SAMANTHA MOONEY: Today is Thursday, July 12 [2018]. I'm interviewing Teri Stewart.

TERI STEWART: All righty, then. So, well, I was born in 1954. And my memory is very good; [*laughs*] it goes back to when I was born and before, so I remember my childhood very well. Most of it was spent in the segregated South. My father's family was without a doubt the most racist, sexist, homophobic, pro-militaristic people on the face of the Earth. Interestingly enough, my mother came from a very blue-collar Philadelphia family; and for most of my childhood, my mother was referred to as "the goddamn Yankee Douglas married." So I—it was very balanced, in that I would spend time in the segregated South with my father's family but then go to Philadelphia to visit my mother's family. And so I would go from a very rural, you know, fascist almost, environment to a much more liberal, blue-collar, working-class desegregated environment; and the contrast was extremely profound for me.

My—and again, I'll have to go back before I come forward—my mother and father met in the Korean War. They were both in the Navy. She intentionally got pregnant to force him to marry her. You know, thanks, Mom; thanks, Dad. Aha. And in—my father's side—my mother did it mostly to try to escape poverty and to build up a world view and to get education, and my father did it because every male in the Stewart family, going back to the last Stone Age, had their war. They were never drafted; they volunteered. They were the first ones. It was like, "Yes! This is our war! This is our generation's war." And interestingly enough, my father's family during the Civil War had people who fought for the South. My mother's family from Pennsylvania had people who fought for the North. And I always thought it would be interesting to see if they were ever at the same battles.

But at any rate, my father's family, they had owned plantations during the Civil War and lost practically everything, so that, although they were still considered well-to-do, each generation was consecutively poorer than the generation before that. My grandmother's family on her side, they were—both the Stewarts and the Stokes [sic] were from Louisiana. The Stokes [sic] had a plantation. The Stewarts also had a plantation called Stewartfield, and apparently part of it still remains as part of a private university in Louisiana [sic], where the main house still exists. And apparently they have a ballroom floor that's on springs, so people could dance all night without getting tired. But they—my father's people—were mostly either in Louisiana or Texas. And again, people—I don't even really know that people can really comprehend how entrenched racism and segregation was. As my grandfather used to say, "God invented segregation. Segregation was God's will. The very first thing that God did in the

Bible was separate the light from the dark. Therefore, God's first will was segregation." Of course, he could also use the Bible to—for any other argument. But this was the sort of head set that they had. They basically hated everybody. This was during the Vietnam War. My uncle was actually in the Vietnam War for many, many years. He really liked it, he lived in Thailand, was part of Air America.

So the attitude in the Stewart family was "Nuke the gooks. We need to just drop atom bombs and blow Southeast Asia off the face of the Earth. Goddamn Mexicans, one day they're just going to take over." And I remember thinking even then, as a young kid, "Well, but we stole Texas from Mexico" [*laughs*]. The Mexicans were here first, so yeah, it's like--it was all very, very twisted, and even the whole color thing, you know. You could have dogs that were different colors, you could have horses or cattle that were different colors; but people couldn't be different colors. In other words, you know, why did the same things not apply? Why was a brown horse OK but a brown person wasn't OK? And you could have people of color work for you, you could have them fix the food you ate, you could have them raise your children, you could have them do all these things, but somehow you couldn't live with them. You couldn't do this in public. You know, the whole thing was very, very twisted to me. Even as a child I saw that it really had to do—just like the sexism in the family and the way women were treated and the way women were controlled. It was really about control, and that was very obvious that there was a fear and hatred and control all meshed together in a very—a very sick way.

But I very clearly remember—and these existed in Texas even until the 1970s—what they would call "colored water fountains," separate entrances, colored entrances, and sometimes people of color wouldn't even have an entrance; sometimes they would just have a window that they could go to. They couldn't go into the store or into the whatever; they'd have to go to a window to get what they wanted. I remember when people of color had to sit in the balconies of movie theaters, that at the county fairs they'd have "Negro Day," neighborhoods being segregated. And it was very funny, because, no, the "N" word was used as a matter of course, particularly by the males. But the women, to try to appeal [sic]—I don't know, more civilized or more genteel, would use the word "Nee-gra," and it was always this long, drawn-out, like, two-syllable word: "And the Nee-gra woman that works for so-and-so." You know, so again there was just this weird insanity to it, was really how I saw it.

But then, you know, I'd go with my mom to Philadelphia, we'd go to the—I saw my first plays, saw and went to my first museums, rode the El, and everybody was there together, and there was nothing made of it. You know, the very same people that in the South you couldn't sit

next to, it was perfectly OK when you were in Philadelphia. And the—my mother's people lived in an old, old row home in an old working-class neighborhood, and it was totally mixed. I mean, you had Italians, you had Jewish people, you had Polish people, you had Black people, and all the kids, we would play in the alleys that ran behind the house. And people would visit and come over, and, you know, go sit on their porches and bring food over; so it was a completely different ambiance. And then you'd come back down South again, and then there was this weird, oppressive segregation.

