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Interview with Mary Scott Boria

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1 Pamela Birchard: Okay. Interviewer's name is Pamela Birchard. And the interviewee's
2 name is..
3
4 Mary Scott Boria: Mary Scott Boria.
5
6 PB: And the date of the interview is the 30th of November 2009. And the place is at 177
7 North State Street on the 7th floor. Um your years of activism where from about 1980 to
8 1994.
9
10 MSB: Um, in South Africa stuff?
11
12 PB: Yeah.
13
14 MSB: Yeah, probably. Yeah.
15
16 PB: and the place of activism is Chicago.
17
18 MSB: Yes.
19
20 PB: Um your year of birth was 1950. The place of birth was Battle Creek, Michigan. And
21 place raised was Chicago, you moved here at 15 years old. And your father's name and
22 his place of birth...
23
24 MSB: His name is Doyle Scott and he was born in Battle Creek, MI.
25
26 PB: And your mother and her place of birth...
27
28 MSB: Um, her name is Mary Scott and she was born in Asheville, NC.
29
30 PB: Ok. Now, um, what was your earliest memory? Or what is your earliest memory?
31
32 MSB: Of anything?
33
34 PB: Of anything.
35
36 MSB: Oh geez. I think I remember maybe 3 or 4 years old, we used to live across the
37 street from school, our grammar school and I remember sitting at the window watching
38 my parents come home from visiting classrooms of my older brothers. And I just kinda
39 remember that because I remember report card pick up day and we used to sit at the
40 window and try to determine the look on our parents face as they walked across the street
41 from picking up our brothers' report cards. So that is the earliest memory that I have,
42 report card pick up day. Not for me, but for my brothers.
43
44 PB: Um, What games did you like to play as a kid?
45

46 MSB: Um, you know we had, we didn't have a lot of you know sort of, obviously we
47 didn't have any tech- any high-tech games. And we maybe had a few board games but I
48 would say we had a lot more sort of street games like hopscotch and jump rope and um so
49 those are the games that I liked. Hopscotch, jump rope, hide and seek, um. I remember I
50 had a friend, we used to play um I dunno we used to play some game maybe some, some
51 game, I cant remember the name of it. But there was some game that we played where
52 she was always sort of uh the cowboy and I was maybe the indian. And she would sort of
53 chase me, we'd make this tent and she'd sort of chase me around her made up teepee. But
54 I remember that because I remember my friend. The game wasn't all that critical but
55 playing with my friend was.

56
57 PB: Um, what was your neighborhood like?

58
59 MSB: Um well I lived in a small town and um and the neighborhood was a very small
60 little residential community. We lived um in a house that was um one house on a block. I
61 mean, our house was the only house on the block. And it wasn't because it was a
62 neighborhood where there were big houses but we just happened to live on this little
63 street that just had one house. So there was houses around us. Our school was right across
64 the street. Um, you know my friends were you know right around in the neighborhood. It
65 was a time when we had um we all didn't have our own telephones so we all had um
66 what do you call it? um we had to share phones with our neighbors. So I remember that
67 really well because my father hated that, we had a party line that's what it was called, that
68 we had a party line with the neighbors because they were always on the phone we could
69 never get to the phone. So for many years we didn't have a phone because he just refused
70 to um you know sort of tolerate having to share a phone with neighbors. But you know all
71 of our friends were in the neighborhood. Um I lived in probably a predominantly black
72 neighborhood um but we went to integrated schools. um It just happened that you know
73 probably the 8 block radius, which was probably my radius, was an all black
74 neighborhood so I sort of grew up with kids who were all black but we did go to
75 integrated schools. You know it was kind of like a nice little beaver-cleaver kind of a
76 neighborhood where um you know most of the mothers stayed at home, and the fathers
77 went to work. Um you know I remember most of my friends had mothers who were at
78 home you know during the day. And if they worked we didn't even know about it. I think
79 there were some mothers who were nurses who maybe worked at night. My mother was a
80 nurse and I always remember her being at home during the day but I guess she must have
81 worked nights. And I didn't even remember that now that I'm thinkin about it. But you
82 know it was a nice little um small town kind of city life.

83
84 PB: And what did your father do for a living?

85
86 MSB: Both of my parents were nurses and um my dad was a nurse for the vetrens
87 administration and he um also had a couple other jobs so you know part time jobs where
88 he was either a waiter or a bartender you know on the weekends but his primary job was
89 a nurse. My mom too. did you wanna ask me that one too? (laughs)

90
91 PB: Yeah (laughs). Um how did religion play a role in your childhood?

92 MSB: Well we were a religious family. My parents were both um we went to a Methodist
93 church in town and I just remember my parents were in the choir. My mother was a piano
94 um played the piano for the choir. My dad sang in the choir. My brothers and sisters,
95 there were four of us and we used to have a little quartet and we used to practice and sing
96 at church. So religion was very much a part of our life and as a matter of fact everybody
97 that I knew went to the same church so church was kind of an extension of um you know
98 our family and our community. So you know that was, when I came to Chicago, um you
99 know my religious affiliation shifted to another church, to another denomination, but you
100 know in many ways it was very similar to what I learned as a kid.

101

102 PB: Um why did your family move to Chicago?

103

104 MSB: Well my parents were divorced and my father, we were raised by my father; my
105 mother had come to Chicago. My parents were, my mother's white, my father's black.
106 And when my parents split up uh there was really no place that my mother could go with
107 her children. At that time in the 50s, it was in the 50s, it was probably 1957, '58. In the
108 50s, interracial marriages were still pretty much taboo. Um and so um since my mother
109 left, she couldn't take her kids with her so we stayed with my dad. She moved to Chicago
110 and you know we sorta had this; my parents did a lot of sorta kidnapping of us back and
111 forth. I mean you know at that time, you know if you stole your kid, or took your kid to
112 another place, you know it didn't sort of make the headlines as it does now when a parent
113 takes a kid. Um and so you know my father would get mad at us, he had all four kids and
114 he would get pissed off at us and he'd drive us to Chicago and say you're gonna stay with
115 your mother and then you know we'd stay with her for a year and then something would
116 happen and we'd be back with him. We'd stay with him for a year so we did that for
117 several years and then finally when um my sister and I got to be teenagers um we had
118 just, I think, we had to come to Chicago one year. This is actually kinda important to my
119 own sorta political involvement. We came to Chicago in probably '63 or '64 and it was
120 the year Martin Luther King was in Chicago. My mother was very involved in Civil
121 Rights stuff in Chicago. So that year he came to Chicago and there was a big, huge
122 demonstration in Soldier Field and we went to that and you know as teenagers we were
123 you know it was like the time of our life. We'd come from this little small town and you
124 know we thought, saw hundreds of thousands of people we'd never seen before. And um
125 so you know we went back to Michigan at the end of the summer, we had just come for
126 the summer. We went back and we just couldn't be small town girls anymore. It was just
127 our town was too small and we, when my birthday came I knew I was gonna get money
128 for my birthday and we bought bus tickets. We packed up our clothes. We left my dad a
129 note sayin we're goin to Chicago, we're not coming back, and that's how we got here.

130

131 PB: Who was your first friend here?

132

133 MSB: Hmm. I would say, well we had a couple friends because we were, I lived here in
134 Chicago when I was 8 years old for about a year, 8 or 9 years old for about a year. And I
135 remember having a friend named Linda who um lived on the west side and we lived in
136 the same building and um she was, and still is my friend. Um I don't see her very often
137 but I know how to get ahold of her if I need to see her. So that was my 8-year-old friend

138 and then when I came back when I was 15, uh, I had a friend named Elizabeth Glover
139 who I went to high school with and uh I don't see her but I know that she lives in
140 Madison, Wisconsin and so.

