

Interview with Mary Lynne Cleverdon

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DePue: Today is Friday, October 19, 2012. My name is Mark DePue. I'm the Director of Oral History with the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library. Today I'm here in Springfield with Mary Lynne Cleverdon. You probably don't go by Mary too often, do you?

Cleverdon: No. My mom would call me Mary Lynne when I was in trouble. But the rest of the time I was Lynne, and my friends know me as Lynne, unless they were my mother's friends first, then they know me as Mary Lynne.

DePue: You're not in trouble today, so I think I'll stay with Lynne. (both chuckle)

Cleverdon: Good. Thank you.

DePue: We wanted to talk to you Lynne, as you know, because you had this amazing experience that is a piece of history on the Civil Rights Movement in 1964. It's always fun, and I think important, to get a lot of background information, as well, because you weren't born at the beginning of the Civil Rights Movement, you had an interesting life.

There are some things that we want to talk about, from '65 to '76, as well, that are certainly fascinating and fit nicely into the study that the library has about Illinois politics. But, from what you've told me, through most of

that you were kind of the fascinated observer to all of these things. Would that be a correct observation?

Cleverdon: Yes. Not minimally involved, but certainly not in the core of planners, organizers and so on. I would say I was kind of in the footnote, periphery of the activity. [I] did get to Mississippi, did do some marching with King [Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.] in Chicago.

In politics, my husband was part of Walker's [Dan Walker, Illinois Governor, 1973-1977] administration. So, again, I was a wife, attended events, was friends with some of Walker's key people. [We] entertained a lot of the door knockers and organizers for the state in the Walker administration. But [I] was just, kind of, one of those people, you know, at the back of the picture.

DePue: But obviously, you were paying close attention to the things that are going on—

Cleverdon: Oh, yes.

DePue: ...which is why this is going to be a great interview for us to add to our collection. Let's start off with when and where you were born.

Cleverdon: I was born in 1941, in a little town called Concordia, Kansas, near the northern part of the state, not too far from Nebraska. [I] lived there until I was about seven.

DePue: Do you know how the family got to that part of Kansas in the first place?

Cleverdon: Yes, my parents were both living and really, basically grew up in Omaha, Nebraska. My father was working for Fairmont Foods in Omaha and was transferred to their company in Concordia and was with them for maybe a year or two, probably not much longer than that, when the local farmer's cooperative hired him to be the business manager for the co-op. So, in that capacity, then, he got to do much more with administration, finance, management, fiscal planning, promoting the co-op to other farmers, I think, too, in the area.

DePue: What was your father's name?

Cleverdon: Arne, middle initial E, Larson.

DePue: With an "o-n"?

Cleverdon: O-n, yes, Swedish.

DePue: I was going to say, there's not too many options there. Is "e-n" the Norwegian side of it? Is that how it works?

Cleverdon: I think so, yes.

DePue: You were born in late...I think, September 13, 1941?

Cleverdon: Correct.

DePue: That's close to the beginning of World War II, for us. Did he serve in the military?

Cleverdon: No. He had had eye trouble as a child, as a result of measles. So, that continued to kind of dog him through college and even when I was a child. I remember him having ulcers on his eyes when I was about three. So, when he was—not drafted—but when he went for his physical, he was declined.

DePue: How would you describe him, personality-wise?

Cleverdon: Oh, my goodness. He was a very outgoing person. He was very well organized, very generous, did a lot of volunteer work, doing tax returns for widows or helping with the church, do a lot of benevolence kinds of things, which eventually grew into work for him later in life. But those characteristics of generosity, easy to know, enjoyed a good joke, was just a very likable person. People were kind of attracted to him, so he was good at promotion. (both laugh)

DePue: To include your mother, I'm sure.

Cleverdon: Yes. Yes. Yes.

DePue: Tell us a little bit about her.

Cleverdon: Well she was kind of feisty. You know, she's always been a very good role model, as a mother. But she had two older brothers who, I think, helped her develop this sense of herself, and she could hold her own against her brothers. As I got into my teen years and heard stories...I mean, she was a very beautiful woman. I remember one of the stories was that, on their wedding day, she was on a float in a parade in Omaha in the morning. Then in the afternoon, they had their wedding and a reception in the evening at an aunt and uncle's home. So, they were very involved in the community and in their church. They had a lot of fun.

The first date she had with my dad, he took her hunting, or not hunting, but, shooting cans and things like that, with a gun. He was going to show her how to shoot a gun. I guess the first time she shot the gun, she hit the can. That was kind of the beginning of the sparring, you know, the fun between them. But they got along really well, and each respected whatever the other said. We could never work one against the other. They were a team. (laughs)

DePue: Darn it.

Cleverdon: (laughs) I know.

DePue: I don't know that I've ever heard anybody, who's talked about a first date being, let's go out and shoot. (both laugh)

Cleverdon: I think [in] those days it was not an expensive date. They did a lot of picnicking with friends and that kind of thing. There's a great picture of her, up in a tree, climbing. So they just had a lot of fun together.

DePue: What was her maiden name?

Cleverdon: Downs. D-o-w-n-s. Her father was from southern Illinois.

DePue: Well, southern Illinois, that oftentimes means they came there from Kentucky or the Confederacy someplace at the time.

Cleverdon: Um hmm. I think that's true. I have not tracked her father's family, although I know there are a lot of Downs surnames down east of Redbud, which is where my mother's mother came from. Her family name was Lohrberg, L-o-h-r-b-e-r-g. Her dad died at thirty-nine, and my mother was only five. So they really lost touch with her father's side of the family. It would be fun to track that. We've done much more with the Lohrberg side. But, because her dad wasn't around, I think she saw her grandmother the last time when she was about seven or eight, on her father's side. And that was the end.

DePue: What was her first name? Your mom's first name?

Cleverdon: Oh, my mom's first name was Mary.

DePue: Well, that's where the Mary comes from.

Cleverdon: That's right.

DePue: That's why you have to distinguish between the two of you, I suspect.

Cleverdon: Yes. Yes. When I was in second grade, there were five Mary's in the room. The teacher wanted us each to go home and decide how she was going to distinguish us from the other four. And, because my mom was Mary, we decided that at some point it would be confusing, even in the household. So I became Lynne, in the second grade.

DePue: Were you okay with that?

Cleverdon: I was. It was kind of fun. I never did meet anybody named Lynne, until I was in college, actually. The woman upstairs was named Mary Lynne Peters, and I

was Mary Lynne Larson. So that was just, you know, an odd thing, that I got to be that old before I found anybody with my name.

DePue: Did your mom work?

Cleverdon: Not outside the home, after she was married. She was a homemaker. My youngest sister is twenty years younger than I am, so for forty years, I would say, she worked as a mother. (laughs) She's still working as a mother.

DePue: I need to find a better way of saying that, I guess. (both laugh) How many children did she have then?

Cleverdon: Five.

DePue: Are you the first?

Cleverdon: I was the first.

DePue: The eldest.

Cleverdon: I am. I am.

DePue: Did you go to all the personality traits of the eldest child?

Cleverdon: I think I did, yes. And I'm living it out. (laughs)

DePue: Which one of the two would you say you take after more?

Cleverdon: I would say my father, probably, in terms of personality and so on. When he was alive, everybody would comment on how I looked like my dad and had my dad's eyes and all that kind of thing.

Now that my dad's been gone for twenty years and people who did not know him, because he was in Springfield only a couple of months before he died... People who know my mom think of me as looking like her and having her blue eyes. So, I guess I have an affinity for both of them. But I would say my personality was more like my father's.

DePue: I'm hoping you might be able to find that picture of your mom up in the tree.

Cleverdon: I probably could. I probably could.

DePue: Was the family religious?

Cleverdon: Yes. My parents were both Lutheran when they moved to Concordia, but there was no Lutheran church there. When they went back to Omaha, they talked to a deaconess in their church to determine what would be a good denomination choice for them. She said she thought Presbyterian was the next best. And so they went to—

DePue: Next best, as closest in terms of—

Cleverdon: (laughing) I don't know if it has to do with getting to heaven or polity (both laugh) or worship style or what. The liturgy is certainly different. But they joined the Presbyterian Church and have stayed with the Presbyterian Church.

My dad became very good friends with the pastor there, Paul McCleave who, when he left Concordia went to Emporia, to the College of Emporia Presbyterian School, as the president, and then called my dad to come and be the business manager there, and then vice president of the college.

Then the two men had careers that kind of moved together, most of the time. We were all in Montana about the same amount of time. When my dad was with the national church, he started and developed their stewardship and promotion department. He was in New Jersey, New York, and Paul, at that time, was in Oregon at Lewis and Clark College, which is a Presbyterian school.

DePue: So Paul was the person that your father followed?

Cleverdon: He kind of followed and then—

DePue: What was his last name?

Cleverdon: McCleave. M-c-C-l-e-a-v-e. And eventually, Paul was called to American Medical Association [AMA] to build a new program, bringing together physicians and clergy, the whole man. Paul was there a year or two, and kept inviting my dad to come and be his vice president or associate director or whatever. My dad eventually did then leave the national church.

Because he had built a network of clergy all over the country when he joined AMA, he brought those contacts in each of the states to the program development at AMA. So, Paul had access to all the physicians that were



Lynn Clevedon's mother, Mary Margaret Downs, was "up a tree" while on a date with Arne E. Larson, Lynne's father, near Omaha, NE, circa 1938.

members, at the time. It was a requirement in those days that physicians be members of the AMA.

DePue: That's the American Medical Association?

Cleverdon: Yes, yes. They built committees in each state to work with this program. Eventually the sort of outcome of all of that was that, now medical students have some coursework. Even in their licensing exams, there are questions about spiritual issues with patients.

For pastors, most young men and women going through seminary, now also have to do what they call clinical pastoral education (CPE) in a hospital setting, so that each is comfortable in the other's domain, if you will, that no longer would a physician give a placebo if a person had essentially a spiritual problem.

I don't know how that follows through today, because once seminaries had CPE as a requirement, and medical schools had some knowledge of spiritual issues, matters. Those were originally taught by clergy and then, that whole profession of the philosophers kind of came in with ethics and spiritual issues and morality and all that kind of thing.

But AMA then closed out that program, because they had achieved the original objective. Then, at that point, my dad started selling real estate, which brought him full circle on his father's career.

DePue: But that comes quite a bit later in your life, doesn't it?

Cleverdon: Yes. Yes, it does.

DePue: When did the family move to Emporia?

Cleverdon: When I was seven, so that would have been about '48, 1948. Church was always at the core of everything. We just were expected to be there. Youth groups were always a part of our lives. The two colleges he worked with were church-based colleges, church-funded colleges. I went to a church college. Faith has just continued to be a very big part of who I am.

DePue: He was at Emporia College; that's where he was?

Cleverdon: College of Emporia—

DePue: College of Emporia.

Cleverdon: ...was a Presbyterian college.

DePue: Did you go to the church on campus?

Cleverdon: Gosh, I don't know that there was a church on campus. We went to the church downtown. I think the students made the...I don't know. When I was in college, we had a chapel on campus, and of course, that was required; attendance was required, even during the week. But I don't remember that C of E had a church chapel. I think students probably went to the Community Presbyterian or whatever denomination.

DePue: Was it at that college he was the business manager? Is that what you said?

Cleverdon: He started as business manager and then became vice president. While he and Paul and Paul's brother, Harold—who was the chairman of the history department—while they were at C of E, they took the college through the accreditation process with North Central Association. So, that was their achievement.

They were kind of generators. They would come in and put something together, fix something that had been broken, build something new, and then they were on to another project, another challenge. They weren't sort of the maintenance team.

DePue: I'm impressed that a young girl of seven or eight or nine knows about things like accreditation, or is that something you heard about afterwards?

Cleverdon: Well, I remember it was a very exciting...I don't know that I knew what the word meant, exactly, but I knew that they were gone, and I knew there were people on campus, and they had special, entertaining responsibilities. I must have been fifth or sixth grade when that happened.

DePue: I also understand that he was an assistant coach for the football team?

Cleverdon: No, but as business manager for the college, he handled all the finances. So, for all the football teams, he was selling tickets. He was responsible for traveling with the team when they were on the road and would be paying their bills or, for the guys who were on scholarship, he took care of things like haircuts and that kind of thing.

He was...I mean, it was a small college. I have no idea how many students, but it was not a big community. He just was there for a lot of different events.

I remember one of the first sort of affirmative action events was him coming home from an away game and being very upset that he had taken the team out for dinner and been told by the owner of the restaurant that only some of the guys would be able to eat in the main part of the dining room. And those of color would have to eat in the back or find another place. I remember my dad having the whole team get up and go somewhere else. I don't know how he found where the other place was, but I remember his level of frustration at that time. That was kind of an interesting...

We had several people from Hawaii, a couple of young men who had come from China and an African-American student who were on the football team. When we were around the campus and having football games and things there, there was usually no problem. But I remember, even going to Lawrence, Kansas. They weren't playing the university, but whoever they were playing that night, at the end of the game, because C of E had some men of color on the team, the opposing team tore down the goalpost. I remember it just being an angry, an angry evening.

I remember, I was travelling with my mom and the McCleaves; dad was on the team bus. I remember him coming over and saying, as soon as the game was over they were going to load the bus and leave. They weren't even going to change in the locker room, just because it was getting ugly, the sort of anti-sentiment.

DePue: How does a very young girl process something like that?

Cleverdon: Well, at the end of World War II, we were still living in Concordia. I will get emotional, but I remember the war was over and the community decided to celebrate. I remember going downtown. I was sitting on my dad's shoulders, and we were watching the parade. People were so excited; it was wonderful. The war was over, and it was a joyous occasion.

But, I don't know, ten minutes, twenty minutes into the parade—it couldn't have been that long; it was too tiny a town to have that much of a parade—but there was a flatbed, being pulled by a tractor that came around the corner down the street. They had Hitler in effigy, in a noose, hung on the back of the trailer. It scared me so much, because the crowd. Emotion went from this very excited, joyful celebration to booing and such hateful sounds. I remember my mom took me home.

They went to the fairgrounds and burned Hitler in effigy. I wasn't there; I was at home. But even from our home, I could hear the angry sounds of the crowd. I remember my mom. I was asking what was going on, and she said, "Well... (with emotion) some people really hate him for what he did," And she said, "What he did was horrible." But she said, "You can't live that hate." That was kind of the first lesson in forgiveness. I don't know. But anyway, when we got to Emporia then, and there were some of those experiences, I remember just sort of drawing already on that learning.

DePue: Was that one of your earliest memories?

Cleverdon: I suppose. That's one of my earliest memories of how a crowd can be swayed, the crowd mentality and how we function in crowds. I think that was the first time the learning was, don't be sucked into the negative. Have an opinion about it, but don't get caught up in destructive activities.

DePue: Well, again, that's quite a lesson to draw at that early an age.

Cleverdon: Pretty unusual, I would say, yeah.

DePue: Have you always been one who had such good powers of observation on these things?

Cleverdon: I guess so, partly because we moved around quite a bit, I think, and I never had a group of people that were my peer pressure group, because by the time I was getting to know people enough that they might have been swaying me, we were moving again. (laughs) So it was the family that really shaped so much of my growing up. That's an interesting thought. But, because we would move...

Like in second grade, we were there for five years. But it probably wasn't until about fifth grade that the girls in Emporia began to see me as part of the group, because a lot of them had been in families who founded the community. They were a very close-knit group and family who did things together all the time.

We lived just outside of town, so I wasn't walking home with any of the girls or living down the street or anything like that. We were pretty isolated. A lot of what I did was at the campus. You know, I had a lot of big brothers and sisters in the campus community.

DePue: You mentioned you had a sister who was twenty years behind you. Did you have some other siblings that were pretty close in age that you spent a lot of time with?

Cleverdon: I played quite a bit with my brother, who was two and a half years younger than I am. But then my sister was seven years younger—

DePue: Yeah, that's too far.

Cleverdon: ...Tim was fifteen years younger, and then Elise was twenty years younger. So, I was kind of the babysitter, mother's helper. Although all the kids had chores as they came along. But I'm closer now, probably, to my sisters and brothers than I ever was growing up.

DePue: Well, I've just got to plug this in, because I was intrigued by the nickname. The college name for the College of Emporia, *the Fighting Presbies*.

Cleverdon: (laughs) Yes. It's kind of a misnomer, (both laugh) although they were very good in football and maybe in basketball, but I only went to football games.

DePue: What was the next move for you?

Cleverdon: We moved to Billings, Montana in 1953.

DePue: So, you would have been twelve at that time.

Cleverdon: I would have been twelve, almost thirteen, yeah. We went to Rocky Mountain College, where my dad was business manager. There were three different denominations involved in that college.

And this is just an interesting little aside... The president was—oh my gosh, it just went out of my mind. We have to come back to that—Himes, Herbert Himes, who had been a pastor here in Springfield, Illinois, believe it or not. He had gone out to be president of the college. My dad applied for the business manager position, so he was there. Living across the faculty circle of five homes from us, was Phil Turner, who had been the choir director at First Methodist downtown, or United Methodist, whatever it was, the circular one. At that time, I had no idea where they'd come from.

It wasn't until I got to Springfield that I met Dr. Himes' son, Herbert, who helped start [Robert] Morris College here. So, my dad was business manager there and Paul was in Bozeman, Montana as a pastor. I attended junior high, seventh, eighth and ninth grade there.

DePue: In a public school?

Cleverdon: In a public school. At the time, Billings was about 60,000 [population]. The Great Northern Railroad had some headquarters there for oil and coal interests and things like that. We loved Montana. We got to the mountains a lot. Actually, because of my age, whenever I had moved anywhere, following Montana, and people said, "Where are you from?" I would always claim Montana, until maybe twenty years ago. Well, I was born in Kansas, but I identify with Kansas and Montana now.

DePue: There's more of a mystique, coming from Montana.

Cleverdon: Yes, yes. It was interesting how people treated you, when we moved on to New Jersey, having come from Montana. You know, did you ride horses to school? No. Did you farm? No. We were in a city, and it didn't have skyscrapers, and New York wasn't across the river, but it seemed very cosmopolitan. Each move I made was to a larger community. It was a nice progression.

DePue: I was going to say that Billings probably felt like a big town when you moved there.

Cleverdon: Oh, it did. It did. It had three blocks of downtown stores (both laugh) and several grade schools. That was really the first time, starting in a new school, where everybody in the room didn't know each other. That was delightful, because they had come from different elementary schools. There were a lot of people feeling shuffled up and knew, when we were all in the same boat. So that was very nice.

It was a lot of fun to get a little more involved in activities and begin to feel I was in control of **my** life. I think that's part of the reason Billings was so important, was I was at an age where I could claim the community for myself, in a way that you don't as a younger child, where parents are in charge.

DePue: How many years did you spend there?

Cleverdon: Three. We left in '56.

DePue: While you were there, I know that—well I'm not sure how this factors in, but I know it's part of this whole narrative that we're going to build on—Montana is a Right to Work State. Tell me about why that's important to the story here.

Cleverdon: I have vague recollections. Our minister at the time was outspoken about a... I guess you could call it, a political issue, which was right to work. I think it was a union, non-union issue. We had a lot of migrant workers, who would be in the area during the summer. I really was not reading news or keeping up with it. But the issue in the congregation became the minister's taking a position on a social issue.

I think, prior to that, pastors were pretty much expected to preach from scripture to your morals and your decisions and your behaviors and your beliefs. This was, maybe, the first time that somebody was taking a stand. It wasn't for a candidate, but it was on an issue. I just remember that sort of festering in the community, again, not being really aware of all of the issues.

He eventually left the congregation. At the time, I thought that was maybe the issue. I'm not sure or positive about that. But again, my parents were always good friends with clergy. So, I remember my dad and their family, we'd do things together, as a family, and continue to be friendly with them [the clergy].

But that was just another sort of opportunity for my dad to sort of feel it's important to pay attention to individuals, no matter who they are, and that, if you are a good person and you do good work, you should have access to jobs and pay and shouldn't be controlled by bosses.

DePue: Does that mean that your father was in agreement with the minister that—I want to make sure I understand this—that the issue about right to work is that there wasn't a requirement that somebody had to be in the union, that the state didn't require that.

Cleverdon: It didn't support unions, right, or wouldn't require them. I don't think it had to do with state employees. I don't know what the demographic was for this, whether it was farm—

DePue: Was there mining in the area?

Cleverdon: There was mining. Anaconda Copper was really big in the northern part of the state. I have a feeling that it may have had more to do with some of the migrant farm workers, in the more agricultural part of the state, which would have been around Billings, between Billings and, say, Great Falls. I just... I don't know... I don't know. I just remember him taking a stand that was not necessarily popular with everybody.

DePue: These would have been in the Eisenhower years. Do you have a sense of how your parents voted in elections?

Cleverdon: I think they were Republican. I know they were Republican. My dad was even a Republican committeeman in Arlington Heights, when he was there. Although, they did have a coffee for Dan Walker. (both laugh) Families stick together.

DePue: We'll get to that later. Maybe that's because Dan Walker was going after Mayor Daley [Chicago Mayor, Richard J. Daley].

Cleverdon: It could have been.

DePue: But we'll get to that here in a later session.

Cleverdon: But, yes, Republican.

DePue: Moving around as much as you did, were you able to stay in touch with the larger family, with the grandparents?

Cleverdon: Um-hmm. My grandparents continued to be in Omaha. From Kansas, we would get up there multiple times a year, because my mom's siblings were there; my dad's brother was there. We'd go up and spend a lot of time with cousins.

Our family, starting in '87, has family reunions, every two years. We move around and whoever hosts... The cousins in my generation have put them all together, until this next year, [when] it will be the next generation, which is pretty remarkable. Those kids are going to take over.

DePue: They're ready to step up.

Cleverdon: They're ready to step up. That tells you where I am in the chain. (both laugh) My mother is the last survivor of her generation, in the immediate family.

DePue: The reason I brought up the grandparents, especially in, is I understand that you had an interesting relationship with one of the grandfathers.

Cleverdon: Yes. My dad's father was an immigrant from Sweden. He left Sweden in 1903, came to New York State, worked on a farm, learned the language, then went to Chicago and was in the building trades.

The story is that, when union organizers began organizing the building trades in Chicago, he was not happy with that and chose to move to Omaha, Nebraska, where he got into the building trades. But some years later, organizers were working the Omaha area, and he was being pressured to join the union.

The story goes that the organizer came to him with the last ultimatum, (clears throat) and my grandfather pulled his hammer out of that little sling on his trousers—you know, his pants, worker's pants—and raised it over his head and just said, "Hold out your hands. I want to see your callouses." And the guy turned around and walked away.

I think it was at that point my grandfather realized that his tenure was up with that builder and with those guys. So, he went into speculation. He'd buy a couple of lots and build a couple of houses and then sell and move on.

There's that kind of streak of independence and not wanting to pay somebody else, who's not doing what you're doing, to sort of organize your life. I mean, there's that.

I had a little experience with that when they were trying to organize civil service at the School of Medicine, [SIU School of Medicine] because your lot wasn't going to change very much, with a union or not a union. But, you were going to be thrown into a situation where part of your salary was going to pay somebody else to do whatever they do, and it sets up a "we; they."

When unions finally did organize civil service, then a person with a concern wasn't supposed to go to their supervisor. They were supposed to go to the union and let the union make an issue of whatever it was. And so it just seemed like...I digress, anyway.