Some things that stick to me a lot from my childhood, I was very aware of current events; we talked politics a lot in my family. The television would always run in the background, giving casualties from the Vietnam War during dinner. I remember I had a huge crush on Sidney Poitier. I thought he was so handsome and so sophisticated and so wonderful. He was really my favorite movie actor. And then in the late sixties, when *Star Trek* came on, I was like, oh, my God, I really love *Star Trek*. And I had this fantasy as a child that I was really the love child of Uhura and Spock and lived in outer space. You know, so I knew from the beginning it was wrong. And you could tell by the—just the level of the anger and the hatred that it was wrong. I'll never forget, I used to watch *American Bandstand*, and then *Soul Train* came on. And *Soul Train* was like so much cooler than *American Bandstand*. The kids were cooler, they could really dance. I had *Soul Train* on the television, and my grandfather came home; and he went completely berserk. I was one of the only people—well, I was really the only person in the entire family that would argue with my grandfather over issues like this. And everybody would say, "Don't argue with him. Don't argue with him. Only makes him worse."

And I'd say, "No, it doesn't. Letting him get away with this stuff makes it worse."

He went ballistic when he saw me watching *Soul Train.* And I remember he grabbed me, and he threw me in the kitchen, and he pressed himself up against me and started humping me and said, "You want Black bucks all over you? Is this what you want?" You know, "You want nigger men all over you? This is what you really want."

And I was so angry, and I remember I just took him, and I just threw him across the room, and I said, "You get off me. Don't you ever, ever touch me like that again."

So needless to say, any time he wasn't there, I immediately turned *Soul Train* back on. My grandmother was like, "Oh, don't put that on! What if he comes back?"

And I'm like, "Well, I'll change the channel." You know, because I just—I grew up not being intimidated and knowing that, you know, things like how they hated my mother. They

hated the way she spoke up to my father, they hated the fact she wasn't submissive—or as submissive as a lot of the women from the traditional South.

Let's see, so, at any rate, interestingly enough, *Brown v. The Board of Education* was 1954, the same year I was born. But the schools weren't desegregated until much later, most of them. At that time I was living with my parents. A lot of times I would live with the family in Texas for large periods of time, not so much sometimes with my parents; and we were in St. Petersburg, Florida, at the time. There were two high schools in St. Pete, Florida. One was called St. Pete High, and it was desegregated and had been for years, and there'd never been any problem. The other was Northeast High, and it was completely segregated, and that was the high school I went to. The very first year I was there—I guess I was probably about fourteen at the time—that's when they desegregated the high school. And all the kids were so excited. They were like, "Yea, this is so cool! We're going to be desegregated. We're going to have Black kids here. This is going to be so awesome!"

Well, the student body was totally fine with it. Who was against it? The parents, the teachers, the faculty—they were so filled with hatred, and they were so appalled that the school was going to be desegregated, it was like they would do anything in their power to change this. Well, to make matters worse, they did bring in some Black students, including this one young Black kid who was so smart and so brave and so cute. He reminded me of a young Sidney Poitier. And to the utter horror of the faculty and the teachers and the parents, we voted him as our Sophomore Student President. And they were like, "Oh, you can't do this. You can't—like, the white body and the Black body can't vote a Black kid to be the class president." So they really had it in for him big time.

And not long after we had elected him, there was a game at the high school, and he was sitting up on the bleachers with another friend, and I was with a bunch of kids down on the ground, and I, of course, was looking adoringly at him, because I really kind of had a crush on him. And we were all smoking pot; he was not. He was with the other kid, completely innocent, not even anywhere near us or possibly even aware of us. So what the faculty and the teachers did is they took his presidency away from him because they said he had been smoking pot during the game. Well, he had not. It was me and a couple of my disreputable friends. And I went and I told him. I said, "You know, we are not going to let them take this presidency away from you. We voted you in. I'm one of the guilty parties, and I'm standing up to say you had nothing to do with this." And he thanked me, and, you know, and we start organizing the student body, the protest, to say, you know, that we weren't going to allow his presidency to be

taken away. And also the temper of the times was such—there was so much going on with sit-ins and civil protest and, you know, bus boycotts that it really was—there really was a revolutionary tempo in the air. So at fourteen I organized a bunch of students, mostly the misfits of which I was one, and we went and laid our bodies down in front of the buses in the cul-de-sac in front of the school. And we refused to move unless they dropped the charges against the young man and reinstated him as our class president. And we laid there, and we laid there, and we held all the buses up, and, you know, the police showed up, and, you know, all the adults showed up, and we would not be moved. And finally he came out, he said, "Teri, I'm going to have to ask you to tell the kids to move."