141

142 PB: (chuckle) What did you want to be when you grew up?

143

144 MSB: (coughs) Either a teacher or a social worker. I didn't have any teachers in my
145 family but um I did have, my uncle was a social worker and he was the first man that I
146 knew that was a social worker and I didn't know men that were social workers. And I
147 actually didn't even know social workers but he was a good role model for me so I would
148 say probably as I got older I thought more about being a social worker. When I was a
149 little kid I wanted to be a teacher.

150

151 PB: Now you said um how Martin Luther King came to Chicago um so after that how did
152 politics affect, play a role in your younger years?

153

154 MSB: Well, I don't think my, I don't remember prior to 13 having any awareness of
155 politics or of any sorta ya know social issues at all. Um, and so I think it was probably
156 when I came to Chicago that that was when I became aware of um you know kind of
157 social issues and so being involved in Civil Rights stuff. And then it was interesting cause
158 when I went back, when I went back to Michigan, the whole Civil Rights movement had
159 sort of um, exploded in the North. And so even in my little town, um there were Civil
160 Rights demonstrations. I remember that black people could not get library cards in my
161 town and I remember the first demonstration that we went to was we demonstrated in
162 front of the library to get library cards for black people because we couldn't get library
163 cards. Um and then I also remember we used to have a skating rink in town that was
164 shared by several other little communities around the city and black people had one night
165 that they could go rollerskating and they couldn't really go rollerskating any other night
166 and we just sort of decided that we were gonna just board up all these buses and take em
167 to the roller rink and see if they would let us in and they did (laughs). And uh you know I
168 think at the same time that I was becoming aware of what was happening politically in
169 Chicago, I probably also became aware that it was happening in my town. And um then I
170 was really excited about it, had gotten involved in the NWAACP in my town but really
171 kinda wanted to be in Chicago so we came to Chicago and um you know got involved
172 with King's work here until he was killed. And then soon after he was killed I graduated
173 from highschool and um I joined the Black Panther party. I was involved in that for a
174 bout a year and a half, and actually um moved out of my mother's apartment and my very
175 first apartment was with Prexy Nesbitt. His parents owned a building on the west side and
176 I um, his father rented an apartment to me, I was like 18 years old. His father rented an
177 apartment to him and I remember, one very memorable political thing happened. The
178 precinct captains were coming around, do know what a precinct captain is?

179

180 PB: No.

181

182 MSB: Um you know Chicago has its political machine, which means that politics are
183 sorta connected by the workers who work politics so if you are in a machine city, in a

184 political machine city that means that the elected officials will um engage just citizens to
185 support their campaigns. And in return for that you got jobs through the city. And the
186 precinct captains were sort of the foot soldiers for the political parties. And more likely
187 than not they were the ones who um would um have city jobs. But they had city jobs
188 based upon their ability to get people to register to vote, to vote for their candidate. So
189 now there's sort of this open voter registration process where you could just go in line
190 and just register to vote. Before you couldn't do that, you had to go through this really
191 difficult process and the gatekeeper for that was the precinct captain. And I remember the
192 precinct captains coming around and asking us if we wanted to register to vote and I
193 remember um I was living in Prexy's building and I learned a lot of sort of um, um
194 independent politics from Prexy and I remember one day the precinct captain came and
195 asked if I wanted to register to vote and I said, "no! I don't vote Im a communist!" [lifts
196 fist in the air] (chuckles) and um and I had learned that from Prexy. Um I didn't know
197 what a communist was but um I was a communist and I wasn't gonna be pulled into sort
198 of regular democratic politics which was so corrupt in Chicago but that was kind of my
199 you know sort of, I soft of started from sort of more Civil Rights stuff to being a much
200 more sort of radical political person. And that's kind of what led me to bigger things.
201 (slapping leg)

202

203 PB: (chuckles) Um.. how did um Martin Luther Kings death have, have an affect on you?

204

205 MSB: Well it radicalized me in bigger ways I think because I remember um you know I
206 mean he was a voice for um he really sort of garnered the energy of people who I think
207 were very intense about sort of social issues in Chicago. They brought him to Chicago as
208 a way to kind of ignite the Chicago Freedom Movement which you know had obviously
209 been organizing before he got here but I think his coming to Chicago sorta uh catalyzed a
210 lot of um political energy and so I was very much, I was very um much mesmerized by
211 sort of King and sort of the awareness of sort of what was happening in Chicago. And so
212 I think his death just um, just I think sort of made us really angry and see that there was
213 much more um, racism and uh, much more soft of manipulation of people's lives. And I
214 think in some ways we were probably, we probably romanticized King's involvement in
215 the city as sort of he's gonna come and change is gonna happen and you know we're
216 gonna be a part of that change and I think the fact that he was assassinated sort of woke
217 us up to the reality that it was much more serious than just these sort of anxious, eager
218 young people who were eager for something. And so to some extent it sort of radicalized
219 us, it made us more angry, made us more vigilant, and um I think it made us see that the
220 issues were much bigger than kid of what we thought they were. So, and I was at that
221 time, I just had graduated from high school and that next semester, um, I went to junior
222 college. I was, had got pregnant when I was in high school, so I had my first child when I
223 was 18, no 17. I graduated when I was 17. And so that derailed any plans to go to a
224 university but it was a great derail because I went to um Crane Junior College, which is
225 now Malcolm X College, and that was sort of the hot bed radical um involvement in the
226 city. I mean it's where young people went um who were very engaged in radical politics
227 and so in some ways it sort of transitioned us from sort of this old Civil Rights mentality
228 to much more of sort of a black power uh radicalism and so that was a place where, and
229 that's where I joined the Black Panther party. Um when I went to Crane it was just you

230 know electric. I guess it was an electric experience now that I look back. I'm sure at that
231 time it wasn't as electric as I make it out to be now but it was good I mean it's where we
232 learned about, we learned. You know about uh a different way about um thinking about
233 politics, a different way of thinking about our society, a different way of being involved,
234 and um, so sort of electoral politics was not even an issue, not even an interest to us. We
235 weren't interested in electoral politics cause all we knew about electoral politics was how
236 the city of Chicago did it and because it was a closed-door system and we didn't have any
237 elected officials that came out of our communities, um we didn't think that city
238 government really worked for the people um you know some of us had, I didn't have, I
239 had an awareness of Kennedy but of course, I was only like 10 years old when he was
240 elected president so I didn't have any sort of interest in national politics, um, national
241 electoral politics. It was all sort of this local, radical politics in addition to sort of the anti-
242 war movement stuff, which for me in some ways was kind of distant for me. I didn't
243 have, I mean I had a brother that dodged the draft and left the city but I didn't have any,
244 um, I didn't feel like I had any connection to sort of the anti-war stuff, I had much more
245 connection to sort of local, radical uh black power kind of politics. And um so I mean I
246 could say that King's death uh just pushed us to be much more vigilant about you know
247 what was happening in the city.

