

An Oral History

with

Charleana Cobb

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### **TAPE 12 and 12A**

This is an interview on December 14, 1995 in Blue Mountain, Mississippi with Charleana Cobb, Wilbert Colom, and Gloria Xifaras Clark conducting the interview. It is 8 p.m. and we are at Charleana's home in Blue Mountain.

**Wilbert:** Charleana will you give your complete name and address and telephone number.

**Charleana:** My complete name?

**Wilbert:** Yes

**Charleana:** My complete name is Vannie Charleana Hill Cobb.

**Wilbert:** Okay and your mailing address now?

**Charleana:** 306 South Guyton Boulevard, Blue Mountain, Mississippi 38610

**Wilbert:** Telephone number

**Charleana:** 685-4312

**Wilbert:** And if you don't mind, your date of birth:

**Charleana:** My date of birth is 2/2/45.

**Wilbert:** Where were you born?

**Charleana:** Blue Mountain in Tippah County.

**Wilbert:** Who are your parents?

**Charleana:** Charlie and Myrtle Hill

**Wilbert:** And where did they live when you were growing up?

**Charleana:** In Blue Mountain in the Antioch community.

**Wilbert:** Now you say the Antioch Community how, when you call something Antioch Community what do you mean by that?

**Charleana:** It wasn't in the city it was in the rural area and it was a community of mostly relatives and friends and everybody centered around Antioch Church. That was just really the center of that community.

**Wilbert:** So the community is really named after the church itself?

**Charleana:** Right

**Wilbert:** So you were born during, just after World War II then?

**Charleana:** Right

**Wilbert:** And so your family did not go north after the war?

**Charleana:** No, my dad did.

**Wilbert:** You dad did?

**Charleana:** Yes, later years he did. It was in the 50's. He stayed like for four or five years from time to time and worked and then he would send the money home and then he'd come back home and he stayed but he never went and lived permanently.

**Wilbert:** What's your earliest recollection? Can you think of your earliest recollection as a child of an important memory? Something that kind of registers with you as when you had consciousness. You were gonna tell me, kind of just tell me when did you realize you were a person?

**Charleana:** When did I realize that I was a person?

**Wilbert:** Yeah that you came consciousness.

**Charleana:** You know that's a hard thing to remember cause it seems now that I'd always known that I was a person. The conscious of ah

**Wilbert:** I remember, my first real memory of being alive are like being in the hospital. Because I can remember being two can you? Can you remember before

**Charleana:** No, I can't remember being two. I can't remember being necessarily four. I don't know. You know as far as age, it's just hard. I cannot remember. I don't know.

**Wilbert:** But what's your first major memory? I want to just kind of give you some contrast.

**Charleana:** I don't what my first major, I can't remember right off what my first major memory

would be of. I really can't. I can't remember anything happening to me at that time that I would particular remember.

**Wilbert:** When do you have your first recollection of any kind of grumblings about civil rights movement in this area?

**Charleana:** Early, now I can remember that kind of early. That was like before I went to school. It wasn't necessarily had to do with civil rights where somebody came to make any change or anything. But it was experiences that my daddy had had at home with some white people who lived in the neighborhood and this man came to the house and my brother and I were real young and he asked us, where is, he wasn't there. So my mama came to the door and she said who was that. And we say oh it's nobody but old Guy Hicks and she said who and we said old g\Guy Hicks and she said and he was still there and he said what do you mean old Guy Hicks? I'm Mr. Guy Hicks. And then my daddy came up and he said they didn't name you Mr. anybody. (Laughing) And he said your children should call me Mr. He said I never taught my children to call you Mr. Your name is Guy Hicks and that's what I've always called you Guy Hicks. To me that was like a sort of some of the first things I can remember where you had there was a confrontation where there was a problem. Then daddy was always talking about rights and how people were treated and mistreated and so forth and I think we were sort of always conscious of there was something wrong and you didn't have the same rights that maybe some other people have, especially white people. And then from that it was the school experience. He was on the school board cause blacks schools had trustees and he was on the school trustee board. So then when I went to school (and I hated that) and they would have

**Wilbert:** You hated that.

**Charleana:** I hated going to school. And they would have the trustee meetings. There was always a struggle because they were trying to get things for the school cause there was the local school then was the school in the neighborhood which we walked to was Antioch school and I couldn't go to school until I was almost 7 because there was so many people until you just couldn't get in school. There was no room. And that was one of the things because they would always talk about what they had at the white school and what we didn't have and we had to take the books that were left over and you didn't have enough room and so forth for kids to go to school. And that was an early age experience. And from that I think it came, well years after that there were a lot of other incidents but I can't remember particular what they were then. But then as far as civil rights and then was people who had there was the NAACP meetings and so forth which very few people attended.

**Gloria:** Did your father go to those?

**Charleana:** Yes, he went to them. He went to the NAACP meeting.

**Gloria:** Where were they held?

**Charleana:** At that time they were at Ripley. I can't remember any being held in our community at that time. So I would think that all of the first meetings were at Ripley.

**Gloria:** In the church?

**Charleana:** Well they were at St. Paul.

**Gloria:** St. Paul?

**Charleana:** Un huh, at St. Paul. And from that then Mr. Ernie Prather, I don't remember who was the first president but he must have been, because then they moved the meetings out at Union Grove Church by where he lived because they wanted to involve other people and they felt if they went from one community to the next then they would get new people to get involved and come to the meetings. But I cannot remember any major incidents or things that took place at that time except for people trying, cause Mr. Ernie Prather who at one time he was the principal of Antioch School too during that time. I think that's one reason why he was sort of involved because he knew that there were a lot of things that black people didn't have.

**Gloria:** This the early 60's?

**Charleana:** Yeah, that was the early 60's. Cause he was principal. It must have been in the early 50's into the early 60's.

**Wilbert:** They were pretty quiet activities.

**Charleana:** Yeah, very quiet. Most things, I think the first activity was more or less discussions. People would talk about what they didn't have or what had happened and they really didn't know how to make change. They really didn't know you to make change. But I think it gave them some feel of relief to get together and talk about it. Cause then everybody knew that there was more than one person you know who thought the same way and knew that there was something missing.

**Wilbert:** Let's get you in mind to like 1963. Do you remember the March on Washington. Do you just remember it occurring?

**Charleana:** Yeah, I remember the march occurring.

**Wilbert:** You were probably 17 or 16?

**Charleana:** 17

**Wilbert:** What was your mind then?

**Charleana:** I thought I'd like to have been there but I couldn't get there. I couldn't go so that was about it. I just thought I'd like to have been there cause I thought it was one of the biggest events that had happened to bring all those people together and realize that there were so many people who thought the same and who were concerned about the same thing.

**Wilbert:** Was any thing going on around here that you can remember that

**Charleana:** In '63?

**Wilbert:** Yeah

**Charleana:** No, I can't remember any thing in particular in '63.

**Wilbert:** Okay.

**Charleana:** No, nothing in particular.

**Gloria:** Let's talk about who were some of the first civil rights workers to come in here, about when did they come in.

**Charleana:** I think it must have been in the latter part of '63 or early '64. It must have been about the summer of '63.

**Gloria:** '63?

**Charleana:** Un huh

**Gloria:** A year before Freedom Summer? Who was that? Do you know?

**Charleana:** I don't remember who those people cause I see that how the NAACP meetings sort of picked up but I don't know who they were.

**Wilbert:** You know that's sort of my memories too that I say I use to go with her to some meetings. I just don't know, in fact everybody uses the word mass, m-a-s-s, a lot. But when I first heard the word it was called mask, m-a-s-k, mask meetings. Not mass meetings.

**Charleana:** I think it was just a mispronunciation of the word but I mean that's what they say. They say mask.

**Wilbert:** I thought people meant mask because they thought they were secret.

**Charleana:** The same thing cause that's what everybody, oh we're having a mask meeting (laughing). But I cannot remember who the first people were when they picked up because the

only thing that was here at that time was the NAACP. That was the only organization until I guess the people who came in from Holly Springs and then that was when they started what COFO?

**Gloria:** Yeap, so that was summer of '64 you think some different people came?

**Charleana:** Yeah, it was some different people came in.

**Gloria:** Who do you think it was?

**Charleana:** I would say Ken Scudder and Cleve Sellers. I'm not sure. I can't be positive, but that's who I think it was because I remember from that they must have talked to Rev. James in Ripley and then I remember them having a meeting at St. Paul and there were quite a few people there and there was people, white people in Ripley. They circled the church and they rode around the church and Rev. James, people were kind of scared and when people would leave to go home after the meeting he would sort of like say well you know somebody is gonna watch you leave here and so forth and people were just really afraid cause that was a lot of first experiences for a lot of people in Ripley.

