

Oral History Interview: Carter Heyward

Interviewee: Carter Heyward

Interviewer: Heather White

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Heather W. This is Heather White, and I am interviewing Carter Heyward. And I'm going to start by just asking you to say where you grew up, where you were born and when that was.

Carter H. I was born on August 22, 1945 in Charlotte, North Carolina, and my parents moved with me—I was their first child—in the mountains of North Carolina when I was two. They were fleeing a polio epidemic that was hitting the cities, and so they moved to Hendersonville. And I was in Hendersonville from age two to about nine, when we went to Asheville, and then eventually, two or three years later, wound up in Charlotte again. My father was a salesman for Esso, later Exxon, and my mother was a homemaker. And as I said, I was the first of three children. But my siblings didn't come along until I was six and seven years old.

The reason I'm back in North Carolina now is that I believe those years between ages two and nine or so were as formative as any other period of my life to this day because there's something about being an only child for half of that time, and then a child for the whole time that really helped me become very vulnerable, in the best sense of that word, to being in the mountains, and being on the land, and being out of doors, and loving

waterfalls and the nature around me, and all of this just got into my soul.
And I had been wanting for decades to get back there somehow.

Heather W. So you grew up between Charlotte and then parts of western North Carolina.

Carter H. Yeah, right.

Heather W. There's a lot of mountains. There's a lot of land there.

Carter H. A lot of mountains, and just waterfalls, and rivers, and just, for me, as a child, as a three-year-old, and a six-year-old, and an eight-year-old, it was just magical. I just remember most of my very best times being out of doors with human playmates, but also with animals and just loving it.

Heather W. Amazing. And what were the congregations—your parents were involved in Episcopal churches?

Carter H. No. Well, yes. My father, the Heyward side of the family, originally from South Carolina, had been Episcopalians from practically the time of the settlers on, but there had been some kind of falling out with the Episcopal church and my particular father's father's grandparents' family, and they had become Presbyterians. So my father was a Presbyterian.

My mother was from a Methodist family, where both of her grandparents were Methodist ministers. And so I had been baptized in a United Methodist Church in Charlotte when I was a baby. And when they went to Hendersonville with me when I was two, they said they went to the Episcopal church because they loved the ivy on the church, and they just

thought it was a beautiful little mountain church. And neither one of them was obviously at all wed to a denomination, and they just thought it was a sweet church. So that's how we got into the Episcopal church.

Heather W. Oh, funny.

Carter H. So I consider myself almost a cradle Episcopalian because I don't remember anything, obviously, before that. But I wasn't technically born an Episcopalian.

Heather W. And it also sounds like the theology wasn't the most important thing for your parents as they were...

Carter H. Not at all, no. I guess the ivy was, but...

Heather W. So what did it mean for them to be raising, or what was your sense of what it meant to be Episcopalian or to be Christian as you were growing up?

Carter H. I often describe my family as a somewhat moderate family both politically and theologically. There was nothing fundamentalist about my parents. Never, ever was the Bible used in any kind of a literal sense, or much less as kind of a bludgeon to beat people up with or to justify anything, really. But we would have family prayer.

And the Episcopal church, like most denominations, Protestant denominations, has always had some little guide book. I think it was called "Forward Day by Day," where there'd be a passage from scripture and a little reading and a little prayer. And I remember we would have these family prayers at breakfast almost every morning for many, many years,

and my mother or my father, and later me, as I got to where I could read, would read the devotion and we would hold hands and have a blessing for the meal. So obviously my parents felt that spirituality was important and that the Christian faith was important, but not in a rigid sense. I'm very appreciative to my parents.

And church, I loved to go to church, but it was not so much for anything that was being said there as for the beauty of it. I mean, I guess I'm my parents' kid. I liked the ivy. I also liked the stained glass windows. I liked the quietness in the church. The priest, Mister...what was his name? Hughes, I think. He seemed to me to be a very old man, but he was probably 40. But he was a very sweet guy, and he was very nice to me as a little kid. So it was just a very comfortable, pretty place to be.

And I remember Jesus, you know, thinking that Jesus really must have been wonderful. Very literally I think I said this was God's son and God was a father, and they were both really wonderful. And I also was learning, and somehow—and I don't know that I was learning this through the church, but I certainly wasn't learning anything contrary through the church—was that God...I think it was very clear to me as a child that God was present in nature and present in the crayfish, and the black snake, and the apple tree, so that God—this would be God the spirit, of course—but that God was...that was really, really God.

And I really felt very, very happy that God was kind of everywhere. So I didn't think God was just in the church. And even though I believed that

God was a father and the—excuse me—I’m not sure I ever...I don’t remember any connection to God being Jesus, and of course the trinity meant nothing to me at the time. So I was growing up as a little Episcopalian, but kind of loosely defined, pretty liberal to moderate in my openness.

Oh, the other thing I remember is that God—and my parents reinforced this as I got older and we talked about it—I was just so horrified about what was happening to, in quotes, “colored people” in our town and all around us, and I somehow knew that this was not what God wanted. And I would go to my parents and say this is not what God wants. Why is this happening? Why does Bessie have to live in that terrible little house on the other side of town?

Bessie was our maid. When we lived in this really nice house. And we lived in a very small middle class house. My family was absolutely not wealthy. But Bessie was a maid, and therefore she lived in the colored part of town. And I was very bothered by all of this. And what I remember, and what my parents said they remember, too, is me asking them these questions and then them telling me that I was right, this was not God’s will, this was not the way it was supposed to be, but that they didn’t think there was anything we could do to change it.

And that, of course, is something I would have to grow beyond as I got older. And they did, too, actually, in the course of their lives. But that was

kind of the way it was as a child. Not God's will, it was wrong, but there it is.