248

249 PB: When did you first learn about apartheid?

250

251 MSB: Oh, I'm sure it was from Prexy. Um, and I would say, hm, it's interesting because
252 um, I would say it was probably in the 70s, um and it was in the 70s because when I was
253 at Malcolm X College, there was a trio of professors who taught various levels of sort of
254 black politics and one of those professors, and they all worked together. One was, I mean
255 they taught different classes, but they were all colleagues and they were all friends. One
256 taught specifically about Africa and one taught black psychology and another one taught
257 um much more sort of political economy of politics but in many ways in was all focused
258 on sort of an African, or African-centered sort of perspective. So I remember um Harold
259 Rogers was the professor who taught African studies and he was actually one of the
260 leaders of kinda the anti-apartheid movement here in Chicago. So I learned a lot about
261 Africa and so I would say my first knowledge about um apartheid came through learning
262 about Angola and Mozambique and then sort of learning about South Africa so I would
263 say that it was probably in the 70s. The whole, I wasn't at all involved in um you know
264 sort of, anti-apartheid stuff until the 80s. Um but it was you know learning about you
265 know sort of um apartheid from the um soft of the historical knowledge of Africa I guess.
266 And then I, I mean Prexy was obviously a major, I still actually have the reading list that
267 he gave me, he was never my teacher but um I have this reading list he gave me years and
268 years ago, like in the 70s, early 70s, you know when we used to mimeograph, we used to
269 use typewriters. Do you know what a typewriter is? (giggles) [nod my head yes] When
270 we used to use typewriters and mimeograph our papers I still kept that, it was probably
271 like 5 or 6 pages of um reference material on Africa, and then you know because he was
272 very much um involved in, and I knew him more as involved in Mozambique and Angola
273 than South Africa but that's certainly kind of then led to understanding you know what
274 was happening in South Africa.

275

276 PB: When did you first become involved with the Church of the Brethren? (drops timer)
277

278 MSB: Um, well its interesting because my mother um my mother, it was 1968 that I
279 joined the Church of the Brethren and, but my mother was, we worked on the west side,
280 um the Bethany Hospital was once owned by the Church of the Brethren and um, and so
281 my mother worked at Bethany Hospital and through her work at Bethany Hospital
282 became affiliated with the church, which was right down the street from the hospital. And
283 you know all the administrators and I mean that little area on the west side was at one
284 point a community of Brethren people and they were like a little secluded community on
285 the west side. And um many of the people um, the church's seminary was in that
286 community for many years and then the hospital was in that community so a lot of people
287 either went to the seminary worked at the hospital, went down the street to the church,
288 and because she worked there, and to me this is kind of a interesting story because, have
289 you ever heard of the Church of the Brethren before?

290
291 PB: Not before you told me. (giggles).
292

293 MSB: Oh ok. Yeah, most people you ask have never heard of the Church of the Brethren
294 and they'll ask you questions like well are there sisters there are there women there
295 because brethren is in the name. So most people have never heard of the Church of the
296 Brethren, it's a very small denomination. I'd never heard of the Church of the Brethren,
297 never had any you know sort of reason to necessarily go there other than the fact that my
298 mother worked there and somebody recruited her to go to church with them and she
299 started going to church with them. That was in like '60, I think she probably started going
300 to the church maybe in '67 and then we started going in '68. My sister and I were
301 probably baptized there in '68 or '69, just had that church was our Church of the Brethren
302 experience because the broader Church of the Brethren was a pretty white church and so
303 our church was a very sort of African-American church. There's probably five African-
304 American Brethren churches in the whole world um so it's a very white denomination.
305 There was no necessary reason why we would go to the church of the Brethren. It's not
306 our church history, it's not our, you know we didn't grow up in a Church of the Brethren;
307 we grew up in a very different denomination. There was no reason other than the fact that
308 it was in our neighborhood that we would go there. I would since find out probably in the
309 middle 90s that my great, great, great, great grandfather was a member of the Church of
310 the Brethren, was one of the original Brethren members that came here from Germany.
311 My mother didn't know that, I didn't know that, just discovered it when I went to go visit
312 Nat, my mother's sister and she had a picture of a you know a very ancient picture
313 (laughs) and it was so ancient and scary I was like who is that man? And she said you
314 know that's you know one of your great grandfathers who was a member of the Church
315 of the Brethren. So in some ways it was you know sort of odd that we would be in this
316 community, going to this church, that nobody goes to cause there's, I mean now we have
317 a membership of maybe 30 or 40 people, it's a very small congregation, um so in some
318 ways I felt like hm, eventually my being there, I'm totally one that believes that you get
319 to places in your life not by your own doing but just by some other sort of something that
320 happens in the world that sort of puts you where you need to be. And um its no accident,
321 that it just happens in some strange ways, so you know, it was kind of, but it wasn't until

322 almost 30 years later that I realized that I had a personal connection to this church. But it
323 was, it was an activist church, um an activist in its own religious kinda way, and it's a
324 peace church, it's a historic peace church, so they're very much involved in sort of peace
325 activities around the world and um the pastor, the pastor whose the pastor now, which
326 probably one of your colleagues is interviewing, um is um, lived in South Africa for many
327 years and it was through them also that the church got very much involved. At least my
328 local church got very much involved in South Africa. The national church um had a
329 project in South Africa and I'm not quite sure who instigated that um but certainly my
330 pastor and his wife sort of promoted the work of the church so.

331

332 PB: So why do you think that you became an activist?

333

334 MSB: Cause I think my parents, certainly my mother, was very much involved in Civil
335 Rights issues and her parents were also very much activists in their own day. I didn't
336 know them but, so I think it's sort of a bloodline thing that it just happens that way and
337 um and certainly there were you know, the time, the 60s was a time when, if you weren't
338 sort of active, if you weren't an activist, um then you, well ill put it like this. If your
339 living in the city, it was hard to kind of not be an activist. Um, if you were living outside
340 of the city, and were aware of sort of and opposed to the war, you might be an activist
341 against the war. Um, so there are obviously um, you know, probably a majority of people
342 who weren't activists but I think if you were in any of those situations you're almost you
343 know, had to be an activist because it's what everybody was doing at that time. At least
344 that's what I thought.

345

346 PB: Um, what, um, what was like the first protest or demonstration that you participated
347 in?

348

349 MSB: I would say the first protest I went to was when King came to Chicago and he was
350 um, working with the Chicago Freedom Movement around um inequality in the public
351 school system. And there was this big huge demonstration at um Soldier Field against uh
352 the then superintendent of schools, Benjamin Willis who sort of had promoted something
353 called the Willis wagons which was, Chicago had a very segregated school system as it
354 still does, um had a very segregated school system, had um a very unequal school system
355 um and had a very overcrowded school system in black communities. So in black
356 communities, that was a community that was growing, and that was a community that
357 was sort of um overcrowding the schools and instead of building new schools or
358 changing the boundaries to um sort of more open up the opportunities for black students
359 to go to other schools that weren't as crowded, he um built or put in these prefab
360 buildings behind the schools and they were either trailers or like you know these
361 prefabricated little mobiles and these mobiles were not heated in the winter and not
362 cooled in the summer. So kids had to go, that was how they dealt with the overcrowded
363 situation in black neighborhoods, by putting these prefabricated buildings that were just
364 as bad as overcrowding and um and it had just gotten to a point where you know teachers
365 actually, Al Raby, who was a teacher at the time um was the leader of the Chicago
366 Freedom Movement and was a teacher. He just had sort of gotten tired and they had this
367 big demonstration at Soldier Field and I remember goin to that demonstration and I

368 remember keeping my protests signs so that when I got on the Greyhound bus to go back
369 home to Michigan I had my protests signs so that when my sister and I went back to
370 Michigan, we were quite prepared for the protests um that we participated in around our
371 library. So that was the first one that I remember and the most memorable and the largest
372 one probably one of the largest ones I've ever gone to in my life so.

