Laurie Green: Okay, this is Laurie Green, and I am at Alice Embree's house on Labor Day, the 3rd of September 2018. And I just want to first ask, Alice, if I have your permission to record this interview and have it transcribed and have both posted at the site at the Briscoe Library?

Alice Embree: You do, you have my permission for all three of those things. I think you said three.

LG: Okay. Okay.

LG: And I can even ask you at the end if there's anything that you want to not have cited. Okay, so we have talked a little bit about the agenda that we want to have for this interview, which is supplementing one by Nick Pfeifer as part of my class in the fall of 2017. And so, we decided that we'd like to start with Alice growing up in the South, in Austin. People have this image of Austin as this cool place that is totally separate from the South. So, I'd like to start there.

AE: Well I actually grew up in the house that we're sitting in, so in this neighborhood. And I think that as a kid, the fact that I was in the South sort of came-- I wasn't aware of it at the beginning. I mean, for one thing people went, "Well, you're in Texas," and Texas had this mythic quality
to it and was supposedly different from anywhere else. So, that was more of an identity. But I would watch my parents wince when they heard any racial epithet. I would, I mean, I was aware of the fact that I lived in the South when I got on a trolley with my mother, and there were signs that said, “Colored at the back.” I was aware when I went into department stores to shop for Easter dresses, that the fountains there said that the nice refrigerated water was white, and the small sort of decrepit looking porcelain fountain said, “Colored.” And a lot of this was coded into signs that said, “We reserve the right to refuse service to anyone.” So, that was a code. And I’m sure that Black people saw it as a-- (laughs) that meant a certain thing. And it actually, apparently, meant that for a lot of Hispanics, or Chicanos growing up in Austin as well. But the lines were clearly black and white. And this comes to you in waves of consciousness, so the fact that you’re in the South and that you’re in-- that you live under Jim Crow laws. You know, there were kids in the neighborhood that would play Yankees and Southerners, like instead of cowboys and Indians. And I remember coming in to my parents and to my mom and saying, “They called me a Yankee.” I was born in Hartford, Connecticut.
But I live here. And none of this, you don't quite get it until certain things happen. You just say, "Well, that's just where I'm growing up." So, I don't think you know that your schools are segregated. I didn't feel-- I didn't look around and go, "There are no African Americans in my classes."

But it was a dawning consciousness and, of course, a southern consciousness. And it was-- and Texas was very much part of the Southeast. As special as it thought it was, it was the South. And when you read *The Warmth of Other Suns*, that book about African American migration north, it's so clear as, as peo-- I mean, lynchings, intense racism. And there's a way you can grow up in Texas and go, "Oh, well that's East Texas." But, of course, you can't really grow up and look at signs that I looked at and go, "Oh, (laughs) that's just East Texas," because there it was right in Austin.

I think when the whole debate around confederate statues began to come up, I realized that I had been a UT student and not conscious of that. But what I was conscious of in college was civil rights. And I was conscious, and I got active, first active in civil rights. And so, I was very conscious of what was segregated at UT, when I became a freshman at UT.
And sports, dorms, intercollegiate activities, many of them were all segregated in 1963. And that's when it dawned on me, but I will say that I don't think, (laughs) I think it's still dawning. I think that even though I became involved with civil rights I did not understand that the depth-- I didn't have an analysis of the depth of racism and the impact of slavery on the country, and basically white supremacy.

It's there, but I didn't talk about it that way, I didn't think about it that way. I thought about it as, well, civil rights. Everybody gets a right to be in the restaurant, to vote. I grew up with the poll tax.

I remember leaf-letting about the poll tax even before I could vote. When I think, I guess it was probably '63, 4-- Well I can't remember when they got rid of it in Texas. So, the schools I attended were, as they say, lily white, not that I was conscious of an alternative. (Laughs) It was what they were, and in junior high they had Austin was doing basically a token integration program that stepped down--

LG: Yeah, but you know-- I'm sorry.

AE: So, a token integration--

LG: In which year?
AE: Oh okay, I'll get it wrong. I was in the 9th grade when the first African Americans came to University Junior High. So, that must have been, okay, '60?

LG: Mm-hmm (affirmative).


LG: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

AE: And so, a very small group of African American kids, like six, were in University Junior High which is now the Social Work School over near the stadium.

LG: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

AE: And that group was part of the class that went into freshman, sophomore-- High school had three years, so I guess you miss, I guess it was freshman, junior, senior. They must have-- (Laughs)

LG: Forgot those sophomores. (Laughs)

AE: I don't know what they did with sophomores, because junior high was three years. And that's just, so you got out of elementary and you went three years in a junior high system-

LG: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

AE: And then you went three years in a high school system.

LG: Oh [crosstalk 00:09:20].

AE: And then you went to, if you were lucky or whatever, you went on to college.
And I was with some really bright-- The families that forced, (laughs) their kids into this token integration, were movers and shakers in Austin. I'm not saying they were so happy to be plucked up and put in these unfamiliar settings where they, where life was difficult, more difficult for them. But many of them had the support system of their families. So, I've been told by a friend, Saundra Kirk, who was in my 9th grade class, that when they would get on-- sometimes the bus wouldn't stop for them. So, all the parents, several of the parent-- the families would mobilize and go and talk to the bus people. I was told that one of the women I knew had-- she got on the bus with her ice cream cone and the bus driver slapped it away from her, and they went and had that bus driver move to another route. This was the kind of-- There was a support system for some of these kids. This is the other thing you don't know as a kid. I was friends with some of them but I didn't understand how hard it was. I didn't understand what they were giving up to do this. And they gave up plenty. I mean, they gave up all their peer group and their support systems to be in a situation where sometimes people were yelling at them on the street. And you just don't understand those things. I didn't.

