois, pension fund, that was the big, that was the big one. City of
507 Chicago it's a little different, it was more purchasing agreements, that they would not do,
508 you know, business, with, now, it's, it's hard to get these kinds of things passed. The
509 factual legislation that gets passed is full of loopholes. (light laughter) You know what I
510 mean? It's not perfect, but it was important to building public support, and building this
511 uh—you know, this image of you know, United St, folks in the United States who were
512 really serious about ending Apartheid in South Africa; about putting pressure, you know,
513 on that. Because the US is one of the big supporters we're of the, we're of that main, you
514 know, stall-work supporters of the South African Government. And uh, and it was how to
515 erode that, that was the start, that was the concept until this divestment campaign was, we
516 started here, we didn't choose it here. But, many universities were involved in these kinds
517 of, there were campus campaigns, and we connected with all the ones in Illinois, as well
518 as, we developed, um, a group called, the Illinois Labor Network Against Apartheid.
519 Which was very important, uh, with people from different unions, who were putting
520 pressure on the, for the state, particularly for the state uh, legislation. And that was, that
521 was a real interesting development, working with, union folks on political issue and uh,
522 union organizers that we worked with, so that, that was exciting for me.

523
524 MM: What was an average day at CIDsA?

525
526 CT: Yea, um, well we didn't often have paid staff. I mean, we had off and on, we would
527 have somebody so, um for me, it involved dealing phone calls, um, uh, working closely
528 with the other leaders in our group to set up educational, sometimes we would have ella,
529 uh, tours of South Africa. And so we would bring, we did that at one point, we took a
530 tour of South Africans down state, in Illinois. Um, with like three of four groups of, three
531 pr, one car load of, which involved uh, white American activist, black American activist
532 and a couple of South Africans, sometimes. And who would go around on a speaking
533 tour, speaking to churches to things like, uh, um, urban league groups, uh, various kinds
534 of unions and different things, and you know. So, we had this one tour, where we sent
535 four groups all around, uh, Illinois to, to met with legislators in Springfield, to you know,
536 just to expose people to folks from South Africa. We also had number of speakers come
537 through Chicago, uh, many, anybody traveling this way, we would set up a venue, and,
538 you know have a, a public uh, event. Which meant getting out flyers, getting out
539 mailings, you know. We also, did, you know, I kept a mail, kept a mailing list database.
540 The mailing list, so there is always updates on that. Um, we would raise money from time
541 to time, I would grant proposals, um, you know, we never raised tons of money, but you
542 know, little bits here and there, to keep us rolling. Um, and individual contributions and
543 so on, and so, just keeping up all that records um, getting out regular newsletters so
544 people would know what was going on. Um, many people wrote for the newsletter, I
545 didn't write, uh, you know, I didn't. But just making sure they were current, and uh, we
546 always had events going on all over the place to. We would, we would meet too, um,
547 some, during the periods when we were working on the Harold Washington campaign,
548 we kinda took height and sometimes just did some stuff behind the scenes but, when we,
549 when we were actually actively working, we met often once a week, um, if not more, if it
550 was necessary for an event. Um, so there was you know, considerable, uh, and, and also

551 tried to study a little, we would read books and papers, from time to time, and discuss
552 them in light of what was going on.

553
554 MM: What committees were helpful to work with in CIDS A?

555
556 CT: You mean within CIDS A?

557
558 MM: Within CIDS A or outside of CIDS A what involvement did you have, like
559 partnerships?

560
561 CT: Um, well within CIDS A, sometimes, we did set up little working groups based on,
562 um, like on a particular project or on an event or something like, we, we did, like we took
563 uh, we had lobby day down in Springfield, where we took three or four buses full of
564 people from various churches and here and there, and we get all these people on the buses
565 and take them down to Springfield to lobby for the, for the legislation. Um, uh, so we
566 would set up little, com, those were internal things. Externally, I think it was more, um—
567 hum, we worked with like the American Friends Service Committee, and various other,
568 you know, groups that kinda had their own agenda, but they were interested in this. But
569 that was more usually an occasional meeting, you know, other wise, what we would do
570 is, you would call, if you had a big demonstration, you would put out a fl, put out a letter
571 saying, asking, if groups wanted to sponsor it, and than you would develop a group of
572 sponsors and then hopefully you would at least get some of them to a meeting for
573 planning this specific thing. There were periods when we were demonstrating at the
574 South African Conciliate quit frequently. Sometimes, it was based on a oh, a particular
575 case, someone was in jail or someone was, you know, there was some kind of human
576 rights focus to it and then we would get people out for that. Or sometimes, it could be,
577 you know, around the divestment bill, or around the timing of uh, some vote in
578 Springfield, or some vote in city council. We were, we would develop some kind of, and
579 so we always tried to build specific collations for those events, you know, sponsorship of
580 a particular event. Even though our core group was, was a little smaller. And we had,
581 there were, quite a, you know, quite a number of different kinds of groups that would get
582 involved; church organizations, associations of churches, you know, um, seminaries, and
583 uh, that sort of thing, and that stuff more because I was more involved with that, but also
584 the labor unions and they, they had, that was became its totally own separate sub-group.
585 And then, uh, late, later, uh, also this group that was the Alexandra, Chicago Alexander
586 Support Committee, you know, they, they developed a sister community project. And
587 they, um, developed kinda a separate group. And then, at one point also, Prexy,
588 developed a Mozambique Solidarity Network, which was actually a national
589 organization, but it was based here in Chicago and he kinda spun off onto that project for
590 quite a while, when he actually, took a role for a while as a um, a foreign agent of
591 Mozambique Government. Um, and this was after the _____ the divestment
592 campaign was done.