And I said, "No, we're not going to do it, because this isn't fair. This isn't right."

And he said, "No, you don't understand. They've threatened my family. Either you and the kids have got to move, or they're going to do something really, really bad to us. And I'm pleading with you, I'm asking you, tell the kids to move."

So I did, and the kids moved, and they took his presidency away from him. And I remember this was such a huge epiphany for me, because I said to myself, "This is so wrong at so many levels. Every time they win, they get stronger. Every time they win, they will do it again. And they will never stop doing it. And the times will come in the future and in my life where standing up or laying down or putting your body on the line is going to really, really make a difference. And I swear I will not be moved." And I have kept that vow ever since then. It had a huge effect on me.

SAMANTHA MOONEY: Two quick questions about him. So what was his name?

TERI STEWART: You know, I do not remember, and that's a shame. But somewhere in my piles, I have the old yearbook, and I'll have to go back and look his name up.

SAMANTHA MOONEY: Yeah

TERI STEWART: But—you said you have another question?

SAMANTHA MOONEY: Yeah, and then, did he still continue being enrolled at this school or not?

TERI STEWART: He did. He did.

SAMANTHA MOONEY: OK

TERI STEWART: But they took his presidency away from him and put some white kid in his place. Well, needless to say, this didn't make it very easy for me at the school after that, and they sort of turned their attention then to getting rid of me and making things difficult for me. And I hated them by that time. I hated them, I hated the school, I hated what they stood for, I

hated every—I was so filled with despair and anger. And so I started skipping school. Actually I really only have that one year of high school. A lot of people do not realize, but I was a high school dropout—or thrown-out, however you want to look at it—and was only there for a couple of months during the second year of high school, of which I skipped practically every class every day or slept through them. And at that time I was running with a real wild, crazy, hippie crowd and doing lots of drugs; and it was so much more fun to go party or go to the park and get stoned than it was to go to school. And I really didn't feel like they had anything to teach me. And again, there was the overwhelming animosity and hatred that I felt after what they had done.

I did have one teacher that was very nice, a history teacher, interestingly enough. And he said, "Look, Teri. I know you're not stupid." He said, "But I'm going to have to fail you, because you never come to class." And I'm like, yeah, well. He says, "I tell you what. I'll cut a deal with you. Read one history book. I don't care which one. Read one history book and write a report on it, and I will pass you in my class."

And I was so touched that a teacher would care about me, would notice me, would make me an offer, and be willing to work with me on that kind of level. I mean—and I said, "I will." I said, "I got—thank you, I'm so appreciative." So I went and got a book, and I read it. And the book was *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee* [*laughs*]. And I was so filled with depression at White Man's Burden and the unfairness of society and just--and everything else that I couldn't even write about it. I was so upset. It was like, no, it's not cowboys and Indians; it's *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee*. Oh, my, God. Why am I part of this species? How did I end up on this planet? None of this makes sense. And I went back to him, and I said, "Look, I really appreciate your offer," and I remember I even started crying. And it's like, you know, "It was so kind, it was so nice, but I read the book, and I can't write about it now. I'm too upset."

And he said, "What did you read?"

And I said, "*Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee*."

And he went, "Oh, God."

So that was basically—

SAMANTHA MOONEY: Did he fail you?

TERI STEWART: Oh, everybody failed me. They kicked me out of school. I was kind of like [inaudible] the entire school system at the ripe old age of fifteen, whereupon I became a crazy, wild hippie and ended up hitchhiking all over the country and going to rallies and going to protests and going to pop festivals and going to concerts and going back and forth to Texas and

ended up living in Austin, which was ground-zero for hippies in the Southwest. And then my other staging point was Atlanta, which was ground-zero for hippies in the Southeast; and if you were going to get anywhere up and down the East Coast, you had to come through Atlanta, so that's sort of how I discovered Atlanta. And I just sort of went crazy for a couple of years. There was just so much going on and so much wrong with the world and so much unfairness and so much prejudice. And I have to admit, one of the things that also got me to—is I did end up having sex with a couple of Black guys—not at the same time, but—not because I wanted to have sex with them, because I was also coming to terms with the fact that I was actually a lesbian, which on top of everything else was like, oh, great—but because they used the race card against me. "Oh, the reason you don't want to have sex with me is because you're really prejudiced." And I wasn't prejudiced; it wasn't because they were Black, it was because they were male. But I hadn't gotten to the point that I could intellectualize and articulate that, so I did it to prove I wasn't prejudiced. Well, you know, that's not the answer to things, either. But again, you know, this brings you into all the issues surrounding feminism and sexism and everything else.