LG: Right, right.
AE: I mean, maybe some people are better at understanding. So, the first thing that was pivotal for me was I, and it must have been '62, I mean, '61, the fall of '61, and an African American young woman, Glodine, was in the Austin High drill squad, the Red Jackets. And we all piled on a bus and we went to Corpus Christi for a football game and we all piled out hungry at a place. And then there was-- things happened, we didn't know what was happening, and they said, “Get back on the bus,” because they wouldn't let us in that restaurant. So then we go to another restaurant. We are seated, literally, we're seated at tables and a woman-- Karen and Glodine and I were at a table-- and they sent the waitress over, I've said this in other interviews, but it was pivotal for me, they sent the waitress over, not the manager, you know, the poor waitress (laughs) came over, and very, very sweetly said, “I'm sorry honey, we just can't serve you here.” And this is the part that stunned me. I got up and I said, “We have to leave, they won't serve Glodine.” And every other Red Jacket, (laughs) except for the three of us were like, “But Alice, we just ordered,” and it was so clear that you couldn't upset the decorum or the desire to eat, or whatever. The learning experience of watching it happen, watching the reactions were very formative for me.
So, the first thing I really got involved with at UT was a civil rights-- it was a Student Interracial Committee, and trying to take on Kinsolving Dormitory and other dorms that were segregated.

LG: I have a question for you--

AE: That was '63. Okay.

LG: Before we move to UT. And that is, what happened? I want to hear the rest of the story.

AE: With Glodine?

LG: Did you all stay or rebel?

AE: Oh I'm sorry. We got up and we walked out and we found a Woolworths. No one--

LG: Interesting.

AE: Now, and it had been integrated because of the previous sit-ins.

LG: Oh.

AE: And, nationally, it had been integrated, so it was a national chain. We went in, we sat at the counter, we ate. And, look, in retrospect (laughs) I'm like, "Hey, where was the faculty sponsor of the Red Jackets?" Where was anybody going, "This shouldn't have happened." Where was--

LG: Was that all of you--

AE: Oh no, no, no.

LG: Or was it just the three of you?
AE: Just the three of us.
LG: Oh my gosh.
AE: We were the only ones to get-- And I'm glad we, (laughs) what would have happened to Glodine if there hadn't been two of us that went with her? I mean, it was a solemn meal, and in retrospect I look back and I go, I didn't know enough at the time, to create a ruckus over it. But just like those African American parents created ruckuses when the bus wouldn't pick up their kids, or whatever. I mean, that's really what should have happened and it really is on the school administration that it didn't. I'm sure they talked about it but they shouldn't have put people in that situation. They shouldn't have put us in that situation and there should have been conversations about it afterwards.
LG: Right.
AE: A debrief, if you will. (Laughs) But nobody did debrief, very well. I mean, we even had, of course, the Charles Whitman shooting on the UT campus and there were no debriefs. (Laughs) It was just like, “Okay, this is horrible, let's all just move on. Nothing to see here.” That's how I feel about the Whitman thing, I mean, the university didn't have any grief counselors. The concept did not exist. I mean, the concept of school shootings like that did not exist, so they, I understand that. But in
retrospect, we were all very poorly equipped to deal with what had happened and what had happened to some of our friends.

LG: So, I'm always interested in what these moments like you've been describing, that's a story that you've told before so obviously you see it as a pivotal story, and I'm wondering was that this moment of recognition for you, that you might be someone who would take stands?

AE: No, I mean, I can see that now. I can see that it set me on the trajectory of, "I'm not a person that's—" For one thing, I'm sitting at the table with Glodine, two of us, we're doing that, that was already probably out of the--

LG: Beyond the pale, so to speak?

AE: (Laughs) Out of the norm.

LG: (Laughs)

AE: So, I didn't understand anything about anything, (laughs) about power or organizing or how you do that with other people. I was a pretty naïve high school student worried about what I look like. (Laughs)

LG: (Laughs)

AE: How shy I was. It was like, that was my--

LG: Did you say you were shy?

AE: Yeah.

LG: Okay.
AE: (Laughs) I think a lot of people are and they kind of push themselves out of their comfort zone.

LG: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Yes. Okay, so you get to UT in 1963?

AE: Yeah, the fall of '63.

LG: Yeah, and you were starting to say how what had happened in 9th grade connected up to your arrival at UT and what you observed there.

AE: Well I remained friends with several of these African American kids through high school. I didn't get involved in some of the things-- I had a few high school friends who I think were involved in the theater stand-ins, which were famous for being stand-ins, not sit-ins.

LG: At the movie theaters.

AE: At the movie theaters on the Drag. But by-and-large those (laughs) were college-age kids, so they were the older brothers and sisters of people I knew. And in '63, I gravitated into this student interracial committee. That's the other thing about-- There were 150, I believe, just 150 African American students at UT then, out of, I don't know, 23,000 or something. We're talking very small, and we're talking people who were trying to make their way. Not necessarily be activists, not get singled out, but actually try to get through college, what a concept. So, Saundra was -- went by the name Vicki then -- and she was somebody I
knew that was active in this. So there was continuity there.

LG: Oh, mm-hmm (affirmative).

AE: Saundra from-- Saundra Kirk, whose brother went on to be-- a much younger brother -- Mayor of Dallas, and in the Obama Administration, (laughs) Ron Kirk. And the Kirks were a very important family in Austin, as were the Means, who, I think they had a taxi company. James Means integrated track. And he was a high school student from Austin High.

LG: Oh right, right.

AE: So, that happened in, maybe, '64. I mean, the Means were like, "Hey, what's going on here? He ran track, why aren't--" but it took almost a year before, or at least into the spring semester, they didn't integrate track. And then, I believe it wasn't until '70 that UT had African American football players.

LG: Yeah, actually even later. Yeah, actually, one thing that you just mentioned that I hadn't gotten clear on before, you went to Austin High?

AE: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

LG: Okay.

AE: Yeah. University Junior High, Austin High.