593
594 MM: So, we are going to go to C-C-I-S-S-A.

595
596 CT: CCISSA.

597

598 MM: CCISSA.

599

600 CT: Right.

601

602 MM: Um, will you explain what CCISSA is?

603

604 CT: Sure. CCISSA um, was the, the Chicago Committee in Solidarity with Southern
605 Africa. Which it was once divestment, was, we were as done with divestment as we could
606 get. (laughter) Like I said, it, I can't say that it was absolutely a, a lockdown on all
607 divestment, but we made our political point, we added Illinois to the list of states that
608 were divestments in South Africa, we added Chicago to that, those lists. That was our
609 goal and we did that. And um, and then it was what next? How next, what's the next
610 step? So, the next step we felt was to find ways of, to understand the region better.
611 Because the region was really important to what was going on in South Africa. There
612 were these sergeant wars, and at the end of the Cold War, um, there was a lot of, of stuff
613 playing out in the countries surrounding South Africa, relating to South Africa, but in
614 Angola, and there were you know, were literally military actions between the South
615 African government and the Cuban government. The South Africans supported by the
616 US, the Cubans being supported by the Russians. And, you know, you played out the
617 very end of the Cold War, in, in central America and in Southern Africa, and in
618 Mozambique you had the same thing with one, you know, the Americans siding with,
619 one, you know, one uh, group and the Russians supporting another group. And you had
620 these literally, Civil Wars going on uh, there, um, also you had the tail end of, uh, I can't
621 remember. I'm, I'm gonna get bad on dates, because I can't remember all the dates but
622 you know, the, the um, Zimbabwe liberation of, in, Zimbabwe. All these things, all these
623 different um, post-colonial struggles for who is going to control those countries. And a lot
624 of that played, played out, you know, the US used South Africa as their sergeant, and
625 through that support for various insurgents used in those countries. And uh, the Russians,
626 and Cubans, and you know, supporting in China, supporting, you know, some more of
627 the left uh, it was a very different world, for the end of the Cold War. And uh, and so a
628 lot of that played out and it all, it all eventually, you know, um, a lot of that ended with
629 the end of Apartheid because you no longer had, I mean, the US was no longer
630 supporting that. Um, but it, you know, it was interesting. But at anyway, we, we, we had
631 to learn about that, more about that, because we were pretty much focused on South
632 Africa at the beginning. And, we had to learn more about the region and those regional
633 wars and some of the stuff going on with that. Um, we were looked for ways to highlight
634 how that was, how the US was complicit, in, in that, in those activities and in those wars.
635 And to lay that there in terms of the human rights violations, in terms of a the um, the you
636 know, racist mentality, um, (light laughter) of supporting, a of you know, using South
637 Africa in that way uh. And, and it, you know, it there's also the whole economic piece of,
638 you know, wanting to promote, um, a very, you know, capitalist model for all of Southern
639 Africa. South Africa certainly was that model and is that model. But, you know, the other
640 countries were open to more mixed economy at the time. Now, who knows? The whole
641 world is a, on a _____ but you know, at the time, that was part, what we were
642 learning about. And in addition to that we, we, we knew we wanted to have more on, uh,

643 more direct support for liberation activities in South Africa. And that's where, like I said,
644 we began raising money for projects there for a alternative medical system, but you
645 know, medical clinic, that was you know, not supported so much by the government. This
646 was pre-AIDS, in South Africa. This was you know, pre-pre-before that time. But you
647 know, there wasn't always good medical coverage for, particularly for people who were
648 resisting the government. Um, uh, what other kinds of, there were other educational
649 projects things like that. Women's uh, women trying to develop you know to, uh, small
650 cottage industries and whatnot, that kind of, those kind of projects; so we'd find a group
651 that was setting up a sewing collective or whatever, and that might be the focus of our
652 fundraising for, so we did some fundraising, but we also did this more, continued to do
653 educational work around the region and around what was going on in these sergeant
654 wars, uh, during that period.

655
656 MM: What was challenging about organizing Anti-Apartheid documentation?

657

658 CT: Documentation, what is?

659

660 MM: As far as your office work; the things that you were doing behind the scenes.

661

662 CT: Uh-huh.

663

664 MM: What was a challenge, and what was the most challenging part of that? Was there
665 anything that was, um, confusing? Did you ever get overwhelmed?

666

667 CT: Well, any time you have two small children, (laughter) you can be overwhelmed. So
668 that, you know, there was that, but, it especially since I didn't have a paid job outside of
669 that, it wasn't, and I, and I, had, technology at home, so, I, that's the, was a good thing
670 and that was partly because my husband's uh, background in technology. So we, we had
671 that all right there. So, it was, it was, it was often time-line challenged because working
672 with people, is working with people. And everybody doesn't always honor deadlines.
673 And, I mean that kinda stuff, you know, lot of boring folding newsletters and my children
674 did plenty of it, in their years too. Uh, on the dinning room table, you know, thousands
675 and thousands of newsletters and stuff went on in there. Um, so that kinda, I mean but
676 that's not, that was not, the challenges were not nearly, uh, anything to make you not do
677 it. I mean, it was so inspiring and exciting in many ways that it was a joy to do. It was
678 not, you know, it wasn't a ch, I mean, you know, there's always a balance with family
679 and stuff like that.