Heather W. Yeah. And were the boundaries in your town, like were you ever able to go and see where the...?

Carter H. I would go with my father when we would take Bessie home. But then something—and this is something I've written about, so I may be saying things that you already know, or maybe you don't. But one of the saddest, most traumatic, but also fascinatingly wonderful learnings for me as a kid was when I was about five my best friend was a little girl named Elliott—interesting both of us having androgynous names. Could have been two little boys, but we were two little girls.

And Elliott and I were jumping rope and we got into the rhythm “Eenie, meenie, miney, moe, catch a Nigger by its toe,” and we did that in front of Bessie, and Bessie left—went into the house, got her coat, left and never came back again. Never saw her again. And I had to explain to my mother that Bessie had just gone. And she said, well, what happened? And I told her.

And so my mother and father told me that that was absolutely a terrible thing for me to have said, and that that's so hurtful, and that the word Nigger was just a horrifically awful word that we should never, ever use, and it's what people call black colored people, but it's so nasty and so hurtful, and never, ever to say that again. And I was just mortified. And I don't know...my mother told me decades later that she and my father had

tried to talk Bessie into coming back and about how sorry I was, but Bessie wouldn't come back. And so that was a consciousness raising moment for me.

Heather W. Yeah. And that part of your earliest memories around race growing up was that these were sharp lines.

Carter H. Sharp lines, and there was something just very hurtful and awful in the midst of it all. And it shouldn't be this way, it is not God's will. I had the power within me to hurt somebody. That's another really important learning. I can do something that was really hurtful to somebody, and I didn't mean to. I mean, I didn't know what it was. And my parents had never used that word, and to this day I don't know where I had heard that. But obviously I heard it in the rhyme. But where I heard the rhyme I don't know.

Because obviously my mother would not have taught me such a thing because...I mean, they were...our entire family was racist in the 1940s and '50s in the way all Southern white people were. But in a more kind of, in quotes, "refined" class-based sense. I mean, the very fact that my parents would have said we don't use that kind of language. Some people do, but we don't. That's, of course, some white people are, in quote, better educated and know better, and others don't. So there was always these assumptions of class as well as race going on. You know what I mean?

Heather W. Yeah, I do. And I'm also—when would it have been that the schools in your town would have been de—

Carter H. Integrated?

Heather W. Integrated.

Carter H. Well, a long time later. That would have—when this happened, that incident with Bessie happened about 1950. And desegregation...I graduated from high school in 1963 in Charlotte, and we were still not integrated. And schools in Charlotte didn't integrate until the late '60s, a long time after the 1954 ruling, the Supreme Court. And in fact the schools in Brevard, where I live now, were among the first integrated in the state of North Carolina, and that was 1962. So even that was eight years later.

Heather W. Later at school.

Carter H. Yeah. So I never went...I never had black classmates or teachers in any public school I ever went to, and I was always in public schools. And in fact I went to college in 1963 and there was no black person in college, Randolph-Macon Women's College, until I was a junior, and one black girl came to be a freshman. If you can imagine one African American coming alone into this all white girls school. Amazing.

Heather W. Amazing, yeah.

Carter H. Totally amazing.

Heather W. Yeah. I'm trying to think of—one other question that I've been asking is when you were growing up, do you have a memory of sexuality—and I'm

using broad kind of terms more specifically—where you heard or were learning about that?

Carter H. Oh, yes.

Heather W. Was there sexuality education—

Carter H. Yes.

Heather W. —or were there other ways that—

Carter H. Well, no we—

Heather W. —there were boundaries and dangers?

Carter H. Going back to race and really interesting. And another troubling incident. In fact, these were my two troubling race incidents when I was a kid. At about that same time, and I think I was a little bit older, maybe I was six. Well, I'm not even sure which came first. But I think the second incident with the yard man, Jeff, who was black.

And he used to bring me prizes out of Cracker Jack boxes for me to let him touch me and for me to touch him, to touch his penis and for him to put his hands in my shorts or whatever I had on out in the garage. And I didn't know, you know, he said this is just our little secret and you can't tell your parents, but, you know, we'll just do this. And he would come like once a week and do the yard work and then we would have this—I don't know how long this went on. I suppose at least several months.

And the way it all came out was I mentioned it to my mother once when I was taking a bath and she reached out to help me bathe or something, and

I said oh, that's what Jeff does to me. And needless to say, the shit hit the fan. And so she called my father, and the next thing I knew my father and the police chief had arrived, with Jeff in tow. And I remember watching through the door as the police chief shot at him. Didn't shoot him, didn't hurt him, but made him run as they were shooting at him and yelling if you ever come back there'll be one dead Nigger in this town. So that was, needless to say, very traumatic for me. But what was interesting, Heather, is that the trauma for me in that was what happened to Jeff, not what happened to me.

Heather W. Yeah.

Carter H. Because what happened to me, I guess I knew it was wrong or something, because it was a secret and because nobody was supposed to talk about it. Certainly I was not hurt. I mean, I was not raped. I was not... I was abused. This was clearly something that ought not to have happened and that could not be tolerated. I mean, you just don't do that to children. But I had not been physically hurt.

And the emotional repercussions of it I think certainly had to do with my horror at Jeff being shot at, because I actually liked Jeff. I was like why was this happening. And then my parents didn't want to talk about it, so they said, look, it'll be better if we never, ever say anything more about this. And so I didn't talk about it, except that I had an imaginary playmate and I would talk to her about it.

And my imaginary playmate was a black girl named Sophie Couch. And Sophie Couch and I would discuss this. And then I had another couple, like Elliott, my friend, the jump roping friend, so I would tell my friends about it. But I didn't tell any adults about this for the longest time. And I don't know who my parents, if anybody, were telling.