DePue: Well, it sounds like you're rather proud of that independent streak that runs through the family.

Cleverdon: (laughs) Yes, there is a bit of that.

DePue: See, that's not a digression at all, then; is it?

Cleverdon: It's an underscore.

DePue: When did you move to New Jersey?

Cleverdon: In 1956. In kind of going back to the theme of the church and faith, my dad had been then in Billings. While we were in Billings, he became, I believe, the first lay person to be the moderator of the Synod of the Presbyterian Church. That synod, which is a regional territory, I think when we were there,

encompassed Montana and Wyoming, because there was a lot of empty space out there. It was a fairly large geographic area.

DePue: What does it mean to be a moderator?

Cleverdon: It's like the president or... You run the meetings. If you're the president of an organization or you're the moderator or you're whatever, it's an elected position, two years.

DePue: I would think that the president would have been an ordained minister.

Cleverdon: Well, it always had been. Well, they don't call it president; they call it moderator. You moderate the meetings. I don't know why they chose that over president, but anyway, that's the term they used.

It had always been clergy before, but my dad was just a very dedicated... He could have been a minister, for the amount of time and commitment he gave to the church and to his involvements there. I think people saw that in him. But he was also a good financial manager and planner. That's something he kind of spoke strongly to, even within the family responsibility there.

I think, when he was in that role as moderator, people from New York and the national church headquarters came out to do some workshops and that kind of thing, and met him and chatted with him and so on. Then [they] asked him if he'd be willing to go to the national church center in New York and develop a stewardship and promotion department. So, he was back to the generating aspect of his life and was there for seven years and built this network, really, around the country, which then led to the AMA invitation.

DePue: So 1956, the family heads east. Where did you end up settling?

Cleverdon: We lived in Harrington Park, [New Jersey] in a suburb just south of the New York border, really. We were probably about fifteen, ten or fifteen minutes from Tappan Zee Bridge.

DePue: Would that be north or south?

Cleverdon: It's north.

DePue: Where did that go into New York? Is that in the Bronx or someplace north of the Bronx?

Cleverdon: It's north of the Bronx. It goes in near White Plains, if you go across Tappan Zee north. He commuted across the George Washington Bridge and was in a carpool with several people in the area. I think there were five fellas that all worked in that building.

DePue: Does that mean he worked in Manhattan?

Cleverdon: Um hmm, yes. I worked there the summer after my junior year in high school, senior year in high school, and then worked there summers, while I was going to college.

DePue: Now, you've kind of alluded to this before, but you moved there in 1956. You would have been fifteen years old, just at the beginning of your high school career. Is that a tough move for you?

Cleverdon: Well, it was, but it was kind of like the other moves. It was tough, because all of the kids in my class had been there for their freshman year. They'd had freshman year to kind of meld. They came from seven little communities; it was a regional high school. If we'd been there a year earlier, it would have been a lot easier.

In addition to them already having a year, we were two weeks into the school year before we got there. Already, the seating arrangements were taken care of. I got the best grades ever sophomore year, because I sat back, in the back of the room, with the thugs—not thugs, but you know, the guys—and was pretty isolated and rode the bus.

DePue: You mean your social life was limited. You had time to focus on academics?

Cleverdon: I did. There was nobody to talk to, nobody to do anything with. So I studied. It didn't feel like I was studying a lot, but I had the time to do it and the focus to do it.

We went to church in Tenafly [New Jersey], which was a different school system. I was active with the choir there. I was active with the youth group there—had some leadership roles through high school with that group—and really related more to the Tenafly kids who were a much more preppy group of people. It was a more affluent community than where we were. I lead kind of a dual life.

DePue: Well, I'm going to be a tad bit brazen here, but I'm assuming... You've got very light blue eyes. I assume you had blonde hair, petite. I would think that some of those boys in the back of the class were noticing you, somewhere along the line.

Cleverdon: It was...it could get...yeah, [DePue laughs] just comments that they didn't make to me, so much, chats that they...comments with each other. My dad was pretty good at—I wouldn't say I was street smart—but he helped me not be terribly naïve. I always had this kind of sense that, if they, the guys, knew what was going on in my head, I didn't feel disadvantaged or abused, which would lead us off into my attitudes about sexual harassment. But we won't go there. (both laugh)

DePue: Well, maybe later on. Yeah, that's a diversion, definitely. What was the name of the high school?

Cleverdon: Northern Valley Regional High School.

DePue: That's a mouthful.

Cleverdon: Um hmm.

DePue: I would assume, if you go back there now, it's just one solid mass of suburbs.

Cleverdon: You know what? It was when I was there. When I go back, the high school looks pretty much the same as it did when I was there. The only difference is it's all surrounded by a huge chain link fence. A lot of the property has been fenced, that hadn't been when we were going to school there.

DePue: Has the character of the neighborhoods changed since you left?

Cleverdon: Not that much, but it's interesting, because our home and subdivision was on what had been a vegetable farm, a huge farming operation. So, there were no trees. In our yard, we had put a lot of very small, little trees. Since we were there seven years, they had grown some.

Several years ago, when I went back with my son and mom to see the neighborhood, I had no trouble getting around. All the landmarks are still the same. But the trees are wonderfully huge.

When my sister and her husband had gone to try and find the house, they had trouble. She was that much younger. She said, "This can't be it. There are too many trees." But they were in the right spot. But in her mind, it still looked like the late '50s, early '60s.

DePue: You mentioned choir. Did you get involved in some other activities?

Cleverdon: I was in Future Teachers Group. I sang with the chorus. I was in a couple of the class plays, ran for an office, didn't win. I had done that my junior year, because I thought, well, this would be a way to meet people. That I did; that was fun, just running for an office and having to make a speech and that kind of thing. But John Fry got elected. (both laugh)

DePue: You remember who beat you. What was the class office?

Cleverdon: Vice president. But John won.

DePue: You mentioned to me, when we first met, something about a math team.

Cleverdon: Oh, well, yes. I was on the math team.

DePue: Not many people say that.

Cleverdon: No. (laughs) There were five students from Northern Valley and five students from all of the public high schools around the state, pretty much. We had five or six regions. The five of us would go off to the regional center, with everybody else from our region. I'd be team one; each of the others would be two, three, four, five. Then we would work our problems and call the results in to a local clearing place. Then they would tally the totals for all five teams around the state. And then you would be on the winning team for that day, or not.

We got together, probably five or six times during the year. It was fun to do a little traveling, see other high school campuses, that kind of thing. I remember going to one of the meets that actually had a campus. I mean, like they had three or four different buildings. One was a science building and one was language arts and so on. I remember it was a new concept at the time. Now, there are other places that do that.

DePue: What were your favorite subjects?

Cleverdon: Math, I was planning to major in math until I hit calculus in college. [DePue laughs] And for the first time, I really began to like literature. I was a poor reader. I think my background in reading was not that great. Maybe that was the moving around early on. My parents are both readers, but I just played outside most of the time.

DePue: Well, at that stage of school, at least back in those days, I'm thinking that English was half grammar and half literature.

Cleverdon: Yes. Yes.

DePue: Did you not warm up to the grammar side of it, as much as the literature?

Cleverdon: Not so much. I did okay with it, but it was just...If you read, you were inside, sitting down. I was sort of run around, ride horses with a friend, or climb trees or take a hike or ride my bike, you know.

DePue: Most of that sounds like the Montana days.

Cleverdon: Well, Kansas, Montana. [In] New Jersey, I started working after school, my junior year. And then I had church activities, was moderator for our church youth group, and in my junior year, started a teen canteen. Those were days when kids really didn't have a whole lot to do, other than drive around. So our church sponsored a teen canteen. I was the coordinator for all of that and picked up all the sodas and got the light gels and took care of sort of transforming the fellowship hall every Friday night, and getting DJs [disc jockeys] and things. That was a lot of fun.

DePue: There are a couple of different directions I can go here. Later on in your life, you're going to live through a couple of pretty important, historical events. Was history an interest for you?

Cleverdon: No. I regret so much not having a better background in history and a better appreciation for history in the making.

When I was in high school, they were doing a new program, where English and history were taught by the same faculty person. The idea was, you would learn the history and you would read literature of the period, about the period, whatever. I always had an English background faculty member, who would spend three-quarters of that two-period time, looking at English and reading.

That was wonderful, but when we got to history, it was kind of like everybody read a paragraph, and we'd go around a table. It was deadly. And in college, I took one history course. The professor took questions from footnotes and captions under the pictures and a lot of detail.

I always thought history would be much more fun, reading biographies or whatever. In English, you're not reading so many historic novels—or at least we didn't—much more creative writing. I just didn't have a sense of the sweep of history, which now I'm trying to go back and catch up. But there just isn't enough time to get it all done.

What I'd love to be able to do is read Western history, Eastern history, African history, South American history and just bring it all down together, because I think what was happening in different parts of the world, at different times, would be so interesting to correlate or compare or something.

DePue: Well, let's talk about that era that you grew up in. We're talking about the 1950s. So many Americans look back at that, maybe it's all the baby boomers. (Cleverdon laughs) You're just a little in front of the baby boomer generation. But anyway, the baby boomers look back at that era as the idyllic time to be growing up in America. You've got the dawning of television. You've got the great music and things like that. Did you get caught up in all of that, as well? Was that a good time to grow up, you think?

Cleverdon: Well, being in Kansas at that time and in fairly small communities, there was the underbelly of things going on. We used to go to Garden City to visit friends. I remember when blacks in that community were coming to the swimming pool. There were some issues around integration. Those issues didn't arise in Emporia, until after we left. But they filled in the swimming pool. The swimming pool was gone. Now, maybe it didn't have to do with that issue, but it was just peculiar to get back there and see that there was no community swimming pool there anymore.

We were unencumbered of television and all those kinds of things. And you didn't have air conditioning, so you stayed outside. So, the influences were local. I guess, maybe on some levels, it was idyllic in that it kind of harked back to an earlier time. It was sort of the end of the development of that culture, without the influences from TV, as much.

And Billings, the same. Even in '56, there was one cable channel in Billings. I would watch Lawrence Welk [a musical variety show] when I babysat for people on Saturday night, if they had a television.

DePue: That's what the grandparents and parents were watching, I would think.

Cleverdon: Yes. Well, it was the only thing on. Then I got to New Jersey, and all of a sudden, there were radio stations sort of targeting kids. There was American Bandstand [teen dance show].

We were very close to New York City, and although a lot of students my age, in New Jersey, had never been to New York, which was twenty-five minutes away. I got in a lot. There was theater; there was music; there was the excitement of New York City and Times Square and Rockefeller Center and...I mean, it was wonderful.

I could never figure out why so many people in New Jersey didn't go, and finally asked somebody. They said, "You know, there are just a lot of, like, derelicts, and you could get robbed or mugged or..." kind of that fear of the big city. There was some of that, but if you knew what you were doing, you were okay. I never had any trouble. And you went in groups; you didn't wander off into weird neighborhoods.

It was an exciting time, and the youth group at our church took retreats to old farmsteads. You know, we'd go out for a weekend and plan a year's activities or something. It just felt so much more...I mean, you begin to feel like a grown-up there. I don't know that staying in Montana or Emporia, for that matter, would have had the same excitement, partly because it was not New York.

DePue: It sounds like you were thinking that that was the right place to be at that age.

Cleverdon: Yes. Yes. Yes. My parents always spoke in terms of responsibility, and my parents had said to me, "If you're out with a group of kids, and you want to stay out a little longer and you call home..." There were some phrases that we used. If everything was going well, and I really did want to stay out, I would give the right phrase. If I wanted them to say, "No, you still have to come home," then there was another phrase, which you used. And then they said, "No, you had to come home."

So they were always my fall back. It was a good group of kids, but they were just thinking ahead, in that environment, which had not been the case in Billings.

DePue: Do you remember the phrases?

Cleverdon: Yes. It would be, "Are you having a good time? And I could say, "Things are going great," and I would stay. But if I said, "Well, we're having fun," then it was time to come home. (both laugh) The great was good and fun was not so good.

DePue: Darn, I'm afraid I have to go home, folks. Any hobbies when you were in high school?

Cleverdon: Not really. Mostly it was church-related activities and choir and fellowship and studies.

DePue: Did you do any dating?

Cleverdon: Yes. Yes. I started dating in Montana. People could drive at age fifteen, so I went on my first in-the-car date with my date when I was [in] eighth grade. I don't know if that was part of the reason the folks moved to New Jersey, [where] you had to be sixteen and a half. (both laugh)

We landed in New Jersey about three days after I could have gotten my license in Montana. But, yeah, I dated a fellow from the church for a while. He was a couple of years older. When he went off to school, then I dated a fella from my high school class.

DePue: Now see, I was right. Some of the boys were paying attention.

Cleverdon: (laughs) He and I still get in touch, actually. He tracked me down, I don't know, five or six years ago. It's been fun, and I've met him and his wife. We've gotten to be friends. That's kind of fun, to have that continuity with somebody from way back then.

DePue: You said that you were thinking at that time you wanted to be teaching, math?

Cleverdon: I was interested in math, having a math degree. Actually, I wanted to be a Katie Gibbs secretary, when I was in high school.

DePue: A Katie Gibbs secretary.

Cleverdon: Katie Gibbs. Katharine Gibbs was a...sort of finishing school, secretarial training in New York. They spoke at the high school and promoted becoming a secretary through their system and working in through the back door.

This was kind of the beginning of my exposure to, like, women's lib issues. They weren't calling it that, at the time, in '59. But the idea was, if you were a very competent secretary, you could come in as a secretary and begin to move up in an organization. There would be opportunities. That sounded great to me, and you'd work in New York City. What's better than that?

But, my parents wanted me to go to college, and I thought, okay." So I went to college. At the end of the first year, I was ready to go to Katharine Gibbs. My folks said, "Well no, you have to go back for a second year, and then if you want to switch, that would be fine." I think they kind of knew that after two years, you'd be ready to finish all four years.

DePue: Where did you go to college?

Cleverdon: College of Wooster in Ohio. It was a Presbyterian college and my dad was working for the Presbyterian Church at that time, in New York. We had looked at College of Wooster and Occidental [a private, co-educational liberal arts college in Los Angeles] in California, but Ohio just made more sense. They gave me early acceptance, early in my junior year. So, I didn't have to worry too much about it beyond that.

DePue: Since your dad was working for the church at that time, did you get some financial aid or support because of that?

Cleverdon: Um hmm. I got some. I think there was probably a discount, because he was a church employee, and I got some scholarship aid. Then, [for] three years, I graded calculus papers for one of the faculty members. So, I had a job.

DePue: Wait a minute; you said you didn't.

Cleverdon: I know. It doesn't make any sense. (laughs) It just took me a long time. Calculus was okay, but it took me a long time to figure out. I did fine on the homework, but when it came to doing it in a timed exam, I just, I could never get through all the problems. I just decided, if I was struggling that hard, I was really ignoring a lot of my other subject matter. So, I decided to correct papers, because once I worked the problems, it was easy to read everybody's papers. So it was a good job, and I spent more time then on English and sociology and some of those other subjects.

DePue: Did you start off a math major, then?

Cleverdon: I did.

DePue: How long did you last as a math major?

Cleverdon: I was a math major for a year, and then I was a sociology major, in my mind, for a year.

DePue: In your mind?

Cleverdon: Yeah. I mean I had...I think you didn't have to declare until the end of your sophomore year. So, freshman year I was a math major; sophomore year I took quite a bit of sociology, but a bit of literature, which was required.

They had a wonderful program, where all freshmen read the same four books during the course of the year. Each quarter, you had a different faculty member. So, you might have had somebody in the econ [economics] department, but you might have been reading Camus [Albert Camus, an Algerian and French philosopher, author and journalist]. You might have had somebody from the history department, but you were reading Sartre [Jean-Paul Charles Aymard Sartre, a French philosopher, playwright, novelist, political activist, biographer and literary critic] or whatever. So it was a fun, dynamic course.

Then sophomore year, I was doing some of the required... meeting so many of these and so many of those. At the end of sophomore year, I became really, sort of discouraged with sociology, because it was so much focus on statistics and research and trying to get people in pigeonholes.

Literature was much more fun and much more interesting. Character development, interpersonal relationships, it was great. I was reading a lot. So, junior and senior year, then I had a lot of catching up to do, in terms of hours and just did a lot of reading. But it was so much easier to sit up with a flashlight and finish a novel than to finish chapter twenty-seven of Soc 101 or something.

DePue: Why were you using a flashlight?

Cleverdon: Well, my roommate was usually asleep. She was more organized than I was. (both laugh)

DePue: So you boarded at the school?

Cleverdon: Yes.

DePue: Well, it makes some sense, geographically, why you ended up in Ohio, as well. Did you get back home very often?

Cleverdon: Thanksgiving, Christmas, spring break pretty much was it. The school was on a railroad line, so we often organized a group, a train set of cars. Usually they were the old cars, they'd tack on the end and come through town and pick up college students all along the way.

You bought your ticket, and it was not very expensive, which was great. You had two or three cars that were for your kids, going to New Jersey, New York, Connecticut, you know. We'd all get off at Penn Station.

- DePue: I'm trying to imagine a bunch of college kids, all in the same train car. It could be a lot of fun, I would think.
- Cleverdon: Oh, it was. It was a lot of fun. Occasionally, though, we'd have the old cars that had compartments. There'd be maybe six, three and three facing each other, with the little glass dividers and so on. They'd be on the generators that worked on the turning wheels. You'd get on, and it would be very dim. But, once the train started moving, then it would pick up, and the light would be a little bit better. If we'd been smart, we could have dressed up and done a Clouseau [fictional French police character, Inspector Jacques Clouseau] thing or something. (Mark laughs) It would have been fun.
- DePue: Well, that goes back to your English background.
- Cleverdon: Yes. (laughs)
- DePue: I'm wondering , especially during the first two or three years in college, if you were politically conscious at the time, if you were paying attention to that, if you had opinions about such things?
- Cleverdon: Not really. Wooster is about thirty miles west of Akron, maybe about the same, maybe a little farther south of Cleveland, but basically a rural setting. The campus really didn't even interact much with the community, as far as I was aware. We had a mock election and did a mock convention. I remember being a part of it, but not really paying attention to what was happening nationally, the year of the election.
- DePue: That was your sophomore year, probably, the Kennedy-Nixon [1960 presidential candidates, Democrat, John F. Kennedy and Republican, Richard M. Nixon] election? You didn't pay much attention to that?
- Cleverdon: I mean, I was excited about Kennedy. I think pretty much the whole campus was. A lot of the students... There was a big group that did major in history, and there were some people very active on-campus, in terms of student government and the mock election and convention, and that was pretty exciting.

But, I was swimming with a synchronized swimming group and doing some other things. So, that was not... I wasn't active politically. Yeah, not so much.

My class in college, when we graduated in '63, we had the highest percentage of graduates who went into Peace Corps [a volunteer program, established in 1961 by the United States Government, to promote world peace and friendship], or some kind of sort of mission work of any school in the country, I think, percentage-wise, not number, but the highest percentage of our class. Just a lot of my classmates went off to the Peace Corps.

DePue: I was going to ask, how would you describe the political climate of the college? Was it more conservative than others or pretty liberal?

Cleverdon: I think it was pretty liberal. The school had an affiliation with a college in Allahabad, India.

DePue: Allahabad?

Cleverdon: Allahabad. A-l-a-h-a-b-a-d or something [correct spelling is A-l-l-a-h-a-b-a-d]. We had a Wooster in India. So, we had a fairly good presence of Indian students. There was one African American woman, who happened to have been on my floor freshman year— Bennie and I were pretty good friends— and a fairly good group of African-American men students and some other, Filipinos, Hawaiian, a couple of guys from Hawaii. It was a nicely diverse class, considering how small our class was.

We did things on the campus that were focused on diversity, but really reaching out. I was active with the children's home, had kids that I went to visit. [I] helped raise money by going to a local greenhouse and deadheading flowers, so a lot of activity that was sort of other oriented and the school fostered that.

DePue: Were you toying around with the notion of going into the Peace Corps or doing something like that?

Cleverdon: I was toying around with the idea of getting married at that time, (laughs) and did.

DePue: Before we get there, I wanted to ask you just a couple of other questions in this area. This is the late '50s and early '60s. This is the dawning of the Civil Rights Movement. Were you paying much attention to any of that?

Cleverdon: No. I don't recall that we did much. What I remember is that I dated one of the African-American guys that was in one of my English classes, for a while. We just had so much in common, and we always chose the same questions to write on and that kind of thing.

It wasn't until our fortieth college reunion that I learned how much discrimination there was in the community, against the black guys who were on campus and what they went through in that period. But, when we were all there, it never dawned on me, when we'd go out into the community and do things—we always went in groups—but it never dawned on me that there was a formula, for instance, about how many white students to each black student needed to be in the mix, in order for them to be okay in the community. You had to have three whites to one black.

DePue: Was that some unwritten rule or—

Cleverdon: The guys knew about that rule. I don't think any of... Well, I didn't know anybody who was keeping track of that information. But I think it was a cultural thing. They just knew how to be safe and protected, just so that the people at the local pizza place or the ice cream parlor or whatever, anybody coming in would say, "Oh, those are college students." Then it would be okay. But otherwise, it would not have been okay.

DePue: What was the drinking age, while you were in college?

Cleverdon: You could get 3.2 beer ["non-intoxicating" beer] at eighteen, I think. I wasn't a big beer drinker.

DePue: So, you weren't paying attention to things like the freedom rides in '61 or the early efforts of doing voter registration or the sit-ins at the Woolworth counters [segregated lunch counters at F. W. Woolworth retail stores]?

Cleverdon: You saw it on the news some. But very seldom did... Even after dinner, some people would go and watch news or Yogi Bear.

DePue: Or Yogi Bear?

Cleverdon: It was a TV show.

DePue: The cartoon show?

Cleverdon: Yes. They would gather in the parlor of the dorm. Dining rooms were in the basements of a variety of dorms.

DePue: Well, watching Yogi Bear isn't an intellectual strain; is it?

Cleverdon: No. No. (both laugh) I did a couple of times, but mostly I was headed back to the library or swim practice or something like that.

So, [I] really didn't follow that all that much. I'm sure there were others who were following, but I don't recall any group that was actively involved in much of that at the time.

DePue: Tells us about meeting your future husband, then.

Cleverdon: I met him freshman year.

DePue: What's his name?

Cleverdon: David Cleverdon, David K. He was from New York, and I met him—

DePue: New York City?

Cleverdon: Dobbs Ferry, just up the Hudson [River] a little bit. We actually were traveling home for Thanksgiving and coming back on the train. Then we sat

together and dated for a while. Then he dated somebody else, and I dated somebody else for a while. And then we got back together, our sophomore year.

[We had] some things in common. He had been active in his youth group at his church. I think it was kind of encouragement from him—or his mother, I should say—that I switched into literature from sociology. He was a religion major.

DePue: Did he have a Presbyterian background?

Cleverdon: Presbyterian background. I think [he] probably hasn't darkened the door of a church since we left campus. Well, yes he did. I know he was at my father's funeral and a few other funerals. But, just not active at all in the church.

We started dating. He was very intellectual and came out of a much more intellectual family. It was very interesting to have conversations with him or listen to him talk and ask him questions. It was a new and exciting time for me, intellectually. I always felt he was much brighter, far more knowledgeable about a lot of things. [He] had grown up outside of the New York.

DePue: Is that what attracted you to him?