680

681 MM: What about your job as an activist, was rewarding for you?

682

683 CT: Well, I suppose, you know, you feed your idealism, you know, you're actually able
684 to feel like you were doing something. We were very unique here in Chicago, during
685 those years in that um, this was like during the Regan era, when generally there was like
686 a malaise of, its like it has been during the Bush years, where you feel like that bad things
687 happening and there's nothing you can do about it. But, the Anti-Apartheid work we
688 actually felt over time, I mean it felt really drudge, drudging at first, but it picked up such

689 momentum and we had a huge victory. And similarly, with, you know, Harold
690 Washington getting elected in this mist of all that, you know, which, which also had
691 similar qualities to the multi-racial collation of it, and the commitments in his leadership,
692 in that regard, that it, it all was a piece, you know, it all kind of, it all kind of fit together.
693 And, it, it, it was very hopeful, it was a lot of hope for, um overcoming some of that
694 work. And then later af, af, I, worked with um, uh fare housing organizations in Chicago,
695 for that was one of my first back, getting back into the work force thing. And, and that
696 again, you know, you, you felt like you were apart of all, all this. And even though this,
697 this stuff is so meticulous and so overwhelming and even race relations today. I mean
698 Chicago is still super segregated. And those things play out in schools, we see it play out
699 in churches, we see it play out in, you know. Even the stuff with Brock Obama's election,
700 it all felt so personal, (light laughter) it was terrible, I mean, in some ways because so
701 many, so many, people who become, you know, hot, hot buttons, Jeremiah Wright, Mike
702 Flakier, you know, all these guys, these are all guys we worked with on this Anti-
703 Apartheid work; spent a lot of time in their churches and know them and know them to
704 be good people, if showboats (light laughter) and then, you know. Problems like that, but,
705 you realize the rate, you, you can't help it when you get into that. You understand this
706 total racial tension of all this, of all those kinds of issues. And um, for Bill Aries, you
707 know what I mean, there's a bit a again, a crisscross of politics and race and, and a class
708 in the city. All of those things play out. Um, and you, like I said, you know, it felt really
709 strange, you know, to have all that being played out on a national stage after we struggled
710 with it so often. But um, you know, that was a challenge. And, and that continues to be a
711 challenge and, I mean, there's lots and lots of work to do.

712

713 MM: How did you generate buzz in the community about upcoming events? What were
714 the steps necessary?

715

716 CT: Well usually we would, um, like I say, um, look for sponsorships for particular
717 events. Um, you know, certain churches that were we knew we had the pastor's ear, in
718 particular. And then it would be a matter of bringing flyers to those, you, you know, to
719 those uh, places, so they would pass them out to generate interest in people coming to an
720 event, coming to see a film, coming to see a, a, you know, speaker, uh, something like
721 that. Um, uh we didn't, we used, a little bit with the newspapers and so on, but you don't
722 get good coverage for something like this. I mean you, they, they finally would get to the
723 point were they wouldn't cover anything unless somebody was gonna get arrested.
724 (laughter) You know what I mean? Or, or uh, or you were ga, you were, you know, we'd
725 have a thousand people out in the street and it was like, that was nothing, you know. And,
726 I mean, the local papers, you know, that just, they didn't even bother. Uh, and we had to
727 provide our own pictures to the Defender, which is the black paper; The City of Chicago
728 Defender. Um, they didn't have, they didn't have the whereabouts of sending their own
729 photographers and whatnot, so we would take all our own photos and send it to them.
730 We'd put stuff in, they might put an announcement in, but maybe not. I mean, you know,
731 we pretty much had to do it all, with our own mailing lists, you know, telling people and
732 then through these intuitional connections; seminaries and whatnot. Having people
733 puttin' up flyers on bulletin boards, you know, passin' out flyers after church and that
734 kinda thing.

735

736 MM: What public speaking tours did you set up?

737

738 CT: Um, you know, I was more the support, I didn't often set them up. You know what I
739 mean, I was part of a team that set them up. And, and the main, you know, the main thing
740 is when we would have people come through Chicago, and we would set up an event, in
741 Chicago, um, for that person to speak at, sometimes there were ten people there and
742 sometimes there were 200 people there. It, it they weren't mega, you know, uh, events,
743 you know. Uh, till, Until, Nelson Mandela, you know, then they, then their talkin' mega
744 events. But, but, before, (light laughter) before he came, you know, they'd often be very
745 small. But I didn't already tell you about the one big tour of folks we took through the
746 state of Illinois, before the state legislation was passed and that was, that was am
747 important one. Um, it just took a lot of coordination, um, cars and hotel accommodations,
748 you know the typical things like that. But, you know, there was, there was a whole team
749 doing that, it wasn't just me, that's for sure.