But certainly at that point I must have absorbed a lesson that there was really something the matter with being touched there by anybody because nobody was helping me understand what was really the matter with this. And later, much later, when I came out as a lesbian to my parents, when I was 35 or whenever it was, their immediate response was they thought this was because of Jeff.

Heather W. Wow. So that was when that incident came back up.

Carter H. That's right.

Heather W. Could be spoken again.

Carter H. Yeah. Isn't that interesting? And I said oh no, I think it has nothing whatsoever to do with this. And then we had many, many, many discussions about me being lesbian, and when I had first had feelings for girls and women. And in fact had I been growing up a little bit later on our journeys, I would have been talking more about being bisexual or being whatever. I mean, I did then and still do experience a very sort of fluid sexuality, and sort of inclusive of many different kinds of dynamics.

But when I was trying to make sense of my own sexuality when I was a younger woman I was making sense of it primarily as lesbian, and was trying to help my parents understand what that meant. And eventually they did, so they came along. But like so many of my friends' parents, it took a while, and it took us being patient with them, and I suppose them being patient with us, too.

Heather W. Right. Right. Well, and it seems like one question to ask about all of that is also did you...was it named that you were white? Were you conscious of being white—

Carter H. As a—

Heather W. Or was it, were you conscious of not having a... Or did you think of yourself as having a race and that race being white?

Carter H. Yes. Yes. You know, I think being white was... I think it was a very important part of our identity as a family and as a society, the church being a white church, and schools being white, and everybody, everything I knew was kind of white except the servants who would come. And... Yeah, I mean, I think that's a good question, but I believe that I was very conscious of being white from very early childhood on. Even in simply asking that question about why did Bessie...why did...

And having a black imaginary playmate, for some reason that was very important to me. And I think probably one of the reasons it was important to me was because Bessie had children, for example, and we couldn't play

together. And occasionally I would see them when we would take her home, but I didn't know them, really, and so there was no mingling of races. This was...we were far beyond plantation culture in the sense that we weren't all living together, so in the same...where blacks and white three-year-olds would have played together, at least in some situations. That was not happening in my life. So I think I wanted to be in touch with black people, and hence created my imaginary playmate.

Heather W. Mm-hmm. Yeah. One of the things that I've thought about is when did I first realize that I was white. When was that, like, a sense that I could name.

Carter H. And do you know when that was?

Heather W. Oh, it was when I was probably in kindergarten. And I went to an integrated kindergarten so, I mean...

Carter H. How old are you?

Heather W. I was born in '74.

Carter H. Uh-huh

Heather W. So that would have been in Raleigh in the early '80s. So I had playmates and teachers who were both white and black, and I remember a young black, a black girl who was one of my playmates calling me and naming me as white, like I was a white girl. And that was kind of one of those moments. It was like oh, that's the name, right? But yeah. But it's also

notable that it was in kind of an experience with someone of a different race, right? Began to think and to name myself as a person who had a race.

Carter H. Interesting.

Heather W. Yeah. And so I think, let me fast forward a little bit to going to college. And remind me again where you went to school.

Carter H. Randolph-Macon Women's College.

Heather W. Randolph-Macon, right.

Carter H. In Lynchburg.

Heather W. Yes. I have been to Lynchburg.

Carter H. Notorious Lynchburg.

Heather W. Yes. Just a few...not too far away from the future Moral Majority leader.

Carter H. That's exactly right. And in fact he was there when I—I mean, when I went to Randolph-Macon, Jerry Falwell was the pastor of Thomas Road Baptist Church, but it was before there was any Liberty University or any bigger organization of any kind attached to him. He was just a very fundamentalist, right wing demagogue at the time and he would rant against Randolph-Macon girls because we were just all seen as way too liberal. Even in religion. Even studying religion was taboo because we were studying Biblical criticism and whatever.

And Lynchburg was notorious for its very racist newspaper. I became very involved in college with civil rights movement in Lynchburg itself, and

marches, and sit-ins and various things. And that was a great part of my college years, actually. And so we were always bumping up against Mr. Falwell. And little did we know that ten years later he would become the head, figurehead of the Moral Majority.

Heather W. Mm-hmm. And so remind me again what years that would have been when you were—

Carter H. '63 to '67.

Heather W. To '67. Oh, yeah, right before.

Carter H. Right. This was...just everything was bubbling to the surface. And I had not been to the March on Washington in '63. I was actually getting ready to go to college. It's when I was beginning. So I was moving up to Lynchburg from Charlotte instead of going to D.C. to the march. And I've always regretted that. I wish that I'd gone to the March on Washington. But didn't go.

But I just had a wonderful social, political and religious education at Randolph-Macon from white faculty members who were very, very socially minded and very adamant about teaching about civil rights and about social stratification, and sociology and, you know, teaching... I mean, it was just—I majored in religion and we spent half of our time reading people like Martin Luther King, and Malcolm X, and James Baldwin, and I mean, just...it was wonderful. And from there went right

to Union Seminary right out of college, and that continued, and even intensified, so...

Heather W. Were your parents supportive of your involvement in the civil rights movement?

Carter H. They absolutely were. They were. And it's funny because my father in particular, I think, would always describe himself as conservative and a Republican. And he really wasn't. I mean, by today's standards there's nothing conservative about him except he had some love of tradition and things being done sort of decently and in order, if you consider that conservative.

But he was a very open-minded person, and was very laid back about rules and mores. And my parents were fine with integration, and fine with Martin Luther King, the civil rights movement. They weren't involved in it themselves, but they were okay with that. Yeah.