Cleverdon: I think so. I think so. Other people I had dated, we just had a lot of fun doing water skiing and hiking and dancing and all these kinds of things.

DePue: He didn't take you shooting, the first time you went out with him?

Cleverdon: (laughter) No. No tree climbing. But we did, when we graduated... We were married just before our senior year, and we got a little motor scooter for our transportation around campus that year. At the end of the year, we decided it would be fun to take a summer trip. We traded in our scooter



Lynne and David were married on August 25, 1962 in Norwood, New Jersey. (

and got a used BMW motorcycle and spent the whole summer traveling about 12,000 miles.

DePue: This was after you graduated?

Cleverdon: After we graduated, yeah.

DePue: Well, that's quite an adventure.

Cleverdon: It was. We had all of the graduation activities for the weekend and left the last party and went home and spent about six hours figuring out how to strap everything we were going to take on our motorcycle. Sort of late at night, [we] put on our helmets and our jackets and got on the bike and left town, with everything else in a trailer that his parents then would pick up toward the end of the summer and take to Chicago, where we were going to land in September.



Lynne's family members join Lynne and David Cleverdon on their wedding day. From left to right are Kristen Larson, Mary Larson, Timothy Larson (in front) the bride and groom, Arne E. Larson and Arne L. Larson.

DePue: This is not a trailer hooked onto the back of the motorcycle?

Cleverdon: No, no. This was a little trailer we left in the yard where we had lived that senior year.

DePue: Were you camping out across the country?

Cleverdon: Yes. Yeah.

DePue: That's kind of a rugged existence, if you're fitting everything on this motorcycle.

Cleverdon: (laughs) I looked for a picture, because I thought you would get a kick out of it, because we had two saddle bags. And, vertically on the saddle bags, were two sleeping bags and then a little rack at the back had a Coleman stove, two-burner Coleman stove, topped with like a backpack that had some food and ponchos and a few of those kinds of things. We traveled very light.



Lynne and David took a 10,000 mile tour of the western United States for their honeymoon. The Garden City, Kansas Telegram featured the couple in its July, 1963 edition.

We had a tent, a pup tent. Sometimes we used it just as a ground cloth, but often we'd pitch the tent. It was fun going into camping grounds, west of the Mississippi. It was like the parents pulling all the children in around their trousers and skirts and protecting them, because here we came.

But, once we got the tent up and the Coleman stove was going and the sleeping bags were in the tent, people would come around look at the motorcycle and chat. So we met a lot of people, and two or three times people invited us to come to their house and do our laundry and take a bath and sleep in a bed.

DePue: I was wondering about baths and things like that.

Cleverdon: There were shower houses a lot of places. Occasionally, we'd get a motel. But there were times where we would just pull off the highway and put our leather jackets over the chrome on the bike so that no light would... If cars were passing, they wouldn't see that there was something over there. Then [we would] get up in the morning and eat ravioli and spinach out of cans or something. I mean, it was not glamorous, but it was a wonderful trip.

DePue: Leather jackets conjures up images of Hell's Angels [outlaw motorcycle club] and things like that. I suspect you didn't quite look like that, but maybe you were closer to that than regular college kids?

Cleverdon: Well, no. That's what just blew people away. They just would never imagine us doing that. It was Hell's Angels time and part of... I had been wearing my hair long, but I got my first **really** short haircut, because I didn't want my blonde hair flipping around out from my helmet when we got into L.A. [Los Angeles] and San Francisco [California].

We were concerned about that, because there was just so much PR about those groups. But, looking back on it, if they had thought we were two guys riding on a cycle, they might have bothered us more than a guy and a girl. You know, you never know. But there were only two or three times, where we found ourselves coasting past motorcycles, all parked parallel, pointing out in the evening, but [we] never had any trouble.

DePue: What are some of the highlights of the trip, the places that stick with you today?

Cleverdon: Well, the Royal Gorge in Colorado—I had never been there—which [is] just stunning, coming down and going across that bridge.

DePue: You went across the bridge over the Royal Gorge?

Cleverdon: It was beautiful.

DePue: It's a deep gorge.

Cleverdon: It is. It is. But just the vistas. And the Grand Canyon was pretty amazing. I had been there as a child. When we lived in Montana, we had made a trip down that way. So it was fun to introduce David. We hiked down into the Grand Canyon. We went down for about an hour, and then we had to get ourselves back up. (laughs) It took longer. But that was really fun.

San Francisco was wonderful, because people were so friendly there. If we had pulled over and were looking at a map, invariably somebody would come up and talk to us and point us where to go. We were going to go down Highway 1, but it had been washed out. This was about nine-thirty at night. We stopped in a little café, somewhere on the south side of San Francisco. We were talking to the guy behind the counter, and he said, "You can't go that way, because the highway's washed out." There was a fella sitting three stools away, at the counter, and he said, "You're going to need some place to sleep." He said, "My wife and I have just packed everything up. We're getting ready to move out of our apartment tomorrow. But if you want to put your sleeping bags on the floor here, you're welcome to do that."

So we followed him home, spent the night there. But it's one of those things that you wish you had written down the address, coming back to the sense of history, there's so many things that I wish I had gotten a signature, made an address, was doing notes or something, but they were just... Things like that happened., That was pretty remarkable. Then we went through Yellowstone and up to Billings.

DePue: That was the return trip, I take it.

Cleverdon: That was the return. Yes, we were on our way back. We had called David's parents, whose anniversary was towards the end of August. They were having a big twenty-fifth wedding anniversary celebration. We said, "We're here in California, there are like ten days, maybe eight days left. We just can't come."

But then we got on the motorcycle and did the tour. We wound up in my grandparents backyard in Omaha, stopped with my parents in Chicago, and then got on to New Hampshire, the night before the big party. That was pretty exciting. And then, [we] came back to Chicago and started graduate school.

DePue: Did you get through the Black Hills, as well?

Cleverdon: I don't think we did. I think we dropped south and just came across northern Nebraska.

DePue: Was most of this on interstates? That's still fairly early for the interstate system.

Cleverdon: No, not coming home. The best part was being on Highway 80 in Iowa.

DePue: Interstate 80?

Cleverdon: Interstate 80, which had just opened. There weren't even tire treads on the cement; it was just gorgeous. We went flat-out, eighty-five miles an hour, with no impediment, until we got to the end of the construction area. Then you were back down on two-lane highways.

DePue: Well, as an Iowan, I know there's not much to see on Interstate 80.

Cleverdon: No. No. We didn't spend much time in Iowa. It went pretty quickly. The nice thing was...Oh, the most exciting, I guess, event, we had been in Garden City, Kansas with friends that I had visited as a kid.

Of course, their adult children were now gone, but we stayed with the Carmichaels. The day we left Garden City, we were going west, hoping to get out toward Denver. It was so amazing, because we broke down in western Kansas. David hitchhiked back to Wichita [Kansas] and found a dealer there, got a trailer, came back, trailered the motorcycle back to Wichita, and we stayed with that dealer for a couple of days, so that he could fix our motorcycle.

[We] went to a motorcycle club meeting. It was the first time I'd seen, or been in a group of bikers, with the bandannas and...They were rough hombres, and their women were equally rough. And here we are...Without our jacket and helmet, we're just like little, scrubbed college kids from the East. We hung around for about an hour, and that was kind of interesting. But then we were on our way again. That was the only problem of the trip.

DePue: I'm going to take a couple of steps back here, because you got married in your junior year?

Cleverdon: Just before senior year, yes.

DePue: And was David in the same class as you were?

Cleverdon: Yes.

DePue: What did your parents think about the two of you getting married in college?

Cleverdon: It was very unusual, at the time, I think, for people to be married, unless you were coming out of the military, veterans.

I think they both felt we were more mature than we probably were and were willing to support us financially, at the same level they had during our junior year. I think they were very supportive. His parents were very fond of me, and I was very fond of them and his family. My parents enjoyed David and felt that I was mature and must know what I was doing. It was really a

supportive environment. There was never... We weren't going against our folks or no animosity, that kind of thing.

That made it a very nice senior year. We were the only ones married. I think David was president of the Student Christian Association on campus that year. It was a good year. [We] lived off-campus in an attic apartment, all the fun that goes along with that.

DePue: How did you folks end up, at the end of your college careers, academically? Where were the standings?

Cleverdon: David was... I don't know that he was valedictorian of the class, but he was class marshal, so he led the men in. I don't really know where I ranked, but I did much better, grade-wise, junior and senior year than I had earlier.

I just remember, we took the same class from Miss Matier, literature class. I went to pick up the final papers, and she was so excited I had gotten a higher mark than David had gotten, by a plus or something. She was a very strong women's libber and near retirement age. [She] had at one time dated and been engaged to the president of the college, but they had never married. He had never married. But everybody knew Miss Matier and Dr. Lowry.

DePue: We'll get it in the transcript eventually.

Cleverdon: It was so exciting, because she was rooting for me. She even invited me to come and wrap presents for her. She was the first cultured woman, I guess, and that I ever got to know fairly well.

She invited me to work with her in her home when she was having parties. I would polish silver with her. She lived in this fabulous coach house. I knew how to take some old curtains that she loved and stitch them up, so that she would cover this whole wall of windows with these curtains, without having to undo them all. You know, it was just whipping them together, but she thought that was... I could do practical things, and she was an intellect.

I just remember enjoying her, but she was always saying, "Now you're just as bright as your husband, you know. You can..." So, anyway, she was an encouragement.

DePue: What did your parents think about that extended tour as a honeymoon across the western United States?

Cleverdon: Well, they didn't have too much to say about it. It was interesting, though; during the course of the summer, I think we sent postcards from Royal Gorge, and I don't think we corresponded or called after that. We were just off and away. David's parents, we learned later, periodically called my parents, very concerned.

My parents always took the attitude, if we had a name and an address on us, bad news would find them soon enough. So they were kind of laid back about it. I think my dad had traveled from Omaha to Chicago for some kind of big event in Chicago. He went via train cars. I think he was kind of rousting cattle or doing something, but he was kind of an adventuresome fellow. So, I think it was not horrendous for them.

DePue: Did you give even a second thought about, maybe we should contact our folks and tell them we're okay?

Cleverdon: Never occurred to me. Never occurred to me. Their attitude was helpful later, when my children, after my divorce, would be traveling with their dad. I would expect them home at 7:30, and they might not get there until 9:00. For a while, I hyperventilated when things like that happened, but then I realized bad news would find you. So, I've had a much easier life.

DePue: Either that, or they took after their mom. (both laugh)

Cleverdon: Yeah.

DePue: There's one other question I have to ask. I'm thinking this is going to be something that will come up again, but you mentioned that your husband had this religious background, but then never went to church after that. You also just told me that he was, what, the president of the Christian Club?

Cleverdon: Student Christian Association.

DePue: There's a disconnect there.

Cleverdon: Well, I never fully understood it. He majored in religion—

DePue: In college.

Cleverdon: In college—went to divinity school at the University of Chicago. I think he wanted eventually to teach. At the time, he thought he would teach religion on a college campus. I think he was... There were a lot of things about... I don't know if it was Presbyterian beliefs or Christianity in general. He wrote a thesis on Jesus as a tragic hero, as opposed to savior.

I think, from as much as I could understand what he was doing, [he] was getting a very good grounding in religion and getting the vocabulary and sort of gathering all of the context, so that, then, in talking with theologians or others in the religious community, he could speak the language, but maybe come to a different conclusion. I don't know if that makes any sense. He and my dad used to argue a lot. It would get very heated, because my dad was a very active layman, believer, and David was the educated, professional scholar.

DePue: Would David have considered himself a Christian?

Cleverdon: I don't think he would have claimed that title exactly.

DePue: Didn't that ever come up between the two of you?

Cleverdon: Well, I made a lot of assumptions, because of his high school involvement with his fellowship group and everything. I don't know where that began to shift. I don't know. I just...I made a number of assumptions.

DePue: Would it be correct to assume that, when you first got married, you weren't going to church, either, then?

Cleverdon: I didn't, regularly. We had chapel on campus that was compulsory. You could miss X number of times. I did sometimes go to church downtown, with some of my roommates, but I was not really active.

The year he was...When we were seniors, he was president, I guess, of the Student Christian Association. That year, instead of doing the kind of traditional, whatever those activities were, we had not been active with that group. So, when he ran for that position, I'm sure there were some, at least one other person, running for that, who had been active in that group, coming up through freshman, sophomore, junior year. But David got elected.

That year, he brought several leading Presbyterian theologians to the campus, or the organization did. But he was the thought behind the action. We had three different theologians who came and spoke on campus, kind of a colloquium. It was a very exciting year and a totally different direction, though, much more intellectually stimulating, I think, for people, for the students who attended. [It] introduced them to a broader context of Christianity.

DePue: How did you personally deal with it, when David and your father would get into these arguments? Did that bother you?

Cleverdon: Oh, gosh, yes. (laughs) It was terribly frustrating, because he wouldn't, David wouldn't let it go. And my dad really believed what he was saying. My dad didn't back down.

DePue: Well, did you consider yourself a Christian at that time?

Cleverdon: I did, but I was one of those Christians whose light was under the bushel. I think people appreciated my integrity and my personality and what I did for people, but they would not have connected it with church. I remember, it was that age where I really felt the man should be the head of the household.

When he started back to church, I was going to be really happy to go. When we lived in Hyde Park [Illinois], I had started going to church,

occasionally, just by myself, because I realized I wanted to be there. Then in Springfield (Illinois), when my daughter was about five, I realized I really wanted to get back to church and started going.

But very often, the only time he was home was Sunday morning, and I just went ahead and went. Partly because neighbors were beginning to invite Carol to church with them, and I thought, there's something wrong with this picture, so then I started back.

DePue: We had talked about Hyde Park. I assume that's where the two of you ended up, after this long trip?

Cleverdon: Yes. We lived in Hyde Park for several years. Then, in about '70 or '71, we moved to South Shore, which is in Chicago, South Shore Drive. So we were fairly near Rainbow Beach Park.

DePue: Now, we're a little bit ahead of the story here, and that's great. You said David was at the University of Chicago in the Divinity School?

Cleverdon: Divinity School, um hmm.

DePue: Did he have the intention of getting ordained?

Cleverdon: I don't believe so. I think he was going to get his degree, and then maybe teach religion at the college level, was my expectation.

DePue: Well, I'm sorry to be prying here... Well, heck, that's my job, I guess. I'm curious that you say you don't believe so. But you're his wife; you've been married for a couple of years now, and you really weren't sure at that time whether he wanted to get ordained?

Cleverdon: Oh, I'm pretty sure he didn't want to get ordained. Yeah.

DePue: He saw himself as teaching religion?

Cleverdon: Right, or related courses. I mean, it might have been philosophy, but much more religion. I think, that's what he was going to do. It might have been that he would have gotten into world religions. I mean, he could have... I don't know. But he got sidetracked into politics. (both laugh)

DePue: And this is '63, the fall of '63, when the two of you got there. What were you doing during those first few months?

Cleverdon: I got a job with Harper Library in their circulation department.

DePue: Was that a public or private library?

Cleverdon: At the University of Chicago.

DePue: That's the main one.

Cleverdon: On the university campus, yeah, the big old Harper Library. And [I] worked in circulation. The second semester, I started graduate library school. Then we were gone that summer and the summer of '64 and fall. When we came back, I started teaching, as a sub, at Reavis Elementary School, in the city.

DePue: Did you have a teaching certificate?

Cleverdon: I didn't have a certificate at the time but decided to start taking teacher education courses at Chicago Teachers' College.

Then [I] got pretty sick, and the doctor said, "You're working; you're in graduate library school; you're teaching part-time; you're running here and running there." And he said, "You need to stop doing whatever it is that you don't really need to do." , I dropped graduate library school, because I was working, helping support us. So [I] continued with the teaching and then took teacher education, so that I qualified to get hired by the city.



School photo for Reavis School, March 1967.

DePue: Just a couple of other questions, before we probably end for today. November 22, 1963, JFK's [President John F. Kennedy] assassinated. Do you remember that day?

Cleverdon: I do. I do. I was working in the library. By then, I was an assistant to the woman who was kind of the manager for circulation. I was concerned, because a couple of people had gone for lunch break, and they were not back when they did come back, they were very red-eyed and teary. I couldn't figure out what was wrong, but pulled them aside and asked. They then revealed the assassination.

Then I just remember myself being so emotional and being so devastated that something like this would happen, an attack on a president. Not being a student of history, [I] didn't realize there had been others who had

been shot at, anyway. I just remember, it was a gorgeous, fall day, and walking home, up Woodlawn, was such an unreal sense that everything looked normal, but it wasn't. Things had changed. It was kind of the end of an era and an attitude. You know, sometimes things happen in your life that change the color of the lens through which you see things. That was one of those events.

DePue: Was part of your response, because you were such a strong supporter, or just the fact that he was the President of the United States; they've assassinated the President of the United States?

Cleverdon: Well, it was partly that. But he represented a hopefulness and a positive attitude and a "we can do" and, with the Peace Corps and so many of my friends who had gone into the Peace Corps, it was just like, it's not over. It wasn't over, but it was attacked. Realizing that there were forces out there... Being in Hyde Park, which is a very liberal community, you just can't believe that there are Goldwaterites¹, out in the periphery, or conservatives, way to the right, out in the periphery, because it's such an insular environment, or it was for me.

DePue: We've been at it for close to two hours already. It might not feel like that. But see, that's because we've had such an interesting conversation. I really appreciate it. This probably is a good place to stop today, and then next time we can deal in your Civil Rights experiences and take some time to really lay that out in detail, unless you want to drive on, but I think it would be better to postpone.

Cleverdon: Yeah. Great.

DePue: Thank you very much, Lynne.

Cleverdon: Thank you.

(end of interview session #1)

¹ Sharing the views of U. S. Senator Barry Goldwater, who held a philosophy of individual freedom and opposed any government measure that restricted that freedom. (Chris Matthews *Complete Library*).

Interview with Mary Lynne Cleverdon

FM-A-L-2012-041

Interview # 2: November 15, 2012

Interviewer: Mark R. DePue

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DePue: Today is Thursday, November 15, 2012. My name is Mark DePue, the Director of Oral History with the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library. This afternoon I'm in the home of Lynne Cleverdon. Good afternoon.

Cleverdon: Hello. Good afternoon.

DePue: We had quite a conversation the last time, and it was some time ago. There's been a lot of history that's occurred since the last time we met. Was it late October, I believe?

Cleverdon: Um hmm.

DePue: I wanted to start with... This happens quite a bit; as soon as we get done actually recording last time, you went into an interesting story that you had forgotten in the course of doing the interview itself. And the story was about when you were in high school, and I think the high school took a class trip to Harlem.

Cleverdon: Actually, it was our church youth fellowship group that established sort of a shared relationship. We went into the city in the fall of, would have been '57, and spent a long day. [We] helped doing some painting and so on and then had a program and Bible study in the evening. Then, in the spring, the

students from the fellowship group in Harlem came out to Tenafly, New Jersey to our church for a day of activities and Bible study and dinner and that kind of thing. We repeated that in the fall of '58, spring of '59, and so had an opportunity just to see Harlem, for one thing—[we] had never been there before—and to realize that, when you are doing Bible study or engaged in something together, there aren't a lot of differences in terms of interests and goals and future expectations, those kinds of things. I guess [it] helped with a certain comfort level four years later, when we were getting involved in Civil Rights, five years later, almost.

DePue: I recall there was a story you told that I thought was rather illustrative, something about opening doors.

Cleverdon: Oh, yes. Sometimes when I would go with my parents to do some shopping or whatever... We lived in New Jersey, and we'd go down to Englewood, which had a fairly large African-American population.

I remember being with my dad one day, and he was observing on our way home that, if I was really interested in equal rights, then I would be more inclined to open doors, not just for an African-American coming behind me or coming through the door my direction, but that I would need to be opening doors for absolutely everybody or not.

He pointed out that equality didn't mean more to one group than to another. That kind of stuck in my mind at the time. I later realized that, in order to achieve equality, you may have to do a little more in one arena, before you can really achieve equality and have things on an equal basis. That is why I chose, when we got back from Mississippi, to go into teaching and to work in the elementary schools in Chicago[']s inner city.

DePue: Well, let's jump a few years ahead, from the timeframe when you are living in New Jersey, and get you to living in Chicago. We talked a lot, and we had a great conversation the first time we met, about growing up and some of these life lessons. You just included another. But this is taking you back to a day when you heard a Reverend Ed King give a speech, and I'll turn it over to you from there.

Cleverdon: Okay. My husband and I were at the University of Chicago. He was in the divinity school, and I was thinking, at that time, about starting graduate library school, but had not done so. [I] was working in the library at the university, Harper Library.

Edwin King was the chaplain from Tougaloo College in Jackson, Mississippi, which was an all-black school. He had been assisting students and was along for the historic Woolworth sit-in in Jackson, which was probably one of the bloodiest sit-ins during the course of the early Civil Rights Movement.

DePue: Now, is he an African-American himself?

Cleverdon: No, he is a white man, a tall, attractive man, blonde, as I mentioned earlier, who had a number of scars on his face. He was there to talk about civil rights. He was recruiting. I don't believe I was aware that his presentation was going to close with an invitation.

We had gone to hear what was happening in the South and had been somewhat aware that the whole Civil Rights Movement was escalating, for sure. We had not been following news during the summer of '63, because we had been travelling and just came back to the campus in the fall and were getting adjusted.

Ed King talked about being attacked, run off the road, attacked by Klansmen and beaten, thus the scars on his face. So his physical appearance was very dramatic. He was healed. But just seeing that attractive man, still at Tougaloo, up here talking to us about his experiences down there, and the hatred he encountered as a "nigger lover," was a very powerful presentation that evening. At the end of the talk, he began to fill us in on the project for the following summer of '64, for the Freedom Summer.

The number of students who were there did not all, sort of, go forward and sign up, as I recall. We did not go and talk to him, either. We went home. This was probably early in November.

Then, on the 22nd, when Kennedy [President John F. Kennedy] was shot, and we were responding to and processing what was going on in our country and in the South, it was at that point that we began to seriously give consideration to participating, the summer of '64, then, in the voter registration activities in Mississippi.

DePue: And this is going to become known, or maybe it was known at the time, as "Mississippi Freedom Summer" or "Mississippi Summer Project"? Is that correct?

Cleverdon: Um hmm.

DePue: Which one are you familiar with?

Cleverdon: Well, "Freedom Summer" was kind of the framework, I guess. My thinking was in freedom to vote, freedom to participate fully in society, freedom to have access to education, freedom to work in jobs that were not pre-classified. Those kinds of issues were of concern to me, and that was where I was most focused.

However, it was also the summer that the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party was evolving in the State of Mississippi. That was the summer that they did send a delegation to the Democratic Convention to

challenge the regular Mississippi delegation. I don't believe they were seated, but some of their issues were considered for the platform.

DePue: That would have been the summer of '64, the summer of the Johnson [Lyndon B. Johnson] versus Goldwater [Barry M. Goldwater] year.

Cleverdon: Right.

DePue: When you first heard about this, did you realize that this was a major effort, that it was more than just this Ed King who was organizing this?

Cleverdon: I knew he represented it as a pretty broad-based project. I was aware that SNCC, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, was involved, and I was beginning to hear a little bit more about them around Chicago. The Congress of Racial Equality, CORE, was the group that I related to. I think David worked through them, in terms of deciding to go to the Oxford, Ohio training. Also, there were contacts at CORE that had invited me to speak, a little bit later in the summer. Then also, the NAACP [National Association for the Advancement of Colored People] was involved.