373

374 PB: What um anti-apartheid groups were you a part of?

375

376 MSB: The one I remember the most, there were actually two. Um, and the one I
377 remember the most was CCISSA , was the community, Chicago Community in Solidarity
378 with the Alexandra community, C-I, C-C-I-S-S-A. CCISSA. And there was one before
379 that but I'm thinkin that it was much broader to Africa, Mozambique, Angola, and then
380 sort of morphed into more of a, of a committee to end apartheid in South Africa. And it's
381 either, um and I don't remember the acronym, it's almost like it was the same as
382 CCISSA. But CCISSA was, I was a member, I wasn't on the board or anything, but I was
383 just a member of the organizing and um that was focused on primarily, well there was,
384 um, okay, so there was one group that was prior to CCISSA, and then CCISSA kinda
385 came, um after um, there was kind of an end to apartheid. Um, and so there was
386 organizing that happened prior to Nelson Mandela being released. Um, that was just
387 much less clearer to me what my involvement was. I think it was much more connected
388 to the work that Prexy was doin and we had, we put out newsletters, and just tried to do a
389 lot of sort of organizing and educating around um apartheid in South Africa and sort of
390 tried to promote um sort of city council resolutions to end investments in South Africa.
391 So that, um I feel like I was much less connected um to that work but I was involved in it
392 so I went to meetings and I went to demonstrations and you know tried to get out
393 information about apartheid. But the CCISSA one was much more, I was much more
394 involved in that and that was really after Mandela had been released. Um, there was a lot
395 of organizing to sort of bring elections to South Africa. Um, and it seemed like it was sort
396 of a fate of complete, you know now weve got, Mandela has been released, the
397 government is going to um develop sort of this new constitution, and there going to sort
398 of develop this new government structure, and of course the blacks in South Africa will
399 be able to vote, and they can also sort of create their own sort of leadership.

400

401 PB: Ok we can get back to that because we're kind of going out of order.

402

403 MSB: Oh ok. Oh ok ok.

404

405 PB: (laughs) That's ok. So um so how did you contribute to like the divestment? Or is
406 that too far forward? Should I, is that like later, or?

407

408 MSB: No, you know it's sort of a blur in terms of the timing of that. Because I remember,
409 I think it was in the middle 80s in the middle 80s that there was sort of that organizing
410 going on. And I remember that I had involvement in that but im not quite sure that I was
411 as, I don't remember my day to day involvement as much as I do with CCISSA. Um, but
412 I do remember um, sort of participating in um, demonstrations, and participating in um,
413 meetings, and helping to sort of put together newsletters, and you know going to

414 meetings, organizing meetings and um, you know um, hosting um, South African
415 activists in Chicago and you know trying to help sponsor events where they were
416 speaking in out in various communities, um and um, also hosting um, I remember hosting
417 a delegation from um a couple of delegations, one from um South Africa, from the
418 Soweto area, and another delegation from the CapeTown area. Um, just sort of bringing
419 delegations to Chicago to speak to different groups about apartheid. And some of thses
420 groups were banned in South Africa, so they were um, what do you call them, um oh I
421 cant think of the name, but they were South African citizens that had been banned from
422 South Africa. So there were very few that were actually living at that time in South
423 Africa. They were living in other places in the world. Um, but you know, participating in
424 fundraisers and you know those kind of things. And again, you know I wasn't sort of one
425 of the leaders, um I was kind of a good follower. I did a lot of um sort of helping to get
426 the world out, and sort of trying to understand the issue and um I believe it was, I cant
427 remember if it was, I mean Harold Washington was a major supporter of anti-apartheid
428 work so I cant remember if it was during his tenure or after that they worked to get a
429 disinvestment um resolution from the city council. Im almost thinking it was during his,
430 during his tenure. And that would have been prior to like 1987 or '88. So I mean that
431 was, that was my involvement at that moment, at that point.

432

433 PB: How was it, um working for the city?

434

435 MSB: How was it?

436

437 PB: Like how um how did you get involved in your work for the city of Chicago?

438

439 MSB: Oh ok. Well I was um, (chuckle) to my, that was not a fabulous decision on my
440 part. Um I was in graduate school in '78, I graduated from social work school and in '77 I
441 um did my graduate internship with the city, um the city's Department of Human
442 Services. And um and when I graduated I went there to work and I worked there from '78
443 to like '81, '82. Um, and it was um, I mean I, (chuckles) as much as I, I mean I got a city
444 job because I had to, I knew someone who at that time, in order to get a job from the city
445 you had to have somebody give you a letter and the letters that you got was from a local
446 elected official, that was how you got hired. And um, that has since been considered
447 illegal to do that, um but you know I wanted to work for the city and I got my internship
448 supervisor was very political connected and got me a letter from a local alderman who
449 supported me getting a job with the city. So I was technically for a couple months
450 considered a patronage worker, which is what they call people who get, you know, um,
451 supported by elected officials to get a job, which was pretty much everybody. Um, and
452 then a couple years after, not even a couple years, I would say probably a couple months
453 after I was hired, um the city then um, was ordered by what was called the Shakman
454 Decree, to stop hiring people based on their political affiliation. I mean I had to declare
455 myself a democrat to my, I had to, actually it was in '77, '78, which was the first time I
456 had registered to vote and I had to be registered to vote in order to get a job with the city.
457 And um I worked in the planning department um and I worked for Head Start for
458 probably maybe 4 years. And I left there in um, actually I left there right after Harold
459 Washington was elected mayor. Um, and..

460

461 PB: Why did you leave?

462

463 MSB: Well I got an opportunity to do something different and it was, it had nothing to
464 do, it had absolutely nothing to do with Harold Washington, um it had everything to do
465 with the fact that I was recruited by um a group of women who had been involved in
466 Harold Washington's election as I had um to run, to start a crisis network across the city.
467 And um, and it was, before Harold Washington was elected, um, resources for
468 community programs were limited to certain parts of the city and after he was elected, he
469 opened up those resources um, to a broader base in the city so there were more
470 community based organizations that got support from the city. So it was an opportunity
471 for people to work in community organizations that now were supported by the city so
472 this new program was started and um I was recruited to be the first director and it was
473 funded by the city and supported by the city so in so ways it was an extension of working
474 for the city. I was no longer on the city's payroll but I was now sort of running a program
475 that got city funding. It was a not for profit that got funded by the city so that's why I left.
476 And I was kind of um, you know I had, I had never done politics um, before the Har
477 Wash- I had never done electoral politics before the Harold Washington election because
478 I just hated city politics. I just thought it was the dirtiest and I had to sort of, I remember
479 when I got my job for the city I went to my supervisor and said I wanted to work for the
480 city, um, cause I was a social worker I wanted to, you know, I wanted to work for the
481 city. And he told me I needed a letter and I needed to get a letter from my political
482 representative and I didn't even know who he was, I didn't know what political ward I
483 lived in, I didn't know any of that. And because my supervisor was interested in hiring
484 me, he kinda helped me figure that process out. And he said but you gotta go get a letter,
485 you've gotta go and get a letter. So I made an appointment to go meet with the
486 committeeman, who was also the alderman, they were sometimes the same person, to see
487 if I could get a letter of support for a job, and I remember walking in his office and um,
488 feeling like the scum of the earth because I said I'm here to get a letter for a job and he
489 looked at me and he said, well little lady why would I give you a job when there are so
490 many men out there who are responsible for taking care of their families and need the job
491 and if I give you a job you're just gonna off of in a few years and have babies. Well by
492 that time I had 2 kids was married and I was like deeply insulted by his um, sexism and
493 racism and all the other isms that he provoked. Um, and I think I went to see him twice
494 and finally my supervisor intervened and got a letter for me to get a job. But probably
495 two months after I got the job I got a call, maybe not even 2 months, I got a call from his
496 office saying I needed to come in and I needed to pay \$400 for this job. You know they
497 would make you sell tickets for the party and all this kind of stuff, and I was scared to
498 death I was gonna lose my job. And he's like you moved out of this ward. How dare you
499 move out of this ward and not tell us that oyu moved out of this ward you know it was
500 just sort of a lot of harassment and I um, (snap) and it was like in the next month the
501 Shakman Decree was declared, which means that none of us were beholden to these
502 political officials for our jobs which was great. Um, but, you know I still, there was still
503 this cloud over you because even though they couldn't hire you and fire you based upon
504 who you supported politically, anybody who has a job knows that you can get fired for
505 just about anything and um so there was always sort of this (cough) pressure to um, to