LG: Okay.
AE: Now I had-- I went to private school for the most part, when I was, I went to All Saints Episcopal School. Then I went to a public school where my children went to public school, Maplewood Elementary, for second grade. Then third through sixth I went to St. Andrew's when it was just beginning. It was an Episcopal school, it was segregated. I remember a guy named Louie Buck, Reverend Buck, was a priest at a mostly African American Episcopal church. And he ran up against the Episcopal hierarchy because he would marry interracial couples.

LG: Hmm, interesting.

AE: And he picketed (laughs) meetings because the schools were segregated. And I remember my parents were Episcopalians, so that would make them-- Well, it's one of the ways that a lot of liberal parents dealt with all of this all the time was like, "Well, we agree with your position, just not the means that you're using."

LG: Right, I got that [crosstalk 00:22:43]. (Laughs)

AE: And so that was always like, "Okay." And we were always pushing the envelope on our tactics, but they generally-- I didn't buck up against outright-- I wasn't thrown out of the family or something. I was just like, "Do you have to do it this way?" And that was more of the sighs.
LG: I just want to comment that I think your story is really important because so often the story of the Civil Rights Movement is the southern black students. And then there's the story of the white students from the North who come down to the South. And there's very little stories of the white kids that did get involved. And I know a couple of the people who were white women who were at the founding of SNCC [Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee] were also from, were UT students.

LG: So, I think your important-

AE: Sandra Cason, and later Casey Hayden-

LG: Right, making-

AE: Yeah, was a predecessor of, in the, it was called Students for Direct Action, SDA.

LG: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

AE: And they did the Stand-Ins, and they did-- they, "Did you know that Negroes can't get their hair cut here, they can't do this, they can't go to restaurants." And they were gathering petitions and raising hell. And I find it fascinating that they were- and there was real pushback. The place where they were meeting, the Y, had a bomb thrown into the window.

AE: One of, I think you know Leon McNealy?

LG: I know he's in the Stand-In film (crosstalk).
AE: The African American man was badly beaten up. And so, there were-- I'm not saying that the violence that I experienced or saw was anything like that, but we were picketing, we would picket at a place on the Drag called, "Roy’s Lounge." And it would just be this magnet for all these fraternity guys who had been drinking in their fraternity houses, who then would come and just hurl insults at us. And they were racially-- they were racial epithets, and then for all the women, (laughs) they were sexist epithets. I mean, we were, “whores,” and we were whatever. And it was like walking in this little gauntlet. And so, it's kind of like just (laughs) taking the abuse of a slightly drunken mob.

LG: Including Charles Whitman, right?

AE: You know, I have heard that and I have never seen, I mean, you've told me that. I don't know that he was in a fraternity. The only book I've read that's really in depth about him is the one that Gary Lavergne wrote-

LG: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

AE: At UT. It's quite good. Yeah. But there is something about that white male rage (laughs) that's frightening.

LG: Yeah.

AE: And that's the whole thing about white supremacy. It was what makes poor whites better? Racism. Right? I mean, (laughs) it's just like we--
LG:  (Laughs)

AE:  In the eyes of the Ivy League, they are--
    It's like their class position would, they would be utterly
    repressed due to class and understand their position in
    life if it were not for racism that made them feel, “Well,
    at least we are not Black.” And that, I think it's a very
    strong thing and it's still going on, and we're watching it
    happen now.

LG:  I'm going to remember that, what you just said.

AE:  (laughs) Oh good. I hope I can remember.

LG:  Like about white supremacism, and it's racism that makes
    poor whites better.

AE:  (Laughs)

LG:  That's a really important point. (Laughs)

AE:  Well that's what every-- That held the glue together in the
    South sort of. I mean, the glue that was there. It was
    like, “Well, at least it's not like that.”
    So, basically, if you're a tenant farmer, you're supposed
    to feel better than-- you get to feel better than somebody
    who's (laughs) an African American tenant farmer.

LG:  Yeah.

AE:  And your conditions are better. You can go into
    restaurants; you can ride on a train. You can do all manner
of things but these Jim Crow barriers, including the right to vote, were the delineation marks.

LG: Right.

AE: But you know, I think a lot about how I grew up not understanding things, (laughs) and how it's-- now I'm almost 73, and I'm going to like, “Hey, there's more to learn.” I mean, there is so much more to learn.

LG: There's so much more to learn.

AE: Talk about a learning opportunity with the Trump era, my god. I think many of us were, “Hey, we elected the first African American president,” I mean, there was a kind of feeling of progress. And then, all of a sudden, the scab’s ripped off this roiling, ugly, persistent racism in this country. It's right there. And I feel like it's hard sometimes to see there's a line of progress here.

LG: Right, right.

AE: And I battle with that, just emotionally. (Laughs) Like, what happened? But-

LG: And also, just, maybe one more comment and then we'll come back to UT. I know-- I heard another sentence earlier which was, that was East Texas. And I have heard students in my class say, “That was Mississippi.”

AE: Oh yeah.
LG: And yet when students do oral histories of parents, grandparents who grew up in East Texas, they get very disturbed about, white kids get disturbed about stories that they heard from East Texas. And I'm not sure that people outside of Texas really get how much East Texas was like what we imagined the Deep South to be.

AE: Oh, it was, I mean, it was, literally. It agriculturally was, economically it was. So, Texas, you know, you get imbued with this, "No, we were the Republic of Texas." And Texas really is, or could be, several different states that are distinct and hey, we'd have more senators that way. But anyway, I'm not suggesting it but it's a very, it is a unique state in that it is so large. It's unique in that, I mean, it's got 254 counties with county governments and county courthouses and, you know, just think of the logistics of the thing. I mean, El Paso's in a different time zone. Logistically, this state is very unique. But that was how it was, like, "Well, this was the cotton country over in East Texas, well, that was like that South."

LG: Right, right. So connected to, like, northern Louisiana?

AE: Yeah, and Mississ-- I mean, the crops were similar.

LG: Yeah so, do you need to take a break?

AE: No.
LG: Okay, great. (Laughs)

AE: (Laughs)

LG: This is great. So, let's now return to, you get to UT and here's what's going on.