So I became, you know, extremely active in civil rights, women's rights, the antiwar movement, early gay rights, environmental preservation, even lived in the early '70s here in Atlanta in a lesbian commune on North Highland Avenue that we called the Highland Home for Wayward Girls. I ended up at the age of nineteen getting my GED and going on to college eventually, but I moved here permanently to Atlanta when I was nineteen. It was between the ages of, like, fifteen and nineteen that I kind of had my wild, crazy travel meltdown, trying to find the meaning of life and who I was and going as counterculture as I could, which was pretty counterculture. And then the other thing, too, about lesbians is that lesbians were very accepting of other women—of color, of women with disabilities. The straight, white mandates for women were not in the lesbian culture, which was, you know, much more accepting in other ways. And the reason I decided on Atlanta was, besides the fact that I really liked the environment and the beautiful trees, is because it had everything I wanted. It had counterculture intellectualism, it was diverse, it was politically radical, you know. And you could be Black, you could be gay, you could be, you know, all of these other things that were important to me at that time. And I would have people say to me, "Well, why do you want to live in that nasty, run-down inner city?"

And I would be like, "You don't understand. Intown living's the wave of the future. We're going to make this a viable community again, we're going to have civic projects, you know,

mom-and-pop shops. You know, we're going to become a community again." And this was in the Little Five Points-Inman Park-Candler Park area. Most of the gay men gravitated more toward the Midtown-Piedmont Park area; most of the lesbians ended up with the old hippies over in the Little Five area. And that's what I wanted. I wanted diversity. So when I moved—you know, and again, the neighborhood was so much different then. It was very working-class, it was very mixed racially, lots of gay people, lots of elderly people, lots of artists, and that's what I really, really wanted. And, of course, during that time of the hippie movement, you know, we started things like Sevananda, [inaudible] Community Credit Union, the butterfly houses in Inman Park, Charis, ALFA—which was the Atlanta Lesbian Feminist Alliance. I worked for the Feminist Women's Health Center. You know, so we did a lot of political work on reproductive rights, civil rights, gay rights, everything. And that's what I really wanted. That was my reaction to being raised in a very oppressive atmosphere in the segregated South, was to sort of throw myself against it with everything I could.

Let's see. And then of course, interestingly enough, thanks to the Supreme Court, my partner and I, who will—Iris, who you've also interviewed—she and I will have been together this year for forty years.

SAMANTHA MOONEY: Oh, wow. That's so cool.

TERI STEWART: And when the Supreme Court passed the fact that—passed gay marriage, it was unbelievable, because we never thought we would live long enough to see gay marriage legal in this country. You know, it's just—that, to me, is really amazing, because even just taking like civil rights, like Black rights, like segregation, just gay rights in my lifetime have gone from you're a criminal and you can be arrested, you're insane and you can be put in an insane asylum, but then the American Psychiatric Association backpedaled on that; and you couldn't be declared insane just because you were gay. And then they had some of the laws that were overturned so you could be imprisoned just because you were gay. So to go from being considered insane and a criminal every day of your life, every breath you took, you know, to being able to be a full member of a society to then being able to have, you know, the rights that other people have, like the right to be able to get married, I mean, it's just—to me just utterly amazing. But it all segues back into segregation and oppression. And also one of the other things that I worked a lot on were labor rights and labor issues and the rights of workers. So all these things have been intertwined. Also, too, when you worked on things like antiwar movement, gay rights, workers' rights, you were working side-by-side with people of all colors.

And that to me is what I wanted, that kind of almost socialist, you know, equality, as far away from the white supremist [sic] as you can get. And interestingly enough, my one regret about being able to get married, which we did right here at the Decatur Courthouse, was the fact that all the evil people in my father's family were dead; because the last years of their lives, they would not even speak to me, because I was considered the spawn of Satan and going to burn in hell forever. And I would have loved to have sent them a wedding announcement. You know, it would have probably killed them, but [*laughs*] that would have been OK with me to turn over in their graves. But I just always thought it was like, see? See how much in some ways things have changed? To me the ultimate irony and the kind of wrap-up of the whole story from slavery to the twenty-first century is the fact that the Stewart family is practically extinct now. There were only ever two children that were produced. One is half-Black; the other is half-Vietnamese. So how outrageously wonderful is that? You know, the old white supremists [sic], you know, have in their own way become extinct.