Heather W. Yeah. And it also sounds like your involvement as a college student was something that—well, I should just ask. Do you remember making a choice about that when you were in college, that you would go to that meeting or what it was that—

Carter H. Yeah. Yeah, I did. And in relationship to other, to professors and other students. I mean, we were finding each other, and people whose values I was very inspired by, and then other Randolph-Macon students who shared these values. And I'm still in touch with quite a few of them, and

so we'll talk about these things from time to time, about how we were all going through the same kinds of things. And some of us were fortunate enough to have parents who were not fighting against us. Some had parents who were ahead of us, which I didn't. I mean, I was always a little bit ahead of my parents in terms of social awareness. I mean, they would say that, that they were sort of beginning to take their cues from me, and I was taking my cues from my professors and people who were ahead of me.

My roommate, my freshman roommate was a girl whose father was the president of the Davidson College at the time, and he was on the front lines of the civil rights movement at Davidson. And so she really had a lot of support. But then she was my roommate, so I was, from her I was very encouraged to be involved. So yeah, it was...

And yet when I look back I think there were like maybe 800 students altogether at Randolph-Macon and maybe 200 in each class, and out of our 200 there might have been 50 of us that were pretty liberal, pretty progressive in those days. And why was that? Well, I don't know. For a variety of reasons, there we were. And all of us were white, which is interesting. And out of those 50 I think 25 of us or so are still in touch, which is really great.

Heather W. And you were also all women.

Carter H. All women.

Heather W. What kind of futures did you and your cohort imagine? Was it odd to be thinking about careers, or were there expectations of marriage?

Carter H. Well, I don't think I thought much about it at the time. I was just loving being in college, and the courses, and the professors, and my friends. Sexually I was not active, which is interesting. I think some of my classmates were, as far as I know. These would have been some of the heterosexual girls, women, who would go off to Washington & Lee, or UVA or various places on weekends, and come back and sometimes talk about things they had done.

And I was kind of oblivious to all this. I think that I was certainly beginning to—in high school as well as college I was beginning to experience sexual feelings. In a very sort of like a bisexual way. I mean, I would have crushes on boys and girls, men and women, male professors and female professors, classmates. And I guess I know that I assumed that someday I probably would meet some man or boy and get married. I certainly had not met such a person all the way through college. I didn't miss it, really, and I didn't really envy people going off to fraternity parties and things.

I was a...I was just, I mean, I was really enjoying reading and working. I always had some kind of a campus job, waiting tables, or working in the library. And then we had our little civil rights movement going on. And I really enjoyed all those things. Plus I liked to hop on the bus and go to the movies with the other girls.

And so I didn't miss dating, and I wasn't thinking much about marriage at the time. And as senior year approached, several of my friends were getting married to their boyfriends. And I really wasn't sure what I was going to do. But two or my three religion professors had gone to Union Seminary and they really encouraged me to go check it out, so I went to check it out and decided ah yes, that's what I'll do next.

Heather W. Wow. So what was it like seeing New York for the first time?

Carter H. Well, I saw New York for the first time in between sophomore and junior years when I went with a friend of mine from Randolph-Macon to work at the Henry Street Settlement House on the Lower East Side.

Heather W. Oh, really?

Carter H. Yes. And I loved that. And we had a great time. And that summer I heard Martin Luther King preach at Riverside Church, and I heard Barbra Streisand sing in Central Park, and went to see "The Fantasticks" on off Broadway.

I do remember Lynn Hodge was my friend's name, and her father drove us up to New York, and I remember driving from the New Jersey Turnpike. We were headed into one of the tunnels. And I just remember looking up at the buildings, and never having seen such a thing in my entire life, and it was like oh my gosh, this is it. And once I got there, you know, it was just great. We had a good time working with the children in the, basically in the...

Heather W. In the settlement house?

Carter H. In the settlement house. And living there, and then going off and doing these fun kinds of cultural events and hearing people like King. So that was... And I went at that time up to Union Seminary to get a catalogue. I remember going up there. Because by then I was already aware that that was something I might do, so I'd obviously begun thinking about it, at least from my sophomore year on.

Heather W. Were you attending churches at that point, either in—especially in New York.

Carter H. I was. Well, Riverside, obviously.

Heather W. Riverside.

Carter H. And I'm sure the Cathedral of St. John the Divine. I didn't go to any one church. It would have been those big ones. It would have been Riverside and the church of...yeah, St. John the Divine. I don't remember going to any others at that point.

Heather W. Yeah. I'm trying to think. Was it...were you...so the settlement, the work in the settlement house was a program in and of itself or was it part of something else?

Carter H. It was a program in and of itself. It was something that enabled college students to come and spend a summer doing some kind of an internship with staff members there. And it was sponsored through the YWCA at Randolph-Macon where the head of the YWCA, Mildred [Hudgeons], was

a great social activist woman. And I had been working with the Y while I was at Randolph-Macon and she had said you really should go do this, you know, you'll have so many good experiences in every way.

Heather W. Wow.

Carter H. So it was great.

Heather W. That is great. That's really interesting. And that hooked you on New York and helped you decide. Were you thinking of other alternatives, or was that the thing you wanted to do?

Carter H. I really wanted... By the time I graduated from Randolph-Macon I knew where I was going, so I had applied to Union sometime during my senior year and got in. And Randolph-Macon had a remarkably fine religion department, so getting into the seminary was no problem at all. And going to the seminary was no problem because academically, once I got there, I was able to exempt most of my first year requirements because I had already taken them in college, because the professors at Randolph-Macon really were very...they were a good lot.

Heather W. Was that the M.Div. program or...?

Carter H. I went in originally—it changed to the M.Div. while I was there. It was a Bachelor of Divinity when I went, and they changed the B.D. to the M.Div. program in the next couple years. But I went, and my first year in seminary was '67-'68, which was the big year of the campus riots at

Columbia and throughout the nation, really. So that then begins a brand new chapter.

Heather W. Yeah.