AE: So, I think I'm on, not the earliest wave of Students for A Democratic Society, but a couple years into its incarnation. And so, what was going on was, in the fall semester of my freshman year, we did the Kinsolving dorm demonstration. And that was African American students who were tired of waiting for the university to settle a lawsuit and seized upon the opportunity of, that the President's daughter was living in Kinsolving Dorm, and that there would be enormous, (laughs) publicity after the assassination. So, Johnson-- so my fall semester, what happened? The President was assassinated. In November. Then in that very small period before the end of the semester, that was when that demonstration happened. And, you know, the press all shows up and, and it was delicately-- the signage was masterful in the sense of that it was not particularly trying to blame Lyndon Johnson. It was, like, "University delays," meaning sticking this lawsuit, not settling the lawsuit, not taking action, "result in President's daughter living in--" You know that was kind of the messaging. It's a little like trying to
not-- But the fact was that the media's all here, and the Secret Service are there in their Stetson hats--

LG: Wow.

AE: And trying to look like Texans, which was hilarious. But, so everybody's like, “Here--"

LG: Had their cowboy boots and their, their hats. (Laughs)

AE: (Laughs) And, and here's this little demonstration, mostly African Americans, and it's a big hub bub, because it's the President's daughter. And there was a lot of like, “Don't do anything, the nation's been through trauma, do not do anything.” I remember there was a lot of that going on. "Don't, don't do this demonstration." And anyway, so I think what happened, I think in the spring semester Lyndon Johnson was going to speak at the commencement. So spring of '64.

And by then the university-- I mean, my belief, Lyndon Johnson called up Frank Erwin, chairman of the Board of Regents and cursed him out no doubt, (laughs) because that's how Lyndon Johnson did things, and said, "You fix this." Anyway, by the spring semester, the university had dropped the lawsuit and come up with an integration plan. But their integration plan was to deal only with the university-owned housing. So, Scottish Rite Dorm could do their thing, you know, you see what I mean?
LG: Yes.

AE: It was like the private dorms, that would be okay. And so, they kind of were up against this conundrum, which is that this university made undergraduate women live in approved housing.

LG: Oh.

AE: And so, they couldn't like, “Oh, what are we going to do, what are we going to do?” So they got rid of approved housing, and that's why you had premarital sex.

LG: (Laughs) I didn't realize you were going to go there.

AE: No--

LG: Okay.

AE: No one would, but I'm just saying, what happened was, all of a sudden, it's--suddenly, there wasn't the same requirement on undergraduate women to live only in dorms. And by the way, if you went out on an interracial date in one of these dorms, and I had a friend who did, my very good friend from high school, and it was a Chicano guy that she married. And they call up the parents, “Your daughter is going out on a date,” I mean, you know, that's what the dorms, the dorms were trying to enforce the mores.

LG: Wow. And that "they" was the administration?

AE: Well no, I--

LG: [Crosstalk 00:36:56].
AE: No, so this was, this particular dorm where this happened was a Methodist-owned dorm, but it would have been private approved housing, under university rules. You had dorm mothers and stuff that were watching out for transgressions.

LG: (Laughs) Okay, this is--

AE: And then we got rid of approved housing and then you could actually live in apartments.

LG: (Laughs)

AE: I had a friend, and she was divorced, and she wanted to move into a university dorm because it was cheaper and they wouldn't let her because it was for university-- (Laughs) You're talking this kind of, "We're protecting their virginity," (laughs)-- It was like, "Uh, no, well you've been married." So that was like, even if she wasn't married, she was divorced. (Laughs) She couldn't get into the approved housing. I didn't even know that was how that was also working. You know, they don't explain things.

LG: (Laughs) Right.

AE: It's like, "Here is your approved housing list." And you're like, "Okay, whatever."

LG: So you just brought in something--

AE: (Laughs)
LG: That I'm hearing for the first time, which is that it was considered an interracial date to go out with a Chicano person.

AE: Yeah. Or a-

LG: So, this story has always been for me-

AE: Or an Iranian foreign student. We had a lot of Middle Eastern foreign students studying oil engineering at UT. So that would also have been inappropriate, if you were a white woman. (Laughs)

LG: Okay so-

AE: Anything other than a white man. Certainly same-sex, well that would certainly be inappropriate. (Laughs) But it was like they were trying to-- I guess if you lived in a sorority you had sorority-

LG: Mothers?

AE: Moms, mothers? Now, all of that began to crumble in the '60s for a variety of reasons, including people making demands for gender equity. And, "Why should these women have this rule and the guys don't have that rule?"

LG: Okay, and that--

AE: But that's a little later.

LG: Does it first come out with the dorm situation? If it's men or-
AE: Well in Austin, I mean, what happened was that you had this civil rights demand and the university stuck in a situation where it didn't want to tangle with privately owned dorms, so it released its restrictions on the housing requirements.

It integrated those owned by the university, and severed that requirement that you must live in approved housing. And so, it was civil rights that kind of began to, interestingly enough, (laughs) play into the gender equity part of it. You know, it bled into it, as it did in many other ways.

LG: Was there a fight over the integration of housing for black male and international students?

AE: All I really knew was that there were co-op houses where African American women were welcomed into. And there was a sports dorm. And I honestly don't know how the foreign student situation worked.

LG: There's been, when these stories get told, which is, for not that long, there's always a focus on the women students in Kinsolving, and I know that there's some men that were involved with that.

AE: Mm-hmm (affirmative).
LG: But, but I haven't-- I need to interview some other people who can talk about what happened with the male students because I know that they were in very, very poor housing.

AE: Yeah, very ramshackle housing.

LG: Right, yeah. So, what other civil rights struggles might you have been involved with before The Rag began in 1966?