I don't know that SCLC, Southern Christian Leadership Conference...I'm not sure how active they were in the Mississippi Project. They were already pretty busy in several other states. I think Mississippi was kind of a—what do I want to say?—a wasteland of activity, just because there was so much hatred, and white people were not being arrested, and murders were kind of commonplace, and nobody talked about it.

DePue: That was considered to be the toughest place to take it on?

Cleverdon: Right. And so it seemed that the students...Now, understand this is a very lay person's perception. I mean, I'm not a historian; I'm not an ideologue; I wasn't the leader. I was sort of on the fringe and periphery, but there.

DePue: This is exactly why we want to talk to you, to get all the perspectives from somebody who's not necessarily in a leadership position that might have some axe to grind or some agenda. That's exactly why we want to talk to people like you.

Now, you've laid out several organizations, SNCC and CORE and SCLC and NAACP and others. Was this all kind of new, alphabet soup to you at the time?

Cleverdon: (laughs) Yes, it was. The one group that we kind of knew about was Operation PUSH or Operation Breadbasket. Now I can't remember which of those came first, or if they were...I don't think they were competing. I think one followed the other. It may be that Operation Breadbasket was the first. [I] hadn't been involved with it, but was just aware that, among the black community, there were some self-help organizations beginning to evolve. I don't even

remember what the leadership was. At this point in time, Jesse Jackson [Jesse L. Jackson, Sr., a Civil Rights activist] was still a student at Chicago Theological Seminary (CTS), near the University of Chicago. At that point, I don't think he was politically active yet.

DePue: So, he was not a known personality?

Cleverdon: People were beginning to hear about him by the time we left in '64. I don't believe that he went to Mississippi that summer. I remember just some comments, when people got back, about his rise, in terms of leadership, but not having been in Mississippi.

DePue: You just reminded me that you and David had gone on that trek across the United States on a motorcycle, as your honeymoon. This would have been the summer of '63?

Cleverdon: Yes.

DePue: I just want to mention a couple of things here. I'm guessing that it's all kind of a blur, and you weren't paying attention, because you were having too much fun touring the country. But this is the year before. Nineteen sixty-two was when James Meredith petitioned to become the first African-American to attend Ole Miss [University of Mississippi]. I don't know if you recall that or not. He finally was admitted, based on a U. S. Supreme Court decision, and that was not a popular thing in Mississippi.

May 28, 1963, I think you might have just mentioned this one. Maybe it was a different Woolworths, but Jackson, Mississippi Woolworths' sit-in.

Cleverdon: Yes. That's where Ed King was a participant and with the students, during that event.

DePue: And you say that turned rather violent?

Cleverdon: It was, to quote somebody, "The most violent, racist white police toward black students and white sympathizers of all the '60s sit-ins and the most publicized."

DePue: Then you've got June 12, 1963, Medgar Evers, who was a prominent Civil Rights leader in Mississippi. He's assassinated in Jackson, Mississippi. And, again, you probably were on your nationwide tour.

Cleverdon: We were on the motorcycle by then.

DePue: Now, you might have been back by this time, September 15, 1963. This isn't Mississippi; it's Birmingham, Alabama. The Sixteenth Street Baptist Church is bombed, and four young church girls were murdered in that.

Cleverdon: Yes. Yes. And I think we probably...I'm sure we would have been aware of that, in Chicago by then. Some of those events, I'm sure, were the impetus for the divinity school or whoever organized Ed King's being there. [They] began to think about how the student body could be involved in some way or more knowledgeable, have direct contact.

DePue: Would King have been making this presentation, after all of these events, then, sometime later in the year?

Cleverdon: Yes. It was into November. It must have been early November. So it would have been after some of these events. I'm sure the organizing for the summer of '64 had already been ongoing, in response to these other, earlier events. I just don't know who invited him and put up the poster. I mean, there were posters around the campus, and that was how we got there.

DePue: You've talked about this briefly, but tell me again how it was that you and David decided that this was something you wanted to do.

Cleverdon: I think David's leadership in this, if you will, had to do with his frustration with the church not being more active and taking a leadership role. So often we find that churches kind of follow the culture, rather than lead the culture, in some ways.

In the '60s, that was certainly true, until the whole movement got going. Then there were a lot more clergy involved, but still not a lot of people from congregations going, at least the churches that we knew of.

I think, once Ed King spoke, we were thinking about it. Then Kennedy was assassinated, and we realized that this was a very serious issue for our country. I think that was when we decided, okay, we need to commit ourselves to that summer and kind of put your money where your mouth is and do what you feel you should be doing, as an outgrowth of your faith and your ethic and being human.

DePue: You say, "We." Was this a joint decision, or was it one that David decided, and you were convinced it was the right thing to do, as well? How did that work?

Cleverdon: I would say I was a participant in the decision. On the other hand, if I had not been, if I had said, "Oh, don't go; don't go," I don't know what the outcome would have been.

I know my parents were very concerned when we were thinking about all of this. But I think they, maybe, were more aware than we were of the danger that it could involve and were more concerned than we were about the risks.

DePue: Well, that's kind of the reason I went through this litany of events in the early '60s, and that all were very violent events. Was it ever an option, in your mind, that David would go, but you wouldn't?

Cleverdon: Our decision was—Because those going had to support themselves, and we never thought about going to our parents and saying, "Would you pay for us?" I mean, we were in graduate school; we were married—I was going to stay and work through, to the end of July. Then, I was going in August to join him, for the month of August. Then we'd come back [at] the end of August and continue graduate school. I'd start graduate library school, and he would continue with the divinity school.

So, when we made that decision, that's the way David got to Oxford, in Ohio, for the training and into Mississippi, and I continued to work at the library through that six weeks, eight weeks.

DePue: When did he leave for the training?

Cleverdon: He was in the first session, so that would have been somewhere around the, I imagine, 15th or 16th of June.

DePue: So, after the school year was over?

Cleverdon: Yes. Yes. I mean, these were all going to be college students, so everybody had to get out of the dorms and finish exams and that kind of thing. I was thinking back to some of the dates you mentioned. In the preceding year, some things were happening, right at final exam time, in May. March was often mid-semester exams, so we would see things on the news but not be reacting to them or responding in a visceral way. I mean, very upset, but going on with what we needed to be doing at that time.

DePue: This didn't have any direct meaning to you, when you're watching Woolworths' sit-ins in May of '63, then.

Cleverdon: Right. We had no TV and didn't take a paper. And then, in Chicago, we were very aware of the inner-city core, which kind of surrounds Hyde Park, where the University of Chicago is. So we were kind of in it, or if you went to the Sears, down on 79th Street, you were definitely a minority when you were in the store. We had gotten comfortable with that, and there didn't seem to be a lot of bias or discrimination that we encountered directly. It took us getting into politics to realize how bad it was.

DePue: What I wanted to ask about next was about this training that you and David both received in Oxford, Ohio. I know that you didn't directly experience this for a couple of months yet, but now is probably a good time to weave this into the story. First of all, why Oxford, Ohio? What's there?

Cleverdon: Well, Oxford, Ohio, has, as you know, Miami University, but also, the Western College for Women was there. Western College for Women's campus allowed them to do demonstration orientation training there. I believe there were three one-week sessions for those going to Mississippi. David happened to be in the first session that was held. That campus is now part of Miami University.

DePue: What were people learning there?

Cleverdon: I think techniques for effectively demonstrating, doing neighborhood canvassing, community development, but mostly voter registration and how to encourage people, who maybe had fear, either fear of violence or fear that somebody would know they couldn't read or a variety of concerns that keep people from going to the polls and registering.

I don't know that they did much community development training. I think there was probably a lot that focused on how serious an undertaking this was and how dangerous this could be and how serious you had to be, if you were going to follow through and go to Mississippi. As I understand it, a number of people, having gone through that week, came to the end of the week and said, "You know, I just can't; I can't do this." David did realize that he had gotten into something pretty big and was aware that this movement could have some major impact. He was more the historian and the intellect of the two of us.

DePue: What was he and what were you taught about how to deal with violence, if it did occur?

Cleverdon: Well, I think they probably did some role playing and how to drop and roll up into a ball, if people are kicking you or ways to behave, if hoses or dogs are coming at you. We didn't really spend that much time on the phone. [We] didn't have money for a lot of long distance calls.

I think, for those who were going through the training, it's very intense. You really are in a whole different culture, and your world is different than those on the outside. We didn't really talk about that a lot.

By the time I got down to Mississippi, in August, I kind of hit the ground running. By then, they had been arrested, and they were out of jail. Things seemed [at a] fairly even keel, except for things like walking on the roads at night or something along that line, where you would have to dive into the ditch, just so you didn't get attacked, in case it happened to be somebody outside the neighborhood coming in.

DePue: But you did go to the training yourself a couple months later?

Cleverdon: No.

DePue: You never did?

Cleverdon: No. No, I didn't. They had three training sessions, right in a row, to get everybody who was going to Mississippi kind of prepared to be there. Then everybody went on down to Mississippi. There was no further training. So, when I went, at the end of July, I just left Chicago. I did a lot to get ready to go, but I went ahead and went.

DePue: I guess my question and curiosity, first of all, Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee suggests that they had adopted the tenets, the philosophy that Mahatma Gandhi had used in India, that Martin Luther King [Jr.] had embraced, as well. Would that be accurate?

Cleverdon: Yes. Yeah. Nonviolence.

DePue: Was that something that permeated those institutions, permeated this whole summer project, Freedom Summer?

Cleverdon: Yes.

DePue: Something that all of you would talk about?

Cleverdon: Well, somewhat, perhaps. But the understanding, when you went was, if you are being attacked, you are protecting yourself or others, but you are not fighting back, and you are not initiating any kind of violence. So, that was the extent of where my thinking was.

I don't know what would have happened if somebody had come to attack me. I probably would have been in a very defensive mode. I'm not a combative person, so it is very consistent with the way I behave, in general.

DePue: Was there an explanation of why this was the right strategy to pursue?

Cleverdon: There may have been in Oxford; that might have been part of the training. Now that you raise that as a possibility, that might have been as much a reason for people not going to Mississippi as being afraid of being attacked, the fact that I wouldn't be allowed to reciprocate or wouldn't be prepared to. It never crossed my mind, but I could see that being difficult for some people to deal with, especially if they come out of families where we all stick up for ourselves, [that] kind of thing.

DePue: Well, I believe...I might be misstating this, but the rationale for it was that it gives...You're fighting for a just cause, if you will, and it gives you moral authority by not resisting, by not fighting back. It validates what you're doing and invalidates in incredible, powerful ways what they're doing. But I suspect parents who are seeing their young daughter going off to the South aren't necessarily convinced by all of that.

Cleverdon: (laughs) Well, I think my parents would be very non-violent. And I think some of the things that they did in their life and interactions would be the same way, but not so much from a Gandhi perspective, as from a Christian perspective, New Testament, especially.

DePue: But they're also of that generation that fought and won World War II.

Cleverdon: Yes. Yes. They did. (laughs)

DePue: Perhaps I'm getting too philosophical here. So, after this training—this would have been later in June—then David headed south?

Cleverdon: He headed south in a carload of people. He called to say that he was leaving and was on his way. Several days... He said it will take us two or three days to get there. I don't know why it was going to take so long, but they maybe had people to drop off in different places.

We never really did talk about whether they were all white students travelling. I'm assuming it was, because he never talked about them being in an integrated carload. We had an experience, later in the summer, like that, but he never talked about the trip down.

I did not hear from him until about a day, day and a half after the three Civil Rights workers were reported missing. He was with that first wave, and they had been there. Chaney had not been there, but Goodwin and Schwerner had been there.

DePue: Yeah. This would have been June 21, three Civil Rights activists murdered near Philadelphia, Mississippi, James Chaney, Michael Schwerner and Andrew Goodman. Were they all white?

Cleverdon: No, James Chaney was a Mississippian and black. The other two were white. They had gone through the training in Oxford, the first session. I think James Chaney probably wasn't even there. I think he was in Meridian, (clears throat) and the two of them wound up in Meridian. Then they had gone out to check on a church burning in Philadelphia, and the Klan took them and murdered them.

DePue: Hearing that news has got to give you pause, in a very powerful way, I would think.

Cleverdon: I was practically paralyzed. I did go to work. I couldn't stand staying home and waiting. They didn't announce the names right away, and I didn't hear from David. I'm guessing he maybe didn't know what had happened either. So, when he got to Mississippi, he called me to say he was there. It didn't occur to me... I don't remember even talking to him about the murders. Certainly they would have known by then.

But Mississippi news media was very good not to air a lot of what was going on, inside the state, during that summer. So, I guess you could call it kind of a news blackout. I mean, the papers weren't full of that kind of thing.

DePue: You saw that as a good thing?

Cleverdon: No. No. But I think that was one way to try and keep a lid on what was happening, just not to publicize some of those kinds of things. I remember working in the library for a day and a half or couple of days. Every time the phone would ring, other people, including myself, employees, would all just stand there to see who was on the phone and what the message was.

It was always a relief when it wasn't somebody calling to give bad news. But every time there's another phone call, and you still don't have the news, the tension was pretty intense. It was a relief, finally, to pick up the phone and have it be David, and he was okay.

DePue: Wow. You have some passages that I'd like to have you read. Why don't you explain what these are about and where you're reading these from?

Cleverdon: Okay. Well, I'm reading from a book titled, *Letters from Mississippi*, and they are reports from Civil Rights volunteers. It's an edited volume, with an introduction by Julian Bond [a Civil Rights leader]. The first letter, I'll read a couple of paragraphs David wrote to me from Oxford, just sort of reflecting on what's happening there. He says [reading],

Dear Lynne,

The organization here is a real student movement, and it looks like it will be around a long time. I would not be surprised if it really does, with time, influence the course of American history, through the leaders it produces and develops, for that is one of its main objectives.

The savvy of the organization is a marvel. It is shrewd, calculating, and geared for years of struggle. Its members have a strange ability to discuss, plan, scheme, openly and honestly disagree, and then come to a definite decision, which all follow.

Now, these people are only students. They're taking on a state, and perhaps a nation, which they think has ignored the heritage of the United States and has violated the fundamental rights of man. They have acted when few others would. They are speaking about a festering sore in this nation. The people who are bugged by this are responding. The story's not just segregation but the general dehumanization of American life.

DePue: Tell us about, as much as you know, what David's own personal experiences were, shortly after he got to Mississippi. What was he doing?

Cleverdon: He was doing voter registration. They got down there, and their office on Harrison Street was kind of a headquarters.

DePue: Was this in Jackson?

Cleverdon: This was north Gulfport. Well, it was Gulfport.

DePue: Gulfport is on the gulf.

Cleverdon: It's just—I don't know—thirty miles or so, maybe, west of Biloxi, Mississippi. [There are] a lot of dock workers down there. We always talked in terms of north Gulfport. Well, I cannot find any reference to north Gulfport. So, I think it's like south Chicago, which is within the city and does have sort of a neighborhood designation, but the south side of Chicago. So, I think north Gulfport was the north side of Gulfport, or Gulfport has grown up and swallowed north Gulfport.

DePue: So it could be north Gulfport, with a small n.

Cleverdon: Yes. Yes. That's right. [clears throat] They started the registration drive and would get a number of people... Ground work had already been done there, I'm pretty sure, because the Haskins, a family who lived across the street, had been generous. People in the community were more than generous to invite staff for evening meals, bring things by, to the little office/shack we were in.

DePue: This is in north Gulfport?

Cleverdon: In north Gulfport. I wasn't there at the beginning, but a lot of southern hospitality [was] being extended to the Civil Rights workers. So, there were people who were willing to go register to vote. On one of those days, when they were taking people to register to vote—they must have had maybe a dozen people, maybe more; I'm not sure—but they were arrested, David and Steve Miller and Barry Goldstein.

They were charged with blocking the ingress and the egress from a county building, which was a big deal for them. I mean, it never occurred to me that somebody standing on a sidewalk could get arrested for blocking ingress and egress from a building. But that was the charge, and they were jailed. They were in jail overnight.

Kenneth Keating, who was a senator, U. S. senator, in New York State, made phone calls on their behalf. I don't know if others had also made contact with their representatives, but I know, by then, there was a lot of interest on the part of, especially, Northern states and congressmen and senators and clergy, keeping an eye focused on what was happening in

Mississippi. So they were released, rather than retained or killed or whatever else might have happened to them.

DePue: Well, another name—you might have mentioned this when we met earlier—Jacob Javits, who was a senator from New York at the same time.

Cleverdon: He was, but I think it was Keating who made the contact. I did a little research. (both chuckle)

DePue: Very good. We like it when that happens. Are there a couple of other passages that are appropriate to read right now?

Cleverdon: I think so. These relate just to how the people in Gulfport viewed the summer workers. [reading] “Fifty times a day people come up to us and thank us and tell us what we’re doing is so fine, so good. The kids, playing with boards in the dust, have the greatest smiles. When we’re out, going from door to door to get people to register, we see a kid get up and run inside. ‘There they is,’ we hear. We are ‘they’ and everyone knows who ‘they is.’”

DePue: Would that have been David’s letter?

Cleverdon: It might have been David’s letter. The first letter I read was definitely David to me, printed that way. I think a lot of the excerpts that are identified as Gulfport may have been David, [or] may have been Steve Miller; I’ve seen his name on a couple. But I think, a lot of times, they just excerpt a paragraph, and this doesn’t say.

DePue: Before we have you read the next passage, then, who put the book together, and when was it published? Do you know?

Cleverdon: It’s just been reprinted; it was originally published in the late ‘60s, *The Letters from Mississippi*. This has notes and Freedom School poetry and other kinds of things, so the copyright for this version is 2007, by Elizabeth Martinez and an introduction by Julian Bond. But I cannot find my copy. I think I gave the original publication to my daughter, probably.

DePue: Would David have possession of some of these letters, then, now, the original letters?

Cleverdon: He may.

DePue: You don’t, though?

Cleverdon: I don’t, no.

DePue: Well, let’s go ahead and read the next letter that you’ve got.

Cleverdon: This relates more to security issues and concerns, because I think Gulfport would not have been a major concern. It would have been a concern, but it was a gulf city, a lot of people were back and forth to New Orleans, that kind of thing. But I think, after the murder of the three Civil Rights workers, it just put an edge on the summer that might not have been there, otherwise. This is July 25.

[reading] “We had a problem with a man and some of his friends who took it upon himself to protect us from the white men who visited us yesterday. He came over at night with his friends and brought along a machine gun and ammunition and told us not to worry. But he finally got ticked off at us, because we got ticked off at him. That machine gun made us edgy, and having weapons was not something that we wanted to be a part of or even be involved with. Non-violence doesn’t involve being armed and ready to shoot back.”

DePue: And page 150, I think here’s something that addresses David’s time in jail. I don’t know if this is David’s passage, but I have a couple of paragraphs marked, there at the top.

Cleverdon: Yes, this is July 8.

DePue: During the time, he would have been in jail?

Cleverdon: So, this would have been... They were in jail very early in their time down there, probably within ten days or so. [reading]

We were booked and taken to a cellblock on the second floor, with about eight white prisoners already in it. Standard procedure is to bribe some prisoners with cigarettes to beat up Civil Rights workers. However, we soon made friends, and in ten minutes we were removed to an empty cellblock on the third floor, with women, juveniles and condemned murderers.

We sang freedom songs, beat rhythm on the bars and metal table, played kazoos of tissue and combs and raised hell. The Harrison County jail is very modern, but you sweat, for Mississippi is a hot place.

Jails are so damn stupid, though. Once you’re in and the lethargy and the apathy stick, you’re stuck. The theory is deterring, but who is deterred? The theory is reform, but who reforms? You just sit or sleep or stare or think about something or dwell on nothing. Jail apathy very quickly becomes life to the inmate. But this apathy permeates everything, only while you are in jail. When you’re set free, it explodes in one big binge of rebellion.

One of the things I think David mentioned to me...Just reading this again, he's a bit of a magician. I think he had a deck of cards with him. So I think he was sort of wowing some of the inmates with card tricks, as I recall, which won some people over.

DePue: When you first said he was a bit of a musician—

Cleverdon: No, magician.

DePue: Yeah. I wondered if I was to take that literally or in kind of a figurative sense.

Cleverdon: Did I say musician?

DePue: No, you said magician. I misspoke. How much later than all of this, then, did you head south?

Cleverdon: I went down, the end of July, because I was going to be there for August and had planned to be there just for the month and go back to Chicago. But toward the end of July, some people from SCLC had been in touch with him and maybe approached several of the students down there to see if they wanted to stay and work for a year, doing community development and further voter education registration.

David and I talked about that and decided that I would come in August, and we would stay through the year and work for Southern Christian Leadership Conference.

And so, at that point, I realized I was going to be closing our apartment, finding someplace for furniture, preparing to be gone for basically an academic year, anyway, and so found some of the people in the neighborhood who would take our furniture. And [I'd] just kind of get ready to be out of Chicago for a while.

During that time, I was sort of in touch with people in the CORE office who knew that I was going to be going, and I was in the process of getting on their records and so on. They invited me to speak at a meeting in a large church. There was a lot of fundraising for the project within the black community.

I spoke one evening, and I believe I've said before, I wish I had been more of an historian, because I should have been getting names—or keeping a diary or something—names of the people I met and the places I was, because so many things were historic, in retrospect for me. Some people knew going through it, I think, but I was just doing what I did. But I spoke to a large meeting one evening, and it was held in a very large church. I mean, it felt to me like I was in Sangamon Auditorium [a 2,000 seat plus auditorium at the University of Illinois Springfield]. I don't know if it was that big, but it was a

huge congregation. I think that the event was put together or sponsored by either Breadbasket or PUSH.

At that point, I was so tired and beginning to feel kind of anxious about going. But I remember just being led in and went up on the stage and started to talk. I'd been introduced as somebody whose husband was in Mississippi, and so I just talked about the whole sequence of things that I've shared with you and the reaction at the university when we knew three Civil Rights students were missing and so on. It was a very quiet time for a house that huge. And I just remember a lot of applause when it was over. Then I left, because I was in the process of getting ready to leave Chicago.

One of the guys from the CORE office called a couple of days later and asked if I could speak again at a couple of other gatherings. But it was coinciding with my departure, and I wasn't able to do that. But as I look back on it, I think, you know, I should have had a clue, being in Chicago. There was so much to be done in Chicago, too, that after our experience down there, we came home to work in our home territory.

DePue: Tell me about the congregation in this church where you spoke.

Cleverdon: Well, as far as I was aware, it was an African-American congregation. But I think it was probably even more than the congregation. I think it was an evening of hearing different people speak. I was not out on the podium, so I don't know who spoke ahead of me. I don't remember much singing. That, maybe, happened before I got there or after I left.

DePue: But this was an overwhelmingly black audience?

Cleverdon: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. I don't recall seeing any other white person there. So I have really no idea. I imagine it went on for several hours. I think it was an opportunity to make donations. I'm sure they took offerings. I just, I don't remember any bulletin or handout or anything. I had a feeling a lot of it was pretty spontaneous.

DePue: Do you remember your feelings at the time? I guess I'm wondering that a lot of people... You know, a very common fear is stage fright, speaking in front of large groups. You were still fairly young at that time, and it just sounds like there's thousands of people there.