Carter H. That '67-'68 year I always cite as one of the major years of my life. If I have to lift up a couple of time frames in my life as being especially significant, that first year in seminary would be one of them, because it was just, even though I had been to New York, and even though I had great professors at Randolph-Macon, and even though I was from a relatively accepting, not progressive, but open-minded household where my parents were supportive of me, still nothing quite prepared me for the shock of being in New York City, and particularly at a time of such unrest in the society and in the academic institutions.

And so, I mean, just think of what was—you know, the assassinations in '68 and all the chaos, the Vietnam War. We had not dealt much with the Vietnam War when I was at Randolph-Macon. And I remember vividly sitting in the Skeller, which was the snack bar for Randolph-Macon students, hearing my friend May Lawson, who was a great girl, I loved her, talk about the war in Vietnam. And I remember saying, what? What is that? And she then explained to us—this would have been like 1964 or '65—that there's this war happening over in Southeast Asia, and this seemed to be what it was about. And it was the first time I'd ever heard of Vietnam. I didn't know such a place existed until my friend May Lawson started talking about it.

And so I began thinking about this, of course, at Randolph-Macon, and I think a lot of us probably did, but we didn't do anything about it. But at Union, oh my gosh, I mean, it was the focus of why many people were there, particularly the guys. Many were there, instead of going to Vietnam they had gotten deferments and were in seminary.

Some were burning draft cards, which was just the most shocking thing I had about ever seen because some part of me had certainly bought into the patriotism, you've got to do what your country says you've got to do, and fighting for your country and serving your country is something that you just do if you have to. And it really was a consciousness shocker for me to have to deal with the fact that oh my gosh, these guys in seminary with me, they don't believe this, or they believe it in a different kind of way. So it was a real consciousness raising moment for me.

And then the racism, of course, the racism that was underneath the riots at Columbia, the anti-racism that was underneath the riots in Columbia University about Harlem and the gym that was being built, that was going to be built there in Morningside Park. All of that was so shocking to me, and so turbulent. And I wound up spending the first semester—stop me if you want me to go in another direction.

Heather W. Oh, keep going.

Carter H. I spent a weekend my first semester in seminary in the psychiatric ward of St. Luke's Hospital, which is up the street from Union Seminary and Columbia University, because I had just completely fallen apart. And the

reason—when I think back on why I had fallen apart, I actually think it had to do with my sexual confusion, just not even knowing what to do with myself sexually. Going beyond being gay or straight, it was like just simply being sexual at all, because most people were very sexually active in seminary, and I wasn't sure what to do. I just didn't know with whom to do what.

And I didn't have all—I mean, I was not getting...people weren't coming on to me and putting... I mean, I wasn't freaked out because people were coming on to me. I may have been freaked out that they weren't. But I don't even remember that. I just remember not knowing what to do with myself. I'm not sure I had ever even masturbated much, if at all. But I really did not know whether I was gay or straight or whatever else I might have been.

So I think there was sexual confusion, and I also think I was completely being blown away by the radicality of the seminary and by the draft dodging, and the card burning, and every day brought a new protest of some sort to the streets. And people, I think, in terms of consciousness, were so far ahead of me, both in terms of sexuality and general political awareness of the world around us that I was like...it really was, even though I had been to the Henry Street Settlement House, I still was like a newborn, in some ways, sort of coming to a new world.

And so I look upon that year, that '67-'68 year at Union Seminary as a very pivotal year. Later, when my partner of 32 years, Beverly Harrison,

who had at the time been—she was the Dean of Women at Union Seminary, and she had just gotten married that summer of '67, and she taught Christian ethics at Union, and she was the Dean of Women Students. And so I spent much time in her office trying to sort things out.

And later, when she left her husband and I...it was like 13 or 14 years later, and then she and I did, in fact, become partners, and she said to me, she said, you know—well, she said many things to me that are worth quoting—but she said she just remembers that when I wound up at [Clark Aid], the psychiatric unit, and she had to take me—she had to come visit me, of course, because there she was, the dean. And she said she got there like the day before Thanksgiving, and she said what can I bring you, what can I do for you? And I said I just need to have my books because I have this exam in Jeremiah on Monday or something and I need to study.

And so she went back and she got me my books. But then she came back to see me the following day and she said you were just going to town on Jeremiah. And she said I thought it was really interesting that here you were in the psychiatric ward totally compos mentis, totally focused, wanting to study the prophets, looking at Jeremiah, of all people, you know, for some clue as to what's going on in the world. And she said you were perfectly okay.

And she said I always said to you—and when my parents called her to talk to her about what was going on with me, Bev said to them, said, you know, the only thing the matter with Carter is that she's just confused.

She's totally fine, but she just doesn't realize how fine she is. She doesn't realize that what she's seeing and what she's thinking about is absolutely the right thing to be seeing and thinking about, and her questions are just basic human questions, and there's nothing the matter with her. And that was extremely, of course, gratifying to my parents, and then to me, as the truth began to set in.

So I came out of St. Luke's and did fine on my Jeremiah paper. And then that was the...then the first semester came to an end, and the next semester came, and the next semester was when all hell broke loose at the university. And I participated in that. And one of my faculty members at the time was C. Eric Lincoln, the sociologist of religion who's African American. And I just loved him. He was a great professor. And he got us organized in his class to go over and sit in in one of the buildings at Columbia University.

So we all did, and we all got arrested together with C. Eric Lincoln. And so I was...we were able to call somebody from jail, and I called my parents from jail down in North Carolina. And they, then, of course were totally confounded by what was happening up there. And, of course, they were getting all the news over the television of these riots, these student riots. And so my father said he called our minister, the priest at the Episcopal church in Charlotte, to say what am I supposed to do, Moultrie? He said, Carter has gotten herself arrested at the Columbia riots. And

much to my father's astonishment, Moultrie Moore said oh, that is wonderful. I am so proud of her.