AE: Well in '64, I think, was my first actual demonstration. And it was, the Piccadilly Cafeteria on Congress Avenue was one of the holdouts that a lot of Austin restaurants had integrated, but this one had not. And I think it was fairly big, or not big, but it was a southern chain, the Piccadilly. At least it wasn't just in Texas. And so, we did a sit-in there. And we, so we met, and this is how I met Jeff Sheryl. I mean we met, several of us met in a car, waiting for the Piccadilly to open. And we were up near the Capitol so we weren't in front of the restaurant. And there was a student whose name I can't remember, he was from Huston-Tillotson, an African American student. And this is what we did, Terry, my good friend from high school and some other people, we went in and we sat down, we ordered through the cafeteria line and we sat down at our table. And we were joined by the African American man from Huston-Tillotson, and he came and sat at our table. And so the restaurant's like, "Whatever."
And then as we went out, he paid the bill. And I'm not saying that it wouldn't be—And the Austin Police, probably partly because they didn't want a big hullabaloo in Lyndon Johnson's home town, or his home state, the Austin Police were kind of hands off. There were no arrests and, in a situation like that, you have to tell the story, because the press didn't tell the story. But we essentially, it was sort of by bits and pieces that—And I can't even tell you when the Piccadilly actually integrated. But that was the first action, civil rights action I was in.

AE: And then there were the Roy’s Lounge Pickets because they refused to let a friend, George Vizard, in with an African American—well the African American woman was trying to use the phone in the restaurant and they wouldn't even let her in to use the phone. And so, we picketed that, and they finally shut down.

LG: Oh really. Rather than just integrating they shut down?

AE: Yeah. Or maybe they shut down for other reasons, but they shut down. Their place is still there. It became a very important punk rock bar. (Laughs) And—

LG: Which bar is it?
It's called Roy's Lounge and, as a punk bar, it was Raul's, so, in the late '70s and '80s. It's -- do you know where, I think, is it Trudy's?

Trudy's, yeah.

Yeah, so it's, if you--

Okay.

Just to the north of it is-- (laughs) I don't know what it's called now, it's gone through many names.

Okay, so it's north of campus--

Yeah, well, the campus sprawls a bit--

Half a mile or something?

Well Trudy's is, it was right about 27th and Guadalupe. It's across kind of from the new communications building.

Oh yes, yes.

Upper end of it.

Okay, I know where you're talking about now.

So those were things that I did. And we began to become more conscious of Vietnam. And the draft began to pick up. And SDS, I joined SDS, Students for A Democratic Society. We were involved with teach-ins and demonstrations and those kinds of things. So, my activism kind of spread into-- my radical politics spread into anti-war politics as well.

Okay, well that is a key point.
AE: A segue, okay?

LG: Because there is also, I think, an idea in a lot of the historical literature that white kids who were involved, who got involved with anti-war, then abandoned civil rights.

LG: And I'm wondering, is that what happened here at UT?

AE: No. I think Vietnam sucked up a lot of oxygen in everybody's lives. And that had to do with the draft. The draft made the war a generational issue. It was one you had to confront as a generation. “Am I going, is my brother going?” So, I think it sucked up a lot of oxygen but the people I knew were still involved. And, we didn't use this word, allied, with the, what became a kind of Black Panther group called Community United Front in Austin. So, there was a lot of-- In 1970, Jeff Jones won student body president, and became president in, he was president the following year, fall of '70, spring of '71.

LG: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

AE: But in that office, they began to do breakfast program support.

The breakfast program moved over to the Y for a while and so there was fundraising and support. Then they also did Economy Furniture strike. That was a big Chicano furniture strike.
So, they did support for the Econ- I mean, by support, sending picketers out and strike funds, raising strike funds. Also there-- well I guess it was, god, I guess it was '66, was the big march from the Valley of the farm workers.

LG: Yes.

AE: So there was, there was a lot of activity. Not as much, to my recollection, happening that was on campus, related to the campus. In other words, related to segregation. But it, but what would happen is that black students would bring concerns up, for example, fraternity slave auctions.

LG: Oh my goodness.

AE: And then there would be protests at the, you know-

LG: Oh my goodness.

AE: Well, yeah. But I mean they were like those, they still have them, don't they? I mean, where they're auctioning off a guy that'll go on a date with you. It's a fundraiser. I mean, they-- this, this is how it's invisible to people. They're like, "What? You know, what?"

LG: Which I just did. (Laughs)

AE: (Laughs) No, I don't mean that. I mean the, "What do you mean it's insulting?" Well, okay, or blackface minstrel shows.
It's not, you know, in the culture of the South, until racism's confronted, it's not evident that it's racism. (Laughs) It's like, "Oh, well, that's just what we do. And we've done it for 20 years." Do you know what I'm saying?

There was a big fraternity on, it was 19th before it was Martin Luther King. So, if you look down from the tower, all the way down, I think it's University, all the way toward the Capitol, up on 19th is, it's sort of carved through, so it's pretty high up there. There was a fraternity that would do their Old South thing and set off cannons and put Confederate flags out. Well the fraternity's gone, I mean, it moved and it's not sitting there anymore. But those things were kind of the Confederate statue (laughs) issues of the day.

I forget this one, I wasn't in Austin and that's why I forget it. In '68 there was just a huge demonstration at a Conoco station that wouldn't-- where the guy, the owner had been involved in a racial assault.

AE: He had hit somebody. Anyway, there was a reaction to the station that he owned, and a big picket line. I think there were, I lose track, 63 arrests there.

And that was in '68. So, the civil rights still spread like that around and there were community elements to it with Community United Front, or establishments where things
happened. Not so much, and of course I left in the fall of '67.

LG: And why did you leave?

AE: I went, well, (laughs) I got-- I always go, “I got put on disciplinary probation. I was one of six people put on disciplinary probation for giving a speech in the wrong location.” The speech was on the West Mall and we hadn't gotten a room reserved. And so, the University, the technicality was that we hadn't reserved a room for this meeting that we held. And Frank Erwin was out there taking names, the chairman of the Board of Regents, and we were served with disciplinary action, that at the time was suspension, and there was a huge hullabaloo. The constitutional lawyer from the law school came and defended us. (Laughs)

LG: Really.