**Gloria:** You were there?

**Charleana:** Yeah

**Wilbert:** Do you remember sort of a story, I didn't want to say anything on my tape cause I didn't know if it was true or not cause I might have been lying on somebody. I have in my subconsciousness a memory about those early days. These guys who came in and Mrs. Hazel Foster telling them in a movement that she did not want all that foolishness being bought up here because it wasn't gonna do anything but cause trouble and wasn't gonna do any good anyway and they could take that stuff and go back to Grenada.

**Charleana:** Right. You know we might say it as a rumor but I'm sure it was true. I didn't hear her say it personally but you know I know people did. They said they did. And I do know some incidents where people were, they said the police had harassed them because she had called the police on them. Now I can't attest to it as being fact but that's what was told. And they say she was one of the people who gave 'em a lot of problems until like probably in the 70's and see I wasn't here then. Cause a lot of things happened after that and then all of a sudden she started having NAACP events at her place of business and it was like she wanted to take all this credit for things that she didn't do. And I know that those things were fact because things that she said she did in the 60's now I was here. She did not do them. I know. She did not do them.

**Wilbert:** Now do you recall Mr. Spight doing anything before they fired him?

**Charleana:** No

**Wilbert:** Okay, I just wanted to know.

**Charleana:** No, I do not. The only thing he did was let Laura and I continue to go to school and he told us that the superintendent had told him if we went to school we were not to graduate. And that's the only thing he did and he would tell me all the time I'll be glad when you get out of this school. I'll be glad when you get out of this school. He said girl I don't know who you think you are. So I assumed that he was getting a lot of controversy because we were in school and we were participants in the movement.

**Gloria:** Did you graduate?

**Charleana:** Yeah, I did. He didn't, I think after the movement because kind of wide spread the pressure they put on him wasn't as great because if it had been then there would have been a lot of publicity that would have been negative concerning the Board of Education and I don't think they wanted that so I would assume they sort of backed off of him and they didn't bother him anymore.

**Gloria:** Do you think he did something to have them back off?

**Charleana:** I really doubt it. I hadn't really thought of it except for the fact to say maybe they don't know what they've doing. They just kids. That's about all.

**Gloria:** But somehow there were messages it seems to me that were given to him by the superintendent about you, Laura and Will that somehow didn't come to pass. Like what you just said, that you've not suppose to graduate. But you did graduate?

**Charleana:** Yes I did graduate. Laura graduated.

**Gloria:** Or mean Will should be suspended but he wasn't suspended?

**Charleana:** Right, I would think so cause see that's Mr. Spight had told me. He say well you know you're not suppose to graduate. The only thing happened to me after I graduated, you know you have to have your immunization record that was one of the things you had to have completed at graduation. Well at that time we didn't realize it was so important to keep up with it yourselves, the people at the health department just kept up with it. I was in DC and I got a notice that had to come back and get my immunization record updated and I had been out of school for four or five months, had graduated. And they told me this but I never went back and nothing ever happened.

**Wilbert:** Do you remember first meeting Gloria or Marjorie or Aviva?

**Charleana:** I have been trying to recall the first meeting. I think it must have been at the office at Holly Springs. I mean I cannot



**Wilbert:** How did you come to get involved with the office in Holly Springs? Tell us about that.

**Charleana:** By that time see the meetings were taking place more often and then see it wasn't the NAACP is was people from the office in Holly Springs which was the COFO office. And Rev. James had gotten involved. Laura and I, I think, he had carried us over to the office to meet some people and then Amos and Sammie Lee, they were involved, and they started going to the office. And I don't remember the first meeting. I am sure it had to be at that office when I met Marjorie and Gloria.

**Gloria:** You don't think it was that we came to your house. You had already met us before we came to you?

**Charleana:** I think so.

**Wilbert:** That was Mississippi Summer?

**Charleana:** Yeah

**Wilbert:** That was Mississippi Summer project that was based in Holly Springs.

**Charleana:** Yeah, right. Cause that's where I met most of the people who work there.

**Wilbert:** You just went to meetings over there?

**Charleana:** Well after that I had. I had gone. Cause see after that I had gone to the office quite a bit.

**Wilbert:** What would you do at the office?

**Charleana:** Just go and talk to people. See what other people were doing.

**Wilbert:** There were some good looking guys over there, that's what you were doing?

**Charleana:** Well yeah, but I didn't go for that I don't think. Cause I don't think I had any interest as far as personally because most of the time when we went to the office after that the people who were there were always out in the field. There were like the people who manned the office and then while you were there sometime other people would come in who worked out of the office.

**Gloria:** So who were some of the people you met there? Do you remember?

**Charleana:** I remembers Cleave Sellers, Bobby Dechacker, Kathy Doll, Hardy Fry, Ivanhoe Donaldson,

**Gloria:** So it was summer?

**Charleana:** Yeah, it was summer. And Rita and Bud Walker. Oh God it was so many people. It's hard to remember right now all the names, Bob Smith.

**Gloria:** Did you go out in the fields with them?

**Charleana:** Yeah, well see during that summer I went more often. I went out in Benton County with Ransom Moore and U. Z. Nunnally cause they were working out in Benton County. I went with them to some of their meetings and I don't remember the churches but they went to those churches. And I had gone with somebody to a church out there by that, not too far from the Cotton Patch Café. In that area out there but I don't remember the name of that church. The only thing we did then was just go to the meetings and see what they were doing and see what other people were talking about and they had started trying to set up the freedom schools during that time. So we were just sort of looking and listening.

**Gloria:** What do you remember? What was some of your impression at that time?

**Charleana:** Well some of the, well just being there and seeing how many people were gonna be there and well I was kind of impressed cause there were a lot of young people. A lot of kids. A lot of little kids and they seemed to have a lot of interest in being there and they seem to have, I think they were interested cause they had found other people who were interested in them. And being in the freedom school because they were beginning to talk about things that they had known nothing about and probably would have known nothing about.

**Gloria:** You must have liked it. You kept coming back.

**Charleana:** Right. I did. It was interesting. It was very interesting. Cause the same thing with me it was like people talked about things that I knew nothing about or knew very little about and things that you could do that nobody had done and then people would tell why they had come to Mississippi and what they could do and so forth and told you what you could do and how you could make a difference and so forth.

**Gloria:** Did you go into the freedom school classes?

**Charleana:** Well later I did. Much later, I did. Cause see it was like in the winter of '64 I had gone some of the freedom school classes then. Cause see there were a lot of local people sort of manning some of 'em then and I had gone to 'em in Benton County and Marshall County and I think I had gone out of Tate County once or twice.

**Gloria:** You know, I was away in August and that's why maybe you were coming around in August.

**Charleana:** Yeah, we did. Cause I remember, I think it was like in August that somebody had organized, from Tippah County, had organized a clothing drive and we had to go and the things were brought down on a truck and they were brought to the office in Holly Springs and we had to go and pick 'em up and then they were brought out to our house and distributed to people who needed them, people who had children who needed clothing, and there was food and all kinds of things that kids didn't have then.

**Gloria:** When did the action start in Tippah County?

**Charleana:** It had to be in '64, maybe the summer of '64. Really before Fannie Lou Hamer came to speak during that summer. Things sort of started, but I can't remember exactly what had happened before she came. Because I know she came to speak it was October and was Halloween. So, there had been quite a few incidents before then but I cannot remember exactly what because I don't think we had gone to Renfroe's Café before then.

**Gloria:** No, you went to Renfroe's in the winter of '65.

**Charleana:** Yeah, it was after.

**Gloria:** But in the fall of '64 I don't know what it was but Fannie Lou Hamer was running for Congress. She was trying to get on the Democratic Primary Ballot and we had to get enough signature on these petitions of registered voters and we had to get them into the County Clerk's office by a deadline. Did you participate in that?

**Charleana:** Yeah, I had almost forgotten about that. Yeah, I participated in that. I can't remember what happened.

**Gloria:** You know why, because I think your father and Annie Rogers, I think Amos kind of refreshed me on this. Well we had the signatures there. They said well you have to get everybody to come in personally to say that they signed and so I think your father and Annie and some other people in fact went down to the courthouse

**Charleana:** Right, I remember them going down there but I can't remember what took place when they went.

**Gloria:** It was around that, that was the time that Marjorie and I got arrested. It was all around that and then trying to disqualify the people who signed and intimidate everybody by making them come in and people would go in.