And Daddy said later to me, he said, you know, that was the most healing thing Moultrie Moore could say, because your mother and I didn't know what to make of all of this, and clearly somebody that we really loved and respected, namely the parish priest, thought that whatever you had done was just great. So that was the kind of... It was like so much was happening. So very much was happening.

And indeed, the administration, like Beverly Harrison and others at Union, thought we were all fine. They didn't mind that we had gotten arrested, and they got us out, and charges were not filed against any of us unless... There were a few people, I think, who were arrested over time who had really trashed buildings and whatever. But those of us who had simply been sitting in were not kept. But that brought that academic year to an end.

And in the meantime I had gone to Charlotte—well, after that I went to Charlotte to visit my parents and I met a man who had become the assistant to the rector at that same parish, and... Well, he and I—this would be a book in itself—he and I fell in love with each other, but it was not to be. Probably largely because he was gay and I didn't have a clue. And I thought, as so often happens when women fall for gay men, you think you're nuts, and you're doing something wrong. And he did not tell me. And I was just totally brokenhearted by that whole relationship.

He and I, to this day, are very good friends. He's in Australia. He was an Australian priest who was over for two years, and he wound up going back to Australia and lived for the rest of his life as a gay man. And I went back to Union Seminary after a year of working in the parish with him and wound up joining a women's group in 1970, and fell in love with my first woman lover, who was a member of the same consciousness raising group.

And that consciousness raising group still meets to this day. And every other year. And Susan Savell, the woman and I who fell in love with each other, are still in the consciousness raising group. We have long since not been lovers, but we're both in it, and there are five other women who are still in it, and then others have died. But anyhow, that continues to be a great source of amazement. And it's fun to have seven of us get together and we talk about these days with each other.

Heather W. Wow. And was it meeting at Union or was it—

Carter H. At Union. It was women who were in, either some faculty, like Bev Harrison wound up being in it, and several other women faculty, and then wives of male faculty, and then a bunch of students, both graduate students, Ph.D. students and M.Div. students like I was at the time, and Susan Savell was. And there were three or four different women's groups that had formed. This would have been...I guess they even formed... I was gone. I was out for two years. I was out from '68 to '70, and while I was gone the first women's groups formed around the early women's

movement, the early second wave of the women's movement, which had come to Union in my absence, so I came back to it. Having left during the, sort of the height of the Vietnam War resistance, and the campus riots, by the time I got back the women's movement had really come to the forefront, which was really exciting. So I certainly threw myself into that.

And it was in that context that... By 1971, a year after I had been in that CR group, I was still...I still thought that I was in love with David Conley, my Australian friend who had gone back, and I still did not know what was going on there. But I also had begun having this relationship with Susan, so what did I know, other than that I happened to have a polymorphously perverse sexuality all over the place.

And David contacted me. In those days contacting somebody on the other side of the world was no easy thing. But he called me, or maybe—yeah, he called me and said I hope you'll think about coming to Australia and spending a year or two so that we can try our relationship. Well, I was thrilled, and so first I said yes and I got myself a passport and a visa, and talked to my women's group about it. They thought I was nuts. Talked to my therapist about it. He thought I was nuts. Talked to my parents about it. They thought I was nuts. Talked to Bev Harrison about it, the Dean of Students. She thought I was nuts. But I was still going to go over to Australia to see David.

And for some reason, I guess these people, their opinions and their counsel to me had sunk in more than I realized, because a couple weeks before I

was actually due to leave I called him—and he says he remembers this phone call vividly—and said I’ve decided not to come. And he said he was so shocked when I said that, and he said but not nearly as shocked as he was when I said I’ve decided I’m going to stay here and seek ordination to the priesthood. And I remember saying that and thinking what have I just said? Because I had been saying to everybody for a couple years I’m not interested in ordination, not for myself.

I joined the movement for ordination of women in 1970, which is really when it had begun to come into being in the Episcopal church, so I had become very excited about that. But not for me. I didn’t think I wanted to be a priest. I’d never thought about it. But obviously I had because suddenly I told him I’m going to seek ordination to the priesthood and not come to Australia. So that launched me into a deeper level of the movement for the ordination of women. And that would have been the summer of ’71 or May of ’71. And then the Philadelphia ordination was three years later.

Heather W. Right. Well, even the way that you just told me that, it was a conversation. It almost sounds like you had...that you were making decisions at a level that wasn’t even conscious.

Carter H. Conscious.

Heather W. You found yourself saying things that—

Carter H. Conscious...didn't even think...it was like did I just say that? Yeah. Well, then my mother and father told me, after I told them about that, oh, well you used to tell us when you were a little girl that you wanted to be a priest. And I said, really? And they said yes, you told us a couple of times that you really wanted to grow up and be a priest. And we said you just can't do that, sweetie, you know, girls aren't priests. And you said okay. So then I—but I didn't, I still don't remember that. It's interesting. I remember Bessie, I remember Jeff. I remember these traumatic experiences around race, but I do not remember wanting to be a priest. I do remember as a teenage girl sort of playing priest with other very church-y teenagers. We just kind of skipped over that period of my life. But when I was in high school I was the chair of the—the chairman, as they called us—of the Episcopal Young Churchmen in the Diocese of North Carolina, and my two very closest friends in high school were two other girls who just loved the Episcopal church. We would go to church all the time. For some reason church was—and I think, quite honestly, now I think, this was one way to avoid dealing with sexuality, my own. But anyhow, when I wasn't working in school or being in musical comedies, the things that I enjoyed doing, I was going to church.