AE: I still think it's hilarious. Because that's not the normal thing that happens in a disciplinary hearing.

LG: (Laughs)

AE: (Laughs) And he was great, Fred Cohen. And the faculty council was in an uproar, and it was a huge deal. It was a free speech movement on the campus. And by the end of it all I was exhausted by it, but also, I think our charges were dropped down to probation. In other words, we could
have gone, I could have continued. I went on an exchange program to Chile for just three weeks, and then I went to New York. And I went to New York because a guy I was involved with was in New York and said, "We can start a paper and be--" I ended up in New York and I ended up doing two things, working partly at that paper when it got launched in '68, on layout nights, and writing occasionally, and then working with the North American Congress on Latin America [NACLA].

And they were doing research on corporations and U.S. foreign policy and the-- Where these people were coming from, was that the next Vietnam would be in Latin America. And that they wanted to understand exactly what was forming foreign policy, how to understand whose interests were being served by foreign policy in Latin America. And so, one of the people I worked with had been in the Dominican Republic before the Marines landed in 1965. And there was an election and he was-- People had various kinds of connections to Latin America. But the belief was that, Vietnam was raging, and that we had to be prepared, analytically, to meet what might be what the next Vietnam.

**AE:** I mean, some really smart people were in this group, and it was a great group. Marge Piercy was in the group, Marge Piercy, the feminist poet.
LG: Okay, we're going to take a turn here and talk a little bit about how you were involved with the founding of *The Rag* and what happened with *The Rag* and even, maybe, explaining what *The Rag* was.

AE: Okay. *The Rag* was an underground newspaper in Austin, Texas, and one of the best examples of cultural and political melding of content. It was the sixth paper in the Underground Press Syndicate. So, it was early; it was the first big one in the South. It was a little comic book sized tabloid when it first came out. For about three months, it printed off a small, multi-leaf, sheet-fed press.

AE: And there were four people that came back from the West Coast having talked to another person who had done the paper in Lansing, I believe, but, you know, “How did you do it and what did you do,” and that kind of thing and then, “Maybe we could do this.” So, they came back to Austin with the fall semester beginning, thinking about trying to make it happen in Austin. Now, three of them were from the same high school in Houston, Bellaire High School. They all-- Dennis and Judy Fitzgerald and Thorne Dreyer and then Carol Neiman. Honestly, I can't tell you where Carol grew up, but I think it was Texas, I'm pretty sure.
AE: And so, they got together with Jeff Shero, Larry Freudiger was the printer, Gary Thihher, and I was there in the beginning, kind of like, "We can do this." It happened at a time the Daily Texan, which had been available kind of as a-- for liberal viewpoints, took a turn to the right with the election of an editor who did not want anti-war opinions in the paper. So, even the very first issue had the previous year's Daily Texan editor, Kaye Northcott, wrote an article about what the new editor was like.

AE: And, I considered-- now this is where some of my women's politics come into this because I considered myself part of it. I was part of it. I helped lay it out. I helped talk about it. I helped make it happen but I typed it, by and large, I typed. The first-- I would be there late at nights typing. I was a great typist, still am a great typist. Learned it in junior high. So, those of us that could type, typed, and I did not think of myself, and this is a gender issue, as a writer. And, you can tell in the early days, I mean, the gender parity of writers was not great and there was kind of a non-hierarchical funneling.¹ And I looked,

¹ In order not to impose the titles of hierarchy, The Rag did not have editors. Instead, the masthead listed Thorne Dreyer as Funnel and Carol Neiman as Funnella. They funneled articles to typists and volunteers doing layout. – Alice Embree
going, “Okay,” but you know, the Funnel, Thorne, wrote, I don't know, 36 articles in the first year and--

LG: But who's counting.

AE: And who's counting and the Funella wrote maybe three. So, even though there was this, "We're all in this together and doing it together," thing. It’s looking—it’s like lots of things, it’s looking back at it that I can see the ways in which I needed a Women's Liberation movement to give me a voice?

AE: So, I was there in the beginning. I did not write an article until the paper-- I was already in New York and I wrote an article in October of 1967. So, we're talking a whole year later after the paper was out. I was in New York. I was doing some research and writing with NACLA, some research heavy type things, doing some articles for The Rat newspaper and then I found out that Frank Erwin canceled the Chilean Exchange because of the Embree girl, that was me. And so, I wrote-- that was the first article. And I would say it really came out of wanting to tell my side of the story and just plain being incensed, and looking back on it, I was like, "The Embree girl." There was an element to it that was also insulting, I thought, to my father, because it was like, that professor's girl. That
was an element I brought into it, just my own thinking, but whatever.

AE: I note in myself it took anger to get me to have a voice in print. And this was before-- So, the paper, the actual paper, lasted longer than almost any other paper like it and it bridged all of this change. It bridged-- A lot of the people working on it were in SDS at the beginning.

AE: And it had a lot of cultural elements, underground comics and things that were fun for people to look at, and ads for psychedelic rock, so it had all this-- I mean, some people were literally just looking at the ads to find out where the next music thing was. And some people were reading the articles and some people, like me, were typing the arti-- (laughter)

AE: So, it bridged this period of upheaval and by '70, December '69 I returned, and by '70 The Rag had been transformed by its embrace of Women's Liberation. And I think it's the fact that it could embrace that change that made the paper last that long. And all these women were working on the paper and they were movers and shakers and they were meeting in women's consciousness raising groups and trying to get Sarah Weddington to file Roe v. Wade and putting up birth control information centers in The Rag office. They were like, "We need this," and then they'd go and hammer up
a bunch of plywood and put an office in the corner. It was like-- the place had been transformed.

AE: I think that a lot of the guys in that early era were like, "Well, it wasn't a very good paper then," like, "It was good when we had it." But they have a kind of jaundiced view of what they call uber democracy. But what happened was this blossoming of women's content and leadership and by the time-- I mean, you typed your own articles. That was it. You want an article? Well, you type it and then we'll consider putting it into the layout. You know what I'm saying? There was no longer [crosstalk 00:08:43] Right, there's no typing pool.