**Charleana:** Right, people would, they would go in. Sometime you had to pick some of 'em up and carry 'em but they would go. They didn't refuse to go cause there were a lot of registered voters and people who had been in that Antioch Community who had been registered voters for many many years.

**Gloria:** Your daddy was a registered voter?

**Charleana:** Right cause he registered probably in the 40's.

**Gloria:** And your mother?

**Charleana:** And my mother registered, Annie Rogers, and my uncle, Will Knox, and Hanner Hill, Hubert Hill. Most of those people were registered during that time cause see all those people was sort of that was kind of a I guess they thought of it as a prominent community. Because they were all land owners mostly. Most of the people who were they were land owners. And see I guess my daddy, and my Uncle German who lived next door and my Aunt Maude, because they had been there. They were born there.

**Gloria:** Now your uncle, he wasn't as supportive as your father?

**Charleana:** No he wasn't. He was not as supportive

**Gloria:** What did he say?

**Charleana:** Not very much of anything. He just always wanted to know what was going on but he didn't go to any meetings and he wasn't very outspoken except he wanted to always know and he would say well if it's anything I can do you know let me know. But he wasn't gone stick his head out and be out front. There were a lot of people who were in the community that were not gonna be out front.

**Gloria:** Did he go to the Fannie Lou Hamer meeting?

**Charleana:** I don't remember if he did. I really doubt it. I really doubt it.

**Gloria:** Can you remember the preparations that were made for the Fannie Lou Hamer speech that night at the church. Do you remember what you had to do to get ready?

**Charleana:** Yeah, I remember some of the thing we had to do. We were gonna serve afterwards and I remember we having to go to the store and we made this punch and had all of the nuts and the food and the cookies and running back and forth and trying to make sure that we had leaflets printed up and try to make sure that all the leaflets were out and

**Gloria:** Do you remember about how many people helped you distribute the leaflets? Or how it was done? I see yu live in a rural and

**Charleana:** We just, they were mimeographed cause I think we did them at church. I think Marjorie typed them up and we did 'em at the church and we had this mimeograph machine that somebody had sent us and we ran the copies off and

**Gloria:** How did you get them off?

**Charleana:** I'm trying to remember. Wilbert, did you distribute any?

**Wilbert:** Yeah

**Charleana:** Wilbert, Laura, and Nolan Gray, Martha Clemons, and I can't remember who else, probably Glenda Thomas and I'm not sure but there was a group of kids who were in school during that time that we had sort of gotten involved because we had been trying to do some little projects to raise money to buy the paper to do this. Which failed but we managed to get the paper anyway. (laughing)

**Gloria:** Where did you get it?

**Charleana:** I think mama gave me the money to buy it. I think that's how we got the money to buy the paper. Mama gave me the money to buy the paper.

**Gloria:** To run off the flyers?

**Charleana:** Un huh, and I can't remember (OTHER SIDE OF TAPE) about the food and stuff we got to make the punch. I don't know who gave us that money but I am sure some of it probably came from the office in Holly Springs. And we used Marjorie's car, which she did cause we didn't drive and I think we used Bobbie Joe's car too. Cause we use to use his car a lot. None of us drove. We'd always have to get somebody else to drive and then they would just drop you off in different neighborhoods and people would walk from door to door and whoever you saw you would talk to them and tell them that we were gonna have Fannie Lou Hamer at Antioch Church to speak and tell 'em that what she was doing and about her being a good speaker and thought they would be interested in hearing what she had to say. And ask 'em to make sure that they were there.

**Gloria:** So what was the response?

**Charleana:** At that time most people would say well I'll be there. Whether they came or not. Whether those particular people came or not. But the church was full of people. There were a lot of people.

**Gloria:** Where were they from?

**Charleana:** Benton County. I am not sure whether any of them were, there might have been some people from Marshall County, but there were people from Benton County and Tippah County. And there might have been some from Union County, but I can't say who they were from Union County at that time. But I know most of the Antioch Community was there. It was a very few people that wasn't there.

**Gloria:** Do you remember anything that she said?

**Charleana:** No, not in particular.

**Gloria:** What was the overall impression that stayed with you that night?

**Charleana:** After getting in there and just sitting there and hearing her speak, and I can't remember a lot of things that she said in particular, but just to look around and see all these people and realize that she had brought all these people out there cause they wouldn't have never been there before that. We had never had a meeting, never had anything to bring out that many people concerning human rights or civil rights or any rights. And just to see all the people and to hear her speak. She was such a magnificent speaker. Tell about the things that had happened to her before she go to that point and how she was determined to keep on going. That was the one thing that impressed me, was her determination to keep going after the beatings and after being put in jail and still being determined to keep on going.

**Gloria:** Then she left.

**Charleana:** Then she left after that night which was October 31<sup>st</sup> I think, cause it was Halloween night. And then before day that morning we found out the church had burned.

**Gloria:** Now you lived almost across from the church.

**Charleana:** Yeah, kind of angular from the church which was about the third house

**Gloria:** Did you see the church burning?

**Charleana:** Well I saw the smoke and the flames. Cause by the time I really realized what had happened the church had burned. It was just smoke and smoldering and there were a few flames.

**Gloria:** Who woke you up?

**Charleana:** My daddy.

**Gloria:** What did he say?

**Charleana:** I don't know who was the first person. I don't know who notified him cause I don't think he was the first person who saw it. I really don't remember who notified him but it was before day that morning and he just jumped up and he told mama, he said Myrtle, he say, the church is burning, the church is burning. She said my goodness what? He said the church is burning. She said all my goodness and then they jumped up and they went to the scene where the church was and was wondering who had done it because they had the feeling that it was because Fannie Lou Hamer was there to speak. Cause by the time she was coming there to speak a lot of

people knew that she was gonna be there to speak. And they knew that there was a lot of opposition from white people in the county and the neighborhood around with having her to come there to speak cause they could not ever imagine having that many black people in any place at one time hearing another black speaker (laughing) and to think a black woman from Ruleville, Mississippi running for a political office. That was unheard of. Totally unheard of.

**Gloria:** Were you with Sammie Lee and Amos? Did you come to Holly Springs to let everybody know?

**Charleana:** Yeah, we came to Holly Springs with Sammie Lee and Amos after the church burned to let everybody know what had happened. And following that I don't know whose idea it was in the first place with the Carpenters for Christmas following that but we knew about, I guess about, maybe the second or third week in November that the church might be rebuilt. Because we got a lot of publicity then because after the church was burned there was suppose to have been an investigation and then you got all this publicity and it was on the news and on the television and then we had all these news people coming out and doing interviews and talking to people and finding out what had taken place prior to that and really the main thing was having Fannie Lou Hamer there to speak and the voter registration and getting people to sign the ballots for getting those names and so forth and nothing ever really became of the investigation because nobody ever really determined who burned the church.

**Gloria:** Who did the investigation? Somebody

**Charleana:** Yeah, they had somebody from the police department and they had somebody from the justice department really. That's where the people came from, I think, the Justice Department to do the investigation. But it was more or less, they just sort of talked to people and asked them did they see anybody around or had there been any threats made and who were the first persons to see it. And that I don't remember who the first person to realize.

**Gloria:** In fact, did anybody ever really find out who did burn the church?

**Charleana:** Nobody as far as I know. Not any specific information came out about. There is always going to be a lot of rumors but to really know who burned the church, nobody ever really knew. I don't think.

**Gloria:** It's still a secret to this day.

**Charleana:** Still a secret to this day about who burned the church.

**Gloria:** What was the reaction? We're talking about Carpenters for Christmas coming down and within a couple of weeks people were kind of mulling the idea of rebuilding the church. Do you remember any of the immediate reaction of the members in the church?

**Charleana:** Of the members of the church? Well, yeah, they were, at the time they sort of wondering well where would they get together to have service and if, ah, there was that TCDC building next door to the church and then they decided that they could use that building until something happened and they got something done about rebuilding the church. But see at that time nobody had any money so people would sort of at a loss for where they were gonna get money to rebuild the church or how they were gonna get money and then I think people sort of thought well maybe we shouldn't have had Fannie Lou Hamer here to speak because this was our church and now we don't have a church and what are we gonna do.