506 work um, for you know the politicians that were in office. And then Harold Washington
507 came along and ran and many of us supported Harold Washington and because we were
508 city workers we kind of had to do it on the down low, we didn't want to make such a big
509 deal out of it cause we were all very much afraid he wasn't gonna win and then we
510 wouldn't have jobs, they would fire us because we were supporting him. And then after
511 he was elected, um, I just kind of felt like I didn't wanna be under that kind of pressure to
512 feel like my job, my political work was dependent upon, my job was dependent upon my
513 political work, but then I also saw that there was an opportunity for me to do more stuff
514 in the community and to um and leave sort of city government which I never found to be
515 a very high level place to be anyway and so I left and felt like I could now do community
516 work, support the political elected officials I wanted to support, do the kinda political
517 work I wanted to do, and not feel like my job was gonna prohibit me from doing that kind
518 of stuff. So, it was, it was a good way to both support the Harold Washington
519 administration and not feel like I had to work for them on a day to day basis so that's why
520 I left.

521

522 PB: Um, how did your degree in social work affect your activism?

523

524 MSB: Um, because I always thought that social workers, I came out of the misnomer
525 cause now I feel more differently about it but I always felt like social workers were
526 people who were consciencious about social issues and that that consciousness um, was
527 suppose to be directed towards social change. And um, and so I felt like I learned and,
528 you know I went back to school when I graduated from college, I went back to school
529 because I quickly realized that my, my employment would be limited if I didn't have a
530 master's degree so in the field that I was in particularly, I was doing social work, I was
531 working in a small hospital on the west side of Chicago. In the social work department,
532 my supervisor had a master's degree and I could just feel that my career would be really
533 limited if I didn't have a master's degree in that field. So I went back, and now if I had to
534 do it all over again I don't know if I would go back to social work school. I think I might
535 choose another, choose another field um because I feel like, now I feel like social
536 workers in many ways, um, even though many social workers and probably most of the
537 social workers I know, um are politically aware and are politically conscious and are
538 politically involved, I think the school and social work in and of itself, the professional
539 within itself in many ways limits social workers' ability to sort of act on their own sort of
540 political beliefs because the nature of 501(c)(3) is you cant really engage your political
541 um sentiments in the context of your work. You could be a social worker that can put
542 band aids on problems, you know you can work in fields that um, allow you to help
543 people, that experience social problems in their lives, but to act on sort of a political um
544 sensitivity um sometimes requires you to step outside of that role because you cant really
545 do it in the same way as, I mean you could be a community organizer, you could change
546 policy, you could do all of that, um kind of stuff but there's, I still feel like there's some
547 limitations and I also think that there's a subtle um, socializing that happens of social
548 workers that makes them think that they're making change when in fact they're just sort
549 of promoting the status quo. And so while on the one hand I think there's tremendous
550 history and potential in the social work field and that most of my friends who are social
551 workers also work for social change and in many ways are radical, that's sometimes, you

552 know we have welfare departments and we have you know hundreds of 501(c)(3)s that
553 are just putting band aids on problems and that aren't really going to the root of the
554 problem and they're staffed by social workers so.

555
556 PB: Um, so back to the 80s now, how did you react to Reagan being elected?

557
558 MSB: Oh, gosh. Let's see. Well I was a big Jimmy Carter supporter, even though I'm not
559 even sure if I voted for him because I don't even know if I was registered to vote so if I
560 was registered to vote I woulda voted for him. Um so of course it was heartbreaking
561 when he lost and Reagan won. Um, that was you know, and I didn't even know, I was
562 sort of in a limbo, I mean it was a period where I was you know having kids finishing
563 school so my radical days were limited in that period of time. Um, but I remember um,
564 you know in some ways feeling like um, Reagan was the worst thing that could of
565 happened to this country. And that no one thought that someone from California, who
566 was governor of California, who was a president, who was, who was, became governor as
567 a result of him being you know a popular actor, had the ability to be first of all governor
568 and then second of all to be president of the United States. And um, that period of really
569 entrenched conservatism was very scary. People were really afraid of what was gonna
570 happen um, when Reagan was elected. And so, in terms of real specific kinds of um,
571 (knocking) in terms of really very specific kinds of actions, I don't even know that I
572 remember um, what specifically he did. Um, I just remember that it was just a really kind
573 of sad, gloomy, fearful time. Um, and it felt like the years of the 60s and 70s shifted a lot
574 when he was elected. Um, and that's when we sort of started demonizing poverty, and
575 you know criminalizing um, communities and shutting down um, programs that had
576 promise and as a result of that, like public housing, or not even public housing, but
577 housing development, cause public housing should have never been a program that you
578 know institutionalized poverty. Um, but It did and I think Reagan coming in meant the
579 collapse of a lot of programs that had the potential of um, creating new opportunities for
580 people and um, it kind of started to happen, that erosion started to happen but, what I
581 remember the most, more than anything else, more than specifically what his policies
582 were, is the way which poverty was demonized. That now poor people were seen as the
583 problem. Crime was the result of poor people, and people of color as opposed to policies
584 that um, promoted poverty, it was like the people were the problem as opposed to the
585 problems being the problem. So that's kind of you know that's kind of what I remember
586 the most about sort of the Reagan years.

587
588 PB: What about um his policies towards South Africa?

589
590 MSB: I don't know that I have really any knowledge of it. Um, let's see, he was president
591 from late 70s...

592
593 PB: He came in office in like '81.

594
595 MSB: Yeah ok so '81. Um, I don't know if I really have any idea what his policies were.
596

597 PB: well let's go back to the local level then and Harold Washington and after he passed
598 away. What affect did that have?