AE: And that was part of the uber democracy that probably made it look kind of weird but be a very interesting period of content with these women who were active like Judy Smith and Linda Smith and Barbara Hines and Pat Cuney. They called themselves the Women's Liberation Front, kind of after liberation fronts in other countries. I mean, it was-

LG: Oh, interesting.

AE: And, none of these women, none of them, were single issue women. They were not-- they had come into Women's Liberation but they were writing articles about apartheid
and gentrification, although it might have been called something else or--

LG: Urban renewal.

AE: Right. And, in other words, very-- Chile, they were writing articles about Chile. They were involved in tons of things. Bringing all this-- basically, allowing women mentoring women and that's a really super important part of what happened in Women's Liberation was helping form leadership and raise voices up and not where-- You had a style in SDS of whoever could talk the longest, and they were always men, almost always men, dominated the conversations. And so, you get into a Women's Liberation setting and you're in circles and you're trying to get everyone to speak, if possible. It's just a totally-- Pat Cuney talks about this. It's like, "Well, we learned to sit in circles."

AE: Not like this and there. But mostly women began to tell stories about their own lives to each other and learn that their-- what they had carried into their heads as, "Well, I'm just shy or it's me. I just can't--" what they thought of as individual problems.

LG: Oh, interesting.

AE: Individual issues were actually societal barriers that they just hadn't identified yet. That's just such a huge-- it was like, "Oh, that happened to you?" I mean, we're talking
the Me Too movement but it wasn't called that but it was like, "Oh, I understand. That happened to you, too? That happened to you, too. That happened to you, too," on and on and to learn from each other in those setting was just huge.

AE: Now, I-- here's the part I was almost going to say and I think it’s kind of a-- Sometimes this is perceived wrong but women of color, primarily found-- wanted to find their voice in women in color organizations or people of color organizations.

AE: So, the leadership, say, of the Black Citizens’ Task Force, Velma Roberts, who was not a UT student but, she's no longer with us, but she-- that's an example of a very strong leader that did not come up in this college educated, Women’s Liberation Front, thing that grew up. So, there is a perception, I think, that white women just were dealing with white women's issues. And I think that's wrong and I think it underestimates the fact that the leadership that was growing up among people of color, among women-- there was a choice being made by people of color to operate within other organizations.

AE: That was--you could say there's a kind of pushing-- I feel that we didn't understand, in some ways ... [inaudible 00:13:45] less clear on this but it’s an important issue
for people who think that, “Well, you just were over here operating independently.”

AE: Now, we did not use the word ally but we were allies with the Welfare Rights Organization that Velma Roberts was working on. So, every International Women's Day, there would be Velma or other people speaking on those issues, impacting other communities. There would be-- our International Women's Day programs look like, Women in Vietnam, Women in Iran, Women Welfare Rights, Lesbian Women. I mean they were just very interesting and inclusive that way.

AE: But I think that because history-- I think that that whole piece, it kind of gets missed by the history of the Second Wave, which just makes some assumptions that these women just were thinking about women's issues and were only thinking about it in a white context and it wasn't really true. And it sure wasn't true at The Rag where everybody had multiple-- They were eloquent on many subjects and made really good active, activist efforts to ally with groups that were not in the UT arena. Does that make sense?

[crosstalk]

AE: Yeah, so generally off campus.

LG: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Yeah, it’s really--
AE: Because people don't know that and they don't-- maybe pulling that out of the coverage of *The Rag*, really looking at it and going what did these women, who you think of were just like cardboard cutouts of the Second Wave, what were they writing about? Because it wasn't just women. And, what were the International Women's Day Programs including? I think those things are left out of the story that gets told about the Second Wave.

AE: And then the Second Wave gets talked about in a way that's like, "Well, these women didn't have other concerns besides gender equity and they went off and they no longer cared about race or international issues," and that wasn't my experience, wasn't the experience of the women that I knew that were starting up Women's Liberation in 1970 at *The Rag*, around *The Rag*. It's a piece that's missed and I guess it's-- We had come up in a period of time where we watched SNCC say, "Hey, white people, you get out and organize white people. We're going to have black voices here."

AE: And so, it was part of our lived experience to have those, Black Power for Black People, kind of have this, bifurcated, more than bifurcated, I mean, where you had like multiple organizations. I think about it with the movie that's ... *She's Beautiful* and I think about the women's voices that came-- that were Puerto Rican Young
Lords’ voices or African American Welfare Rights organizers. And there was a lot more crossover and maybe it’s just kind of a racist amnesia or something that there wasn't crossover and that there wasn't-- and I got to be part of the beginning of it and maybe it, as the women's movement went on, became--

AE: Sometimes I think trying to get changes, like the ERA, there's a way that when you get tangled up in the constitutionality of it all, you kind of drift off into pragmatic politics, in a way. I think you see it in the suffrage movement where you had a lot of abolitionists and there was good-- You can critique some of this but it got worse when they went into the South trying to win the vote for suffrage in the South and then you just got outright racism because they adapted in a pragmatic thinking, that there was an adaptation that was made and it was-- I'm, I'm getting lost in here. I’m probably incoherent by now.

LG: Not at all.

AE: Yeah, I am.

LG: It’s, I think--

AE: These are issues you are interested in, I know.

LG: I think it's that this isn't single issue--

AE: Mm-hmm (affirmative).
LG: And so, in your mind, you're thinking about all these things that are at the same time and there's all these different threads and it is hard to process it all together. So, I have a question for you. UT also -- the UT activism -- also doesn't fit into our understandings of the Women's Liberation Movement from authors, historians, that have a perspective from Women's Liberation in the North and Midwest.

AE: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

LG: But here, I could see last fall, when my students were interviewing women activists here and we had a dinner with people coming together, that there were a lot of relationships among Chicana activists

AE: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

LG: and Anglo, as they're called, women activists, right?