**Gloria:** Was somebody getting blamed here?

**Charleana:** For burning the church?

**Gloria:** No, for bringing Fannie Lou Hamer that cause all that to happen?

**Charleana:** Yeah, right. Mainly me (laughing). Cause I think a lot of people, even to know I think people have sort of the same feeling about, that's why they don't want people to do certain things at the church now because they bring up the fact well you know this church was burned before. She was the culprit. But I wasn't just the culprit cause everybody wanted her there until something happened and then I think they didn't know what, I think it was because they didn't know what to do afterwards.

**Gloria:** So there was some resentment toward you. Was there any like anger toward the white community?

**Charleana:** Yeah, but there was cause see everybody felt like maybe some white person in the community might have done it but they couldn't put a finger on anybody cause they didn't know anybody..

**Gloria:** But what was the message of the burning?

**Charleana:** I think the message of the burning was that you know don't have any more meetings. Don't have anymore people here to speak because this is what you get.

**Gloria:** And did that frighten you?

**Charleana:** No because it had happened in some other places. So, it wasn't ever ruled out that it wouldn't happen in the beginning. It was just something that you didn't talk about to people in the community because you knew in the beginning if you had been a part of the movement because people had had threats. There had been little incidents and things that happened. You would hear rumors. Maybe the person didn't tell you to your face that somebody say, "oh, well they said you better not have no meeting at this church, you better not have no meeting at that church, do your church would be burned and all that kind of stuff." So, you knew, we knew from



the beginning that it was a possibility that something might happen but nobody set there to see if it was gonna happen cause you just always had to go on in hopes that nothing would happen.

**Gloria:** And then you had all this national attention?

**Charleana:** Yeah, after the burning of the church we got all this national attention and then I'm not sure, out of some of that attention I think came the Carpenters for Christmas and Marjorie and Gloria.

**Gloria:** They contacted you, you think? The people from Ohio.

**Charleana:** No they didn't contact me. They must have contacted somebody at the office in Holly Springs. And I would think that's, I thought Marjorie might have been one of the contact persons that they made contact with.

**Gloria:** So when did they come down?

**Charleana:** They came down during, in December. Some of the people must have come about the 19<sup>th</sup> or 20<sup>th</sup> of December. Because it was when the universities and colleges were getting out for Christmas holidays.

**Gloria:** You remember about how many came?

**Charleana:** In the very beginning, the first people who came it must have been about 20 because there was a meeting in Jackson that I had gone to and I remember it was on the weekend and we had gone, Mr. Ernie Prather, Amos, Sammie Lee, and Sammie Lee's mother and I, and probably some other people had gone to this meeting in Jackson. When we came back home and then I walked in my mama's house and like all these people were like on the floor and everywhere. And I had gotten, after we went to Jackson I had gotten a notice down there was saying that the Carpenters for Christmas were coming to rebuild the church because I really didn't know until that last minute.

**Gloria:** You didn't, you were away.

**Charleana:** I didn't know. Yeah, I was away.

**Gloria:** So you didn't do any of the preparations to house them but it seems

**Charleana:** No, not, well we had started. See we had just gone to Jackson that weekend but we had sort of started. But after that first group came and then there was a problem with housing and I had to

**Gloria:** What was the problem with housing?

**Charleana:** People wouldn't let 'em stay in their house because they were afraid. Then after I got home and, see we had that little house and we didn't have enough room for all those people, then I had to get out like the next day and start talking with people and try to find housing and find out places they could stay. So, we had trouble doing that because people were too afraid to let them stay in their house.

**Gloria:** Now I know they were in your house and they were in the Rogers house.

**Charleana:** They were in our house and they were in the Rogers house. Those were the two main houses.

**Gloria:** And then gradually other people give in?

**Charleana:** Right, some of the other people did. We had, my family had a little building that they had had a store in was just across from the church. So, they cleaned that building up and about four or five people stayed in that building, that little store building. And then my aunt who lived next door to the store building which was across from the church also, they finally let about three or four people stay at their house. And as time went on they would come out when they started building on the church. People would come out and they'd stand around and look and they realized that here are these people who took their Christmas vacation and didn't go home and they come here to rebuild our church. You know we should do something. You know, how scared can you be. So then a lot of other people did participate as far as letting people stay in their houses. Like, there was one cousin they didn't let anybody stay in their house but somebody came with a motor home and they let them park the motor home in their yard and make their electrical connections and so forth from their house. And then there were a lot other people who would bring food to the church when people got for breakfast and lunch and dinner and what ever they would send things but they were still afraid to let people stay at their house. But they felt that they needed to do something. They just could not sit back and do nothing. So, they would bring food, bring coffee, bring whatever to try to help out. And then they would even send stuff to the other people's houses that would let people stay. But they couldn't be seen there. But they would do that.

**Wilbert:** Do you remember their names?

**Charleana:** I remember some of the names. I remember Joe Gross, and Jessie, I remember Stan Guntierman, Jerry Vonkoff, Mary Nehoe, Burl Scott who was the architect, I think.

**Gloria:** Scott, he stayed a long time.

**Charleana:** Yeah, I think he was the architect. I remember Paul Smitz and his wife. I don't remember her name but she was there too. She came with him.

**Wilbert:** Some of those same people came back next summer.

**Charleana:** Right

**Wilbert:** The summer of '65 from Oberlin.

**Charleana:** Right, that was Joe Gross and Jessie, Jerry Vonkoff, Stan Guntierman, Kathy Rickie. They were the summer volunteers in '65 who were a part of the Carpenters for Christmas. Now Stan Guntierman and Jerry Vonkoff and Jessie and Joe were. But I'm not sure. I don't remember Kathy Rickie being a part of the Carpenters for Christmas.

**Gloria:** But they came back to continue building the church?

**Charleana:** Yeah, they came back and worked on voter registration that summer and then the integration of the swimming pool and so forth during that summer.

**Gloria:** They were with you when you integrated the swimming pool?

**Charleana:** Yeah, some of those people were but I can't remember exactly who. Because I remember somebody got hit by a rock and somebody was arrested during that summer but it was a white person who got arrested. And somebody was hit by a rock when they go into the swimming pool. I remember one other one, Michael Fadden. He was a part of the Carpenters for Christmas. He was going to school at Oberlin, Ohio. Cause people came from other schools but mainly that's where it sort of got started from Oberlin. Because in the very beginning they were called the Oberlin Carpenters for Christmas. But then there after they got so much publicity after the first few people came and then people started coming from a lot of other places, a lot of other schools and states and so forth.

**Gloria:** When did you start integrating things in Ripley?

**Charleana:** It must have been in '65.

**Gloria:** In the winter of '65?

**Charleana:** Yeah, cause

**Gloria:** You had a newsletter called "Voices"

**Charleana:** "Voices of Tippah"

**Wilbert:** Do you remember if it was the Spring or the Summer?

**Charleana:** It must have been, she thought the theater was in the winter time but we went in Renfro's Café. It was in the summer time. It was spring time maybe.

**Gloria:** Wasn't the first thing you did the theater?

**Charleana:** The first thing was probably the theater and then I think after that it was Renfro's Café cause that was the most prominent café in Ripley and probably one of the oldest.

**Gloria:** It's still there.

**Charleana:** And it's still there.

**Wilbert:** I remember the theater real clearly because you remember, cause I remember sitting by you and popcorn being thrown.

**Charleana:** Yeah, I can remember popcorn being thrown at us too.

**Gloria:** How many of you went into the theater?

**Charleana:** It must have been about five or six of us, I think. Cause it was Wilbert, Laura, myself, (did Glenda go or did Nolan go?) I can't remember.

**Wilbert:** It wasn't Nolan

**Charleana:** I don't think Nolan went either. I must have been Glenda.

**Gloria:** Can you describe it?

**Charleana:** Well we went. I think when we first got there we just sort of stood there and kind of looked and wondered if we should try to go in or not. But I cannot remember any opposition when we went to pay to go in cause I remember this little sort of like cubby hole entrance that you had to walk up in and then the window was like to the right of you and I can't remember any real opposition when we went to buy the tickets to go in. The thing happened after we got in and then it was like all the noise and all the rumbling and people getting up and walking out and popcorn being thrown on our heads.

**Gloria:** Because of where you sat?

**Charleana:** Yeah, because of where we sat. Because see black people had always gone up stairs and we went down stairs because that was the purpose to integrate it so we wouldn't have to go upstairs. And then when I guess after that I don't remember going there but that one time. But I am sure somebody else had gone back possibly during that next, maybe that summer or so forth. But evidently people didn't keep on going cause when I know when I moved back here in '82 it was like nobody had ever been there before.