750

751 MM: What was a greatest challenge in setting up a fundraiser?

752

753 CT: Um, well, getting people to part with their money, you know what I mean? (laughter)
754 Never, never an easy thing, and, and, and many of people who were involved were not
755 deep pockets, you know, we, we didn't have that kind of support. Um, there were, um,
756 we had stalwart's supporters but nobody would give us a big, big chunks of money. So a
757 fundraiser often was, um, more of an educational event that we asked people to give a
758 few dollars for. Still festival where we charged two, two bucks, five bucks to see some
759 films on Southern Africa we did that, once or twice. Once in a while, we would do
760 something, we'd try to do things that were more social like uh, uh, an event in the club,
761 you know, or like uh, uh, with music and stuff like that, but we'd never make a whole lot
762 of money off those events. So we, you know, we did, we didn't do, uh, most of our
763 fundraising was done by mail, I think. Uh, most of the time, we did, well, I remember one
764 though. We did, this something called uh, Get Up, Stand Up it was based on Bob Marly's
765 song and, and it uh, it was uh, uh, music and films and so on and uh, I'm trying to
766 remember that was in some, club in uptown, uh, it was Riviera, or something like that.
767 That one was an actual, actual event with tickets, with, you know, uh, with live music and
768 uh, you know, big names and so on, that was kinda cool. But then again, that was a
769 matter of selling tickets and getting people to buy tickets and so on.

770

771 MM: What role did religion play in furthering your activism?

772

773 CT: Well, it's kinda at the core, I think for me, um, uh, as I mentioned, I grew up, you
774 know, in the Catholic Church, of course I went away from that, as a, as a teenager largely
775 over issues of women's ordination and hierarchical issues like that, that bothered me. But
776 then kind of found my way back through this Christian Socialist Movement, and um, and
777 so, I, it was important to me, it, it drove me, I think. I got a lot of support from my own
778 church community, which was a very progressive church called Wheaton United
779 Methodist Church, up in Evanston, um, located in Evanston. And um, what, I always felt
780 that was like, almost like a sergeant family for me in terms of support. Because my

781 family, many, many activists had families, who their parents had been activists since
782 then, I, I didn't. So, I didn't really have anyone, who really understood what I was doing
783 or really supported it, except my elders at this church, these people who had been
784 activists, all their lives and they're now in their eighties and they're still activists you
785 know, their amazing, And, and they were very, very supportive of me and, in doing all
786 that, all that work. And uh, were always sponsoring all of my stuff, and always, you
787 know, wanted to know what was going on, and you know they're just being supportive.
788

789 MM: Was Wheaton Methodist Church involved with any Anti-Apartheid activism
790 organizations?
791

792 CT: Yea, I, I, whenever we would need, whenever we were looking for sponsorships for
793 something, they would do it, they would sign petitions, they would write letters, they
794 would, you know, they were supportive of all of, anything I brought to them. And in fact,
795 one of the people there, um, had been involved with Clergy and Lay Concern, that's
796 how I got involved, er, or I don't know if I got involved there separately, but anyway, I
797 was there with him, initially. Um, through you know, because they had, they were aware,
798 and they were, and they were educated on these issues, because it was a, it was kinda a, it
799 was a very progressive church.
800

801 MM: How did you get involved with the ANC, the African National Congress?
802

803 CT: Well, that's always been a bit remote for me. Um, um, you know, we were
804 supporting them, remember they were, they were clandestine most of the years we were
805 working. So they were not in South Africa, they were, I mean, except underground in
806 South Africa. They were in neighboring countries, Tanzania, uh, they had a big office in
807 London, and they, you know, uh, in, in Sweden, they had support groups in, through the
808 American Committee on Africa, uh, in New York. That was one way that, and Prexy had
809 his own connections. The ANC had an office in New York, and so he had some relations
810 with them and, in terms of them sending speakers through. Um, we had their materials,
811 we, you know, we would study some of their papers, things that would come, oh, down
812 the pike, you know, and that, that was the main thing. Um, we, we discussed now, over
813 many years, their various principles um, that they uh, had the Freedom Charter, which
814 was a sort of list of like thirteen points, that uh was kinda like their declaration of
815 independence, sort of, document. And, and we would occasionally hold that up and study
816 that and we were committed to the same values. And that I think was the, the core of that.
817

818 MM: What were your responsibilities at Lake View's Citizen Council?
819

820 CT: Um, when I worked there, I was the office manager. But, I was also involved in
821 strategy sessions, very similar actually, similar role, sort of been my, my thing. Um, and,
822 uh and that was a local community organization um, that you know, did all kinds of
823 issues, tenant's rights was the big, I think the biggest issue that we took on, that had some
824 success in, in that, Chicago developed a tenant's rights ordinance, which is even to this
825 day, uh, a pretty progressive uh, protection for tenants in the city.
826