AE: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

LG: Right. And I think that people who might listen to this might not understand [crosstalk 00:21:10]. So, if you could also talk about that, relationships with people like Martha Cotera and Cynthia Perez and--

AE: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

LG: Right. And the Economy Furniture Strike, you just mentioned.
AE: Yeah. The Economy Furniture Strike was this, I believe that's where a lot of Chicano, Chicana activists cut their teeth in politics and it was with a furniture union picket lines and it carried over. So, a lot of those people that became involved as either activists in the Furniture Strike or allies ended up being the first Chicanas in the County Commissioner's Court or in the City Council or-- And the, one of the things that's fascinating to me is that, and, students today don't understand, that it wasn't until, what, until '72 that the right to vote for someone under 21 existed. I think that was when there was a constitutional amendment that you could vote at 18.

AE: So here, all-of-a-sudden, boom, '72, we're talking Jeff Jones is in the student body office and people go, "Oh, we can mobilize a young voter block that's an ally with the Chicano, the developing Chicano community. We can start exercising some muscle here in terms of alliances that start to transform the City Council and the Commissioner's Court." So, that all was bubbling up right then when, all of a sudden, to the huge surprise of the Democratic, white men in the Democratic Party go, "Oh, my God, there's a student vote."

AE: It was huge. Jeff Jones would be a wonderful interview because he tells great stories about like, all of a sudden,
at this precinct convention that was always going to some white guy that lived in a central part of town, well, he is in the Jester dorm precinct going, "What? What happened?"

And they're passing resolutions about the war in Vietnam and everything else. I mean, all of a sudden everything becomes opened up to- and there was pressure from civil rights but then it was pressure from people who said, "Hey, you're going to draft us and send us to war and we can't vote?"

AE: So, there was a bunch of pressure and then, boom, the thing changes and it begins to alter the city landscape and the way people think about politics, electoral politics. And I think that's kind of a missed piece of history. It doesn't get how that happened. But that's where some of these alliances, that's why they go back there. And they go back to-- There were big debates in The Rag, do we support Gonzalo Barrientos or Raza Unida, and people on both sides and whatever. But, some of the UT people cut their teeth on Raza Unida, like Martha Cotera, or they came in and started looking around going, "We need Mexican-American studies. What happened? Where's our history here? Mexican-American Cultural Center."

AE: So, those alliances strengthened in that period of time, they were kind of electoral. And the other thing, and
students, obviously, they probably get this but generations of activism, passed quickly. So, in my life the '62 Port Huron guys, they weren't all guys, but they, by the time I come in in '64, we're almost a new generation and we're the weird Texas SDS chapter, one of the biggest in the nation where people were like, "What happened here? These people are nuts."

LG: What made you guys nuts?

AE: Because they-- people show up in cowboy boots and cowboy hats, and they're all like from Michigan and Princeton and graduate school now. And they're like, “What happened with them? We don't want them in here.” Generations-- well, Texas was just plain weird. I think that-- I mean, there was more cultural stuff. There was more marijuana, there was more, whatever.

AE: I mean, it was just different than a kind of thoughtful, Port Huron, beloved community of people who are probably graduate students and all of a sudden you throw in a bunch of people who drive cattle trucks for their father in the summer and work in a dry-cleaners. I mean, more working-class, more edgy, culturally edgy, just plain-- they speak differently, in Texas accents. We don't know what the hell happened here. No, it’s true. These SDS, these more staid
SDS people would go, "What happened here with these-- who are these people?"

LG: And SDS had a large chapter here.

AE: It was a huge chapter and because you-- In a lot of the country had people bouncing off an Old Left and defining themselves in relationship to it. I mean, that's what Port Huron was. “Okay, we're a new generation and we don't quite think this Cold War thing you had going here is how we're going to think about the world.”

AE: And so, you had-- and in Texas you didn't have much of an Old Left. You had a few but it wasn't the same thing. It was more like a cultural conflict. Like you get kicked out of your family if they found out you were on a civil rights demonstration, right? There was more cohesion. It made for more cohesion and it made anyone who was odd, there was like this gravitational pull. Okay, you're odd because you play psychedelic rock. You're odd because you believe differently. It made a different cohesive thing that The Rag was definitely a product of and it wasn't the Ann Arbor folks writing clever SDS leaflets. It was like a-- but that's what I mean by generationally. We have the sort of staid group and they're mostly very thoughtful and they write lots of leaflets. And then two years pass and all
this-- it begins to change and because student cohorts are generally four-year cohorts, it changes rapidly.

AE: And the only reason I think I ended up knowing all these different people is that I was from Austin and even when I was in New York, I'd come back here for Christmas and vacations and I would get to, I had the advantage, therefore, of some long continuity that other people didn't have that advantage. They would be here for-- maybe they'd be here for school and they'd go somewhere else, back to Buffalo to teach or something. But I was here, even when I wasn't here, I would come back here and I knew all these people because I would find them in their lairs, in their meetings, in their demonstrations. And they kind of knew me. “Oh, that's Alice, she'd been put on disciplinary probation in '67.” I mean, it would be like four years ago but they would know who I was, too.

AE: So, it was-- I think I have an Austin home-base advantage, if you will, of seeing Austin that other people didn't have. And there were lost of Austinites in that group, too. Mariann [Vizard], Mariann wasn't an Austinite, she was from Fort Worth. Pat Cuney went to Austin High. [inaudible 00:31:56] Austin High. They start selling The Rag on campus at Austin High and get in trouble. Get called into the office. "What are you doing with this paper?"
LG: Really?

AE: Yeah. I think she started as a Young Republican and then she kind of was, like, "Who are these people?" I mean, she started as kind of like, "Well, I believe in free speech" and, of course, she's like, "Well, not that speech. You can't do that." And she ends up kind of falling into the-- But she's a good example of younger than-- of almost a different generation. It’s easy to be older student cohorts because they're all-- because you see them come in. They come in.

(phone alarm ringing)