**Wilbert:** You know the secret to that was there was a lower price ticket if you went upstairs.

**Charleana:** went upstairs. You know I didn't realize that.

**Wilbert:** You remember that. And what had happened was that we had a white person walk up there that was with us. I can't remember who it was.

**Charleana:** I don't either.

**Wilbert:** Bought the high price ticket for all of us and gave us the ticket and we went ahead. See the inducement to keep it segregated was it would have been a little bit cheaper to go upstairs.

**Gloria:** Do you remember planning this? Do you remember any of that? How did you plan it?

**Charleana:** I can't really remember. But I know we had to plan it. We must have been sort of planning it, cause Rev. James had to be a part of it. Cause I remember after we left the theater I think we went back to the church to St. Paul Church and we sort of talked about what had happened. I remember that and I remember when we left the church he was saying like go home and don't be out anyplace and

**Gloria:** How did you feel when you were in the theater?

**Charleana:** Kind of strange, scared a little bit. Wondering what was going to be the next move. Wondering if anybody was gonna hit anybody. If anybody was gonna get hurt. Wondering what was gonna happen when we walked out. That was the main thing. I was more concerned about what would happen after we left the theater.

**Gloria:** And what did?

**Charleana:** Cause I think we must have walked. I can kind of remember we must have walked from St. Paul Church and we all sort of bunched together and walked back to St. Paul Church. And every car that passed everybody was looking wondering who it was or if a rock was gonna be thrown or if somebody was gonna try to bump into you or so forth. It was kind of frightening. It was really a frightening experience.

**Gloria:** Then what was the next thing you did after that?

**Charleana:** That Renfro Café must have been the next thing after that. I can't

**Gloria:** That was a little different though?

**Charleana:** Yeah, that was a little different when we went to Renfro. I can't remember who, I know I went in Renfro's. I don't know, did you go in there Wilbert? I remember we had, that was suppose to have been a real organized thing because I remember Henry Thomas Simmons who was one of the persons. They had gone and I can't remember, maybe a couple of other

people, had gone upon the square and they were standing like across from the café when we went into the café and somebody else was like at the courthouse so they could see us when we went in and when we came out to make sure that if anything happen that they were gonna be able to notify somebody else to let 'em know what had happened to us. But I remember going in and we just sort of went in and sat down and nobody wanted to serve us.

**Wilbert:** Now see that's my recollection. I did not know whether or not there was more than one time at Renfro's.

**Charleana:** Yeah, cause see I, yeah we had gone and

**Wilbert:** I remember we were not served.

**Charleana:** Nobody served us the first time we went in Renfro's café. We just sort of went in and set down. We tried to place our orders but nobody ever served us. They just sort of like, I remember this lady coming from the back and she walked up by us and she sort of stood there and looked and then she turned around and went back and there wasn't very many other people in there as I can remember. And they just sort of stared at us and mumbled. But we were not served.

**Gloria:** How long were you there, do you remember? What did it feel like, how long were you there?

**Charleana:** Felt like a lifetime (laughing) We might have stayed in there 30 minutes. Because we sit down. Because they had these little booths and we sat down.

**Gloria:** Did anybody do anything to you besides look at you?

**Charleana:** I can't remember anybody doing anything.

**Wilbert:** My recollection is that do you remember they walked us around the corner, police came in and got us and walked us around the corner to the sheriff's station.

**Charleana:** No I don't. I don't.

**Gloria:** You don't remember being escorted to the police station?

**Charleana:** I can't remember going to the police station. But I remember when we walked out

**Wilbert:** They didn't arrest us but they

**Charleana:** They didn't arrest us. I know that.

**Wilbert:** They called my father and let him come get me.

**Charleana:** I really don't know what happened to us. I guess we probably walked back to the church because I know the other people who were sort of looking out for us we did the same thing like when we left the movie theater we always would go back to St. Paul Church. And sort of talk about what happened and you know if we should go back again and so forth. But I really couldn't remember exactly what happened because I just remember no body was arrested in anything we had ever done as far as being

**Gloria:** Put in jail

**Charleana:** put in jail. Except I remember when the person when they went to the swimming pool that somebody did get arrested at the swimming pool but it was one of the white workers who had gotten arrested.

**Gloria:** When you went to the swimming pool you went as an integrated group.

**Charleana:** Yeah, we went as an integrated group to the swimming pool. Cause we went to the swimming pool a lot of times. See we didn't go to the swimming pool one time. We went to the swimming pool a lot of times and when we went to the swimming pool then all the white kids that were in the pool they would just get out and they would stand and look and mumble wonder why were we there any you know they didn't think we should be there. I remember this white worker got hit by a rock and one of the white workers got arrested at the pool but I don't think he was arrested, I can't remember for what, but I am sure because he had gotten into the pool. He was there but they told him it was for some other reason. I forgot what it was now.

**Wilbert:** They really didn't detain him. They just took him down

**Charleana:** No, they just took him down and held him and somebody went and got him and that was it. He wasn't detained overnight or anything.

**Wilbert:** Do you remember the Kream Kup.

**Charleana:** Yeah, but I can't remember exactly because the first time I had gone to that Kream Kup that was like one of the major places where people went to get milkshakes and ice cream and they had sandwiches and stuff. They had a side window and it said colored. And that's where black people went to. And you did not go to that front window cause they refused to serve you. Cause I remember somebody had gone to that front window and they called the police on them. I remember that and they just asked them to leave. They said, did you know you weren't suppose to be up here and they weren't served. There had been some incidents there before and I think it was by people who did not know that they were not suppose to go to the front window. People who was visiting. And they didn't know the side window was there, black people.

**Gloria:** You went into the theater once. You went into Renfro's once. Did other people follow you?

**Charleana:** Yeah,

**Gloria:** How did the barriers actually get broken?

**Charleana:** Now I think other people did go into Renfro's after that because I remember well matter of fact I had gone into Renfro's after that and had been served. But I didn't want to eat the food because I remember they served us and they took the ketchup, we had french fries and burgers and they just took the ketchup and dumped it all on the french fries and stuff. And we just sort of set there and we paid for the food and then like everybody else in there got up and went out. All the other white people in there got up and went out but this was like, I don't know how much later we had gone into Renfro's, but that time I don't think it was anybody but just Laura and I.

**Gloria:** You ever go into Renfro's now?

**Charleana:** No,

**Gloria:** Why not?

**Charleana:** I don't know. I don't even think, I can't think of any reason why I want to go in there now. I can't think of

**Gloria:** Is it all white again?

**Charleana:** I am sure it is.

**Wilbert:** It was one of my father's #1 coffee drinking spots.

**Charleana:** Yeah, I was fixing say cause

**Wilbert:** He had to get the cane later on.

**Charleana:** Yeah,

**Wilbert:** It's kind of a political spot. It's kind of like a coffee club. A lot of people talk with father just hang around Renfro's.

**Charleana:** Yeah, they just sort of hang around Renfro's. Right now, they at McDonald's. But for a while I think if you had gone into Renfro's cause I think people did after that, go into Renfro's and there were no major incidents. But right now I don't think anybody would even



give Renfro's a thought. There are so many other places to go so. At that time Renfro's was like a major place. You know there were not a lot of cafes to go into.

**Gloria:** What did you do after all this? All this integrating you did in your hometown where everybody knew you. Then you were ready to move on to something else?

**Charleana:** Yeah, after it. Well, not necessary ready but then I didn't know what else to do in my hometown. But then I sort of, I went to the office in Holly Springs and I worked in the Holly Springs office and sort of worked on voter registration with people out of that office and then I went to, I left there to go to Jackson, Mississippi to work out of the office down there. I got to Jackson. I didn't even get to the office. I got to the bus station and there were people in the office in Atlanta that had started in the office in Holly Springs. (TAPE 12A) Laura and I were going to Jackson so they called and told them to direct us to Atlanta. To go to the office down there. So we got back on the bus and wound up in Atlanta. And then after going to Atlanta, when I first went I really didn't work in the office in Atlanta. I just went there and stayed for a while and people were getting organized and I went to Alabama and worked in Alabama in Hales County. Before I went to Hales County I worked a little bit in Lownes County and that 's where Stokely Carmichael was working at at that time.

**Gloria:** Were you working under Stokely?

**Charleana:** Yeap and I didn't stay there too long. I went on to a place in Alabama called Eutaw, Alabama and then from that I went on out into Hales County and I worked with Marian Nasif

**Wilbert:** The place in Alabama

**Charleana:** Hales County

**Wilbert:** What was the other town you said before that?

**Charleana:** Eutaw

**Wilbert:** Eutaw, Okay

**Charleana:** Eutaw. And I worked with Marian Nasif and another guy, I can't remember his name. Ron something. Ron Kaufmann in Alabama and we stayed with this black lady.