827 MM: Tell me what it was like to be an activist, white woman?

828

829 CT: In relation to the South Africa stuff, or just in general?

830

831 MM: In general, however you want to take—

832

833 CT: —Um—

834

835 MM: —the question.

836

837 CT: Well, I mean, for one thing, I, I, had to say you know, I really had the luxury of
838 having a husband who had a real job, so, that I was, I worked within community
839 organizations where I could afford to work for less money. If it hadn't been for that, I
840 don't know what, I don't know, I might of had a very different life. You know, but, but,
841 and, and, and it wasn't a big burden on my husband, he enjoyed his technology (light
842 laughter) and the developments that technology went through over the many years that
843 he's been doing that kind of work. And he always then took all those, all the technology
844 and applied it to these projects that we did together. And, so, um, you know, not to make
845 it like, you know, he was out doing all this work and I was having all this fun, but, but, it,
846 you know, I found that, it has certain elements of a very traditional um, old fashioned
847 fifties lifestyle. So, of where, you have dad who earns the money, and mom who does the
848 volunteer work. And it, and I, that doesn't necessarily always make me happy that, that
849 was the case, because that took a toll. We made a decision, because I made so little
850 money doing community work, that all my, all my money would of gone for childcare,
851 and that didn't seem to make any sense, (light laughter) to me, you know, in order to keep
852 doing the, the work I was doing at the time. So, being at home with my kids for eight
853 years without any paycheck, meant that I also though had the headspace and the mi, you
854 know, the uh, emotional space to be doing this activist work on that. That, and you know,
855 and I think that's kinda the, and I mean and it's a, it's, and it's hard because now at this
856 juncture for me, it's hard because, I hadn't developed a career in the same kind of way I
857 might of. But, I don't know that, that had to do so much with the activism as much as,
858 family and you got to make choices and, you know, somethings got to give. And, you
859 know, it's very hard, it's very hard to raise children with two fully committed careers,
860 um, two, you know, deep careers. But, the activism certainly was, um, intense, and, and
861 uh, spent a lot of time on it, you know, it was just flexible and that was a good thing.

862 MM: Tell me about some of the conflicts or tension, among Anti-Apartheid activists that
863 you worked with.

864

865 CT: Um, well there always were, I, I mean there always were these ideological
866 differences between um, some, from between the CCISSA group and the nationalists.
867 There always is conflict on that, and that played out on an international scale, in South
868 Africa, you have the ANC but you also had the PAC, and the PAC was a nationalist
869 group; Pan African, Pan Africans Congress. And they were ver, they wouldn't speak on
870 the same stage together, and some of that played out here too. Because we, we all knew
871 each other, but you know, we just bump, you know, and you were lucky for people to get
872 invited across, to come to various events. So, then there was that tension um, and then

873 uh, within CCISSA or CIDSA, I think a lot of it was more personal politics. You know,
874 just needing to be aware of not um, you know, of, of, of letting people leave, of not
875 assuming, to much um, but, there were, there were so many within the group who were
876 very generous in there, and, and meeting, being a white person in that setting that was so
877 critical of white domination. It was just a real learning experience and, um, uh, important
878 and, and, uh, something you have to go through, (light laughing) you have to live through
879 it, to understand it. It's, it's, a, to, to, be willing to open yourself up to serious critique of
880 much of what formed your _____ and your, your white privilege and
881 understanding your white privilege. And, nothing you do about it, but you, I mean, you
882 can't well, there is something you can do about it, but I mean, there's nothing you can do
883 about the circumstance where, where you find yourself born into, but um, that you have
884 to make a conscious commitment to, stand against it. And uh, it's not always easy, and
885 it's not easy to talk about, just like a big, you know, you've heard, just in recent months
886 where Eric Colder says, you know, we're all cowards when it come to talking about race.
887 Well, I, I, don't know that I was a coward going into it, but there were times that were
888 challenging, in that regard, to be willing to, like I say, sit and listen to this, to sit and hear
889 how people, how people respond to white leadership or what white people think or how
890 white people act or whatever. And to, I remember specifically going through the whole
891 OJ Simpson thing and, and, I, it was fascinating, it was fascinating to, to be within more
892 of a, more of a black organization and hear what the women had to say about all that stuff
893 and _____ You know, um, black white relations, that, I think that was the, the, the
894 most challenging thing on the racial, racial level.
895

896 MM: Tell me about some ways that you educated people about the issues of Apartheid in
897 your day-to-day life.
898

899 CT: Hum—Well, um, I remember one, um, I, mean my day-to-day life was the Anti-
900 Apartheid Movement, (laughter) so its, I didn't really have much outside of that. I mean,
901 uh, you know, um, my, my kids, I mean, grew up in the movement, you know, I mean,
902 they were in baby strollers out in front of the conciliate, and you know what I mean, and,
903 you know, grew up within this thing, you know, how to answer a particular, you know,
904 liberation call, you know, and then stuff like that and um, always being aware of that um,
905 and, um, being um, at the church I was at, it was kinda interesting, these things would
906 play out too. There would be a demonstration at the Methodist, um, uh, pension fund
907 board, which is also located in the same town as the church and people who were the
908 security for the pension fund were members of the church, as well. So, they were always
909 pushing for things, like say, well, if you're gonna have a, if you're gonna have a,
910 education, you're gonna do an educational program, Anti-Apartheid, we need to have the
911 other side, you have to present both sides. And, and I was like, no I don't. (laughter) If
912 you want to present the other side, feel free, but don't, you can't expect me, because I'm
913 setting up an event. And that, so that was a little bit outside the, but, but it really showed
914 the kind of mentality of some people, practically around divestment. I mean, this was not
915 so much that Apartheid was good, but it was more, whether divestment was valuable.
916 And, would, would, end Apartheid, would have any effect on Apartheid or whether or
917 whether, what they call, constructive engagement, this is the alternative to divestment,
918 which, where the, it would be the, their government and major corporations were saying

919 no the way we can change South Africa is by engaging them and being there, being in,
920 you know, which of course we didn't believe that at all. So, you know, but, I, you know, I
921 would have to play that out sometimes and you know, people would say, but you have to
922 be fair, you have to present both sides of this issue. And that was kinda, that was just, just
923 not my job, you know, it wasn't. So, but I don't know, that, uh, that was maybe was not
924 exactly what you were trying to get at.

