

SNCC Digital Gateway: Our Voices

Lowndes County: Strong People

4.1 Catherine Flowers: The Ability to Find Ways to Make Change

Catherine Flowers: Despite Lowndes County being known as Bloody Lowndes, there's something in us. It's in our DNA, as it relates to how we resist. And the resistance is not sometimes loud. It's quiet work in the community, and I think there are people there that are still here who have that, who have that in our loins the ability to find ways in which to make change. And I think that SNCC's role later helped to refine that. And it's based on that, that for me anyway, it's that legacy that I stand on.

4.2 Ethel Williams: Looking Out for Each Other

Jennifer Lawson: Your father and your mother, did they have a history of having to had protected—were they from Lowndes County?

Ethel Williams: Yes. They were from Lowndes County. Mama was on White Hall, and Daddy was on this side of White Hall, and of course, that's the way they met. And Mama's parents were on the other side—y'all know where the city hall is?—ok, on that side. And Dad's parents were on this side, and some way or another they met. But that was always that strong bond between them. And we were taught, whatever one had, the other had. Dad always said—excuse my language—you get each other. You give them hell behind closed doors, but you come out fighting. You come out fighting for each other. But give 'em hell behind closed doors. And that was for brothers and sisters. Not so much for the ones on the outside, but you let him know behind closed doors what you did wrong, Jennifer. Or you did so and so, but I'm coming out fighting for you either way. And that's what we were taught. To look out for each other, and do those kind of things that will make us strong. And because of those two, that's why we were strong. You couldn't tell John nothing. [Laughing] You couldn't tell him nothing. And there wasn't nothing Daddy could do but stick up. And Mama had that too. I remember once, if I be here a little bit, and Colia might remember, John was in a house in Prattville, and Dad got worried they were going to burn it down with all those fellows in there. And my sister Dorothy—oh, Daddy went to the meeting wherever it was. He told them I need ten men to go to Prattville with me. And Dot told him, "Daddy, get nine because I'm going with you." She was pregnant with her baby girl, but she went to Prattville with Daddy. Instances where we had to stand up with him because there were men who stepped back. And John didn't want Daddy hurt, and he didn't want John hurt. And we didn't want each other hurt. One morning we were asleep, house right down there, just below John, was not brick then. And I said, "Boys." The fellows were over in the SNCC house, and you know, women had a long, hard day, and we were at the house resting, and so were they. State troopers eased in very quietly, and Daddy—we were surrounded. And all Daddy could hear, and they asked him to come out with his hands up. And you know, just waking up, but Daddy got on up because they wanted to see a young man over at the SNCC house, and Daddy was not going to let them go alone. Mama got up, put her clothes on, went right with him, so that's how we were with each other. You got one, you got us all. But he went on over and talked

to the young man that they wanted to talk to. So our closeness and looking out for each other came from our parents, through my parents because that's what they taught us.

4.3 Jennifer Lawson and Courtland Cox: Reflections at the Freedom House

Courtland Cox: The quiet and beauty of it stands in stark contrast to the sense of, you know, brutality and terror. And even—I'm sure the beauty of the land was here when we were here over fifty years ago, I never saw it 'cuz I was just focused on the road; focused on staying safe; focused on the activity of the day; focused on going to plantations; focused on the mass meetings. The focus of staying on the road never gave you a chance to see what the landscape was about.

Cox: Mr. Henson and the Jacksons lived over there. You know, his store was up in the front over there. Members of the Jackson family lived over there, so we were kind of surrounded by—when I think of Mr. Jackson, I think of him as coming out of the earth, of being just the strength. He is the definition of strength for me.

Jennifer Lawson: I felt safe, even there were times when there were pickup trucks coming down this highway that we worried were the Klan or others, who then were shooting in tent city. And we were close enough to tent city that we knew when there were problems there, and we'd have to worry about the violence that could then come here. But we felt very protected by the Jackson family and the other families right here.

Cox: I think that being here in this place has really developed my perspective for the rest of my life for the past—I left here in '67, so it's now 52 years, 51 years—you know, it's a real important thing in my life, and I think about it all the time.

Lawson: We had—because it was a collectively owned book—a well-worn copy of Franz Fanon and several other books. And we would entertain ourselves in the evenings sometimes by reading and discussing what we read, so it was a very good book club in many ways too. But it was a place where we talked about—it was shaping our political thinking.

Cox: The ideas of independent political organizations; the ideas of the use of power; the ideas of controlling our own community; and the person who was the great proponent of it, Kwame Ture, Stokely Carmichael, really came out of this place here. And the symbol of the Black Panther was not only here, but was taken out to California, Oakland, California, and became a national—so a lot national and international discussions came out of this place in a county that had maybe ten—twelve thousand people in it.

Lawson: We had so much thinking about Black Power and Black independent political power, Black economic power, and beginning to set a stage for our future as people for years to come.

4.4 Willie Ruth Myrick: John Hulett

Willie Ruth Myrick: Mhmm John Hulett, and I tell people this all the time, when I talk about him, number 1 I'm talking about him as my uncle and number 2 I'm talking about him as the man that he were because John Hulett was a person who – he loved people. And he loved seeing things be right. And he did everything in his power to make Lowndes County be a better place and I think that rubbed off on

me because when I would see him talk to people and I would see how he treated people, because when I was younger, I had this attitude like Willie Ricks – I wanna fight. But dealing with him and being around him and being with him I realized this is not the way for it to be. And John Hulett like I say he was just a unique person and he didn't believe in violence, he always believed in, we can sit down and we can talk about this and we can work this out.

4.5 Willie Ruth Myrick: Alice Moore

Willie Ruth Myrick: Yes. And then there was Ms. Alice Moore, she was another person, I don't think she believed that a rattlesnake would bite her. She really didn't. She like I said, they felt like If I go with Mr. Hulett it's goin be alright because ain't nobody goin mess with us and there was another lady Ms. Lillian McGill, she too was another strong-willed lady and she felt like if John Hulett think it's the right thing to do, let's do it. And that was, you know, that was the type of attitude everybody had.

4.6 Lillian McGill: Tweety Bird

Jennifer Lawson: So now let's back up and explain this. You have a nickname, and if you'll tell us for the camera what your nickname is.

Lillian McGill: Tweety Bird! And they got so good with it, they started calling me Tweety. And Bob's [Mants] children call me Ms. Tweety.

Lawson: Why did they call you—

McGill: They called me Tweety Bird because first place is, anything that was going out, we had a slogan that said everything stopped before it got to Lowndes County. And I'd go meet it, and when I'd come back, I'd talk so much, and I said, I would tell them I would bring it, and they'd say, "How can you remember all of that?" Well it didn't take no—when I was in school, they should have nailed me to a seat sometime and I was exempt. I think I'm—but anyway, they'd say, "Well, she's in here. I know she knows." But anyway, I would be telling in the mass meeting about these things. Sometimes I'd write 'em a little note, pass it up there, and get this. And John Henson was good at it and Mr. Strickland would say, "You come on up here, Tweety, because what you're giving us, we'll never get out what you saying." And I'd get up there, and I could come out with it so that—"Now we never would have gotten all that out of that paper that you gave us." "Come on, Tweety. Bring it up." And so the name stuck. Tweety.