The sad part is is that the neighborhood is not what it used to be. We did all those things we said we were going to do about making it a vibrant, rainbow, wonderful community and having civic projects and doing this and doing that. And, you know, and then all of a sudden all of the white-flighters, who had abandoned the city and abandoned everything in the city to go have their white enclaves in the suburbs said, "Oh, what a nice intown neighborhood you have now. Why, let's move back." And they came back, and they displaced everybody who made it a cool and groovy neighborhood. We lost our soul. Things—and I know people would disagree with me, because it's all about property values—well, property values are only important if you only intend to live there for a short period of time and sell your house and move on. If you intend to live there your entire life and be part of a community, you don't want property values to go up. You know, you want to be able to live there, and it was a better community when it was a blue-collar neighborhood and when it was diverse. People knew each other, people helped each other, nobody really had anything, so there wasn't any real separation. We had McLendon Gardens, which was Section Eight Housing, specifically so that we would be an inclusive, diverse, multiracial neighborhood. And when the white-flighters started moving back and raising the property values, people couldn't afford to live there anymore. One of the first things they did was take away all the subsidized housing, you know, which I was completely in favor of, you know, that this was what made us a community. This is what kept us from becoming a suburban enclave.

So we lost our people of color, we lost our gay people, we lost our artists, we lost our elderly. And now, as one of the elderly people there, the attitude is, "Would you old people hurry up and die so we can scrape your cottage, cut down every tree, and throw up a McMansion?" I don't even know the names of half the people that live on the street anymore. You know, they get out of their BMWs, they do their little tight, white butt-walk up their driveways into their air-conditioning—nobody used to have air-conditioning. Everybody sat on their porches, you know, when it was a blue-collar neighborhood. They go in there, they turn on their computer, they turn on TV. You don't see them. There's no interaction, there's no caring, there's no sense of community. A house that used—right across the street—that used to have eight people that lived in it, Black divorced mom and her three kids upstairs and a white divorced mom and her three kids downstairs, now has but two people in that entire house. They have their lawn services come, they have their maid services come, they've got their mobile dog groomers that come. So everything—I mean kids that used to come up and down the street and all to mow your lawn or walk your dog or wash your car, you don't see that anymore at all. And there's no diversity anymore. The very thing that I tried so hard to get away from has like come back to infiltrate the place that we tried to improve so that we could live there all of our lives, and that to me is very sad. And with the increased lack of tolerance under the Trump administration, with the increase in hate crimes and school violence and environmental destruction, I really see us as going downhill, that this is now part of the dumbing of America. And I think that, you know, people need to remember the past and, you know, and again, you're only as strong as your weakest link.

SAMANTHA MOONEY: I have a couple of questions for you. So where was the town in Texas where your family was?

TERI STEWART: Several places. Mostly around Marble Falls, but also several other small areas because of my aunts and uncles and that they would buy a ranch and then several years later they'd move, they'd buy another ranch. So other small towns like Lexington and really small towns like Weesatche—

SAMANTHA MOONEY: Oh, yeah

TERI STEWART: I mean, like, talk about the middle of nowhere, and Weesatche is named for what mostly grows out there, which is weesatche cactus. And when, you know, you say, "Where is Weesatche near?" Well, the closest place to Weesatche is like Goliad and some—

SAMANTHA MOONEY: I know where that is.

TERI STEWART: Oh, you do?

SAMANTHA MOONEY: Yeah

TERI STEWART: But, you know, and that's part of the thing, too, is the kind of hatred that they had not only came from the environments that they were products of in the South but it came to their isolationism, too. You know, if you are not exposed to other things, if you are not exposed to other people, if you don't work side-by-side with them and live side-by-side and ride the bus side-by-side, you don't realize that there's not really anything to be afraid of. You know, and it doesn't really—I mean, I hate to say this, even though it's true—it has very little to do with color and a whole lot to do with gender. I mean, you're more likely to be victimized by a male period, regardless of what color you are as a female. You know, you're more likely to go through, you know, one war after another after another after another, because this is a very testosterone sort of thing. And even though I was part of the Lesbian Separatist Movement for a short time in the '70s, you know, you very soon learn that not every woman is your friend and not every man is the enemy. But you are more likely to be a casualty of male violence than you are of female violence.

SAMANTHA MOONEY: Yeah, I'm intrigued by this Lesbian Suffragist group. It sounds like another time.

TERI STEWART: Yeah, that's a whole 'nother story, as is the half-Black descendant and the half-Vietnamese.

SAMANTHA MOONEY: Yeah, I might have to have y'all in again for another interview sometime.

TERI STEWART: Now, that would go under the subject of reproductive rights and feminism and is all part of—yes, interestingly enough, my uncle, who was in Vietnam for the whole Vietnam War, was there for the fall of Saigon, everything else, actually brought a Vietnamese woman that had worked with him at Air America and married her, brought her back to the States. So it was very interesting that, you know, despite all of their fascist ways to "preserve the race," it's like, that didn't work. [*Sings*] Nyeh, nyeh, nyeh, nyeh, nyeh [*laughs*].