925

926 MM: That was perfect.

927

928 CT: Ok.

929

930 MM: Thank you. What was the last project that you worked for regarding the Anti-
931 Apartheid Movement?

932

933 CT: Well other than a lot, a lot of little gatherings, since, over the last years. The last big
934 event we did of course was the first election and, in South Africa, and we, we um
935 supported a delegation from Chicago to go to be observers, um, through the UN, and to
936 be observers of the election. And um, so we, you know, got involved recruiting people,
937 helping them raise money to go, um, getting them orientated, you know, to what life was
938 like in South Africa then, making all the connections for them, you know, and sending
939 them off and a having big send off, and having a big thing when they came back, because
940 that was fun. (light laughter) We had some big parties. When Nelson Mandela was
941 released from jail, that was a big party, and then but then, the elections. But I didn't go to
942 South Africa then. And, some of it was, matter of, its hard for to me to get away with the
943 kids, and that was my primary responsibility. So um, I didn't go, I choose not to go. But
944 we supported the elections here, so, here people came to Chicago to vote at the conciliate
945 and we held all day, uh, the American Friends Service Committee had an office a couple
946 blocks away, and we held all day reception for voters and we stood out in front of the
947 conciliate the whole day with music and balloons not in a demonstration mode. And as
948 people came to vote, they were either happy to see us or really pissed off. (light laughter)
949 Because there were a lot of white South Africans who were not happy about what was
950 going on. And so, we had confrontations and we had good times, but it was a great day,
951 was a very exciting day and um, and we served food all day at American Friends Service
952 Committee, so there's a lot a, you know, just on the ground work, but that was the last, I
953 think that's the last real work we did, other than a party when they came back from South
954 Africa. And since then, there's been a number of uh, more, uh, social things in South
955 Africa, conciliate hosts us from time to time to various receptions and whatnot. And um,
956 but that's always wonderful. Lisa Brock is often the instigator of those, uh, those
957 invitations for all of us. Which, which it, it's very nice, but I miss the actual work
958 together on that um, more than, it's nice to see people once and a while, we have, you
959 know, just friendships, you know. We occasionally do something together but, you know,
960 I really miss seeing everybody frequently and struggling with them, over a common
961 cause.

962

963 MM: When did you feel disappointment during your activism?

964

965 CT: Um, well you know, I, it, it, for the years that we worked, like I said, compared to
966 other, you know, compared to people who worked against Apartheid their whole lives,
967 never to see any, light at the end of the tunnel, (light laughter) you know, we really had it
968 relatively easy. I only worked this for fifteen years or so, fourteen years, it really was not
969 that long. But there were times in that were you can feel like you're beating your head
970 against the wall. You know, but you literally, you know, with the Regan administration
971 was so anti, uh, so pro-Apartheid they were so, they were so tight with the South African
972 government and um, were you really felt like you know, like I said, like you were really,
973 um, beating your head against the wall. But, I think, I think that, you know, these things
974 take, it takes a very long time, to change the public's mind. And, and yet and it takes,
975 there's this build up, build up, build up, and then you have these historical moments
976 where things, snap. And, and we were just lucky to have been there at that moment when
977 all those many, many years, going back to when Mandela, was put in jail, you know, and
978 he was in jail for twenty-seven years, I mean its nothing to, I mean it was in jail, (light
979 laughter) and we were just, you know, doing this work for some years, um, and I mean
980 it's nothing to what people suffered on the ground. But, but those, those things could be
981 frustrating. Um, you know, just feeling like, you're just plotting along, plotting along and
982

983 MM: If you could re-do one major event in your activism life, regarding Anti-Apartheid,
984 what would that be?
985

986 CT: Re-do. I think more about how the world's so different today with communications.
987 Then we didn't even have email, I mean, you know, it was phone calls or letters. You
988 know what I mean? It was, you know, maybe, maybe faxes came in and that was a big
989 deal, you know what I mean, that you could, you know, actually get something from New
990 York without waiting for a week, you know, for it to get to you and um, uh, stuff like
991 that. And, I, I think, I don't know, I, I sometimes wonder how that might have changed
992 things. I mean, I saw a few, you know, Anti-Iraqi War demonstrations like, (snaps
993 fingers) snap, just come together out of nowhere, um, with people on, on cell phones and
994 stuff like that. I just thought that was very interesting that, that kinda, those kinda
995 developments. I think that, more than, more than regrets over how we did things in the
996 past. I, I, I didn't have that so much, as, as just thinking how it might have been different.
997

998 MM: Who do you attribute to the success of organizing the Chicago, Anti-Apartheid
999 Movement? You know, it's a very broad question, but when you think of someone who
1000 really dedicated to the cause, who would that be?
1001

1002 CT: Yea, well Prexy Nesbit, in particular, was a real center for us, as well as, as Lisa, um,
1003 brought a lot of really important things to the table. Um, and, Sheryl Johnson Odium, was
1004 uh, another professor and a historian um, who, um, they were, I think the three, you
1005 know, bases that to me were really at the core of, of what we were doing. Um, I mean
1006 there is so many people who played important roles, and people who wrote legislation,
1007 lawyers and some lawyers who actually wrote this stuff. And, there were, you know, uh,
1008 like I say, other people who worked deeply in the labor movements trying to get them to
1009 support that, which we never would have passed legislation without them, um, those kind
1010 of folks but, I think that would be my main three.