Cleverdon: There were. It's funny, when I said I would speak, it never dawned on me, the magnitude of the audience. I just... It was going to be at a church, and I'm thinking, [at] my church there might be a couple of hundred people show up, (laughs) all friends. I was committed to the effort, but I think maybe the stage fright just put me sort of [as a] deer in the headlights. My mouth begin to go, and I just poured out where we had been and what my journey had been.

I do know that a couple that I met, before we left—who lived over on Dorchester, not too far from where we did—were both African-American. I remember Tom saying, you know, he had not intended to get involved. They were probably fifteen or twenty years older than we were [and] had almost grown children. He said, “But when I saw you guys go, I had to think, what are my skills? I need to be there.”

He didn’t go during the summer of ‘64, but toward the winter, he took some vacation time. He was a really good carpenter, and he went down and worked in communities where he was assigned, doing Habitat-like [Habitat for Humanity] construction and helping with people. Over a period of two or three years, [he] made several trips to do that kind of thing and work in neighborhoods, not so much voter registration. But, anyway, he got involved.

DePue: Do you know, the leadership that you had in SNCC and CORE and SCLC, was it primarily an African-American leadership?

Cleverdon: Oh, yes, yes. SNCC was John Lewis.

DePue: Who is still in Congress?

Cleverdon: Alive. I think he is still in Congress, yeah.

DePue: If not, he just retired.

Cleverdon: It would be recent. My brother called me a couple of nights ago, or maybe it was right after Obama’s [President Barack Obama] reelection, and he said they introduced a Congressman who had been active, and I think he said SNCC. I said, “That has to have been John Lewis.”

DePue: He is certainly the most prominent of the Civil Rights leaders of that era, who’s still in Congress. I can’t think of any others.

Cleverdon: Right. Right.

DePue: Tell us about heading south.

Cleverdon: So, I flew to New Orleans, and David picked me up there. It was kind of a late, cost-saving flight. The next morning, we went into Mississippi, and I remember thinking how beautiful the country was. But, as we went through Gulfport and got up into the area where we were going to be, I just remember being so distraught, I guess. I hyperventilated and was just like frozen to the seat of my chair.

I had seen a lot of impoverished people in rural Kansas, doing things with my dad, when he worked for a farmers’ cooperative, or in the inner-city in New York, when we visited the kids in Harlem, and in Chicago. But I guess

I had never seen the shanty shacks, and I dignify it with homes. I mean, they were homes, once you got inside. The people make a home.

But from the outside, it just...I was so upset with the conditions of their community. It just looked like you could, you know, put your foot against a door, and it might fall off the hinges or...so poorly constructed. And dirt roads, not like a block, you know. If it were the length of MacArthur [Boulevard in Springfield, IL], between, say Washington [Street] and Monroe [Street], there might be three or four of these sort of dwellings. The toilets were very shallow, and the wells were very shallow.

DePue: Toilets? Was it outdoor plumbing?

Cleverdon: Well, some were indoor, but some were outdoor. So, I'm reacting to just the physical set-up of the neighborhood—I don't know that you can call it a neighborhood, but geographic area—was just so splotchy. It just seemed like everybody was isolated in their shack.

DePue: Are you describing north Gulfport for us?

Cleverdon: Yes.

DePue: How big a town was it? What can we relate it to? It sounds like a very small town environment.

Cleverdon: A very small town environment.

DePue: A few hundred, a few thousand?

Cleverdon: You know, the size of Elkhart [Illinois]? Have you been to Elkhart?

DePue: It's not ringing a bell for me. It probably should, but no.

Cleverdon: Okay, well, its north of Springfield, where the mines are. Maybe like the geographic area of Pleasant Plains [Illinois], but not [a] dense population. And there might have been some areas that I didn't get to. I mean, I didn't spend a lot of time getting out and around the whole area.

DePue: Were a lot of these fairly large lots big gardens and things like that?

Cleverdon: No, not big gardens. The Haskins, who were across from our office—we called it—did have like a kitchen garden, and she had a lot of chickens running around. She was very good to prepare evening meals for us, pretty regularly. Although, other people in the community would also just see somebody and say, "Hey, all you guys, come." There were maybe five or six of us. "Come for supper on Tuesday next week" or whatever. So, [we had] a lot of chicken that way and fresh vegetables, those kinds of things.

DePue: When you first got there, did you feel a bit overwhelmed by the situation?

Cleverdon: I felt overwhelmed for the people. I think that was why I just froze. I mean, I could hardly breathe. We drove around, and I collected myself. Then we went back to the office and went in, and I was feeling okay. I'm comfortable in any environment, as long as you can look into the eyes of people.

DePue: What do you remember about David at the time? Was he calm and collected?

Cleverdon: He was. I think he had already had that experience of being in jail and was out. They had a court date set for later in August, but they were being a little... I don't know if you could say less aggressive with registration, but certainly going with smaller groups to register people to vote, to kind of avoid that ingress, egress problem again.

I remember coming into the office and realizing that there was no functioning toilet. The one that was there was sort of... [It] had boards over it, and it was full of excrement and bleach and whatever. So, my first job to just kind of show them I could do whatever, I found a shovel from [the] Haskins and dug a hole and shoveled out that toilet, and cleaned it up. Now, it didn't work any better than it had before. I left the board on it, but got rid of the fly problem. I think at that point, I was no longer just a pretty face. (both laugh)

DePue: I suspect it was a refreshing face to see. Tell us about your living arrangements. Where did you stay?

Cleverdon: Well, on the same road, down the road, a couple of, like, empty lots was another little shack. And there was kind of a narrow kitchen that ran across the front of it. And there were like two sleeping rooms, I suppose. One of the sleeping rooms was originally like a living space, but a three room shack. People would be either on the beds or on mattresses or sleeping bags on the floor.

It was always very hot. You didn't have to worry too much about covers, although I preferred to have sheet, no matter how hot it was, because the roaches ran at night. The first couple of times I was awakened by roaches on the bed just freaked me out, so I took to using a sheet.

We kept peanut butter and raisins and bread on hand, and sodas, mostly Cokes, and made peanut butter and raisin sandwiches. Some doctor... I don't know if this happened at the training in Oxford or if one of the Gulfport volunteers had heard this from somebody they knew, but if you're low on cash, and you need nutrition, evidently raisins and peanut butter are about the best combination you could go for. So we had that.

In the morning, sometimes, we'd go out, and there'd be roaches in the bottom of the Coke bottles. I mean, they would have climbed up and fallen in. Sometimes they were longer than the bottom diameter of the Coke bottle. I

mean, it was just gross. As I look back on it, I think, maybe that's why a sow bug here and there or a little scampery thing, now and then, doesn't freak me out too much.

DePue: Did you and David have your own room?

Cleverdon: Well, not exactly. I mean, when we were sleeping, anybody going into what would be the bedroom had to go through the room where we were sleeping. So it was pretty open. I don't recall any doors, even, on anything. So it was kind of public space. You took what space was empty at the time, and that's where you were.

DePue: You talked about the Haskins. I'm assuming that's another African-American family, across the street?

Cleverdon: Yes.

DePue: You're living in an entirely African-American neighborhood?

Cleverdon: Yes.

DePue: How close were you to a white neighborhood?

Cleverdon: I would say maybe half a mile, a mile. I don't really remember the line of demarcation. When I lived in Chicago, on 48th Street, I was aware that 47th Street was the dividing line, and Drexel was the dividing line, and 61st were kind of the perimeter for Hyde Park-Kenwood. I don't recall anything like that, but then, we didn't have a car, so I don't remember. There were some cars available. I don't even know who they belonged to.

But we really...I didn't get much beyond where I could walk, within a mile of where we were. And I have no idea whether Harrison Street...My mental image is that it ran east and west, but I'm not sure about that.

DePue: That was in Gulfport, Harrison Street?

Cleverdon: In north Gulfport, yeah.

DePue: Going back to the place where you were living, your living arrangements, how many people were there, and were they all white?

Cleverdon: Yes. They were all white that I recall. I don't remember any black students in our project. And there were Dave and Steve and Barry and a woman named Ellen. I think there was maybe another woman, and then I joined them. There may have been other people, but that's kind of a vague memory.

A lot of them were out doing things. We didn't spend much time sitting in the office, talking or getting to know each other. The bonding of the

group had really happened at Oxford, and then in those first five or six weeks before I got there.

DePue: Did it take you a while to feel like you actually fit in with the rest of the group?

Cleverdon: I would say, because of our SCLC connection, I was probably there maybe three weeks, three and a half weeks, before we had to go to the training session, over in Americus, Georgia. During that time, I felt more connection with Mrs. Haskins, really, than some of the other staff, because I was doing more office work, phoning, following up on who was going to be willing to go register to vote, talking to Jackson about equipment, not equipment, supplies, things we needed, that kind of thing. The others were more field workers, if you will.

DePue: Well, that kind of gets to the next question. How did the people in the neighborhood react to this group?

Cleverdon: Very friendly, [demonstrating] their southern hospitality. As I said earlier, the Haskins were wonderful. We could kind of call their living room our living room away from home, very generous that way. But a lot of other families would also let various ones of the field workers invite them to dinner. I would say maybe three times a week, maybe four, a family would have us over for supper. So, there was a lot of support.

DePue: So you didn't have to live entirely on peanut butter and raisins?

Cleverdon: Right. (both chuckle) I came home, having a real love of fried chicken and a real hatred of peanut butter. I didn't eat peanut butter for about three years. (laughs)

DePue: Well, gosh, what was I going to ask next? You talked a little bit about what you were expected to do. I guess one of my questions is, what was it that was so challenging about getting the blacks in that area registered? What were some of hurdles that they had to overcome?

Cleverdon: One was education and knowing how to even read the registration form, because there was a big questionnaire that people had to answer. I don't remember what it was like when I went to register to vote, but it seemed to me that it was, show us a photo ID and an address, and you're registered. But there, they had questionnaires for reading, and education was one of the problems.

DePue: Did they have a literacy requirement?

Cleverdon: No. You just had to be able to fill out the form. So, one of the things they were doing in voter education was just helping people know which boxes to mark on the form. I mean, reading the questions and then saying, if this is the

case, then this is the box you mark. So, there was a lot of learning to do the form.

Then the other was transportation to get there. And third was just the risk of being seen and known, that you were one of those blacks who stepped out of line, or in this case, into line, to get registered, because it was pretty much frowned on at the time. You might lose your job, or your wife might lose her job, or your husband or something happen to your kids. Those were the concerns people had.

I don't know what the history was. I don't have any anecdotal stories about what happened to whom. But I think there was a history of keeping people from registering to vote.

DePue: I read someplace, the percentage at that time was about 6.7%. I don't know how they determine that.

Cleverdon: Registered.

DePue: That were registered. Apparently before they started the registration drive.

Cleverdon: Well, and it was interesting, because evidently they had enough people registered so that there would be a few black people who could serve on juries or a few black people who could serve on whatever. I don't know if these are federal regulations. I'm guessing, you'd have to...By now, maybe the issue had gotten to the point—I'm conjecturing—where you needed a few reliable blacks to do certain things. So you registered a few, and they qualified to do what needed to be done. I don't know.

DePue: Well, define "reliable" in this sense.

Cleverdon: Well, people who would do what the master said.

DePue: So, compliant?

Cleverdon: Compliant.

DePue: Was there a poll tax? Do you know?

Cleverdon: I don't know. I don't know.

DePue: I wonder if you could talk a little bit more about the political culture at that time, in Mississippi. Let me start by just saying this would be a time when the Democrat Party would have been very powerful throughout the entire southern part of the United States. How would blacks, if they were allowed to vote, how would they have voted? How did they vote?

Cleverdon: That 6%. Boy, I don't imagine they were rocking the boat, at that time. But this is also the summer that the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party was forming. I'm sure that SNCC, working with the Freedom Democratic Party, with CORE, with—I can't think of that other group—oh, NAACP, were beginning to... I think a lot of the people were not voting. I think that was... Boy, I'm out of my depth here. But I'm thinking that the delegates who went to the Democratic [National] Convention were sort of grassroots people, selected. I don't know what the process was.

DePue: But the Freedom Democratic Party sounds like it was a branch of the Democratic Party, but it was there to represent blacks?

Cleverdon: Well, that's an interesting question. I don't know if that was a parallel, kind of like, in Chicago you had Republicans who had no power. You had Democrats who controlled everything.

Then you had, basically, independent Democrats who were not part of the regular Democratic operation, let's say, who, however, organized and so on. They did run candidates and were on ballots and so on, and sometimes they won.

But I don't know that the Freedom Democratic Party in Mississippi actually had people on the ballots and were elected. I had a feeling that that was more of a grassroots, coming together of people from different parts of the state.

DePue: Was it you who, in a previous discussion we had, mentioned Fannie Lou Hamer [voting rights activist, instrumental in organizing Mississippi's Freedom Summer], or did I get that name elsewhere?

Cleverdon: No. There were a couple of things, when we were there. Again, all these things happened so quickly. I remember one afternoon, kind of late, David came and said we were going to go to... It was like a trailer out in the country. We had an address. We weren't exactly sure where we were going.

Whether [the] Jackson office had called and said, "We're trying to get people over there," Fannie Lou Hamer was going to be coming, and they were going to have kind of a rally and a gathering. I'm guessing maybe they were pulling people together about the convention, and we should go.

So we drove out, and it was quite dusk when we got there. I remember just pulling off this road. There were a lot of old cars parked in fields. Down at the end of a very long driveway—well, two lanes, ruts in the grass—was a trailer house. There were a lot of people standing around outside, and she was inside.

We just kind of milled in among the people and moved into the trailer. People were pretty much filing in and filing out. They'd had such a good

turnout, that there was no way everybody could come in and sit down and participate, but just had an opportunity to see her and see her talking to people. You couldn't stop and have a conversation, so we kind of went on out the other side.

We were really waiting for two or three other people, who were going to come. Evidently, they were going to have kind of like a rally at that point. It got later and later, and finally [at] 9:30 or 10:00, we decided we really needed to get back to Gulfport. So we didn't stay for the rest of that event. I knew Fannie Lou Hamer's name, because we had begun to hear more about that organizing.

DePue: Was she part of the Freedom Democratic Party?

Cleverdon: She was. She was very instrumental in that whole process.

DePue: And she's African-American?

Cleverdon: African-American. So that, again, I wish I'd just been able to whip out my autograph book and say, "Sign this; you'll know I was here."

The other event was in Jackson, picking up materials, one time, when John Lewis was in the office. He came in, so people kind of created a path for him to go over to where the desks were in this...it was like a storefront. He was making phone calls and so on and thanking people for being there.

Again, it was mostly an African-American group; although, there were other white students who were in the movement, as well. I just remember being astounded, how poised and polite and mature he seemed. He wasn't that much older than we were, two or three years or something like that. He was definitely a man in his own right, and we were students working at being grown up. (laughs)

DePue: You mentioned this trip to Americus, Georgia. What was the reason you went there?

Cleverdon: Well, those who were going to do community development and run a freedom school, funded by SCLC [Southern Christian Leadership Conference], wanted us to go to Americus for training, so that we would have two or three days of training over a long weekend, so that everybody would kind of be on the same page, get some materials, have techniques and things that they wanted us to focus on, voter registration, but also maybe sewing classes for some of the women or nutrition classes, whatever.

We drove over there. [We] had a car. I don't remember who provided it, probably SNCC or somebody. We had to pick up two African-American women, in route. We couldn't pick them up until after dark, because we

couldn't be seen driving in their neighborhood. [We] didn't want to compromise their families.

We came into their community, picked them up, and because we were travelling in an integrated car, we'd been told that, when David or I was driving, the two women needed to be on the floor of the back seat, with a blanket over them, just so that they wouldn't be discovered and that, when one of them was driving, then David and I needed to be on the floor of the back seat, with [a] blanket over us.

We did pretty well, but it was about, I don't know, probably 1:00 in the morning, after 1:00, maybe, we stopped. We had to get gas. I just remember being fearful. David was driving, and I was the dutiful southern wife, and the women were covered and stuff. Of course, in those days, you didn't have self-serve, so the guy came out and filled the gas tank. He kind of glanced at the car but didn't seem to register anything. We paid for the gas and went on down the road.

I remember, about ten minutes after we left the filling station, we were aware that there were headlights in the rearview mirror. Those headlights stayed with us for about half an hour and then turned off. But for that period of time, our fear was that somebody might have suspected us of being Civil Rights workers, because we were definitely not from Mississippi. But, after that half hour, and they turned off, then we made the rest of the trip safe and sound, and that was wonderful.

[We] got to Americus the next day and participated in some of the training sessions. Martin Luther King was the main speaker. Hosea Williams was there, Andy Young and Coretta [Scott King]. We were just in a great big, like, gymnasium.

DePue: What kind of training did you get there?

Cleverdon: Again, focusing on the passion for voter registration and Civil Rights. It was a lot of motivational speaking, I guess you would say, storytelling. Hosea Williams had done a **lot** of voter registration, other places, and he had some wonderful stories to tell.

It was quite moving, I remember and singing *We Shall Overcome* [anthem of the Civil Rights Movement)] (becomes emotional) was just powerful.

Then that night, we were in dormitories. So the woman that I was living with, staying with, was in her forties and just very, very passionate. She'd left her kids at home, and she was here. I thought, "Oh, my gosh," you know, "She's really putting her life on the line." She was going to be working in her own community and risking her family, as well as herself. We talked kind of late into the night that night, and it was pretty, pretty wonderful.

The next morning, we got up early, because we were going to go by bus to a beach, either in Savannah or near Savannah. I didn't think too much about it. I mean, there wasn't a lot of preparation and, again, most of the group was African-American, and they probably all knew what was coming. But I hadn't really thought about it too much.

When we got to the beach, it was all white. We pulled into the parking lot, but didn't park, just sort of drove the bus up beside the bath house. We got out and quietly assembled, as everybody got off the bus, and went to the beach and put toes in the water and pretty much were back on the bus, heading back to Americus before, I think, the lifeguards or manager, or anybody knew what had happened.

Evidently that was the first time black folks had been to that beach, in that water. That was pretty exciting, once we got back to Americus. But it was nice to get back there. That was kind of later in the day. I think there were a couple of seminars in the afternoon, but David and I had to leave.

We drove through the night to get back to Jackson, because the next day, which was Saturday—and I don't know what date it was, the end of August. I don't think it was September yet—but the court case was going to be heard by Judge Cox.

DePue: That would be a long trip. You're talking about Americus, Georgia, through Alabama to Jackson, Mississippi.

Cleverdon: Yes.

DePue: That's a lot of driving, I would think, especially on the roads that they probably had at that time.

Cleverdon: Two lane. I remember at one point, around, I don't know, 3:00 in the morning or something, I remember driving. It was just the two of us, because the women were staying, and somebody else would be bringing them back. But, I remember... You know how you get kind of in a daze, sometimes, when you're driving? All of a sudden, I hit the brake, because there were all these red lights in front of me. I thought I was going to run into a truck or something.

Of course, hitting the brake brought my adrenalin. It was a radio tower or something, probably a mile or two away. But, in my fog, it was enough to sort of get the brake on and get me awake again. That was as crazy as some of the other risks. That was probably... The biggest risk, in some ways, was being on the road, being extremely sleep deprived, more than once.

DePue: Because there weren't many places to stop in between?

Cleverdon: Well, we were just trying to squeeze everything in. We wanted to stay in Americus, at the SCLC Training Conference, as long as we could, and then just cut it close getting back, in time for the court appearance the next morning. And it was, “How late can we stay, and how fast can we drive?” knowing that we could not speed, because you did not want to get arrested. So you had to calculate your time and your miles pretty carefully.

DePue: Maybe it helps to be young.

Cleverdon: (laughs) Yes. Can't do that anymore. Or, I choose not to do that anymore. (both laugh) It's a choice.

DePue: You said you were coming back, so David can go to his court date. Tell us about that.

Cleverdon: Right. Right. Well, Judge Harold Cox was well known at the time for having made a lot of racial slurs in his pronouncements. We were very concerned that he was going to be the judge. I think it's a circuit court, no, a federal district. I don't know that much about the hierarchy.

DePue: Was this a state court or a federal court?

Cleverdon: I think it was federal, because—

DePue: But the charge sounds to me like it would have been a state charge.

Cleverdon: Which is why I don't know what happened between the arrest... Oh, well, I still don't know why it was held in Jackson. It may have been because they didn't want to try the fellas right there in Gulfport, for fear they would become recognized. Maybe it was a safety issue. I have no idea.

DePue: That maybe SNCC or somebody else got it into a different jurisdiction?

Cleverdon: It may have been the lawyers, because that summer all the legal work was done by lawyers, who also volunteered to participate in that summer. They would either come down for a week or two weeks, generally.

In addition to that, the Mississippi law books, records, all that kind of thing, were not available to any of the lawyers representing the summer workers. A lot of the lawyers who worked in the sort of southwest quadrant of the state, anyway, did all of their briefs in law offices in New Orleans. They didn't have access to Mississippi.

What happened was, we got there. Cox wanted to hear it on a Saturday. So we showed up, David and Steve and Barry. David was going to be the first witness. Before he was called to the stand, Judge Cox said—or maybe he was already in the chair—but Judge Cox said, “We will accept the affidavits for direct examination,” which means you start with the hostile

lawyer doing the questioning, the prosecutor, which means that here... I don't think David had ever been in court before and, instead of your lawyer, who, by the way, was not the same guy who wrote the brief, he's somebody else, who's come in and now is going to represent you. He's not there to kind of warm you up and get you relaxed and all that kind of thing. But he accepted that Cox didn't want to be around very long that morning.

So the prosecutor stepped forward, and he said, "What's your name? Where do you live? What are you doing in Mississippi?" Then he said, "Now, young man, I'm looking at your affidavit here, and it states that, on such and such a date, you were taking people to register to vote. And you claim that blacks are systematically excluded from juries in Mississippi. Is that correct?"

David had not written any of this. This had been prepared by a lawyer from somewhere, but you don't refute that. So he said, "Yes." The prosecuting lawyer said, "Young man, on the day you were arrested, there was a jury in session, and there were two black men sitting on that jury." At which point, Cox, the judge, turns to David and he said, "Young man, that's perjury, and nobody gets two bites out of that apple in my court, dismissed."

David stepped down, and that was the end of his testifying. Well, each of them had the same brief, because they were all there together. So it was a very short morning. Steve and Barry both were on the stand, but again, not for very long, and we were off to Gulfport. I didn't think too much about it.

DePue: Was a sentence issued at that time or a judgment?

Cleverdon: No, because, for felonies...Perjury is a felony. To have a felony, as I understand it, acted on, that order has to go to Washington and be co-signed by the Attorney General, who was Robert Kennedy at the time.

What I heard...Again, I don't know the law well enough; I haven't done the research on this. But, evidently, always before, anything coming from any federal court goes...It's automatic, pro forma, the attorney general signs it and sends it back. But, evidently, that summer, Robert Kennedy was paying attention to what was coming out of Mississippi and maybe especially what Cox was doing. He did not co-sign.

So it got sent back, without Robert Kennedy's signature, at which point, when the lawyers found this out, they realized that this was a pretty dangerous situation for David to be in. If Cox and local authorities decided they were going to take action, they might have arrested him and incarcerated him or put him somewhere. Who knows what might have happened.