599

600 MSB: Oh, man. Um...

601

602 PB: I mean that's kind of jumpin a little bit.

603

604 MSB: yeah

605

606 PB: But we've been kinda jumpin (chuckles)

607

608 MSB: Ok, his affect just sort of on us as a community of activists. Well, you know it's
609 interesting because he died differently than King. King was assassinated and Harold
610 Washington died at office. Um, and so I remember exactly the moment and the day
611 where I was the day he died. I was actually doing a training, at that time I was working
612 for um the um sexual assault network and we'd been doing, our major program was a
613 training um people around the city to sort of um deal with sexual assault and domestic
614 violence and um that particular day we were focused on domestic violence and I was on
615 the west side and it was probably about 10 o'clock in the morning, 11 o'clock and the
616 morning and somebody called me and sort of in the middle of this training with all these
617 people and said that Harold Washington had just died of a heart attack. And um, it was, I
618 mean it was right before Thanksgiving and it was just the most dreadful, awful period of
619 mourning and I think the person who accompanied him to, it's interesting the person who
620 accompanied him to the hospital was Linda Murray(?) who was his physician, who was
621 one of the leaders of the anti-apartheid movement in Chicago. Um, and I had knew her
622 through some of the Africa organizing work that had happened, um so I imagine it was
623 dreadful for her, but you know it was just a, you know, he had came and he had fought so
624 hard once he was elected he had fought so hard for the city council to not block
625 everything that he was trying to do that he had just been elected to his second term and he
626 had at that point a majority of city council representatives supporting him. So it was the
627 opportunity for him to be able to initiate some of the, some of the um things that he was
628 interested in and (snap) he died. So, you know, it was, people were fearful that you know,
629 I think people were, you know fearful that he was a very progressive mayor and that we
630 would go back to a period when we sort of had sort of city council business as usual, the
631 city would be business as usual, but, but there was also this kind of other feeling that you
632 know there are a lot of people who are elected as alder people under his time who
633 reshaped the city council in the city and that they could carry his um legacy even if he
634 was not here. Um, but there was a lot of fear and you know people in Chicago are very
635 sort of keyed to power. They understand that power is nasty and dirty and happens behind
636 closed doors and we witnessed on TV and some of us at you know city council how very
637 much the old machine just quickly (shwoop sound) went in and tried to, and were
638 successful in sort of snatching power away from people who had you know come under
639 the wings of Harold Washington. So, it was kind of um you know a very scary time and
640 um things haven't been the same since. Um, but you know his election was kind of so
641 momentum, momentous it was, people were, uh I would say a majority of people didn't
642 believe that a black man would ever be elected mayor of the city of Chicago, much less

643 the president of the United States, but um so his death and what that represented for
644 progress was kind of scary to a lot of people I think.

645
646 PB: So what were some of the um anti-apartheid organizations that you were involved in?

647
648 MSB: well CCISSA was the main one. That's the one I can remember and you know I
649 think that was a couple years after Harold Washington. Um

650
651 PB: Did you do anything um activism wise with the YWCA?

652
653 MSB: We did. And actually um, most of the work, most of the work that we did, you
654 mean around South Africa stuff?

655
656 PB: Yeah.

657
658 MSB: Yeah most of the work that we did was to sort of promote relationships with um
659 women's organizations um that were involved in rape and sexual assault. And I
660 remember we did, we host a um, Diane Russell was a, Diana Russell is a um, women
661 activist professor from um, at that time I think Milbury College(?) maybe Newbury(?)
662 College. I cant exactly remember the name, who'd done a lot of work on South Africa,
663 who'd done a lot of work on rape and once sort of the um anti-apartheid movement
664 started to flourish, she produced a book on women of South Africa, and I think it might
665 have been actually been called the Women of South Africa, um and it was at that moment
666 that we realized that she was a South African woman. None of us knew her as a South
667 African women, we just sort of knew her as a rape, anti-apartheid rape activist. And um,
668 so many of us then, once we realized that she was from South Africa started to solicit her
669 involvement in trying to make some connections between um, you know sexual assault
670 and violence in the United States and sexual assault and violence in South Africa. And so
671 we hosted her several times and um, in Chicago, she was teaching in California and then
672 found out also that her brother was a Episcopalian priest in South Africa that was very
673 much involved in South African movement. So you know we tried to make some
674 connections between, we wanted to make sure that um there was a, um, organized effort
675 to make sure that women's voices were heard in the development of the new constitution
676 of South Africa. And there were women, I mean you know women were at, in leadership
677 in South Africa so you know we weren't trying to sort of promote their leadership, we
678 were just trying to be in solidarity with women who were organizers in South Africa and
679 to make sure that these issues, issues around violence, issues around rape and sexual
680 assault were issues that were also um, heard and promoted. So she was kind of a vehicle
681 for us to um, educate women around South African issues. It was kind of like she was
682 revered in the sexual assault community in the United States, I mean she was revered and
683 now that she, we understood her and had this connection, it just opened that door for us to
684 also educate women about what was going on in South Africa. I mean we didn't do it in
685 a, we didn't do it as part of a South African sort of um, organized committee work, but
686 we did it, as a matter of fact I kept trying to get the sexual assault groups to send me to
687 South Africa (claps) I was like we should go and do something with the women in South

688 Africa. (claps) Um, but we hosted, as a matter of fact that's when we hosted um this
689 women from Alexandra who was coming to Chicago anyway, we hosted her at the Y.
690 (Sirens in the background)
691 So we hosted a couple of um delegations of women at the Y as a way to sort of have
692 some exchange, as a matter of fact there's a woman um who is um part, she's probably
693 gonna be somebody that gets interviewed as part of this project, um who is um director of
694 the rape crisis center out in Lombard, Illinois who is South African and um is um is a
695 mixed race South African, has been here in the states for many years and was very much
696 involved in the South African, so between her and sort of the work that we were doing.
697 You know you ask me these questions and I start to remember things that I hadn't really
698 thought about for a long time. You know we wanted to um, you know make sure that
699 there was a way that whatever communities we were working in here in the states were
700 ways that we could open the door to helping them understand what was happening in
701 South Africa. So that, for that period of time I remember, I worked at the Y from like '83
702 to like '87 or '88 and it was kind of in that time that I was sort of becoming more
703 involved in sort of this uh committee on South Africa. But also doing it through, more
704 through the women's work that I was doing at the Y. So that was, I'm glad you asked me
705 that because I hadn't thought about that very much. Um, and I can see the women who
706 had came to visit us.

707

708 PB: So what was your specific role in the organization?

709

710 MSB: I was just a member. You mean the committee on solidarity?

711

712 PB: Yeah whatever you want.

713

714 MSB: Ok yeah I was just a member. I didn't have a leadership position, I don't think I
715 was on a committee, I mean I don't think I was a leader of a committee. Um I think I was
716 just a good loyal member of the work and was involved in promoting the issue in
717 whatever ways the organization um you know, promoted it and some of it was through
718 the work at the Y and I would say that probably that which I felt much more connected to
719 was the work that came out of my church. Um I was also involved with a group named
720 Synapsis and the South African, both the sister city Alexdra committee and the prior to
721 that the disinvestment work was done. Synapsis was like this umbrella organization [lifts
722 arms over head like an umbrella] um that has sort of this social justice um organization
723 that had lots of different projects, and one of them was their South African project. And
724 so they also had a Philippines project, and they had a Burma project, and you know it was
725 sort of like if you had an interest and you needed to have a home for your work, you
726 could go to Synapsis and Synapsis was mostly Brethren and Mininite religious folks and
727 so the South African work was done under Synapsis and I was on the board of Synapsis
728 and the project that I was interested in was the South African project so it was kind of
729 through Synapsis that I was more formally involved in the South African work. And you
730 know we were all, there were so many different organizations that kinda named
731 themselves different things because maybe they were focused on a particular aspect of
732 ending apartheid and I shouldn't just say ending apartheid but ending both the formal, the
733 formal mechanisms of apartheid as well as sort of the remnants of apartheid which I think

734 the um (phone ringing) um CCISSA group did. (ringing again) [gets up and looks out the
735 door] Oh I don't need to get it. Sorry.