**Gloria:** How long were you there?

**Charleana:** For a winter. Almost a winter and it was a nightmare. I mean you couldn't get. You would walk from door to door trying to find out if people were registered to vote and people wouldn't talk to you. You couldn't get anything. You couldn't make any progress there. They were like about four or five families that you might get to talk to some of the people there. There

was one person and I don't remember the man's name. I guess he was a prominent person in that community there and he had a store and he would always let us come down to his store and he would tell us about which houses to go to and who to talk to and who we might make some progress with. But the first time I got, they had a meeting in Selma and everybody was suppose to go to the staff meeting in Selma. Were some way or another, I can't remember who I rode with, I got a ride to Selma and I left everything when I got to Selma cause there were people from the office in Atlanta was there and this young man, George Green, he was carrying some people back to Atlanta and I went back to Atlanta. I left all my clothes and everything Hales County, Alabama to never go back again. I never went back anymore. I didn't go to get anything. I didn't ever go back there again.

**Gloria:** Did you participate in the March in Selma?

**Charleana:** No I didn't. I wasn't there for the march in Selma. But I did participate in the March in Jackson.

**Gloria:** Tell us about the Jackson march. When was that. What happened there?

**Charleana:** You know what, that's a good question. I was a part of it but see what ever had taken place was already going on and I cannot remember what started that march in Jackson. All I know that we were people from the office, somebody had called the office in Holly Springs and they said they needed some people to come down and help do some things like help keep people organized and help get information out, take phone calls, make phone calls, so we were asked if we wanted to go and do that and I said yes. I say how about being a part of the march. They said no you can't do that. There is something else for you to do.

**Gloria:** Was this after you came back from Alabama?

**Charleana:** No, this was before I went to Alabama.

**Gloria:** So it was '65.

**Charleana:** Yes it was in '65. So when we got to Jackson and we wound up, there were so many other people who had gotten there to be a part of that march they didn't need us to man the telephones and get information out. So we became a part of the march and got put in jail immediately.

**Gloria:** Was it jail?

**Charleana:** Well they said jail. You were arrested but they didn't, there wasn't enough room in jail so we got put in the fairground. We got locked in the buildings and

**Gloria:** Who got the rest of them out?

**Charleana:** My God, it must have been about two or three thousand people. Cause all the jails were filled. All the buildings in the fairground were filled. They had these big hugh cattle buildings and all of them were filled.

**Gloria:** How long were you there?

**Charleana:** There were people who were there for longer than a week. But I was there for about four or five days because

**Gloria:** How did you get out?

**Charleana:** That is a good question. I've never known. Somebody bailed me out but I have been trying to find out all this time who bailed me out. I don't know. Because I know they would let some of the workers come in because they had people, a lot of people were getting sick. Cause there was concrete floor and people were like sleeping on the concrete floor. And people were getting sick. So every once in a while they would let a freedom worker come in and talk to people so they would come in and they would try to find out who was sick, who needed to be out first. So I happen to be one of those persons who had gotten sick and all I know one day the policeman came and said well you're needed outside of the door and I was scared as heck to go outside the door because beatings had been taking place, severe beatings and you know you were looking at. So finally I got up and I went and like everybody sort of tried to go with you and then they would separate you when you got near the door. I got to the door and this guy was saying well you're gonna get out. I says oh I am. They said yeah because you know you're sick and you're not, and I say what about the other people. They say well they will get out but then we're taking the people who're sick first and somebody's bailed you out. I say well who bailed me out, were did the bail money come from. Said somebody in New York. I never knew who. I never got an answer about who. So that's always been a secret. I got out and that was it. And then the other people followed cause there was some people who, I'm sure were there for two weeks before they got out.

**Gloria:** Were you going to SNCC meetings too at this time?

**Charleana:** Yeah, that was the Atlanta SNCC office because by that time I think everybody was sort of going to SNCC meetings at that time.

**Gloria:** And the office in Jackson was at a SNCC office or a COFO office?

**Charleana:** It was a SNCC office.

**Gloria:** COFO had kind of what?

**Charleana:** Kind of phased out cause see those same people were the people who were in SNCC at that time.

**Gloria:** Pretty much?

**Charleana:** Yeah, pretty much those same people who were in SNCC they were in COFO.

**Gloria:** The original COFO was a coalition?

**Charleana:** Right, it was a coalition but it had sort of phased out at that time.

**Wilbert:** It was SNCC, COFO and who else

**Gloria:** NAACP

**Charleana:** Yeah, NAACP. Oh and SCLC. They were not in this area but

**Gloria:** SCLC, SNCC and CORE

**Wilbert:** Yeah

**Charleana:** Yeah, cause SCLC must have played a major part then because Andrew Young was a part of SCLC during that time. Cause I had gone to a seminar in Atlanta and it was sort of like a student conference during that time and it was sponsored by SCLC.

**Gloria:** Did you meet Andrew Young?

**Charleana:** I met Andrew Young, Martin Luther King, that was my first meeting of Martin Luther King.

**Gloria:** What did you think of them?

**Charleana:** They were very impressive. I just thought of them as being very impressive people and being brave people and being sort of down to earth people you know cause you would read about 'em in the paper and people would tell you about 'em and you thought about them like they were giants and then once you met them you just realized that they were just common people and you know just kind of nice to meet 'em and sit down and have a conversation and realize that they could talk to you on your level and you could talk to them on the same level and everybody, I think it was mainly because everybody had the same interest. And that was getting people registered to vote and trying to better people's lives because voter registration wasn't the only thing at that time because people sort of became social workers. Because you had people when you go to talk to them about voter registration then people would tell you well I got sick children I can't afford to carry them to the doctor. I got children that I can't feed. My children can't go to school because they don't have clothing and you just, you had all these problems then you try to get somebody to do something about it. That's how the clothing and food distribution came about.

**Gloria:** Yeah, that's where the clothing and food drive came from when you started knocking on the doors and way out in the rural of Marshall and Benton and people just staring at you and after a while they say wow these people are hungry and you're talking to them about voting.

**Charleana:** That's right. People needed food, they needed medical attention and they just needed attention period. The attention they couldn't get any other way because some of those people had gone to social service and they were always being refused.

**Gloria:** Is this what you found when you worked in Alabama? Did you run into this?

**Charleana:** Yeah, in all the rural. Cause see that was really a rural area in Alabama and you run into a lot of that. You know, I think that some time that's why people be so afraid to talk to you. Or open their doors or say very much of anything. Because they were more interested in what can you do for me? Can you get me any food? Can you get my children any clothing.? You know some time when you got beyond that point if they realize that you can do anything for 'em then they were willing to talk about voter registration and tell you about other people and how they were willing to try to become registered and so forth and do things. Cause I lived at this lady's house and she had gone to the march in Selma and she had taken a severe beating wherever she was living on this man's property she had gotten thrown off and she was an older lady and she was raising two grandchildren and she was having a very hard time. And see, that's how we really got to know her is because something had done some things for her before we had gotten there. And she was receptive to us by letting us stay in house because she said she realized what could happen to you if you tried to do anything to better yourself. So.

**Gloria:** Was this SNCC in Alabama?

**Charleana:** Yeah, that was SNCC. Cause see everybody who was working in Alabama at that time came from the SNCC office or had some affiliation with the SNCC office in Atlanta.

**Gloria:** Do you think it was not very successful?

**Charleana:** Well not in the county where I was working at the time. I don't know what happened after I left because see after I left, I left the two people I was working there with Marian Nasif and Ron Kaufmann were left there. And then U. Z. Nunnally went there to work. Well U. Z. Nunnally was working in a different part of that community in the beginning but we just didn't have very much contact cause that was, you couldn't get any place. It was just a rural place and you didn't have any transportation to get any place.

**Gloria:** What kind of things did you see happening at SNCC at that time? Do you want to talk about it?

**Charleana:** I saw SNCC sort of falling a part. Because they was sort of having, by the time I went to Atlanta, well after I left Alabama and I went back to Atlanta to the SNCC office, for the

first few months it wasn't too bad. They were doing okay. But then the black power struggle came in and then the struggle within SNCC started. I think it was the power struggle within SNCC started and people just sort of couldn't deal with certain things and people just sort of fell apart. The financial situation got to be a bad situation. Cause I remember going to that office. The financial situation had gotten so bad at one where people did not, were not being able to be paid and when you got ready to eat they had set up a kitchen at the office and the food was bought and cooked at the office and everybody was fed at the office because the financial situation had gotten so bad. And things were falling apart. They had taken on a group of people called the Atlanta Project People and they had sort of drifted into the SNCC office.