SAMANTHA MOONEY: So you talked a lot that there was a lot of, like, discussion. Did you ever see any, like, direct violence or any of that kind of stuff in the area that you lived, or was it more like just talk?

TERI STEWART: Oh, no, there was violence, sure. I mean, these were very violent men. It was very violent times. And even if it was not—but you know, I saw violence toward women. I mean, that was the thing, it was violence toward anybody and everybody. They

would have been violent toward somebody just because they were Jewish. When you have that kind of male white supremacy going on, it's like, yeah. And if they did something horrible, they would brag about it. [*Imitating violent male*] "Oh, yeah, I drug 'em behind the truck," you know, blah, blah, blah. Or "Hit 'em with a crowbar," or blah, blah, blah, "Smacked her up side the head and taught her a lesson." So yeah, that's how they made it happen, is with violence. Because if you can take violence out of the equation, anything else can be worked through. But no, absolutely, violence was the way they controlled everything, whether it was the people of Vietnam or the people here in the United States, absolutely.

SAMANTHA MOONEY: And then what did your parents think about integration?

TERI STEWART: Oh, my father was totally against it. Matter of fact, he would say, "I didn't even know Teri knew any Black kids." Well, of course, he had absolutely no interest in me as a human being at all, one, because I was female, you know, which, of course, in the male Stewart mind is not quite human. Females are almost like a species of subhuman that have their purpose, and their purpose is to procreate males and to take care and cater to males and be a servant class. So, you know, my father never really had any interest in me at all, whatsoever. You know, if he'd worn a condom, I wouldn't be here, and that would be OK, too.

My mother was fine. Yeah, my mother—my mother grew up in Philadelphia, and she saw the segregated South as wrong and would argue against it, and that was one reason why my father's family hated her and her sister Shirley because they considered them, you know, outspoken Yankee bitches and, you know, don't know when to keep their mouths shut. You know, one of the things my grandmother would bring up over and over again is when my mother and father moved from Houston to Alabama, they had a dog. And the woman that came and helped my mom take care of the house loved the dog. And so when they moved, my mother gave the dog to the woman, because the dog loved the woman, the woman loved the dog. And for all of my life, my father's mother, my grandmother, [*Imitating angry older woman*] "And when they moved from Alabama, she gave that dog to that Nee-gra woman, and can you believe she went and give her a dog? You know they probably beat that dog. They probably starved that dog. I'll never forgive her for giving that Nee-gra woman a dog."

You know, so it was like, no, my mother's totally different. Not that she doesn't have her quirks and prejudices, being a product also of her times, but her times growing up as basically the child of a single mom because her father was killed when she was very, very young. He worked on the subway in Philadelphia and was hit by a train and was killed when she was probably about seven years old. So that left her mother in a really bad position of raising her

and her sister on a beautician's salary. And you know, that's what I mean, these, you know, and so her mother lived with her sisters in the row home because the women kind of had to pool their resources just to survive. And so no, she came from a whole different, you know, a whole different atmosphere, and I know that meeting, you know, my father's family was a real shock to her, and that's why they always referred to her as the "goddamn Yankee Douglas married."

SAMANTHA MOONEY: So she didn't know what your father's family was like?

TERI STEWART: She didn't care. She was young and in lust and in love and had decided that my father, who was an extremely handsome man when he was young—he looked like Tyrone Powell [sic]. You know what he looked like. He was a real stud muffin. And that's why, she admits, she intentionally got pregnant and forced him to marry her, because he was the love of her life and everything else. And, you know, he pretty much treated her like a doormat, but then he had been raised in the—that's the way women were treated.

SAMANTHA MOONEY: Well, did your mom ever talk to you about race when you were really young?

TERI STEWART: Yes

SAMANTHA MOONEY: What did she say?

TERI STEWART: No, she was definitely—I wouldn't call her an intelligent woman particularly, although she was very skilled at being a homemaker, but she was extremely compassionate and actually belonged for a while to the Quakers and the Unitarians. And one of the books that I remember from my young childhood that was actually a book that she and her sister had had when they were growing up in the 1930s was a book called *Thee Hannah*. And it's the story—wonderful, wonderful children's book—the story of a young Quaker girl in Philadelphia whose parents are part of the Underground Railroad, smuggling African Americans out of the South and into the North. And, you know, we would read it, and it would also be—you know, it would be very matter-of-fact. You know, when we were in Philadelphia, we were at her place, and she would say, "No, that's not right. That's wrong." You know, really, there's no reason to think that way. So, again, being exposed to both sides was very instrumental to me as a child growing up and also just being very aware, too, that the same people that are going to be racist and segregationist are also the same people that are going to treat women like shit. I mean, this is a no-brainer. So, I remember as a child that there would be such horrible fights and such horrible arguments that I would get one of the dogs and we'd go hide under a table or under a chair together until the fighting and the screaming and the slapping and, you know, all this other stuff ended. So no, it's the same thing.