736

737 PB: (chuckles) It's ok.

738

739 MSB: Um so it was through Synapsis that I was more formally connected with um
740 CCISSA and that group. You know there were a couple things it was interesting because
741 I just have memories of um being involved in a lot of different kinds of organizing
742 activities and you know my mother was involved and my children were involved and so
743 we were involved in walkathons and we were involved in protesting in front of the South
744 African Conciliate and um we were involved in bringing over delegations um we were
745 involved with in um, and I would say probably the last significant um work that I did, or
746 the last significant thing I was involved in was um, we went as a delegation, the church
747 sent over a delegation of maybe about 10 of us to South Africa, um in the early '90s. This
748 was before; this was probably right after Nelson Mandela was released. Um, but certainly
749 before the elections and um, so you know just learning about the issue, helping to
750 organize and engage people in understanding what it was. I don't think, I mean I wasn't
751 like on the steering committee, I might have been at some point on the steering
752 committee but I think everybody at some point was probably involved at that level. You
753 know these were big, these small bodies of people, um as you sort of think back you sort
754 of think obviously there had to be sort of this massive organizing effort to change such a
755 massively corrupt government. Um and it was in hindsight but at the moment there were
756 these little pockets of organizing activities, some of which had major impact, so you
757 know um contacting your local officials to support a resolution to disinvest, um, your um,
758 your government's money from companies that do business in South Africa was a huge
759 endeavor but when you stop and think about it, you think ok this was involved in me
760 contacting three or four local officials that I know, you know in some ways it was small
761 but it was really big and had a really big impact when you think about, you know,
762 meeting every week or meeting every month or on-going meetings and stuff, it feels like
763 it's a lot but in the scheme of your life it may not be uh the most important thing that
764 you're doing at that moment but it's like if you don't do it, you don't see this most
765 important change happen. So I dunno, it's hard to explain it, but you know it's sort of like
766 this little group of people, and I think really the people that are the organizers, it was a
767 little group of people who did a hell of a lot of work and got a whole lotta other people
768 somehow involved at various pieces. And I was sort of one of those people from time to
769 time I was involved at a coordinating role but maybe it was just for one event or couple
770 of events but never years and years and years of involvement but you stop back and
771 think, ok from the early 80s to 90s, that's like 10 years of your life, what's not 10, for me
772 it was not ever every day of my life. Um, it was for significant pieces of my life but never
773 really kind of, not somebody, not somebody like a Lisa Brock, or a Prexy Nesbitt, who
774 that's what they live to do. Um, it was important to us but it was important that they
775 involved us as opposed to us sort of thinking through what would be the next level of,
776 you know, I would have loved to been involved in the conversations, ok what's the next
777 level, how do we step up this organizing, I was never involved in that.

778

779 PB: can you tell me more about your trip to South Africa?

780

781 MSB: Yeah um. Um, Joan Garag(?), who was my pastor, who was my pastor's wife, was
782 the one who was in charge of this project, the South African project, and um, had at that
783 point, Chicago had entered into this relationship with Alexandra, which is a township in
784 South Africa, that is like a million people living in one square mile. Um, and the work
785 was really focused on, um I think they represented, Alexandra represented some of,
786 probably some of the most um astute radical organizers in South Africa. I mean they had
787 a, um, they had a uh, had developed a consciousness and an analysis and an
788 understanding of what needed to be the next steps of South Africa that they were not so
789 much the reactionary politicians, there were a lot of them in South Africa. So I guess the
790 Chicago committee had decided to adopt um Alexandra as it's sister city as a way to sort
791 of promote resourcing Alexandra and helping to prepare them for the next level of both
792 political involvement and taking over this country, so there were a lot of political activists
793 in South Africa. So our church had been supporting um work in South Africa and um just
794 said, our church meaning the broader church, said, Joan went to them and asked if they
795 supported a delegation going and they said they would. I mean we had to raise our own
796 money but they helped to support that. So there were 10 of us um from the church, not
797 just my church but the churches around, not all African-Americans, I think half of us
798 were African-Americans, and we went over for I dunno maybe 7 or 8 days um and the
799 goal first and foremost was to learn from what was happening in South Africa- what was
800 learn- what was happening in Alexandra just to figure out ways to be supportive of their
801 political organizing. Um, but then also to see what sort of other political activities were
802 happening in other parts of um South Africa. So we went to Johannesburg, which is
803 where Alexandra is. We went to Johannesburg and then we went to um, Durbin, which is
804 very much of a hot bed of political organizing and activity. We never did go to Cape
805 Town, we didn't go that far south, um but we met with groups, we met with groups and
806 we went to this one town. I mean the political organizing in South Africa was so intense,
807 so intense and so vicious um in the sense that you know there were many political parties
808 and the government was supporting a lot of very reactionary political groups, so there
809 were very few groups that were really representative of sort of Mandela's sort of
810 mandate. And so um there was a lot of sabotaging of political organizing. People were
811 getting killed, you know um, just all kinds of, you know the worst kinds of um, really you
812 know um political empowerment. So it some ways it was a great opportunity but on the
813 other hand it was a time when uh you know a whole was up for grabs. But I must say,
814 despite of all of that, there was an astute and educated political um constituency that was
815 ready for change in South Africa. And what they needed, I think what they needed more
816 than anything was outsiders to support them, financially and to support them
817 ideologically, but they had the tools and the knowledge to organize themselves. They
818 knew what they wanted, they had developed leadership. So we went to Alexandra and I
819 was very impressed um we went to you know, people, it was interesting because in
820 Alexandra people lived like..

821 [puts fingers on desk to show]

822 So here's was your house, here was your house, here's another house, here's another
823 house, so let's say so like four little houses here, they all um basically shared water
824 supply, so it's almost like little huts, but not really huts, they were more um shanty town

825 types. And so, and each one of these little houses, maybe like 15 or 20 people living in
826 like one room.

827

828 PB: Wow.

829

830 MSB: So it was like very, very dense population with um people sharing water supplies,
831 and very little electricity of any living here but they had, so this little collection of four
832 home, this was like a little, um they had elected their own little leadership. And the
833 leadership from that little group joined up, and the leadership from this group you know,
834 joined up and then they elected their representatives and then that representative would
835 go and it would be like a whole little block. They would elect their representatives to the
836 point where they sort of had build up this couche of sort of elected officials who
837 represented people at the lowest level, so they had this tremendous um, network of very
838 sophisticated political um, governmental system because they also had to create a little
839 quazi government to manage the day-to-days needs of people. So they really had you
840 know people who hadn't had much of any education, had a very sophisticated uh
841 democratic process going. So we were learning more, I felt like I was learning more from
842 them then they were getting from us. But it was really kind of a way to be supportive and
843 to see how much passion people had for their own sort of freedom. And uh so, you know,
844 we participated in a lot of meetings from people at that local level all the way up to, we
845 didn't meet with Mandela but people who worker for Mandela, and before, actually
846 before he was elected.

847

848 PB: What emotions were you feeling when he did get elected?

849

850 MSB: Oh man. I wish I hadda been there. I mean (claps) I'm like that was the moment I
851 would have loved to been in South Africa. And I woulda, I didn't participate in the
852 elections, I know a lot of my colleagues went down, um for the election and participated.
853 But you know we were glued to the TV. My pastor went and he um, was, you know, um
854 was an election worker on the day of election, or the days of election and it was like you
855 know if we could put that much passion into, I mean obviously we saw it in the Obama
856 election, but if we could put that much passion into participating in you know the
857 development of change and democracy and people voting for their own you know needs
858 being met, you know it's like the most exciting moment but its like, you, we were glued
859 to the TV and you know watching and you know communicating with him and you know
860 just hearing about and you know seeing people standing in miles and miles of lines for
861 days to go and vote. I mean it was a, you know, you feel like, it's hard to believe. (claps)
862 And what was harder to believe, it was harder to believe that this transition of power
863 happened so non-violently. You know, no one thought that as entrenched as apartheid
864 was and how devastating the lives of people of color was, that a, that a society that had a
865 vast majority of its population um, as the political minority, would ever um, transition of
866 power non-violently. It was like, to me it was like tremendous, um, witnessing, a
867 tremendous peaceful way in which people, civilized people can shift to power Now, post-
868 apartheid, post election is another story because you know what has happened over the
869 years since then is um, you know, defies some of the um, development but not really

870 because people were, people who lived as um, oppressed as South Africans lived
871 certainly had enough opportunity to respond violently and they didn't and um so.