**Gloria:** Who were they?

**Charleana:** Well I can remember a person by the name of Barbara. She was a part of the Atlanta Project People. Another person who was already there and this person, she had worked for SNCC but she also worked with the Atlanta Project People and it was Faye Ballinee and Michael Simmons, Dwight Williams, and I don't know. There were a lot of people but these were just a few of the people because Michael Simmons he finally no longer worked for the Atlanta Project Group and he worked for SNCC and he was there when I left.

**Gloria:** What was the Atlanta Project People?

**Charleana:** They were suppose to work in a, they came there and their office was suppose to be in a neighborhood in Atlanta, an inner city neighborhood. They was suppose to work with the local residents in this neighborhood. And I don't know how they got organized. I really don't remember now. Because they really were never suppose to be a part of SNCC but what happened was they came there and they needed to use the facilities in the office. So, that's how they got into that office to become apart of it. And they sort of used more than they were suppose to use. They sort of used the finance. They sort of used things that didn't suppose to use and helped deplete the funds and I don't know it just got to be a struggle and I think it happened because well they would start saying well you know we all fighting for one cause. You know you can't separate us from the SNCC people and you can't keep us out of this office and it just became an office with a lot of struggle going on. And a lot of people who were disillusioned because they saw things falling apart. Financial situation had gotten bad and they had gotten a lot of people in that they had no control over and it just finally

**Wilbert:** You probably had a bunch of agent provocateurs and we just don't know it now?

**Charleana:** Right, well I think people felt like that the office had been infiltrated. I was kind of reluctant to say that but there were a lot of people who sat down and discussed this and they really felt that they had been infiltrated by the enemy but you couldn't always tell who these people were but you knew that they were some of the people who had come in later. And you didn't feel like it was people who were already there but some of them might have been.

**Gloria:** You know through all this time, I mean, whether you were particularly back in your hometown, do you have any like interaction with white folks in Tippah County while you were active in Civil Rights in '64 and '65. Did you have any specific incidents with any of them? Did they talk to you any kind of ways or do you remember any experiences that may have occurred between.

**Charleana:** Not personally, except there was always somebody saying well aren't you the person who're working with the civil rights people? Why did you, are you Charlie Hill's daughter? And I've sort of gotten known as just being Charlie Hill's daughter because they felt like he was an outspoken person and then we had a couple of crosses burned and thrown up into the yard.

**Gloria:** Of your house?

**Charleana:** Un huh and we had the mailbox had been blown up and crosses were burned at the mailbox. Now people did talk to daddy more than they did to me because they would tell him what was gonna happen to me if I didn't stop participating and they heard that I was the person who had something to do with these people and they weren't anything but trouble makers and didn't they have sense enough to know that there were not problems in the community. They didn't need these outsiders in and so forth. So that was, the only thing I can think of right now.

**Gloria:** What was your daddy's response to them? Do you know?

**Charleana:** Now what he said to them right at the time they were talking to him I don't know but he would always say that you know nobody's coming to start any trouble. I feel the trouble is already here (laughing). That was usually his response to things like that.

**Gloria:** He didn't try to get you to stop or anything?

**Charleana:** No he didn't try to get me to stop cause I think if he had then I probably wouldn't have gone on cause they would never, I think my mom a lot of time she would get scared for me to do certain things or go certain places. But she would just always say, be careful. You know what can happen. You just be careful. You know these people don't like what you're doing. They don't like what we're doing. So, be careful. Always let somebody know where you're going. How long you're gonna stay and so forth. But they never tried to discourage me or stop me.

**Gloria:** You feel they supported you?

**Charleana:** Yeah, they did support me. If they had not supported me I don't think I would have done all the things that I did and gone all the places that I've gone and talk to some of the people that I talked to and I am sure I wouldn't have gone in Dixie Theater.

**Gloria:** You think they're proud of you?

**Charleana:** Yeah, I know my daddy was. Mama was too. Cause see I think I did a lot of things he really enjoyed having me do. I really do. I think I did.

**Gloria:** Do you remember one cold night in 1964 (everybody laughs)?

**Charleana:** In the bathroom.

**Gloria:** You remember what?

**Charleana:** About you and Marjorie in the bathroom and using the bathroom behind the church and my daddy steps out with the shotgun because he said he heard somebody. Because they had to sort of guard places around because there was like the cross burning and the white people would ride up and down the road in front of people houses and stuff. Cause daddy and one of my first cousin's husband got their prize shotguns taken away from them and they never got them back.

**Gloria:** What do you mean? Who took them away?

**Charleana:** The people from the sheriff department, but I think that happened in '64 right after the burning of the church when the people stayed in the little store house and they were sort of like would set and watch because people would like ride up and down that road at night and that's when they burned some of the crosses and stuff and they would scream out and hallow niggers and talk about what they were gone do to the niggers and so forth and what they do to the nigger lovers and they knew these people were there. The Carpenters for Christmas were staying in this building so daddy and my cousin's husband would set there a kind of guard to see if anything was gonna happened and they would have their shotguns cause they wasn't gonna take any chance. And that's how this night, I can't remember the whole incidence, but people from the sheriff department did come on the scene and that's how they got their shotguns taken away from 'em. They said they had no right to be there with their shotguns. That was against the law for them to be sitting out with their shotguns see. They were saying you know we got to do something. You better keep these people away. We're not just gonna let them come here and do anything they want to do because nobody is bothering them. But they got their shotguns taken away and they never got them back. They didn't arrest them or carry 'em to jail or anything.

**Gloria:** You know when the civil rights workers, when Marjorie and I came and we lived in Holly Springs, but there was one night when I had to stay at your house. Do you remember that?

**Charleana:** Yeap (laughing)

**Gloria:** How do you feel about that?

**Charleana:** Well, I didn't mind you staying but it was the sleeping situation cause we had to sleep in the same bed together and I was kind of reluctant cause I felt like I had never slept in the



bed with a white person before. So I wasn't too sure about how you felt about sleeping in the bed with me, but I think I was more reluctant than you were. So, I was kind of hesitant to go to bed and be comfortable in the bed sleeping with a white woman in my house in Blue Mountain, Mississippi.

**Gloria:** Were you uncomfortable in the bed?

**Charleana:** Well I think after I got in the bed, after a while I wasn't uncomfortable. But in the very beginning the first thought of it I was just totally uncomfortable. I think after we had gone to bed I didn't feel too uncomfortable maybe for a couple of hours I might have. Cause I had to think about it and

**Gloria:** What were you nervous about?

**Charleana:** I don't know. I think I was just more nervous about having a white woman have to sleep in the bed with me. I think that was just the whole thing.

**Gloria:** Did you think that was dangerous or something?

**Charleana:** Well, I don't think I thought so much of the danger of it because I always kind of felt safe at home. But I don't know. It was just an experience that I had never had before, never really had given it any thought and it was just a totally different experience from anything else I had had before you know. (laughing)

**Gloria:** Or since?

**Charleana:** Or since. (both laughing)

**Gloria:** Yeah, you know I felt like I was putting you in danger by being there that night in your house. And that was kind of what made me nervous. That I was there and what if your house got burned down the next day because someone found out that I slept there.

**Charleana:** I might have had some of those kinds of thoughts but not too much.

**Gloria:** You felt safe?

**Charleana:** Yeah, cause I felt relatively safe. Cause I kind of always felt safe if I was at home.

**Gloria:** You never felt somebody would try to come there and burn that house down cause you were so active, your father was so active?

**Charleana:** Well, no not really because I just always felt that it was somebody there at home most of the time. If somebody came around somebody was gonna know. Cause daddy was just,

he was always on guard. Before that he was just sort of always, if a noise was made or whatever was made if somebody came around somebody always kind of knew.

**Gloria:** See this is what I was wondering. How did they not know that the church was being burned until it was almost to the ground? No one was guarding at all.

**Charleana:** You know I think, well see there wasn't any guarding of the church before that. Before that there was really very little guarding, well there had been some.

**Gloria:** Well he did that night.

**Charleana:** There had been some, but I just think after that night everybody was kind of exhausted. I just think everybody was kind of exhausted after that night. And you know I think everybody thought after there was so many people there and everything had turned out so well during the speaking and everything and I think everybody was just overwhelmed at the speaking of Fannie Lou Hamer and seeing all these people there until I really don't think very many people thought anything about whether the church would be burned or there would be any incidence to happen after that.