1011

1012 MM: What was your greatest moment of accomplishment in your activism?

1013

1014 CT: Well, it had to have been that first election, or maybe even when, Mandela's release,
1015 that was big too. I mean, the legislation, you still didn't know, once the legislation
1016 passed, it was fine, it was like a fine post, we passed it, we were glad, but, but, it, it
1017 didn't, you know, Apartheid was still there, (light laughter) you know, Mandela was still
1018 in jail, you know. So, I suppose, um, Mandela's release, that was, that was big, because
1019 then you really knew that was really the sign that the end was, was near.

1020

1021 MM: What did you learn from being in the Anti-Apartheid Movement?

1022

1023 CT: Um, well it confirmed what I knew from history, that in, that in order to change
1024 things, people have to get involved, and, and that um, it really can happen. (light
1025 laughter) I mean, that's the, the beauty of it, is to actually see the, see it, a campaign that
1026 actually had some effect. Um, but you also learn there's the other side of that. I mean,
1027 you have your victory, but then, victory can be fleeting, in that, uh, then you come down
1028 to the reality of governing. In whether it's Mandela, Washington, Brock, you know, any,
1029 any, any of these situations, they had to deal with reality on the ground. And um, like I
1030 say, this, those, the, exaltation of the victory is very fleeting, when you start basing
1031 serious problems of inequalities of uh, people's lives in South Africa still today, and then
1032 aids on top of it in South Africa, it's been so devastating, um, and um, even today now
1033 with transitions, uh, Mandela was sort of amazing that he stepped down, um, that was
1034 very important to the history of South Africa and to Africa in general; to have a leader, a
1035 popular leader, be in, and step down and have a tran, peaceful transition to another leader.
1036 Topeka, the next President, was a bit of a disappointment in some ways, and now we are
1037 facing a big unknown with this Jacob Suma, will be the, probably the new President. Um,
1038 and, um, so, but all you can do is um, you know you, work toward what's important to
1039 you, and, and that and it moves history forward and that I think that, that was uh

1040

1041 MM: How did your involvement with Anti-Apartheid change you?

1042

1043 CT: Well, it, it totally my um— it was very rewarding in a being able to have good
1044 interracial friendships, uh, very, working, people level (light laughter) really being able to
1045 develop friendships, and um, and have mutual respect, understanding. Which seems so
1046 impossible, in my early years, it seemed like an impossible idea. And than, and I didn't
1047 go into Anti-Apartheid work expecting to find that. I was interested in the issue and the
1048 racial justice aspect of it, but I, I think, maybe in my subconscious I always wanted that. I
1049 think that resolved some of that for me, some of those, um, the pain of that, you know,
1050 that separation, that uh, it isn't just black people who, who suffer that pain, that white
1051 people suffer that pain too. It's part of why it's so hard to talk about it. And uh, so, and I
1052 think that that, that has been the, you know, the beauty of it is, seeing South Africa
1053 coming to some new political place. But also, seeing the possibility of true reconciliation
1054 between groups of people who you know, have historically hurt each other, you know,
1055 terribly, and um, and it's by far not done, a done thing, and so, its still keeping those

1056 commitments, but those friendships and those, that comradely that uh, can sustain you.
1057 You know, through those struggles.
1058
1059 MM: Looking back what are you most proud of?
1060
1061 CT: Well, it, it you know, it's easy to be proud of, of the victory and yet we played such a
1062 small role relative to, you know, events of the world, I mean, um, and it's, it's always
1063 wonderful to be thanked and praised from the ANC or from the South African
1064 Government and get an award, things like that, that's always very, you know, very nice,
1065 but um, but I'm think, I think I'm most proud of those relationships that we talked about.
1066 Even more than, than you know, the bigger political victories, which I said are, are
1067 dramatic, important historically but sometimes fleeting. And yet, yet, um, I feel as
1068 though, um, where you, you know, you really fight Apartheid is in, day-to-day
1069 relationships with people, and uh, whether it's, you know, where you put yourself in
1070 terms of community or where you put yourself in terms of people you, activist you work
1071 with, and uh, and uh, and I think that that uh [tears come to her eyes]
1072
1073 MM: That was beautiful, you're gonna make me cry. (laughter) [tears and smiles]
1074
1075 CT: Oh, no. (laughter) [tears and smiles]
1076
1077 MM: Um, what memorabilia do you still have in your possession that brings back
1078 memories regarding Anti-Apartheid?
1079
1080 CT: (Laughter) Well, most of it is here, in the library.
1081
1082 MM: (Laughter)
1083
1084 CT: All this stuff, about, about ninety percent of the stuff that's here in the library was in
1085 my house.
1086
1087 MM Oh
1088
1089 CT: Boxes and boxes and boxes, I brought in boxes of stuff was, was 5,000 banners, and
1090 all of this stuff was in my garage so, so, I was the one who had a place to store stuff so, I.
1091 I had, I had all the stuff.
1092
1093 MM: (Laughter)
1094
1095 CT: And, um, but I've kept, I have some, uh, I have some uh, one set of newsletter I kept
1096 and for myself and then I also kept just a few, interesting oh, fabric, fabric stuff from
1097 South Africa that people brought me back that um, had Nelson Mandela's photo on it.
1098 People would wear them uh, during the elections and stuff. And I have some of that, and I
1099 have some mugs, you know, that were from when Mandela was in jail, you know, that we
1100 sold mugs and, I mean, that was one of our little fundraiser thing, and uh, a few things
1101 like that. A few little, you know, like I say, these little uh, little uh plaque or a plate that