And Fran, Jane and I used to celebrate the Eucharist together in the backyard, just the three of us. And one of those two women is still a friend of mine and we laugh about it. We would use coconut milk and Vienna sausages as the blood and body of Christ and we'd take turns consecrating.

So we didn't give a hoot about the rules about who was supposed to consecrate Eucharist. We would just do it because we thought it was so cool. But that had been a chapter of my life before I was at college. And college was more serious. But in high school, still and all, we were playing at being priests.

So obviously this was not something that was totally alien to who I was, but I just had never put the pieces together. Nor had I ever taken it seriously because women couldn't be priests. Most people don't start thinking about being what you can't be in a very serious way.

Heather W. When people asked you why you were getting the degree at Union what would you—

Carter H. I think I said I wanted to teach, which is what I wound up doing, too. But I really wanted to teach religion like several of my college professors had done. I thought that was just so wonderful. And that is, in fact, what I wound up doing. And in many ways did not need to be a priest. I mean, I've never aspired to be a parish priest, although from time to time I've worked as a supply person in parishes and I've preached, or I've taken over a service from time to time when somebody's been on vacation. But that's never been central to my understanding of my own self.

Heather W. So what kinds of decisions then...I mean, you kind of consciously realized that you wanted to be a priest. Was it at that point that you... Did you have to do a year at EDS or...?

Carter H. No. I went to see the Bishop of North Carolina, who was not about to let me be a priest. I mean, that's a story, too. This was a bishop named Tom Frasier, and I had had a run-in with him eight or ten years earlier when I was in high school over—I'm going to tell this story tomorrow, I think, in one of the panels—but over the integration of the diocese in youth camp when I was the president of the Young Churchmen. The camp was not integrated. This was 1962. And I really fought with him about that, as did the whole youth commission. And we lost.

And then he turned me down for ordination back in 1971 or '72, whenever it was I wound up actually seeing him. And he said it's because you have an authority problem, which is what he had said to me back in 1962 around that.

So then I went to the Bishop of New York, Paul Moore, and he was happy enough to accept me. And it did not make any difference to him at all that I had not been to an Episcopal seminary as long as I could pass the general ordination exams and worked in a parish, an Episcopal parish for a couple years doing field work, which I did at St. Mary's Manhattanville there near Union Seminary.

So Paul Moore and the Diocese of New York accepted me, and that was wonderful. So that was my diocese I worked with when I was ordained a deacon and stayed in that diocese after the Philadelphia ordination, even though he didn't participate. Stayed there until I went to Massachusetts.

Heather W. And were there other women ordained as deacons?

Carter H. When I was ordained?

Heather W. Yeah.

Carter H. Yes, like three. I think three had been ordained as deacons the year before I got ordained as a deacon, or maybe even two years before, because I think by the time I became a postulant, you know, coming on in the process, Carol Anderson was the woman. Do you know her? She was an associate at St. James Madison Avenue. Julia Sibley was a chaplain at a couple of the hospitals on the East Side. And maybe just those two. I think maybe those two women had already been ordained deacons before. And Emily Hewitt was ordained a deacon the year before I was.

So I think Carol Anderson and Julia Sibley were ordained deacons, and then the next year Emily Hewitt was, and then the next year, '73, I was, along with Barbara Schlachter and Marie Moorefield. So there were altogether six women deacons by the time of the Philadelphia ordination in the Diocese of New York. And we had been ordained in three different batches.

Heather W. And all under Paul Moore?

Carter H. All under Paul Moore, yeah. And we all were very fond of Paul Moore. He was a great man. Love Paul Moore. The Philadelphia ordination put a strain in that relationship, which is sad. It was too bad, because I had always very much valued him as not only a bishop, but really kind of an older friend. He was obviously such a lover of justice.

But he couldn't bring himself to ordain us in Philadelphia, even though his closest bishop friend, Bishop Bob DeWitt, was really the organizer of it, along with Sue Hiatt, the woman deacon who was organizing it. And I never did really understand why, other than he did not seem to accept the urgency of it the way Bob DeWitt did and the way we ourselves did. He felt that sooner or later the church would get around to it anyhow, and there was no point in upsetting so many people.

Heather W. So he wanted to wait for the institutional gears to change.

Carter H. Yes. He and a bunch of liberal bishops felt that. And they all believed that it would change very soon. They believed that if we just waited a couple of years it would change. We did not believe that. We believed that the movement was pushing in the opposite direction, that the opponents of women's ordination were gaining ground, and just as the Equal Rights Amendment was in the process of being defeated that women's ordination was not going to happen.

And my friend Sue Hiatt, who really was the woman organizer, and she was also a social worker by training as well as a seminarian and deacon, she said she figured that the Episcopal church would not ordain women until it was harder not to than to, and that therefore there needed to be something like this irregular ordination because that would force the church's hand, and unless that happened they would find excuses for the next ten years or so to keep putting it off until the Roman Catholics had decided it was going this way. We see where that would have gotten us.

Heather W. Right.

Carter H. Because the opponents were using all kinds of reasons, the ecumenical things about the Catholic church, everything from these ridiculous reasons to these are the wrong kind of women. These women are either too masculine or too feminine. We were always too something. And they literally would say that. We couldn't ordain women who were too attractive in the classical feminine sense because they would be a distraction at the altar, and women who were too masculine might wind up being lesbians. I mean, it was just the most ridiculous mush.

Heather W. Yeah. And was there any...I mean, it sounds like there was. But did you feel direct pressure to present yourself in some sort of neither too masculine nor too feminine kind of way?