That was evidently the first time that that automatic signature didn't happen, and Cox was pretty upset about it. So it was several years later, before that whole thing was resolved. I don't know; I guess they dropped the charges on the ingress/egress business. That kind of got lost in the perjury charge.

DePue: Well, let me see if I can recap what you just talked about. He and these other two gentlemen were originally arrested, because of blocking ingress/egress, which to me sounds like a misdemeanor.

Cleverdon: Right.

DePue: It sounds like a state statute. And it gets up to Jackson, and the federal court, maybe because of some things that their defense attorneys were doing, before they know it, they're charged with a very serious, federal crime, a felony charge.

Cleverdon: Perjury charge. Right.

DePue: And they didn't much care about the ingress/egress. That was just a way to... Is that you're understanding it?

Cleverdon: Yes. Yes. The perjury... I shudder to think what would have happened if Kennedy had signed that, and whether or not David would have been prosecuted. It would have taken a lot of fancy legal work, because it was Mississippi, to say, "I didn't utter those words. It was the lawyer who prepared the brief. It was the lawyer who defended us in court." Leave it to the lawyers, but I just don't know how that turns out.

DePue: Well, just from the way you've described things, also. The brief sounds like it said that blacks are unfairly excluded from jury duty, and just because there are a couple, you characterize as reliable blacks, who served on a jury at that time, doesn't necessarily invalidate that blacks were not allowed to serve on juries, as they should have.

Cleverdon: Right. Right. I think—

DePue: But this is why lawyers can make plenty of money, I guess. (Cleverdon laughs)

Cleverdon: Well, they created a mess; that's for sure. It took more of them to play it out, yeah. I just remember, I was the only person sitting, other than Steve and Barry were up here waiting to be called to the stand. I'm just sitting here by myself, and just the way Cox said, "...and nobody gets two bites out of that apple in my courtroom." It was just... I could just feel my blood drain, just the way he said it.

It was over so quick. I mean, three minutes or something, just a sinking feeling. So, we went back to Gulfport.

DePue: Where does it go from there, then? As you've described, people are getting very concerned about (phone ringing in the background) David's safety, and I assume yours, as well.

Cleverdon: Yes. It was probably a week or so, maybe even a little longer than that, because they had, actually had to send that document to D. C., and for it to come back, it took a little while. We had about a week, maybe a little more than a week, back in Gulfport.

During that week, we met a woman, an older woman, who had taught school in the north, who was living in Gulfport, in the community. She was willing to give us her bedroom. I don't know where she was going to sleep, but she was planning to be part of the SCLC Project for the year. I was going to be helping her with the teaching of a pre-school or an early elementary school primary grades.

She had gotten some used desks for her living room and dining room area, to turn those into classrooms. So, she was going to set that part up. We had begun looking for a space where we might put a few sewing machines and some tables and reading charts and things like that. We were beginning to move forward with what we thought we were going to do for the next year, or at least through to the following summer.

Also, we were still working in the office a bit, during the day. Then one evening, Mrs. Haskins had been willing to be our contact. I was over at the house, where we were staying, and she came over. She said it was important for me to come to her house. I said, "Why?" She said, "Well, a couple of men from the FBI [Federal Bureau of Investigation] had been to her home, looking for me. They [the Haskins] wanted me to stay with her, because they were just concerned about my safety.

They [the FBI men] had David, and were interviewing him. They would bring him back at some point, and we would know what was going to happen next. I remember going to sleep on her sofa. Then, around 10:30, 11:00, maybe even a little later, they came knocking on the door. They had David with them and told me to get my things. They were going to drive us out to New Orleans.

So, again, they were driving, and we were keeping out of sight in the back seat. They were concerned that Cox or local officials, weren't sure who might take action against him. They just didn't want to risk his being arrested or detained, maybe not even charged with anything, but just taken out of action. So, they took us to New Orleans.

DePue: And who are these two again?

Cleverdon: They were a couple of FBI from the Gulfport office. They gave us airline tickets, and we flew back to New York and lived with David's parents, then, through the fall and didn't return to Chicago until after the new year.

Then, we were back there and lived in student housing again. But he worked, and I worked until the following. In '65, then, he went back to graduate school.

DePue: Did either of you return to Mississippi to do any more work?

Cleverdon: No, because it was several years before the court case was resolved. There aren't a lot of Cleverdons around, and it just seemed prudent, not that I was interested in... The idea [of] getting detained was not attractive. In a way, I'd like to go back now, because I think a lot of time has passed, my gosh, a lifetime. But, yes, I wish I had stayed in touch with the Haskins. I never did know their first names. We kind of made a point of calling everybody Mr. and Mrs. and using last names.

DePue: How did they refer to you?

Cleverdon: They called us by our first name. But part of our focus was dignity. At that time, as movies and other things you read suggest, they were mostly "boy" and "girl."

DePue: You mean, that's how the whites would refer to them?

Cleverdon: Would refer to them, "Hey, boy."

DePue: And you referred to them as Mrs.?

Cleverdon: Mrs. Haskins, Mr. Haskins, or Mr. and Mrs. whomever, but never a first-name basis with the people, maybe the kids, but not the adults.

DePue: Did you think your experiences and David's experiences had been successful, had made some progress?

Cleverdon: I would say, yes. Number one, [emotionally] it showed that there were people beyond Mississippi, white people, who cared what was happening, who took an interest in their lives and making a difference in their lives.

I'm sorry we were not there for a year, because I think it would have been a wonderful experience to have been able to live and work and actually do child education, nutrition training, teaching sewing skills, providing a place to gather and to sort of validate community, where community existed, but it wasn't as visible.

It was also exciting, because for me, I realized that perhaps for those who were still in Mississippi... In spite of a lot of the living conditions, there was a quiet dignity within their community. They could raise chickens, and they could have gardens. So life was, family-wise, intact.

When I got back to Chicago and began doing canvassing and things in some of the neighborhoods or teaching in an inner city school, I realized that [there were] people who had a great hope that things would be better in the north, like Chicago. They got to Chicago and didn't find work or didn't find community, and maybe lived in a brownstone apartment, with four other families, with hanging cloth, separating the dining room from the living room from the bedroom, each space being a different little family cluster.

Maybe there was still hope in Mississippi. Some of the candle had been dimmed by making that hopeful trip north. It didn't happen there, either. I think it was an exciting summer for people who saw [emotionally] students were there.

DePue: So, you're proud that you did that? Just seeing your reaction, this is probably a foolish question, but how did it change you?

Cleverdon: It was very humbling. It was very important, in that, when we got back to Chicago, I began to feel a tug toward...David, more toward politics, me, toward education in the inner city.

At that time, a lot of people I knew, who were wives of students, went to the suburbs to teach. But I really wanted to teach in the inner city and so began to prepare to do that and loved those years of teaching in the heart of Chicago.

I did get involved in politics, in independent Democrat politics. As a Republican, it was hard to switch, but [being] Republican didn't go anywhere in Chicago, so you had to be an independent Democrat.

DePue: You're careful to make the distinction. (both laugh)

Cleverdon: Yes. And so those were, kind of, two major themes, I guess I would say, that kind of evolved out of that summer, instead of winding up on a college campus, with David teaching religion and ethics and me having fireside teas for students. We kind of took a different path.

DePue: Well, I think this is probably a pretty good place to stop for today, and next time we can talk about Illinois politics, especially independent Democrat Illinois politics, a different kind of story, but another important chapter of your life. So I'm looking forward to that. Thank you very much, Lynne.

Cleverdon: You're welcome. Thank you.

(end of interview session #2)

Interview with Mary Lynne Cleverdon

FM-A-L-2012-041

Interview # 3: December 10, 2012

Interviewer: Mark R. DePue

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DePue: Today is December 10, 2012. My name is Mark DePue. I'm the Director of Oral History with the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library, and today I have my third session with Lynne Cleverdon. Good afternoon.

Cleverdon: Good afternoon.

DePue: How are you today?

Cleverdon: I'm good, thank you.

DePue: You sound quite a bit better than our last conversation, when you were fighting a cold, I believe, at that time.

Cleverdon: Yes. I was rather croaky last time around, but this is better.

DePue: I forced you to soldier on, anyway, and we had a great session. We pretty much finished off with your time and your husband David's time, down in Mississippi, working on the voter registration drive in 1964, and at the end of the year, you guys came back. So, we're going to pick it up with coming back to Chicago and ask you about your arrival back in Chicago in 1965. I think that was in January?

Cleverdon: In January, yes. We had spent most of the fall in New York State, with his family and then returned in January. [We] had an apartment in student housing, over on Kimbark and Hyde Park Boulevard. I went back to work at the university library, Harper. David worked at the hospital and did some jobs there, worked in an EEG lab and so on, through the spring semester, because we had actually given up [his] scholarship and everything for that year.

That summer of '65, I began taking courses at Chicago Teachers College to get certified. Coming back from Mississippi, I decided I really wanted to do something with underprivileged populations. So, I was preparing to teach in the Chicago Public Schools and did, in fact, start as a substitute in the fall, then, of '65.

DePue: What level were you teaching?

Cleverdon: I took whatever came my way. So sometimes it was in an elementary school. A couple of days I was at Englewood High School, but, because of my age and my fair coloring, several of the teachers suggested that I consider not being in that high school. It had a lot of trouble, and it was a troubled area of the city, at the time.

Then I began to work more in just the elementary age group and wound up over at Reavis Elementary School, on Drexel and 50th Street. It was within easy walking distance of where we were living.

DePue: As we talk today, I'm going to weave in some events that were happening at the national level. (music in the background) That threw me off for a second.

Cleverdon: (Lynne whispers) I was going to turn that off.

DePue: Well, let's go ahead and take a pause here—We took a very quick break, but, as I was mentioning, as we go through this, I'll put in some chronological landmarks here. The first one I wanted to ask you about was, I think, December 10 of 1965. That's when Dr. Martin Luther King was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. I wonder if that had any significance, if you remember that.

Cleverdon: I just remember him receiving the prize and being so overwhelmed that he, who had taken so much risk, personal risk, and had, as a result...I don't know if he—he didn't create, but he drew out the worst in people who were opposing Civil Rights—could still receive the peace prize for what he stood for and what he did. I just remember being very impressed that the decision to award it to him was so well deserved. It was an exciting time, but I don't remember marking it in any other way.

DePue: Well, this one was a few months earlier, but I suspect you also would remember 1964, I think, the Civil Rights Bill passed. And in 1965, in August,

Johnson signs the Voting Rights Act. And here you were, working on voting registration in Mississippi. Do you remember much about that?

Cleverdon: No, not really. We were starting in '65, '66. We were getting really involved with politics in the Fourth and Fifth Ward in Chicago, when Abner Mikva made his first run for U. S. Representative. I have a vague recollection of that being a significant outcome.

I don't remember that that was such a big deal, because in Chicago people were already voting, and it was... What we were trying to do was make sure the people who were dead or in buildings that didn't exist anymore were not going to be voting, because of all of the ways the Daley machine made sure that their candidates won.

DePue: How do you prevent the Chicago Democratic machine from turning out the vote and doing all those kinds of things that had gone on for a long time?

Cleverdon: Well, we became poll watchers. That was kind of a scary, kind of risky, because you would be sitting in a polling place, but you were aware of the fact that the regular committeemen knew everybody. You might see what was happening outside, with a dozen eggs or a loaf of bread or whatever.

I remember David was working in a couple of precincts, prior to the election, and had ridden a bicycle over. When he got done canvassing the block that he was working on, [he] came back and found that the tires of the bicycle had been flattened. So, then he couldn't move on expeditiously and wound up having to come back. I mean, it wasn't a... I don't know that it was as risky as it felt it was risky. The Daley machine certainly had good PR on what you were risking if you moved into some of these neighborhoods.

DePue: I'm confused about one thing, because my understanding of the poll watchers is that you would typically have poll watchers from each of the main political parties. I'm assuming that you and David both were... Were you registered Democrats at the time?

Cleverdon: Uh huh, but we considered ourselves Independent Democrats. I mean, there were—

DePue: I understand that, but if the parties are identifying the people to serve as poll watchers in all of these various wards and precincts, wouldn't the party have selected "reliable," Democrats, who were part of the machine? Then the Republicans would have something. They'd find their own persons.

Cleverdon: We were uninvited poll watchers.

DePue: Oh, (Cleverdon laughs) so there was a Republican, and there was a Democrat, and there was you.

Cleverdon: And then there was me. Or, in another polling place, there would be David, or in another precinct, there'd be somebody else, so that we would have done our homework from the voter registration list and know the buildings that didn't exist anymore, for one thing.

So, if somebody came in, we could challenge, ask to see identification and that kind of thing. Or we could report, if a precinct seemed to be having [a] higher turnout than average, and maybe the precinct committeemen didn't know everybody coming in.

Sometimes one of those old voting machines would get stuck, and you couldn't pull the levers, and then it slowed things down. So we would make phone calls to, like the Mikva headquarters, and then they would talk with the Election Commission and get people out to fix them. But there were a number of ways that things could get derailed. So we were there just to kind of protect our Independent Democratic activity.

DePue: What were your impressions of the Republican poll watchers?

Cleverdon: (chuckles) Unremarkable, unremarkable. The Republican Party in Chicago, at that time, really didn't... It existed; people were there, but as I recall, I don't think they did a whole lot of campaigning or door-to-door knocking.

DePue: But you, as poll watchers, were doing the work that you would think the Republican poll watchers should be doing. So, were they? Were they natural allies when you found problems?

Cleverdon: No, no. Usually the judges were all pretty friendly. There might have been other parts of the city where Republicans would have been more actively involved in the process, but, as I recall, I never really had a sense of which of the judges was Republican versus Democrat, in terms of the way they were responding to people coming in.

DePue: So, that wasn't something they wore or were labeled or anything.

Cleverdon: No. No. There were times when we sort of joked that the Democratic committeemen had chosen the Republican judges. So, who knows if that's true or not. (DePue laughs) I never got to know any of those folks very well.

DePue: Well, it's just a one day activity, I think, and you probably don't see them for a long time again.

Cleverdon: Right. Right.

DePue: I want to ask you a couple more questions about teaching. How long did you teach?

Cleverdon: Three years.

DePue: And you mentioned the last school that you were at was Reavis?

Cleverdon: Uh huh, Reavis.

DePue: Tell me a little bit about the students you had in those classes.

Cleverdon: They were all African-American. And, except for one other teacher and the principal, all the faculty were African-American, as well. The first year, I taught kindergarten; the second year, I taught first grade; the third year, I taught second grade.

For some of the children that I taught in kindergarten and first grade, I felt like I was, maybe, one of the first white people they had had up close and personal relationships with. So, there was a lot of touching my hair and touching my skin and kind of getting used to, if I was real.

But my kids...I loved my kids, and they became **my** kids. I didn't have a family at the time. The year I taught second grade, I remember having half of the class that I had had the year previous. So, they'd take two classes and mix them, cut them in half and blend them differently each year.

At Christmastime, I remember, we were in the Christmas pageant. Several of the teachers were on the stage, kind of orchestrating, because the kids hadn't really learned their parts and so on. I had worked with my kids and have a more personal, interactive style, I think, with children. But anyway, my class was sitting at the back of the auditorium. I just remember, when it was their turn, they got up, walked down the side aisle, got on the stage, did their presentation the way we had rehearsed and rehearsed and rehearsed it, and got off the stage and came back to where I was sitting. I didn't go up with them at all. I remember, in the afternoon, the other second grade teacher came up to my room, and she came in, and she said to me, "How did you get **those** children to do what they did today?"

I felt that she expected me to tell her I had put rubber bands around their toes or something. I said, "Well, you know, we worked on it until they knew what they were doing." She was astounded, because she'd had half of that class in spelling activities and so on. She couldn't believe that they could perform as well as they did. I think my expectation always was much higher than some of the other teachers, probably, and they [the students] did a beautiful job.

But a lot of the children, during severe storms, would not have the clothing to come to school or sometimes not have money for lunch or things of that kind of kept reminding you that they were disadvantaged, a lot of them on welfare. It was an impoverished part of the city. But they were neat kids, and I just wished that I could have followed them for a few more years, until they had the ego strength to take that forward.

DePue: Was this a segregated school you were in?

Cleverdon: No, it was an inner city school.

DePue: So, just by virtue of the neighborhood, they were all black kids.

Cleverdon: Right, right.

DePue: What did you know about the families? Did the families come to parent-teacher conferences, those kinds of things?

Cleverdon: No, very seldom. I had one child with some severe problems. I remember his mother coming to school one day. I had asked her to come, two or three times previously, and then she came this last time that I saw her. When she walked into the room, she told me—just in front of the whole class—she said, “Whenever David’s a problem,” she said, “he always wears a belt.” She said, “I give you my permission to take off that belt and strap him.”

I was just horrified. She was talking to me from the door. I was at my desk. She didn’t wait for us to get together to talk to me. I went back there and ushered her into the hall, and I said, “You know, I would never do that to a child.” She said, “Well, I just want you to know that you have my permission.”

The next time, like a couple of weeks later, I had asked her to come in. She didn’t come, but evidently a social worker or somebody who’d been working with the family, showed up at the door. When he walked through the door, David began to cry. I didn’t see coming, what was going to happen. But this man just walked up to him, grabbed him around the neck, held his head and used his knuckles and just did a little grind on the side of his head, which, I said, “We’ve got to go to the office.” I said, “I can’t have this happening down here.” I said, “You may not come again.”

So, I never did see him again. But David continued, I think, feeling he had an advocate in me. He got calmer in the classroom and some of the anger management issues were easier for him to control. So, I felt that was a bit of a success.

DePue: This man that came in, was that his father?

Cleverdon: No, it was like a counselor, who had been working with the family. David had anger management issues. He had an older sister who wore leg braces. I don’t know why. She was a third grader. I just didn’t know that much about the family.

I wasn’t really in a position, at that time, to do much family intervention. I went into counseling much, much later and might have behaved

differently, at the time, had I had a little more training. I think just being humane toward the child was helpful to him.

DePue: Well, based on this one experience you had with the family, was it frustrating for you that you didn't have more of the parents coming and finding out what's going on with their children?

Cleverdon: Oh, yes, yes. Well, and it was frustrating having thirty-nine children who were so ill-prepared for school, in one classroom. The problem with the families was they didn't have any background. Now there are programs that involve families in education and reading and those kinds of things, but at the time, there was Head Start, but there wasn't much being done for the families or the mothers, basically.

A lot of my kids had "uncles" who kind of came and went and that kind of thing. They would talk...I mean, one of the worst things a child could say to another child was, "Your momma." That could start a fight, or it went from words to shoving and that kind of thing.

The biggest impact on the classroom was the year, '67, January, when we had the huge snowstorm that just closed down the city. So, for about ten days, like a school week and a couple of extra days, my class was cut in half. I only had about twenty kids. The advances we made in that period of time...They started school at 10:00, went to 12:00, half an hour lunch, 12:30 to 2:30, and then released. There was no enrichment. There was no bathroom breaks, no recess or anything.

So, in the morning, we focused strictly on reading. In the afternoon, we focused on math, and then either science or social studies or something like that. But, with that uninterrupted time to really focus and concentrate, they developed skills that carried through the rest of the year.

It was like I had two different grade levels, practically, because that group of twenty, who had clothing and parents who saw that they got there during that time, had much more of my attention, gained skills that carried them through to the end of the year. Then the other half of the class came back, when the snow had melted, and you could get around the city again. They were just somewhere else. So that was pretty amazing.

DePue: Were you able to see quite a bit of a difference between the beginning of the school year and the end?

Cleverdon: Yes, yes. But again, it was...I never used corporal punishment, which a number of people I taught with did use corporal punishment. There was a woman, Doris—I wish I could remember her last name—but her husband played with the Count Basie Band, and she was teaching either fifth or sixth grade. She was wonderful with those older children, and they loved her. She was kind of a role model for the girls and very encouraging. It was wonderful

that she had them at that age, because by then, children are beginning to self-identify, and even if they go home to stressors, they still begin to have their own identity of who they are and know kind of who they want to be. A younger child finds it a little harder to... I mean, they're just developmentally not to that point yet. This is all according to Lynne Cleverdon (both laugh), my observation.

But Doris was wonderful and neat. She'd never flown; so one year at Christmastime, her husband wanted her to come out for New Year's in New York City. I said, "Well, you can fly with us." So we flew out with her. She flew with us, going to New York. And then she hosted us; she and her husband hosted us for one night at the club, when Basie was leading up to New Year's Eve. That was one of the fun things that happened, so that was good.

DePue: One of the highlights, I'm sure. Let's get up to 1966. I know you've been talking to that timeframe, anyway, but as I understand, January of '66, Martin Luther King made the decision to actually set up a residence in Chicago. Do you remember anything about that?

Cleverdon: I don't remember anything about him having a residence in Chicago.

DePue: Later that year, the summer, he was leading some marches in Chicago.

Cleverdon: Yes, and we marched in a couple of those, coming down Michigan Avenue and out to the Buckingham Fountain and his speaking and so on.

DePue: What was the purpose of the marches?

Cleverdon: I think that focused much more on housing and jobs and those kinds of issues, kind of social issues, more than voter rights or anything. I think... David worked for HUD [Housing and Urban Development]. Gosh, I can't remember when he started that.

It might have been early '68; it might have been late '67. HUD was beginning to buy properties. It was kind of like a precursor of Habitat [Habitat for Humanity], where HUD would buy houses in neighborhoods and then find qualified people to move into them, I think, purchase them and would help subsidize their mortgages and things like that. So, he [David] was working at identifying homes to purchase for HUD, for a while, before the next phase of his career.

DePue: Do you have any memories that associate with those marches?

Cleverdon: It was exciting. It was pretty safe, compared to what had happened in the South. There was just a sense of great camaraderie, purpose, kind of a celebration that things had moved to the point of focusing on something other than voting and beginning to focus on people's living conditions and other

aspects. If it was happening, we went, a couple of times. But we were not part of the planning or any of that.

DePue: How would you describe the demographics of those who were in the marches? Were you in the minority as a white?

Cleverdon: Isn't that interesting? You know, by then, I don't know that I was paying a whole lot of attention to being a minority in a group. I was teaching and had been teaching, was teaching in a black school. It must have been pretty mixed, a pretty integrated group, I would think. I became more conscious when everything was white (both laugh), rather than when I was a minority in an African-American crowd.

DePue: Did you have a chance to meet King?

Cleverdon: Well, I didn't meet King in Chicago. I met King in Mississippi, well, not even Mississippi, when we were over in Americus, Georgia. But once we got to these events, there was no...no, unh-uh.

DePue: Well, I think we can get you up to around 1968 or the timeframe when you and/or David started working for Abner Mikva. When did that first occur?

Cleverdon: Well, in '66, we were working for his campaign in the Fourth and Fifth Ward. So the Fifth Ward was Hyde Park. It's where the University of Chicago is, that area. Fourth Ward is Kenwood, which is a fairly wealthy, I don't know, six blocks. It's where Obama's [President Barack Obama's] home is now and runs up north of 47th Street. But the Fourth Ward goes farther north. So those two wards had their Mikva office on 53rd Street.

I worked in the office there—not paid staff, but volunteered—when I wasn't teaching, because I taught until spring of '68. So in '66, we were both volunteers, and David began doing some political organizing. Then Mikva lost.

DePue: So he had a Congressional campaign in '66 that he lost?

Cleverdon: Yes.

DePue: Did he retain his seat in the Illinois Legislature?