872
873 PB: Let's kind of wrap this up now. So um, what do you think that you're most proud of?
874

875 MSB: In terms of South Africa, organizing?
876

877 PB: Yeah and activism and everything we kind of went through (chuckles).
878

879 MSB: Oh. Hm. Um, I think I probably am most proud of the fact that I was able to
880 involve my children in understanding these broad, international issues and that um, that I
881 learned from, I learned from people who um, made a difference. And I was able to be
882 mentored and um, involved and, I was mentored and encouraged to be involved in people
883 who I think made a difference in that context, their work really, really made a difference
884 and that they, the little meager efforts and little tiniwini bit of money that these people
885 had made such a big difference in supporting such a massive change in the world and that
886 who would of thought that anybody would of cared about Africa? Who would of thought
887 that anybody would have cared about Africa? And so to me it was like to have um, any
888 involvement and have lived that period of my life at all, whatever I did, whatever little
889 meager involvement I had um, shaped my whole thinking of Africa, as a continent, you
890 know South Africa as a um, as a place where, and people who have nothing still have the
891 ability to change their life given, um you know, some ability to think about their lives
892 have to make that change. So I would you know say just having lived through that period
893 was probably for me, very um significant and I would say being able to live and actually
894 involve my children, um, in it at the same time, and my mother. I mean my mother, in
895 some ways was the instigator, and my mother was white. And I only say that because
896 there's nothing significant in terms of her being white. What was significant to me is to
897 sort of see a white person in that role and I don't even know if I think about her being
898 white, she passed away a year ago but, I don't even know if I think of her in that role but
899 I think, wow she was able to transcend her race in a racist society and she lived her life a
900 different kind of person. And to me, she was a real model of how people can live their
901 life differently even in when the odds are against them. So it means anybody can do that,
902 whatever color you are. So that generational experience was really kind of special for me.
903 I think I wouldn't of appreciated it as much if I not spent, nurtured by my mother and
904 then been able to sort of nurture my children into um, see the, that kind of change happen
905 in our lifetime.

906
907 PB: If Mandela was here right now, what would you say to him?
908

909 MSB: Oh my God. Well first of all, I would say, um, this morning I woke up thinking
910 that um, I wrote this on my facebook, that I think that I'm thinking too much and that I'm
911 overthinking and that I need to stop overthinking and um, and somehow somebody
912 responded to be, start living and stop thinking so much. It led to another comment and
913 somehow Mandela came into this or maybe it's because I knew you were coming today.
914 But you know, I was thinking about how, oh I know what I was thinking about how here
915 is a man who, oh this one woman wrote on there, what does it feel like to be free? And I

916 said, well Mandela is a perfect example of someone who does not let the chains on their
917 body um, control or um, control the way in which they think, and that he was able to be
918 free in his mind, which led him being free in his body. And the last thing I said is free
919 your mind and your ass will follow.

920

921 PB: (laughs)

922

923 MSB: I mean that's one of my favorite quotes. But I guess I would say thank you for the
924 model of endurance that you provided for all of us to see how strong one can be even in
925 the midst of such um, you know, in the ultimate, which is the ultimate, which is
926 incarceration for a vast period of your life. And that, you did it with such grace and that
927 you were such a graceful person that you know, you were able to assume power and then,
928 and then give it up. And not feel like it's yours to own and to me that's such a wonderful
929 example of how we don't have to own power, that it's, you know, it's our lives that we
930 should own and it's not power. So, you know, I would just thank him for, for the many
931 examples of how we live our lives. And um, think about humanity in response to that, um
932 you know, I mean I'm always jealous when I see Prexy's pictures of himself with
933 Mandela and all these people with Mandela cause I've never, I've never met him before.

934

935 PB: What do you think that your biggest contribution to the movement was?

936

937 MSB: Oh let's see. I dunno, I guess I would say um, my um, opportunity to sort of open
938 doors for other people's awareness of the issues in South Africa and being sometimes a
939 vehicle for that and um, you know, um and I think that um, you know, there, people can
940 do all kinds of things and if you ever, if you ever think that you cant make a difference
941 than you're not gonna get involved. And so I think everybody has to see themselves as
942 being a vehicle to make a difference however small that contribution is, because if all of
943 us feel that way then no one ever sort of comes together and so, you know it takes leaders
944 to mobilize us, but it also takes us, who are willing to be mobilized to make, um, sort of
945 those movements happen, so I would say um, just being open and aware and wanting to
946 communicate and wanting to um, learn, um from you know, people who live their lives
947 differently than us, and to communicate to other people, and to sort of bring other people
948 along, so.

949

950 PB: So what person or event like mobilized you or influenced you the most?

951

952 MSB: Um, let me think. Oh, God. This is gonna be hard because it's like what do I
953 remember um, and if I say something will it be the thing that I really think mobilized me.
954 I would say that my involvement, I remember the, one of the things that I remember the
955 most is, one day, I don't remember the day, one day, sitting in the auditorium at Crane
956 Junior College listening to Black Panthers speak. I was so moved by the speech that I
957 quickly ran and joined the Black Panther party and I would say that's the thing that
958 opened other doors for me to be involved in, and even though I was involved in the Civil
959 Rights stuff and stuff, that was kind of the thing that stirred my passion and kind of made
960 me feel like, you know as a young person, oh wow this is really exciting, I can get really
961 involved in this, and it was the thing that made me think about the world as opposed to

962 just Chicago. It made me think about our relationship to the rest of the world because
963 then I got to meet people who were doing things, I got to think about things in a different
964 kind of way, and I would say that particular moment I remember was an awakening
965 moment, but I certainly think that Prexy Nesbitt um, has probably had the most long term
966 um, do you know Prexy? [nod my head] Oh, ok. (laughs) I was like, oh yeah I'm sure you
967 do but I never asked you that, has had the most long term, because I've known him since
968 1969 and he's been very consistent in his work and he's been able to connect um, all of
969 his work back to local and international and um, and I don't see him a lot but um, he was
970 the first person who, um you know made me sort of challenge my own ideas about
971 politics. So I would say both sort of, um, becoming a, you know, joining that, moment
972 when I decided I wanted to be a part of the Black Panther party and also knowing that,
973 and I think also that I was living in Prexy's building at that time, I dunno what he thought
974 of the Panthers at that time, but also having him as someone who was educating me about
975 Africa, and educating me about Southern Africa, was probably the moment in which I
976 um, felt like I could act on my political beliefs in a way that um, you know, I could be
977 more connected, I think to the world. So I would say that those most two things probably
978 made a difference for me. Sometimes I just wish that I, you know, I had a family in
979 between, got married and divorced, married again, you know so there were a lot of sort of
980 life changes in my life that made me always challenge, should I be doing more stuff at
981 home or should I be doing more stuff, you know that's always sort of the challenge
982 people face is you know, how much should I be contributing to the world, changing the
983 world and how much should I be contributing to changing my own kids' lives. And you
984 know, how do you marry those two things so they're that they're not, neither of them are
985 disruptions in your life but they're just kind of consistencies in your life. And I think they
986 were moments when they were disruptions in my life and I had to pull away and be more
987 sort of a home body and then I got really tired of just being a home body and I felt like
988 that I needed to be more involved. And I probably would have been much more, sort of,
989 at a higher level of involvement but I just couldn't, personally I just had more sort of
990 family, life challenges that were, that made it really difficult to be that much involved
991 um, as I would have liked to been. But I think if I look back over my life, I am very
992 thankful for the opportunities that I had.

993

994 PB: I think that's a good place to end.

995

996 MSB: Ok.