**Gloria:** They sort of let their guard down.

**Charleana:** Yeah, they sort of let their guard down after that because I know before that they had guarded the church cause daddy had stood at the church and some of the other neighbors had guarded the church and matter of fact that little store building and all up around the neighborhood period. Because I don't think, not all the time people thought people who were participating that weren't participating. So, you know, they sort of kind of guarded the neighborhood. But I just think people were so exhausted after that speaking engagement. Cause it was kind of late when

**Gloria:** It was a late night.

**Charleana:** Yeah, it was very late night because I don't know the actual speaking cause other people got up and talked because there were some other people who talked to. And it must have been about 12 o'clock or so when people left that church. It might have been after 12. Cause we had to clean up so it was really late when we left there and there were a lot of other people who stood around and sort of talked about what had taken place and so forth and I think everybody was just so exhausted.

**Gloria:** So it had to be between midnight and 3 or 4 a.m.

**Charleana:** Yeah, I figure between midnight and 4 a.m. Cause see people in the country you know, somebody must just have gotten up and realized what had happened. I just cannot remember right now who the first person was that told us or who the first person was that saw it.

And Amos didn't remember that either?

**Gloria:** No

**Charleana:** You know, that's really something. And I've heard it discussed before now and I knew. I've just sort of forgotten.

**Gloria:** Who would have been closer to the church then?

**Charleana:** My relatives across the street. My aunt and her daughter and family. I'm gonna ask here cause she probably remembers. Cause they probably remember. And see all those people would get up so early in the morning cause people would go to the field and so forth. Well they'd just get up early anyway cause that's what they were use to. So, it might have been some of them. I'm gonna ask her cause she might remember.

**Gloria:** You have anything else you want to say?

**Charleana:** No, not right now. I can't think of anything. I know there must be a lot of other things, but. I can remember one incidence, I went to Washington. Did you go to Washington when we went as lobbyist? And that was in the winter time. I do remember this.

**Gloria:** Sammie Lee went to Washington and he didn't tell about that.

**Charleana:** Sammie Lee went and his mother went

**Gloria:** What was that for? Cause I couldn't

**Charleana:** We went as lobbyist. It must have had to do with the Fannie Lou Hamer situation and getting her on that ballot. Cause I remember we went to congressmen and that's what they talked about.

**Gloria:** It was a challenge. Was it August for the challenge?

**Charleana:** No we went in the winter time. We must have. (OTHER SIDE) I don't know I can just remember it was in the winter time. It was cold because it was snow and we went from the office in Holly Springs and we went in cars. And Marjorie went. Because she drove her little bug. Yes, she knows because she drove her little car and Sammie Lee's mother rode in that little Volkswagen. I remember that cause she had a hard time. She was determined that she was gonna go. She wanted to be a part. She rode all the way from Holly Springs to Washington, DC in that Volkswagen.

**Gloria:** What did ya'll do when you got there?

**Charleana:** See there were many other people there. There were people from all over the State of Mississippi there and people got put in groups and you went to congress and a lot of people went to justice department. People went to, they went to all branches of government. They went as lobbyist an then they went and they talked to the congressmen and so forth.

**Gloria:** Was it for the voting rights act?

**Charleana:** It might have been for the voting rights act. I cannot remember.

**Gloria:** I remember going myself. I was coming from Massachusetts. I remember visiting my congressman and Speaker of the House who was from Massachusetts at that time.

**Charleana:** Cause I remember going. Cause there must have been

**Gloria:** And you had cards and letters that you sent to them too?

**Charleana:** Un huh. Yeah, cause I remember we had signatures too and we had letters and we had stacks. Cause when I got there I was put with a group of people. I didn't know anybody in this group. I knew nobody with this group of people that I was with and I can't remember who was the, cause whoever, it was a white worker who led this group of people and he was from I believe Clarksdale or somewhere in that area and I was with that group of people cause we visited the congress and we visited the justice department and I can't remember where else. But we were there for like a week. We were there for I know a week. Cause I stayed with a lady and I think Sammie Lee stayed with this same woman and his mother did too and her name was Virginia Brown. Cause when I went back in '65 I stayed with this same person cause I had kept in contact with her.

**Gloria:** Well when do you think is our first trip to Washington?

**Charleana:** That was the first trip to Washington.

**Gloria:** Was it in the winter of '65?

**Charleana:** Yeah, it was. Yeah, it was in the winter of '65 cause I was still in school. Cause I took a week out of school to go. No, well it couldn't have been in the winter of '65. It had to be in the winter before '65 because I graduated in May of '65. I sure did. I graduated in May of '65 and I was still in school cause I remember that was one of the things that Mr. Spight had gotten repercussions about cause I took that week out of school to go to Washington. I was the only person--I know somebody else who went.

**Gloria:** So you graduated in May of '65?

**Charleana:** Un huh

**Gloria:** So it was between January and May. It was in that period cause I remember also going when I went from my house, from home.

**Charleana:** Because I know somebody else went. Georgia Mae's sister, Ada Faye went too. It was a lot of people from Tippah County went. And see we went from Tippah County to Marshall County and then there was a lot of people from Marshall County. Cause there must have been about five cars who went at the same time we went and there were people who had gone ahead of us. There were a lot of people.

**Gloria:** I want to guess it was the voting rights act.

**Charleana:** It must have been. I have been trying to remember exactly what we went for. I remember going.

**Gloria:** It seems you remember the process a whole lot and what you did.

**Charleana:** I can remember meeting some people that I didn't, I remember meeting a guy from Kentucky named Scott McNeill and he worked with, I guess, some SNCC people in Kentucky. And I remember meeting him and his name was Scott McNeill and I heard from him like months later and he was still in Kentucky and I use to heard from him like some years later and then I just sort of didn't hear from him anymore. I don't know I met some other people. I can't remember names right now. But that was just the one person I remember name stuck in my mind because then I continued to hear from him. But I remember going. I remember some of the things that happened. I remember the snow and I remember how cold it was.

**Gloria:** Was it all worth it?

**Charleana:** I felt it was all worth it. I think it was all worth it. I think any coming together at that time was all worth it because see this was something that black people had not been use to is becoming organized in any manner and getting together and realizing that they could make any difference and then I think the numbers, everybody would look and see the numbers, and I think the numbers would make a lot of difference in how they felt and whether felt they could make a difference. And I felt it was all worth it. Cause if it was for the voting rights act we did get it. And I think just being there, being there in numbers made a difference. Just showing up and being there. Cause I don't think white people ever thought black people could get together in numbers. And I think that's one of the problems now. Cause between that time and now they seem to have a problem getting together in numbers except when the Million Man March came about. And I don't know, you know. That was

**Gloria:** Do you know anybody that went to the Million Man March?

**Charleana:** No, not any body personally. I don't know.

**Gloria:** What do you think of it?

**Charleana:** Well I thought it was good. I thought it was something positive. And I was just surprised that they did get that many people that anybody who ever the person was could get that many people interested in one cause of any cause to get them together to go to Washington or wherever in 1995. Cause there is a lot of problems but I think people now sort of like they were in the 60's cause people in the 60's I think one thing that happened to them they realized whatever could happen to one could happen to the next person. Whatever you had you could loose it. And if they stayed on somebody's place and they did something the person didn't like they would have to get off anyway. And so, now I feel like a lot of people are jobless. Education level is going down for black people. Kids are not being able to get in school. Grants are being cut. Money is not there. You can't afford to send them and there is a lot of people out of jobs. There is a lot of crime among blacks. And I think now there is a lot of people who would like to know what, looking for answers. To try to do something about it because there is so much crime among black people in black communities and so many people are afraid to live in their own communities. And that's always been one of the safest places for black people, in their own communities. But now it's not because you are afraid of some of your own people. I think they are seeking answers just like they were in the 60's. They were seeking answers in the 60's. Wondering what could they do and how could somebody else help 'em. But now I think they realize the helps gonna have to come from within themselves. They are gonna have to find their own answers. So that's one reason why I think the Million Man March was good. Whether anything positive come out of it or not I think there probably been a lot of positive things on the individual level that have come out of it cause I think it changed a lot of people's minds by just being there. And I think it changed some other people's minds who wasn't there to realize that they could organize and maybe something can be done. So I just think it was a fantastic thing to have happen in 1995. It's a start. You know cause they going to have to start some place.

**Gloria:** Thank you ma'am.

**Charleana:** You are quite welcome. Now let me go and maybe.....