Cleverdon: I think he did. I think he did. I can't remember to whom he lost. But then, in '68, Vic deGrazia had asked me to be the office manager for the congressional district. That office headquarters was down on East 79th Street. So, then I managed that office, coordinated volunteers who did all kinds of mailings and those kinds of things. Mike Duncan was the campaign manager. Norton Kay was the PR [public relations] guy, along with, I think, Jean Erkes did some work for him.

DePue: Is that a male or a female?

Cleverdon: A female.

DePue: Jean Derky?

Cleverdon: Jean Erkes, J-e-a-n E-r-k-e-s. Genie [Eugenia] Ermoyan, at that time, was Mikva's assistant. She had been with him for a long time.

DePue: Let's go back to Mikva. Who was Abner Mikva? Who is Abner Mikva?

Cleverdon: He was...He is a remarkable human being, who was, for ten years, a state representative, initiated gun legislation way ahead of his time. I really was not up on all the things he did, but he and Paul Simon, and...I can't remember, one other person who was...The three of them worked very closely together in the state legislature and were pretty much cut from the same cloth. I just remember everybody was very disappointed he did not get elected in '66 and signed on for '68.

DePue: As I understand, he would have been one of the original Independent Democrats, independent of the Chicago machine?

Cleverdon: At that level, yes. Locally, Lynn Despres, Leon Despres, was our alderman from Fifth Ward, and he was an Independent. But mostly, you supported Independent people, and they never got elected. (laughs)

DePue: How would you describe Mikva's personality?

Cleverdon: Very, very approachable, a very bright man, kind of awesome. You know, for me, as a young woman at that time, just getting my feet wet in politics, it was pretty amazing that you could talk with him and be just sort of a regular person and yet know that he was accomplishing a lot in the state legislature—I should look up some of the things he did accomplish, but I haven't done that—and then went on to Congress.

DePue: Was it David who was the impetus for both of you ending up working for Mikva, or was that something that you went into independently, as well?

Cleverdon: No, I think, I think Victor had approached David to do some organizing in the Fourth Ward. When we got two years, and I had done some volunteering in the Fourth/Fifth Ward office, then a couple years later, Vic had asked if I would work as the office manager. So, my skills were much more...and I was paid staff at that point. So, my skills were organizing the office and making sure we had supplies and all those kinds of things, an agenda for him.

DePue: You mentioned Victor's name a couple of times, Vic deGrazia. Tell us a little bit more about him.

Cleverdon: Well, we met him, I guess, working on the first Mikva campaign. Then they became friends. We eventually had a coach house. We moved from Kimbark, up to a coach house that was just around the corner from deGrazia's in the Kenwood area.

When my daughter was born, in '68, often I would leave her with Robin, Vic's wife at the time, if I was going to a meeting. Vic had a meeting every week with kind of the key players in the campaign. We'd meet at the Executive House in Chicago and have breakfast and go over the game plan for the next week.

He was an awesome person. A lot of people called him Machiavellian and felt used by him. I think he read people really well. He had worked with Bruno Bettelheim in a school or children's home. I think it was a residential home for teenagers. I think he was just really good at understanding people's weaknesses and strengths. I remember being in awe of him.

In '68, one day he came into the office—I was now staff—and he walked in, and he said, very gruffly—and he was a big man and rugged features, Sicilian—and he said, "Where's my agenda for the meeting?" I kind of laughed; I don't know why. I said, "Well, if you need an agenda, I'll make an agenda." At that point, he just laughed and relaxed. From then on, we were... I was comfortable around him, and he was a friend. I don't think many people had done that to him, but it worked well, and we were friends from then on.

DePue: Family friends, the couples were friends.

Cleverdon: Yes, yes, yeah. And his kids. His daughters sat for my daughter, when they were in high school and that kind of thing, yeah.

DePue: Let's go back to Mikva a little bit more. You've given us some idea of his politics. It sounds like, what you're describing... Would it be fair to call him a Progressive Democrat, at that time?

Cleverdon: Yes. Oh, yes.

DePue: Was he at odds with the Democratic machine?

Cleverdon: I would say he was. All the rest of us certainly were. (laughs)

DePue: Did he go out of his way to be at odds with them, or he just kind of—

Cleverdon: No, no. I just think the positions... I don't think he ever... Well, I don't know him **that** well, but I don't think he ever did anything to be at odds with anybody. I think he had a very solid agenda. He was ahead of his time on some issues, but I really feel that he was a very focused person, moving the

state, the country, in the direction that he saw being healthy and appropriate and good and all those things.

DePue: That kind of entices me to ask, what direction did he want to take the state and the country?

Cleverdon: Well, the gun issue was one. Like I say, I don't really...at the time I wasn't an issues oriented person, but I always felt that he had the interests of all of the constituents at heart, and he was fair-minded. Like I say, I can't tell you what all the issues are. But the gun thing, just...I have never thought it smart that everybody have a gun and be armed, and I still don't.

DePue: Would that have been an issue that he would have been at odds with the Democratic machine, at the time, in Chicago?

Cleverdon: I don't know if it was the Democratic machine. I think it was the rifle association. A lot of those organizations were always lobbying against gun control. I can't imagine the machine would have been that upset about gun control, considering gang activity and so on in the '60s in Chicago was pretty severe.

DePue: I want to get to 1968. I know you've been talking about that, in part, because you're working in the 1968 Mikva campaign, that second time around for congress. But let's start at the beginning of the year to just kind of have a marker here, what David was doing. Was he working full-time in politics, or was he still a student?

Cleverdon: When we came back to Chicago, in '65, and he started school in the fall, he had switched from the divinity school to the department of history, because of Richard Wade, when Wade was working for Robert Kennedy's presidential campaign.

I think David was interested in getting involved in that campaign. Well, I know he was. Wade had suggested that he, David, do some organizing in Indiana. We had gone down there...I'm sorry I'm forgetting what year that was. Was that—

DePue: Well, if you're talking about the presidential campaign, I'm not sure when Kennedy would have announced for a presidential run, but I'm guessing it would have been after LBJ [President Lyndon B. Johnson] bowed out of the race, which was early in '68. Normally, you'd announce in '67, if you're running for president.

Cleverdon: Right. And when was Kennedy—

DePue: Let's start with the beginning of the year, and then we'll get to all this timeline.

Cleverdon: Okay, okay. Well, I'm thinking he was either still a student...But he had also worked for HUD. I really haven't gone back and kind of teased that out. He was working for HUD in '68, in July, when Carol was born, my daughter. I think he'd been working with them through, probably, from the fall of the year before or very early on in '68. So, he was, yeah.

DePue: We're going to walk through the year 1968, and I'm going to tease your memory on a lot of different things. Most of these are things that are happening at the national level.

The year kind of starts in a rough way, because you've got the Tet Offensive in late January, early February. We haven't talked at all about the Vietnam War, which, by '68, dominated a lot of the political discussion in the country and a lot of the protests that were going on. What were your and David's position about Vietnam, at the time?

Cleverdon: I can't speak for him. We were aware of all of the protests that were going on. We were not participating. I think we were so...I was so focused on local politics or Mikva's run. I was pregnant with my first child. We were hopeful that we would get out of Vietnam.

It was something...I felt more of an observer, in the same way that, with some of the women's issues, I was also kind of an observer of things happening on a national level, but I wasn't really involved with them, I guess I would say.

DePue: The next one, I suspect you have a clearer memory, and that's April 4th of '68, when Dr. Martin Luther King is assassinated in Memphis.

Cleverdon: Yes, because that was...The city kind of went up in smoke. I mean, there were all kinds of outbreaks.

We were living on 48th Street, just south of 47th, which was where Kenwood ended and the rest of the Fourth Ward was more ghetto community. Then I remember just being very concerned about all of the noise. There were no homes or buildings between our coach house on 48th Street and 47th Street. There were no stores on the south side of 47th Street. Everything was on the north side of the street, and most of those were liquor stores, taverns, that kind of things. So that part of the city was just always buzzing, twenty-four hours a day.

I remember being concerned about that. But then...Mm I getting the convention confused with...I think, I think, I don't know if it was Jesse Jackson or...Somebody encouraged people to drive with their headlights on, and things began to simmer down. I think it was the summer convention, maybe.

DePue: There was serious rioting, especially on the near west side of Chicago, where entire neighborhoods were basically gutted and went up in flame. I don't know what was going on in the south side, in your neighborhood, as much, but certainly there was an explosion of violence in a lot of cities, and Chicago was one of those.

Cleverdon: Yes. Well, that was the time, then, when we were firebombed, that night. I remember ironing in the coach house and being... It didn't have much space, so I was ironing in the living room and remember looking out the window to see something flickering up against the tree. [I] went and looked out, and there was fire coming up the side of the coach house. I had heard kind of a glass shatter or something, but it took a while for the fire to get going.

David went out and checked it and saw that there was a bottle that had had gas and rags and stuff in it, and the side of the coach house was burning. So we went to deGrazia's. Their house was sort of like a fort, I mean, a big old stone home. We spent the night there, but then came back the next day.

That can't be right, though, because Carol was born in July. What date did you give me?

DePue: This was April.

Cleverdon: April, yeah, no, the firebombing was in the summer.

DePue: In connection with—

Cleverdon: In connection with the convention, yeah.

DePue: Do you remember your reaction to hearing the news that Martin Luther King had been assassinated?

Cleverdon: Well, it was very similar to when Kennedy [President John F. Kennedy] was shot. I just felt like another icon had been taken away from us. I was so distressed about what might happen to all of the Civil Rights activity that had really evolved and focused around him.

There were a lot of people involved in many, many places, but he represented the leadership at the time. I remember wondering what that was going to do in terms of the future of Civil Rights and the social aspect. I thought the voting thing was going to be okay, but I just wondered whether the movement would hold together or move ahead in segments. [I] was concerned about that and was very sad. I mean, I just... The fact that people kill others who have, in my mind, higher goals, was just kind of devastating.

DePue: It was about this same timeframe, and I think it might have been afterwards—I'm not sure; I should know—that Lyndon Johnson announced that he would not be running for reelection, which was a surprise to almost everybody. It

obviously was a big part of his response to what was going on in Vietnam and being so troubled about the administration of that war. You had talked before, that David was working for the RFK [Robert F. Kennedy] campaign, so would it have been this early spring, early summer timeframe that he was doing that?

Cleverdon: Must have been. Must have been, because Carol was not born yet. She was born [in] the middle of July.

DePue: Why the RFK campaign? Do you know?

Cleverdon: Well, Richard Wade, who was at the University of Chicago in the department of history—American history was his focus—somehow was connected to the Kennedys. They had asked him to oversee, from Chicago, the campaign, at least in northern Indiana and maybe all of Indiana; I don't remember. And I don't remember why.

I don't know Indiana politics, but I had a feeling that they didn't feel they could find indigenous people there, or they felt David, having done a really good job for Mikva and getting through the primary, would be able to do some work down there, before we got into the fall push for his campaign.

DePue: I don't know the results in Indiana. Do you recall? Did Kennedy win the primary in Indiana?

Cleverdon: I don't remember.

DePue: I think, at that time, it would have been McCarthy, Eugene McCarthy and Humphrey [Herbert H. Humphrey], certainly, and Robert Kennedy. There probably was a couple of others in there; I can't recall. Of course, it was June 5th of 1968 that Robert Kennedy had just won the primary in California, and he's assassinated.

Cleverdon: Yeah, yeah. I don't even remember the date of the Indiana primary. I don't remember celebrating a lot. So maybe, maybe they were big Humphrey people or... I just... I don't know. But then, Robert Kennedy being shot, I mean, it was not a good time, understatement.

DePue: Was David's focus, though, back to Mikva by that time, anyway? Or was he still working for Robert Kennedy's presidential campaign?

Cleverdon: No, I think he was back, focused on Mikva's campaign.

DePue: Of course, all of this comes to a head in August of 1968, when the Democrats come to Chicago to hold their convention. Tell me what your memories are about that convention. Part of it, obviously, is the story that you began, about the firebombing.

Cleverdon: Right. And, you know, as I look back on it now, I don't... I mean, we were watching television. I did not go downtown.

DePue: Because?

Cleverdon: Because I didn't want to get clobbered.

DePue: Was Carol already born at that time?

Cleverdon: Yes. She was born [in] the middle of July. I was a new mother in a coach house that had no air conditioning, and it was a hot summer, which also people said played into all of the furor, just because people were hot and out of sorts. I must confess, I was a very insulated new mother at that point and didn't... I guess you could say I was on sabbatical, until September. (laughs)

But then, events kind of spilled over into our neighborhood. I think that the next day, at some point, I had come home, and I was getting ready to take Carol for just a walk around the neighborhood and kind of see what I could see, as a result of the night before.

There was a car parked at the end of the driveway, and there were four white fellas in it, young fellas, probably early twenties, maybe mid-twenties. They had short sleeved, open neck shirts and so on. They were pointing up the driveway, at the char on the side of the coach house, laughing and kind of carrying on. When they saw me come out, their faces, just kind of like, were stunned, jaws dropped, and then they sped away. It occurred to me... I was feeling vulnerable, from the community north of me, and all of a sudden, I realized that they may have been from Cicero or somewhere, thinking that they were still in a black neighborhood and were going to incite some kind of event or excitement.

When the fire department came to put out the fire, they did not use lights or whistles or bells. I mean, they just very quietly had come the night before and put out the fire and left, so as not to create any kind of a scene or incident. At that point, I became much more comfortable, again, in my neighborhood and realized that whatever had happened was not a local event. I mean, those were not local men in that car. There would have been no way for them to even come and look at that char, unless they had been a part of making it happen, because there was just... There was no time to spread the word, so to speak.

DePue: That would have been one of scores of incidents that were happening in Chicago at the time, in the midst of violent protests and activities inside the convention center and all. So, that's why you think it wouldn't have been anything in the news at the time?

Cleverdon: Unh-uh, unh-uh, unh-uh. The fact that the fire department came that night... There was a lot of activity on 47th Street, and there was a lot going on

downtown and on TV. But there must have been other incidents like that. I can't imagine we'd be the only one. But we didn't report it anywhere, other than the fire department.

DePue: Was it the only house in the neighborhood that was firebombed?

Cleverdon: That I know of. It wasn't something...deGrazia's knew it happened. The Levis, who owned the coach house, knew it happened. They lived in the main house. Sensibars knew it happened. They were in the other half of the main house, that was just right across the driveway from us.

DePue: I'm wondering, at the time, were you paying any attention at all to what was actually going on in the convention center? I mean, you had great reason not to. You've got a brand new baby at home.

Cleverdon: I wasn't really focused. The news, at the time, seemed to be focused. The news that I was seeing, anyway was really focused on all of the rioting in the streets and police intervention and people getting arrested and those kinds of things, downtown. But then, the rest of the time I was looking after my baby and hanging out with Robin and trying to be as normal as possible.

DePue: I know that, when we had our pre-interview, you mentioned Bernardine Dohrn's² name. I need to ask you about that. I don't know if this was when that would fit into the narrative or not.

Cleverdon: No. I met her... Gosh, that would have been in '63, in the fall of '63, spring of '64. She was a law student at the University of Chicago Law School. We used to walk up...I'm blocking on the name of the street [Woodlawn].

DePue: That's okay, we can get it in the transcript.

Cleverdon: Okay, okay. When I would leave the University of Chicago Harper Library, I'd walk out to the street that went up by our apartment, Woodlawn. Often she'd be coming from the law school, which was on the south side of the campus. We would just sort of accidentally meet there. We were never friends, never did anything other than walk together. But I remember just talking about her classes and things that were going on, and we were talking. I was working at the library.

The only thing I knew about her that sticks in my mind, is that she always fixed eggs and bacon, and she left her skillet, with the fat in it, in the oven. She didn't clean it out every time. I had always done my dishes, so the idea of just leaving a pan in the oven, ready to pull out every morning, was

² Part of the leadership of the Weather Underground, Dohrn was considered the organization's figurehead. She spent the 1970s living underground and was on the FBI's Ten Most Wanted list. Today, Dohrn is an associate professor and director at Northwestern University's Children and Justice Center.
(<http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/weatherunderground/today.html>)

just amazing to me. And I thought, oh, she's brilliant. But [I] never had any, any political discussions or anything with her. So [I] was really rather surprised when, down the road, [I] heard more about her underground activities.

DePue: Let's get back to the Mikva campaign because, after the Democratic convention, I would think David's focus is very much on helping Abner Mikva win that election.

Cleverdon: Yes, yes, through the fall. I had been the office manager, up until Carol was born in July. Then, in the fall, I was not doing so much in the office, but I was still attending some of the strategy meetings and things like that, taking notes and so on.

But David was then very much focused, and I think maybe he was being paid now by the campaign. I don't think he was in school anymore. He coordinated all of the political action people, precinct workers, in the whole congressional district. So he was meeting with people in the university area, Hyde Park, Kenwood, the north end of the district. But he was also spending time and helping organize the southern end of the district, which was much more conservative.

DePue: By this time, would it be fair to say that David saw his future in terms of working in political campaigns and working with people like Mikva?

Cleverdon: Yes, and when Mikva did get elected that year, David was hired as one of his aides and worked in the Chicago office at the federal building.

DePue: The next name that factors in here is Dan Walker. Let me just ask you a couple of questions about Walker, and then we'll get more into the specifics.

One of the things is that he was a Montgomery Ward executive, I believe. He made good money doing that, but had always wanted to get into politics for many years. He identified himself as an Independent Democrat, of the same league as Abner Mikva and [Paul] Simon and Dawn Clark Netsch [Illinois professor of law and politician] and others.

Then Walker was in charge—I believe, in charge would be the right phrase to say—of the commission that looked into the Chicago convention and the police department's response to that and ended up calling it a police riot. Any comments that you have about that?

Cleverdon: Not so much. I was aware of the Walker Commission Report, and that was kind of at a higher executive level than I was functioning, for sure, or even really paying a whole lot of attention. I think deGrazia worked with him on that. I don't know how much Mikva was involved with that.

DePue: How did David end up being involved with Dan Walker, then?

Cleverdon: deGrazia. I don't know all the inner workings of this, but at the time Walker decided to make the run for governor, Paul Simon was also running for governor.

DePue: That would have been in the 1970-71 timeframe?

Cleverdon: Right. Mikva was between a rock and a hard place, because he and Simon had been very close ten, twelve years, through the state legislature. Mikva had also been close to deGrazia, who had sort of orchestrated his campaign and gotten him elected for Congress.

Vic [deGrazia] was the power, the ideas, the organizer. I think he had worked with Saul Alinsky [community organizer and activist] at one time, so he was well-versed in community organizing and was just a great strategist.

DePue: Would it be fair to say he was the political brain behind both Mikva, for a while, and later on for Dan Walker?

Cleverdon: Yes, yeah. And did, under Walker, became deputy [lieutenant] governor. So Mikva was kind of in the middle, but I think Vic felt this was an opportunity for Dan Walker. Coming off that commission report, his name was definitely well-known, in the Chicago area, anyway. So, at that point, Vic asked David to then become the political organizer for the state for Walker.

DePue: Let me give you a little more background here for the interview on Dan Walker. And you mentioned Paul Simon, as well.

Paul Simon, at this time, had the unique position of being the lieutenant governor in the Ogilvie Administration. Richard Ogilvie was a Republican, and, obviously, Simon was a Democrat. That was rather an anomaly. This was about the same timeframe that the state is rewriting the constitution, so that won't happen again.

Cleverdon: That won't happen again, right.

DePue: And Simon, as you mentioned, had aspirations to be governor, himself. This was a perfect opportunity, because the other thing that Richard Ogilvie had done was to institute a state income tax. So everybody in the political scene thought he was pretty darned vulnerable. (Cleverdon laughs)

So now you've got Simon, who probably has the blessing of the Democratic machine, and he was identified as... The slate makers sit, and they identify who the candidate for governor should be, and it's Paul Simon.

And now you've got Dan Walker, who is going to run a very vigorous campaign as the guy who is going to undo the Daley machine. Would that be a fair assessment?

Cleverdon: Um hum, um hum.

DePue: So, after I've laid all of that out, I'll turn it over to you to talk about that primary campaign and David's involvement, and maybe you as a bystander, because you've got a small child at home.



This picture was taken in the summer of 1971, in Hyde Park, during Dan Walker's run for governor.

Cleverdon: Well, actually, by then, I had gone to work, down in the Loop. But when the Walker campaign got going, and they began pulling that together, then I worked kind of as a secretary/receptionist for the primary for Walker. Carol was at a sitter in Hyde Park, at that time.

I remember feeling uncomfortable that Mikva was not supporting Dan Walker. I felt terrible about that, and the fact that the two men had sort of—Vic and Abner had gone separate directions—it just made me sad that, over this campaign, two friends had gone separate ways.

I didn't know that much about Paul Simon, at the time. I mean, he was a name, and I knew he was in office. But I wasn't following politics all that closely. As you can see, I'm not even grassroots, (laughs) shallow roots on a lot of this, just involved and working for the good guys, as I see it.

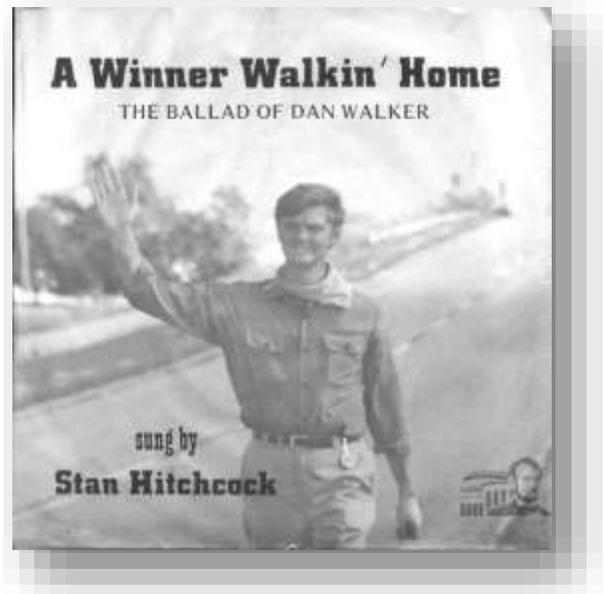
I remember the conversations about Dan seeming very stiff, and Simon had wonderful rapport with people. And I remember the conversations evolving, to the point where Dan was going to walk the state. So that whole campaign got under way.



Richard Anderson, Lee Major's supervisor on the hit television series, "The Six Million dollar Man," met with Lynne (center) at a Governor Dan Walker's fundraiser in the Springfield area, circa 1975.

Well, in order to appeal to a population base that probably didn't get all that involved in politics, David also was responsible for organizing some fundraisers. What he did, and others, was plan a series of country and western concerts around the state. I don't remember all the people, but Mel Tillis was one of them, and there were several other people on the roster. They performed out here, near Petersburg. And they performed maybe four other places around the state. By this time, maybe '74, David was head of the Illinois Democratic Fund.

One of the times that was really interesting was an evening, where a number of these people gathered at our house. Somewhere in a stack, I have the original little forty-five record [45 rpm/7" phonograph record] of Stan Hitchcock, who wrote a song, called *A Winner Walkin' Home*. He wrote it in Carol's bedroom. We now were living in Springfield. This would have been...1974.



Stan Hitchcock, well known country western artist, was so impressed by Dan Walker's walking campaign in Illinois, in 1971, that he wrote a ballad to commemorate the event, entitled A Winner Walkin' Home. Walker used this record as a promotional item during his campaign.