SAMANTHA MOONEY: And then moving forward to your high school years, I've just got, like three questions, so it should be pretty fast.

TERI STEWART: Well, that's OK. High school was real fast. [*Both laugh*] They didn't want me, and I didn't want them.

SAMANTHA MOONEY: Well, so, my first question is, like, do you remember, so you say some of the students were very excited about integration? Did they immediately approach the new Black students?

TERI STEWART: Yeah

SAMANTHA MOONEY: OK

TERI STEWART: Yeah. And the other high school, St. Pete High, was integrated, had been integrated like, forever.

SAMANTHA MOONEY: Yeah

TERI STEWART: You know, and there were no problems there at all. So we sort of felt like this prehistoric dinosaur, you know. And the kids—the kids believed in Martin Luther King. They really did, you know. And Malcolm X and the Black Panthers and Angela Davis, you know, and just all this kind of stuff, that this was all part of the movement, you know, this was all part of the times, and that was, you know, what was right. And the March on Washington and all this other kind of stuff—which, incidentally I was—the first gay march on Washington, I was there, one of the first pro-choice marches on Washington. You know, back in my youth we did lots of marching and protesting and making signs and banners, and was part of Roadbusters and CAUTION here to stop the expressway from going through our neighborhood. So the kids were really galvanized, and they were really cool about it. I don't think I heard any kid—not to say that they weren't there, but no one came to me and said, "This is a terrible idea."

SAMANTHA MOONEY: Yeah

TERI STEWART: We were all like, yeah, finally we're not a dinosaur, finally we're modern, we're changing, you know, we have civil rights. But the adults were a completely different matter. Their old, ingrained prejudice and racism and everything else was just—is what cost everyone so much. And yeah, I do need to go back and pull out my high school yearbook.

SAMANTHA MOONEY: So what year was school integrated?

TERI STEWART: It was either 1968 or 1969.

SAMANTHA MOONEY: So it was pretty late.

TERI STEWART: Oh, yeah. Well, that's what I was saying, because [inaudible], because I was either fourteen or fifteen, depending on whether it was '68 or '69. I mean, how old are you when you're in your first year of high school? Usually fourteen?

SAMANTHA MOONEY: I don't know, because ours was a little different.

TERI STEWART: Well, whatever it was, I'd have to go back and pull—I'm saying it was either '68 or '69. And *Brown v. The Board of Education,* 1954, the same year I was born

SAMANTHA MOONEY: Yeah

TERI STEWART: And it took that long?

SAMANTHA MOONEY: Crazy

TERI STEWART: It is crazy.

SAMANTHA MOONEY: So you mentioned the "Commie," obviously the world history teacher. Did you notice like any other kind of educational bias or was that not so much [rest inaudible]?

TERI STEWART: I'm not—well, I don't understand the question.

SAMANTHA MOONEY: So like, was there ever any like education [sic] like, in the way that the history was taught or like science, you know, like sometimes eugenics or anything like that. Was that ever mentioned by any of the teachers?

TERI STEWART: You know what? I really kind of just zoned out.

SAMANTHA MOONEY: Yeah

TERI STEWART: I'm sorry.

SAMANTHA MOONEY: No, no

TERI STEWART: I would just like, glaze over, you know, and fall asleep or just skip school. You know, really and truly, I wouldn't consider it a good education at all. The classrooms [sic], even then, were too big. And plus, at that time, there was no diagnosis and there was no remedy, but I was dyslexic. I still am. And I think I probably have a little bit of the attention disorder, because I can Z-out immediately, because all I had to do was do this, and, you know, there I was in outer space with Spock and Uhura. I was not sitting in some math class, you know. Or I would just fall asleep. And to me it was interesting because Iris, my partner, is the one who diagnosed me as being dyslexic. I always just knew there was something weird. I mean, I had a good vocabulary, and I loved to read, but my spelling sucked, and my math skills sucked. And she was teaching me to type, and it was when she was teaching me to type that she said, "You're dyslexic." And I did not even know what that was. I was in, I guess, my late twenties then. And I realized, well, you're not just stupid, you're not just

spacy. You've actually got something going on. And once I knew what it was, I spent years correcting it. I carried a pocket dictionary with me everywhere. I looked up every word, I made sure I spelled it right, I started practicing math again, knowing, you know—although I got really high scores when I took my GED when I was nineteen and you got the little letter about you were in the top ten percent, you know, in the state, blah, blah, blah. But that was just very basic math—adding, subtracting, multiplying, dividing.