Carter H. Well, yes and no. We would talk to each other about it, and we laughed about it. At one level we realized it was ridiculous. But one of the very most wonderful parts of this, Heather, was that there was, in those early days, such mutual support among all the various women who were seeking ordination. And we were, except for the fact that the earliest batch of us were white women, we were pretty diverse as white women go in terms of high church, low church, some of us more academic, some more pastoral, different ages, different parts of the country, different kind of styles, and definitely some more feminine and some more masculine in terms of our bearing, and some more kind of androgynous.

And I think people were pretty able to be very self-reflective and not critical of each other, and play this for what it was worth. And at times we would do things—I mean, we wouldn't do things purposely to confuse the conversation, but if we realized that there was a woman among us who was so, she was so kind of classically feminine, and probably was one of the lesser feminist of us. I mean, she was supportive of us, but she was so unlike most of us. But when she was going to be one of the spokespeople, we would make—we being the Episcopal Women's Conference—would make sure that somebody else was there, too, so that they couldn't simply dismiss everybody as being this flaming feminine, that they'd see somebody else.

So some of us would wear skirts and some of us would wear jeans. Some of us had short hair, some had long hair. We'd try to pick some matchy-match when we were out on public presentations so that we couldn't all be written off as one thing or the other. And it worked pretty well.

Heather W. And it sounds like the incentive to do that was kind of from all points, because any one position in there, too feminine, too any of that—

Carter H. Yeah, you couldn't win for losing.

Heather W. Right.

Carter H. And somebody once said to me—this sounds like sort of a non sequitur, but it's not—years later when I was teaching at EDS some man came to, some clergyman came to one of my classes. He was on the board of

trustees of the Episcopal Divinity School and he came to sit in on one of the classes. And he had this wonderful time in the class, and everybody was very happy to see him, and very welcoming to him, and he and I got along fine. And I think he had a perfectly wonderful experience.

Well, he went home and talked about what a dreadful time he had had, and how hostile I was to him or something. And the person who was, at the time, the dean of the seminary, was talking to me and he said what in the world is Jim talking about? And I said, well—I studied a little bit of Freud when I was in seminary—because I said I think this is what Freud would call the reaction formation, that the man had too much fun, and it scared him to death.

The reason this connects up with what we were just talking about is even if we were just perfect, even if we were exactly what they think priests should be in terms of our ambience, our appearance, our style, that too would have been too scary for some people. So it's like you couldn't...there was just no way to win this conversation with people who were opposing women's ordination, for whatever reason. None of us was going to be the right woman.

And more complicated were the criticisms we had from some women. Not each other. Not the women who were seeking ordination. But some other women who would come along later, for the most part, who would want to disconnect from us and not want to be seen as angry women, or as feminists, in some cases. I mean, I've sure you've...I mean, even to this

day we all have to deal with that. You know, I'm not a feminist, or, you know, I'm not angry like those feminists were or are. And so that became something of an issue as the years passed.

Heather W. Did you also feel that you had to be very careful about your sexuality?

Carter H. Yes, in the very early days, yes. The Philadelphia ordination, in the years leading up to Philadelphia, those of us who were lesbian or who were trying it on for size or whatever, some of us were known to each other. In fact some of us were lovers. I mean, some were obviously. But by the time we got to the Philadelphia ordination of the 11 of us, there were only three or four who were sort of identifiable to each other as lesbian.

And we did, all of us came out to Bishop DeWitt so that he would not be surprised by anything that anybody got up and said to protest the ordination, for example. Because like in a marriage there's a place you can leap up and say no, no, don't proceed, and here's why. And we thought we cannot let the bishops be caught not knowing something if somebody's going to try to make an issue of this. So we told him, and he was fine with it, like Paul Moore would have been, totally fine with lesbians. And he said fine, we'll just hope that nobody makes an issue of it. Because we all sort of agreed that just simply being women on that particular occasion was enough to deal with. And so we didn't make an issue of it, and nobody did get up and protest for that reason.

And then after the Philadelphia ordination, a lot of the opponents to it were trying to dismiss all of us as a bunch of dykes and would say things

like that in the press, or call one up and say, you know, how could you associate with all those ugly, man hating dykes or whatever. But one of the things I will go to my grave loving about my sister priests in that circle is that every, all 11 women were completely stellar in terms of supporting one another.

And one of my own housemates, we were not lovers, but Sue Hiatt and I were on the faculty together at EDS. In 1975 we joined it. And she was single. She was about as nonsexual as any woman I've ever met in terms of having just cultivated a very sort of asexual style. And so we were not lovers. But she would be accused of being my lover. And she would thank people. She would say thank you very much.

Heather W. [*Laughs.*]

Carter H. Carter and I don't discuss that. And that's pretty much what all of the women would say, you know. If accused of being lesbian, they would say thank you, what a compliment. And that was the most disarming thing you can say to people who are homophobic.

Heather W. So instead of distancing themselves from it.

Carter H. Oh, what a lovely compliment. And would not say I'm not. Would not say they were or they weren't. We just don't discuss these things. So it was a very great and disarming way to be strategic and in solidarity with one another in those early years of women's ordination. And, I mean, that taught me so much about the movement, whatever the movement is,

whether it's a gay movement, or an antiracist movement, or whatever it is. Somehow that kind of solidarity is simply not letting yourself get, you know, you be the good girl and I'll be the bad girl or vice versa. It doesn't work that way.

Heather W. Right. Let me check to see how we're doing on time. It's ten till 5:00. Ten till 4:00 I meant. Are you okay for another question?

Carter H. Yeah.

Heather W. Or do you need to be somewhere at 4:00?

Carter H. Maybe not, because, well, 4:00 is when the conference begins, and so I sort of want to...

Heather W. Why don't we stop.

Carter H. Okay.

Heather W. I'm going to...

Carter H. Shall I give you my contact information and continue this?

Heather W. I would really...yeah.

Carter H. Okay.

Heather W. Like to figure out some of this.

[End of recording.]