DePue: Seventy-one was the timeframe when he was actually walking the state.

Cleverdon: We weren't here yet. He was walking the state. Why did Hitchcock write that song at our house in Springfield? That might have been for the second. Maybe that was for the second campaign, because we were in Chicago when Walker was elected the first time, and David came here. That would have been for the second, the second campaign, the time he ran for reelection. And, of course, he didn't win, so that was the end of that. Okay. So, he was elected, yeah.

DePue: He won the primary.

Cleverdon: He won the primary, and the walking part had been really effective.

DePue: As I understand, he walked 1,197 miles, which is a lot more miles than the length and the breadth of the state, so he must have been walking—

Cleverdon: He crisscrossed, right, the state. I can remember going out a couple of times, just to see him walking along the highway. Sometimes his kids would be with him; sometimes various campaign people would be with him.

But mostly, I was in the office, downtown in the Loop, running the old...Remember the early computer cards, where they punched out all the

little... Well, we were at the cutting edge of technology in our campaign. We had cards on everybody, and each card had whether they'd done coffees at their house or done some door knocking or gave money or whatever. I would take those stacks over to the computer place, and they'd run it out and print it up. We were slick. (laughs)

DePue: If you look at it from today's perspective, pretty primitive. But at that time, very cutting edge, I would think.

Cleverdon: It was. It was.

DePue: What led you to kind of give up the teaching part and start working in these political campaigns?

Cleverdon: Well, when I was teaching and got pregnant, the public school system said, if you were three months pregnant, you were no longer allowed to teach in the classroom. I had taught longer than that. I wore big bows and baggy shirts and things like that. But, when it became pretty plain that somebody was going to say something to me pretty soon, that was the point at which deGrazia said, you know, "How about doing this for Mikva?" So that's where that got started.

DePue: It was quite a surprise, I think, for the Democrats in the state, the power brokers in the state, when Dan Walker upset their man, Paul Simon. Do you remember that night?

Cleverdon: Oh, it was a wild night. I mean, we were so excited. I remember being in the headquarters and results coming in. It was just... It was an amazing, amazing night. Everybody was toasting, and we had pizza. It was just quite a, quite a night, yeah.

At that point, I knew that I just was not going to be able to stay with the staff and go through the general election, because I had really spent so much time, even in the primary, away from Carol. So I knew that I was going to have to give that up, which was sad on the one hand, and on the other, it allowed me to then be home more.

I began teaching in an alternative school on the south side. David continued with the campaign, through the fall.

DePue: Before that occurred, how well did you get to know Dan Walker?

Cleverdon: Not really well. Not really well. I spent some time with Roberta [Walker] and enjoyed her, very down-to-earth, a mother, very conscientious about her children.

During the fall, more than in the spring, I began to have breakfast ready when David would have the various regional coordinators in for

breakfast once a week, at our house on South Shore Dr. So, I knew some of those fellows, but not really well. Some of them I felt I knew better than others. They would meet at our house...not all fellas—Ann Lawrence was one of the women who organized—but she and Ross Richardson and Pat Quinn and David somebody. I can't remember his last name, but he eventually married Dan Walker's daughter. He had a pilot's license, so he would bring people from southern Illinois up for the breakfast meetings.

DePue: Pat Quinn must have been a pretty young guy at that time.

Cleverdon: He was. Most of these fellows were in their early to mid-twenties, at the most, I think, and Ann.

DePue: Well, we're talking about Pat Quinn, as the governor today. What were your impressions of him? Do you remember much about him?

Cleverdon: High energy. [He] walked with a bounce in his step, always on top of whatever was going on. I mean, some of the people would come in and maybe their reports weren't as thorough, but Pat was always well-prepared, had done, during the week, whatever they had set out to accomplish. [He] seemed to be one of the people who would continue to be pretty successful in a political arena. I don't know his family background, but I think there was...His dad or somebody in the family had been politically active.

DePue: What was your impression of Dan Walker, as a candidate at that time, as a person?

Cleverdon: He was still a pretty formal guy. You could talk to him, but I didn't have chit-chat. I mean, he was not a chit-chatter, so I didn't spend very much time talking to him. I'd say, "Hi."

DePue: Did he seem intense?

Cleverdon: Yes, well, intense, and he always seemed to be preoccupied, kind of preoccupied. Whereas Mikva, when you were speaking with him, was present. I don't know if that makes any sense, but, yeah.

DePue: How about his politics? Did you have a feel for Walker's politics, or was that something that David discussed with you much?

Cleverdon: I didn't see David much. David was spending, not twenty-four/seven, but probably eighteen/seven on the campaign. I didn't really have that much of a sense of Walker. I guess, at that point, I was like, okay, if Vic deGrazia thinks he's going to be a good guy, I'll go for it, that kind of thing.

DePue: Were you and the deGrazias, the Cleverdons and the deGrazias, still doing a lot of things socially?

Cleverdon: As there was time. Vic and Robin had a traditional, tree decorating party for Christmas. So we would get together with them and a few other couples and have dinner and then decorate their Christmas tree, which was always kind of fun. Vic loved music, classical music. So there'd always be a good record on. At the time, that's what we had, was records. So good music and a lot of good food. Robin was a great cook. It would just be a very lovely evening, usually about four or five couples at the most.

DePue: Do you remember some of the other couples?

Cleverdon: Um hmm, Rudyard Probst, who was doing some work for the state. His expertise, I think, was... I don't know if he had been a counselor or a social worker or something, but I think he worked with the state at the time people were being moved from institutions to half-way houses or group homes, that kind of thing.



Lynne chatting with Rudyard Probst in 1968, at a Christmas party held at the deGrazia home. (Narrator's photo)

Gerard and Nancy Schlais. Nancy worked a lot in the campaigns, as well. Gerard, I think, was a contractor. They lived in Hyde Park. Yeah, those are mostly the people I remember.

DePue: You mentioned the very memorable night that Walker won the primary. You kind of bowed out of the campaign after that, but my sense of that campaign is it wasn't quite as rugged as it was in the primary season, that the general election worked better for Walker, in that respect.

Cleverdon: I think, not being a political analyst or anything, I think the fact that he had won the primary, against the organization, just set him up to do really well in the general election, and there was a lot of activity.

I think the statewide door knocking, political action, which David was responsible for, was kind of unheard of, downstate. I came to Springfield and was going to volunteer for... Doug Kane. I remember going to his office, and there was nobody in the office. I was ready to go knock on doors and really do a thorough canvassing, and people didn't do that downstate.

I think the fact that Walker's organization, his operation, took a Chicago style, independent politics approach to the state made it a pretty...I mean, it wasn't easy, because people were out there knocking on doors. But I think the strategy worked well. It wasn't as hard fought.

DePue: Were you still in connection at all or hearing anything from the Mikva people?

Cleverdon: No. No, by then, Abner was in Congress. I don't know how he and Vic, maybe patched things up, once Walker got into office. I have no idea how those relationships played out, after all of that.

DePue: You might not have a reaction to this question at all, but one of the things that those who were supporting Simon were especially bitter about—I think bitter's probably an appropriate word—when it came to Dan Walker, is that Walker painted Simon as one of those Chicago machine insiders, that he was just another tool of the Daley machine. They took offense to that, because Simon, as you mentioned yourself, had always identified himself as an Independent Democrat in the Mikva vein. Did you have any feelings about that issue, yourself?

Cleverdon: I don't remember that so well. It sounds vaguely familiar. I know that, when people get into political campaigns, the truth isn't always the foremost in people's minds when they're setting up their strategies (laughs). But I can see, if that was the way he was depicted, that both Mikva and Simon would have been pretty distressed about that.

DePue: Would that have been out of character or in character for people like Victor deGrazia and Dan Walker to be painting him that way.

Cleverdon: Well, it wouldn't surprise me, if it was Victor. I mean, that would have been his...I think there was some... Well, I know there was some tension. I wasn't in on the conversations or anything, but the fact that Mikva didn't go with Vic and Dan Walker was distressing to Vic. And the fact that Vic didn't go with Simon was distressing to Mikva, I believe. Now, we could talk to Abner about that, and he might say, "Oh, where is she coming from?" because I wasn't in on the conversations.

DePue: What happened after Walker wins the election in November of '72? What happens with you and David then?

Cleverdon: Well, then all of the people who had been supportive of Walker are really the pool from which he must choose people to come into office with him or into positions supportive of his time in office, as governor. So quite a few of those people, I think, wound up working in the government.

Mary Lee Leahy came down as Children and Family Services Director. I don't know what Ross Richardson and Ann Lawrence did, but they were both here in state government positions. Then, at the end, when Walker left office, they started the Feed Store [restaurant], downtown. At somebody wound



Mary Lee Leahy was running for Alderman for Chicago's 7th Ward in 1971. Pictured at the Swedish Club in Chicago are Mary Lee Leahy (left), David and Lynne.

up running for state representative, out of Chicago. David Caravello had some kind of a job. And David Cleverdon was hired to help with placing people who had been supportive of Walker in available positions at the state level.

DePue: You're very careful of how you say that.

Cleverdon: (laughs) Well, he was kind of a non-person, because I think there was a feeling that patronage jobs was not a good thing in the state. But [I] think, David functioned kind of in that role, and his office was over on the second floor of the State House.

DePue: Was he the main person working on placing people in positions?

Cleverdon: Yes.

DePue: Well, you know the term that is normally used in Illinois politics for that position; the term is patronage chief.

Cleverdon: Yes.

DePue: So he was Walker's patronage chief. Is what you're saying?

Cleverdon: That's the way he functioned (both laugh). Yes, I would say so.

DePue: In terms of how Illinois politics works, especially in that timeframe and that era, that was one of the more important positions you could have.

Cleverdon: Yes, but it was an odd position, because it was a non... I mean, he was kind of a non-entity, because I don't think they ever acknowledged him in that position. I think Walker... I don't know that the face to the state included a patronage position, so it wasn't something that people talked about. It wasn't like Vic deGrazia, now deputy governor, or Mary Lee with an appointment to an agency or some of the other positions that people had.

DePue: Well, the general public probably wouldn't have been all that aware of what David was doing. But the way it worked at that time, was that the party chairman for the Democratic Party, in each one of the counties, knew who David was, because he was the person they would work through to try to get their people into various positions.

And to complete the irony of all of this, Mary Lee Leahy, by 1990, is representing a woman by the name of Cynthia Rutan, that completely changed the patronage system in Illinois, and I think, to a certain extent, the United States.

Cleverdon: Yes. Yes.

DePue: But that's a different story.

Cleverdon: Yes, that's a different story. That's her story. (laughs)

DePue: And we've already interviewed her about that. It's a fascinating and pretty important story to tell.

Cleverdon: Yes. Well, the odd thing is, when the regular party is functioning, they have people who can hold office, but they also have people in the precincts who can keep the machine oil cranking. When Walker went into the second campaign for his second term, there were not a lot of people out there in the precincts. A lot of the key district organizers were now working for the state and couldn't be in two places at the same time.

That's my own perception. I don't know that that's exactly true, but I think a lot of the people who had been responsible for getting Walker elected were now working for the state, and they weren't out there getting him elected a second time. There wasn't a second tier of people.

DePue: Tell us about what you were doing. You're living in the Springfield area at that time, those four years?

Cleverdon: We moved to Springfield in '73, and my son was born in August that year.

DePue: And what's his name?

Cleverdon: Joe, Joseph. And for the first time since I was about eighth grade, I was unemployed, at the time. I didn't work for about two and a half, three years.

DePue: In other words, you're a stay-at-home mom, working pretty hard.

Cleverdon: Yes, right, right. (laughs) I did PTA for my daughter, out at her school, and that was fun. It was fun to do some entertaining. David, during those first couple of years, would call and have lunch plans with somebody, and they would come to our home for lunch, which was kind of fun to do some entertaining like that of people...but unemployed, not gainfully employed.

DePue: It sounds like you missed not being out, into some kind of a position.

Cleverdon: No, it was really, really kind of nice. I enjoyed some PTA things. I enjoyed just being able to focus on the kids and neighbors, and that was good. But, I had always been involved in something, so when it came time to go back to work, when David and I divorced, then it was, what am I going to do?

At that point, teachers in Springfield were being RIFed [reduction in force] every year. I felt that that was not going to be...that would be too stressful, if I were going to be supporting a family. So I did not go back to teaching.

DePue: What did you end up doing, then?

Cleverdon: I worked part-time for the Westminster Presbyterian Church, as their director of Christian education, until Joe went to school full-time. Then, in '78, I began working at the School of Medicine.

DePue: The St. John's School of Medicine?

Cleverdon: At Southern Illinois University [SIU] School of Medicine, in the department of medical humanities, where I continued to work until 2007.

DePue: But when did you start working for Westminster? Was that 1976?

Cleverdon: That would have been '70...Yes, '76.

DePue: How much do you remember about the Walker Administration years, or were you busy with what you were doing as a stay-at-home mom?

Cleverdon: I don't remember too much about all of that, in terms of the politics and so on. I was pretty much a stay-at-home mom and more involved in PTA and church and neighborhood things.

DePue: Were you aware? Were you hearing at all about the difficulties that Walker was having in his relationship with the Illinois Legislature?

Cleverdon: I was just aware that there was conflict or that things were not moving, I guess. Gosh, it was kind of like Obama being president and proposals not moving forward, because there were just non-support. But it might have... Was it more contentious than that? I don't remember.

DePue: Until [Illinois Governor] Rod Blagojevich came along, there was no comparison, in terms of how contentious Walker's relationship with the legislature was at the time.

Cleverdon: That's significant.

DePue: I don't want to impose too much on this, but, in part, it was because he ran against the Daley machine. The Chicago machine had plenty of people in the Illinois State Legislature who felt much more aligned with the Democratic machine than they did with this upstart Walker, who had demonized them through the entire campaign. So he had that group, plus the Republicans and wasn't able to move much legislation through there.

An example of that is, come 1976 in the primary, the Democrats slated Michael Howlett to run against Walker. And, the second time around, Howlett is the one who defeats Walker, in the primary. But again, it sounds like you weren't all that much involved, at the time.

Cleverdon: Right. I used to think I was on sabbatical from politics. Then, at some point, I realized I was retired from politics. (laughs)

DePue: It sounds like that might have been about the timeframe for that to happen.

Cleverdon: Yes, yes.

DePue: Were you paying attention at all to the annual fights that the Illinois Legislature was having on the issue of the Equal Rights Amendment?

Cleverdon: No, no, no.

DePue: So, from 1976 on, you've already pretty much talked about what happened there. It sounds like you got divorced in '76. Was that before or after the primary?

Cleverdon: It was in March of that year.

DePue: So, let's kind of wrap things up here, because you have a long relationship with the SIU School of Medicine, it sounds like. When did you retire from there?

Cleverdon: In 2007, in the spring.

DePue: Not too long ago.

Cleverdon: Not too long ago, no. So I had been with [the] department of medical humanities. [I] started really as a researcher and working with some library projects, sort of falling back on my University of Chicago experience at Harper's. But, as the SIU School of Medicine was growing—it was fairly new at that point—each department was beginning to pick up more management responsibilities, rather than having all things managed centrally.

So, as that happened, I became, eventually, the business manager for our department and got a degree at UIS [University of Illinois Springfield] in counseling and so was doing some counseling through the department of family medicine, did some teaching and evaluation of medical students in inter-personal skills, offered a couple of electives and did student evaluations. It was a wonderfully varied position, and every two or three years something else would be added to the pot. So it was a great place to be and a lot of excitement at the school, growing and the department, flourishing.

DePue: Well, we spent an awful lot of time in those early years, growing up and then your life down in Mississippi and those years in Chicago, when so much was going on and those four years in Springfield, when your husband was working for the Walker Administration. And then we spent just a tiny little bit of time on the thirty years, roughly thirty years, you worked in Springfield in a couple of positions, but primarily at SIU.

I wonder if, for all of that, what you would look back as perhaps the most fateful decision that you made in your life, the one that seemed to change the direction of your life?

Cleverdon: Marrying David. (laughs)

DePue: That's kind of a given, isn't it? Anything else that stands out, though?

Cleverdon: I think the decision to stay in Springfield, at the time of the divorce. David moved back to Chicago, and I decided to stay here. [I] considered going back to the area of Arlington Heights, where my parents had moved in '63. They had moved... The same year we moved to Chicago, they moved to Arlington Heights. But I liked Springfield. I liked the community here.

I think there have been times where I wished that I had picked up the threads of my Civil Rights activities and some of the political activities, earlier in my life. But I guess, as a single parent, I was really focused on an arena for work that would allow me to have a quality of life as a parent. Those decisions and choices kept me here and focused on parenting, until they were gone.

DePue: Was that role as a parent part of the decision to stay in Springfield, versus going back to Chicago?

Cleverdon: Yes, yes. I felt the Springfield community, just the pace of life, the focus of the community, the experience of the children in schools... The schools were wonderful here. My son went to a school in Chicago that was kind of a magnet school, the year he was in eighth grade, but then came back here for high school. They were visiting their dad in Chicago, visited grandparents in Arlington Heights, so they were being exposed to a bigger world. But this was where core values were formed, and I think this was a great place to be. I made that choice, and I don't regret it.

DePue: Looking back at your life, is there one thing that really sticks out, that you're most proud of accomplishing or doing?

Cleverdon: I don't know if I would say it was something I did. I think it's the variety of my life. This has been an amazing opportunity to reflect on places I've lived, things I've experienced. I would not say that I have been the generator of some of these experiences. They were just... I was in a place and a time, and things were happening, and I was part of it.

Just the variety of people I've met and the experiences that have kept me really believing that people are basically good, that people want to be perceived as decent, and that there is a whole lot that we could be lifting up as positive in this world, rather than focusing so much on all the problems. I think, if we could just feature the good stuff more than we do, it might be really helpful.

DePue: It's interesting you say that, because there was a period in your life, you and David both decided to focus on one of the problems of the world, and that dealt with the lack of voting rights that blacks in the south had.

Cleverdon: The personhood of the people we were working for and with, that was a problem, but it was also a time to accentuate the good in a whole, a whole population that had been denied that sort of access to voting, or in Chicago, housing. In the south, housing, too. I mean, all of those... You have to kind of fight for, I guess, what you think the good is, I would say.

Teaching school in an inner-city situation... I guess I would see myself through those years, sort of practicing what I believed in and things that had been instilled, as I was a kid, by my dad and some of the experiences we had. I probably haven't been as good an advocate for those causes, in a way. But, getting into the medical education arena, I was still focusing on students' ability to relate to all of their patients and communicate well, but it wasn't issue related, as some of the earlier activities had been.

DePue: If you look back at your life... I'm going to divide it up into three parts in your early life. Which of these three would you feel was a more important defining event or period of your life? Would it have been working on voting rights in

Mississippi or teaching those young kids in Chicago or your political involvement, especially up in Chicago?

Cleverdon: More defining for me? I think Mississippi. I think Mississippi. As brief as it was, it was more on the edge of...It was a greater risk, I guess I would say, in doing something that I believed in and teaching in the inner-city in Chicago. I guess I'd have to kind of put those all in the same package.

In the political arena, I supported the candidates, but what I was doing was managing the office, doing some canvassing, doing some sitting in the polling place on Election Day. That could be kind of scary, but it didn't have the feeling of engagement, in the same way that Mississippi or teaching in the inner-city did.

DePue: Let's jump way ahead and talk about 2008 and the election of Barack Obama as president. Was that a culmination, do you think, of so many things you spent your early years working on?

Cleverdon: Oh, yes. I mean, the fact that he was elected...I regret that I didn't get more involved in his campaign. I have to confess, I don't even know what was happening in Springfield, other than yard signs. I know there was a lot of computer-generated contact. But I never took the opportunity to go to one of the house meetings or any of those kinds of things. I just knew who I was going to vote for.

But the fact that he was elected, that was a very emotional night. No, I was very emotional that night (both laugh). Watching everything in Chicago, was just amazing and just...It wasn't an ah-ha, but it was like, it's happened; it's here. It would have been great if Martin Luther King could have been here to see it and Kennedy [President John] and Robert Kennedy.

DePue: Did you get to go to the inauguration? Did you want to go to the inauguration?

Cleverdon: You know, I'm not that excited about big crowds. I was much happier sitting in the comfort of my home and watching it on TV.

I have supported a child in Uganda through Compassion International, and a number of the photographs that I receive from the Obama family—and I know it's all politics generated—but as a fairly nice supporter of them, of his campaign and everything, I get Christmas cards and other mailings during the course of the year. I get something from Michelle or whatever. I mean, this is not personal contact, at all. But it's been fun to be able to send those photographs on to Doreen. [her Compassion child] I think how exciting it must be for somebody to see, who doesn't live here, but is in a needy, impoverished circumstance in her own life in Africa—I mean, it is Uganda, but still—to get pictures of Obama. It's just been kind of a nice connection between me and her.

DePue: A couple of the more important events in the Obama campaign occurred right here in Springfield at the Old State Capitol. The first one was his announcing his run. The second one, his announcing of his vice presidential candidate, Joe Biden. Were you at either of those events?

Cleverdon: No. No.

DePue: Same reason? Big crowd, didn't need it?

Cleverdon: Yes. Well, I just don't tolerate the heat or the cold very well, and, as I recall, one was a hot day, and one was a cold day. (laughs)

DePue: How would you like to wrap up our conversation?

Cleverdon: Well, I would like to say, thank you very much. This has been an amazing opportunity for me to reflect on things that, gosh, I haven't really thought about for a long time. It makes me urge my children to keep diaries and take pictures and keep track of things that they're doing and people they're meeting and so on, because I just feel so bereft now (laughs) that I didn't do more of that.

But this has been a wonderful way to bring a certain integrity to my life and things that have happened. So I, gosh, I thank you for that. It's been so much fun, because we started, just thinking about Mississippi, but then we went backwards, and following some of the threads backwards brought out some of those themes that were important in my family.

Then, the politics came as sort of a second wave. Going back and thinking about those things has been great. So, it's been wonderful.

DePue: I must admit, when we first met, I had no idea that one of the things that I'd definitely want to pursue was the political involvement that both you and David had, especially in the Walker Administration and the Mikva campaign and things like that, because those are two of the more important, influential people in Illinois politics in the last fifty years.

Just as kind of a footnote here, Mikva is... I guess he's a retired judge, but he's probably as busy as he's ever been. For a while he was chief counsel, I believe, for Bill Clinton [U.S. president 1993-2001], during some very tough years for Bill Clinton, when he needed lawyers quite a bit.

Cleverdon: Yes, but I don't think that lasted very long. Wasn't it just two and a half or three years, maybe?

DePue: I don't know how long he did that, but he had a couple... from '69 to '73 in the U. S. Congress, and from '75 to '79, again in U. S. Congress. And he had a variety of different roles and positions, beyond that time, including serving as a federal judge for many years.

Cleverdon: Well, he had represented the Second Congressional District. Then, I think there was a redistricting plan that had some influence on his moving up to Evanston. I think his second time in Congress, he represented the North Shore area. I could be wrong on that, but I think he was [representing] Evanston and Wilmette and that area, the second time around.

DePue: This has been a wonderful experience. Thank you very much for helping us capture a little piece of history here.

Cleverdon: Well, thank you.

(end of interview session #3)



Lynn Cleverdon, 1997.