But once I realized what my problem was, I could correct it. And instead of just going with it the first time, I would go back and look again, although being dyslexic did have some interesting things as a child. One, I always thought I understood the fear of God, and that's why God had to be surrounded by "scared objects" and "scared places" and "scared people." And it wasn't till later that I realized the word was "sacred" and not "scared." [*Laughing*] And I realized, too, that anti-Semitism was not the Jewish people's fault. When I was younger, I thought, well, you know, people wouldn't hate Jewish people, but the Jewish people keep running around calling everyone else "genitals," and if they wouldn't call them "genitals," then nobody would be mad at them [*laughs*]. It was "gentiles." [*Both laugh*.] Oh, well, that makes sense now.

SAMANTHA MOONEY: Oh, you're going to make me cry.

TERI STEWART: And I always loved reading. I always loved history and reading history, although I found a lot of times that it was very, very sad. But you know, once I realized that I was dyslexic, I was able to, I would say, pretty much correct it. But it took several years of actually being aware and working with it. So that's ten points to Iris. Good teacher.

SAMANTHA MOONEY: And then my second-to-last question: So you mentioned that after the protest, things were made very uncomfortable for you at the high school. How so?

TERI STEWART: The teachers and staff had it in for me. They were following me around, they--just making things very difficult for me. Mrs. Dunkle [spelling?], who was like one of the faculty, used to come up and stop me in the hallway and check my eyes. "Are your pupils dilated? Are you on drugs?" Wouldn't [sic] measure my skirt, because you know, back then, girls couldn't have their skirt x-number of inches above the knee, and you would measure my skirt. Come up and feel my back to see if I was wearing a bra. You know. And at that point, I was just like, "Fuck you, man." You know, get the hell out, get out of my face. I'll admit, I had a bad attitude [*laughs*]. I was a non-complacent [sic] child.

And the other thing, it was so easy to hitchhike. Everybody hitchhiked back then. And being a young, cute, blond, teenage girl, I put myself out, and I always had a ride within ten

seconds. So I could go anywhere. I've learned to love truck drivers. Boy, you get down there at the end of the expressway, put your thumb out, truck driver stops. "Where you going?"

"I don't know. Where you going?"

"Memphis, New York City."

"Fine. Let's go." And that was so much more the open road, and everything that was happening in the world was so much more exciting than that high school or anything at home. I mean, I hitchhiked all the way to New York City for the Concert for Bangladesh, you know. Of course, I didn't have a ticket; but that didn't make any difference. It was a huge party right outside Filmore East or West or whichever one it was, out there on the steps; it was a happening. And that was important, too. Was it a happening? You know, you didn't have to have any money, didn't have to have a place to stay. You'd always meet somebody, you know. Or you'd go to a crash pad or something, you know. You'd go there, and then you'd hear, "Oh, there's a pop festival going on" so-and-so. You just go. So I basically—you know, I was basically wild, crazy, and on my own from the time I was fifteen to nineteen.

SAMANTHA MOONEY: And then my last question is, you mentioned your history of like activism and protest. Can you talk about some of your involvement with the civil rights protests?

TERI STEWART: Just everything. Marching on the streets, going to meetings, networking, even years later the march on Forsyth County. By then I'd already been an old political activist here in Atlanta like forever. First and second, you know, early gay rights marches here, where there were just a handful of us. And we'd walk into Piedmont Park, and the guys from the Piedmont Park [sic] Driving Club would come out and spray the "Sieg heil!" at us and throw Nazi salutes, and we'd be walking down Peachtree Street, people would be spitting on us and throwing cups and cans. And you know, Conscious-Raising groups with other women, where, you know, civil rights and feminism and reproductive rights and gay rights overlapped. You know, the other way is where you go away for the weekend with a, you know, group of political activists. It just—everything, I mean, all the way back to protesting the Hyde Amendment, where they took Federal funding away from poor women, to working for the Feminist Women's Health Center, walking out on the street downtown handing out pamphlets with birth control information. Street theater—we used to do lots of street theater down at Woodruff Park, just—I mean it was just like a way of life, it was like every day. You know, even working at Sevananda, you know, and working with all the different ethnic groups and all. It just—I mean, it was everywhere.

SAMANTHA MOONEY: Well, thank you so much. I really appreciate your coming in to give your history.

TERI STEWART: Well, thank you for talking to an old, broken-down warhorse here.

SAMANTHA MOONEY: You're not broken down.

TERI STEWART: Oh, yes, I am. I'm an old, broken-down warhorse and more than ready to pass the baton on to the younger generation, because, as they say, those who don't learn from history are doomed to repeat it. You said you wanted some extra interviews—

END OF RECORDING

Transcribed by Claudia Stucke