1102 was given to us by the South African Conciliate and you know, thanking us for our work.
1103 I mean that was, the, the most important thing about that one was, that was just a few
1104 years ago that, that we, that they had a reception and we used to always have events on
1105 Sewado day which is a commemoration of a time when some children in South Africa
1106 were mowed down, they were, they were fighting against learning only in Afrikaans,
1107 which is the white language, and uh, the police shot 'em dead, a whole bunch of children.
1108 And so, this is always a commemoration, well now, they don't call it that anymore in
1109 South Africa, it's Youth Day. So, when we went to the conciliate my kids were there, and
1110 the, the uh, Council General was just a great guy, um, really highlighted them and talked,
1111 talked about their, how important it was that they grew up in this and what their
1112 responsibilities were to the world. And that's what, that why that, they gave us uh, like a
1113 plate thing and that, that one was important to me because of that and that it really made
1114 an impact on my kids who are in their early twenties. So, that was uh, that, you know
1115 that, it goes on, now, that the, that's the memorabilia, that's the, what you need to
1116 remember to help to take it forward.

1117
1118 MM: What do you wish others to know, in 2009, regarding the Anti-Apartheid
1119 Movement?

1120
1121 CT: Well, I, you know, I think, I think it's good for people to know that's, that something
1122 like that happened. And that it was possible and that we worked together on it, and that
1123 we brought together, it's just like people with Harold Washington or whatever, that there
1124 was a time (light laughter) where the people of different races could come together to
1125 actually try to do something, in the city. And um, even today, to start something like that,
1126 it just seems impossible. There are so few places where that, where that happens, um
1127 anymore. Uh, we're back to the white guy rules, you know, in this city. And um, but, so
1128 that's important but, but also that it's not over. Just because you, you know, have these
1129 victories along the road, it's not over. I mean, many people in South Africa still suffer as
1130 much as they ever did under Apartheid, with poverty and disease and, and uh, and things
1131 are much better than it was, many more services and whatnot but, and in the city, the
1132 same thing is true that um, you know, they inequities, you know, maybe, maybe now
1133 garbage is picked up a little better after Harold Washington, and he used to talk about, he
1134 was gonna be fairer than fare, in terms of service delivery to different neighborhoods and,
1135 and, and that was important because um, and it did improve and Daley built on that
1136 because he saw that, that was politically expedient, but, but it's not over, you know, and
1137 those things are still difficult. Or that, you know, uh, racism still is a really deep seeded
1138 um, uh, piece of this countries history and that we haven't addressed it, and if reparations
1139 would work, I would be for them, (light laughter) I'm just not sure it would make any
1140 difference. You know, I, I don't know what the exact answer is. But, but, I don't think
1141 that this country is honest with itself about the roots of it's, the, the creation of wealth in
1142 this country on the back of slavery and on the back of today, you know, Mexican
1143 immigrants, and, uh, that their, you know, that these race problems still are critical and,
1144 um, and it's you know, and, and it's hideous; uh, historically and, and uh, generationally
1145 your still seeing the, the, the, the pain of, of slavery played out in, in people's poverty,
1146 (light laughter) today. And, and you, and you see white privilege and that's even difficult,
1147 you know, and I mean, and, and you realize how hard it is, even my children who grew

1148 up with this consciousness, have a hard time understanding it completely. They both
1149 have, a, a, pretty good sense of it, but it's like, you know, it was hard in high school for
1150 them to see um, racial issues, even though they're right in the thick of it. With a little bit
1151 of distance, they see it more and after moving to, like, my son went to school in
1152 Colorado, which is pretty white, and suddenly realizing a lot of this stuff because it, it, it
1153 was no longer under his nose, you know, um, to see the tensions, the racial tensions, I
1154 mean, even in the high school I mean that, we tried, we, we built a multi-racial parent
1155 group to raise some money for projects, but the main thing was to work together and be a
1156 model for our kids on how you can work together and, you know, do stuff together and
1157 uh, have the uh, common purpose and uh, and make stuff happen, and that you know, I
1158 think that that's, the you know, that's, unfortunately is the, is the legacy, that, that still
1159 goes on. And in South Africa, as well as here, and that, that was always a big feature of
1160 our work, here in Chicago, was understanding that, we needed to be the, the future, we
1161 wanted to see in our relationships. And we needed to, um, as much as we could, I mean,
1162 you know, and we needed to deal with stuff on the ground, as well as, uh, internationally.
1163

1164 MM: Well, I would like to thank you very much on behalf of: Columbia College, the Oral
1165 History class and myself for your dedication and service for the Anti-Apartheid
1166 Movement. And also, [official interview ended after Movement]