Interview with Rosalind Plummer Ford, who graduated from Swarthmore in 1973 and now works as an attorney. The interview was conducted by María Mejía, intern, and Ali Roseberry-Polier, research assistant, on August 7, 2014 over Skype. The transcription is word-for-word, except for false starts and filler words. In one instance, there is a name in brackets to replace a mistaken name.

MM: So can you just start by giving us an overview of your time at Swarthmore College?

RPF: Sure. I'll start by identifying myself. I'm Rosalind Plummer, class of '73. I graduated from high school in '69 and leading up to my graduation we as a country were experiencing some very interesting public conversations about redefining and realizing relationships between people, particularly in terms of racial relationships and economic relationships. We had voices of leadership speaking not only nationally but speaking internationally like Malcolm X and Martin Luther King speaking about these relationships. I actually grew up initially in the South, which was legally segregated, so you actually could not cross certain lines. We were coming through that, and in the midst of that growth attempt, we saw the assassination of those voices. Those people were silenced. Young people picked up that message and continued on that message and actually helped to strengthen our parents who were maybe a little bit more frightened by the kickback from that effort.

It was in that climate that we came into Swarthmore, and I can say that myself and others, we came to Swarthmore as children, we experienced a lot of pain, and we were forced to make sometimes frightening decisions, adult decisions as a matter of fact, about where we stood on issues and the crises that faced us. One of the things that we did was the follow up to a crisis that had happened at Swarthmore before – in fact, part of my motivation for wanting to go there was the press coverage about the initial takeover of the President's Office. Even though it resulted in the tragic death – it didn't cause it, but it resulted in the tragic death of the president – which ended that confrontation, my class came into Swarthmore with the intent to follow through on the momentum that had been set by the prior class. What I remember with the most joy about it was the black community, such as it was, it was very small but much larger than it had been as a result of the efforts of the preceding classes, was like a family. We had personal gripes like family members do, but nothing that was not forgivable in the end. We really operated like a family and felt about one another like a family. I have not really experienced that among a group

of people of the same age anywhere else, any other school that I have gone to, to the extent that we felt it at Swarthmore. When we went back into the takeover situation with the follow-up to get the Black House, because we needed a place to express ourselves, part of the motivation, people need to understand, was that we were actually being denied the opportunity to participate in the mainstream activities. So we had, for instance, a student who had participated citywide in Philadelphia as part of the all-city choir but suddenly was not good enough to participate in the singing activities on the campus. We had to form our own thing so we formed a Gospel Choir, we formed an African and Modern Dance company. We called people together and said, hey, will you instruct us here? Will you do this? We created our own momentum, somewhat out of isolation, but it became a joyous thing for us because it bonded us tighter. But anyway, back to the crisis. So we're going back in there because we said, we need a place where we can express ourselves where people don't complain about our music, don't complain that we're doing the same thing that someone else may do is suddenly offensive to you. We wanted to be someplace where we can get past that and enjoy our college experience. And we also wanted to share and express our culture. We felt that that was best in an environment where we were comfortable – we're not going to be attacked, we're not going to be belittled or maligned. So we were back in the President's Office and it was interesting because some of us were on scholarship, so we're like, oh my god, how is this going to affect my scholarship? But we made that adult decision that there are some things that are worth standing up for, and at this point, with all that's going on in the country, we have to take a stand on something on a level that it matters to us. I was really impressed by something that we did as a group. During our takeover of the president's office they were using all kinds of tactics to threaten us and frighten us, but one of the things was, one of the students who was participating was scheduled to perform in an event – it was a music event that was scheduled on the campus because she was a music major – and the word was, if she didn't show up for that event, she was out of here. So we, operating in the way that we had adopted from our predecessor students, we had a consensus, which of course caused us and forced us to talk to one another and work through issues. We decided, well, the solution to that problem was to take over the lodges where the concert was going to be scheduled.[1] We were

[1] The lodges are a group of two room, two story buildings adjacent to Bond Hall. Before moving to the Robinson House, SASS used one of the lodges as a Black Cultural Center and a meeting space.

rotating groups anyway, so we would go into the office and one group would retire to go get some food. We had the rotation going which was actually very sophisticated when you consider our ages. So we rotated a group to the lodges and we took over the facility that the concert was going to be, the concert had to be cancelled and that eliminated the problem.[2] That was a family kind of thing, it was gently done, totally unexpected by the administration, and it solved the problem. That's kind of the way that we tried to do things.

The other thing that I remember that was very impressionable to me was following on the footprints left by the previous class, we adopted in our governance an Afro-centric model, so you don't have a president or a leader, somebody who can be isolated, punished, or co-opted. We had a steering committee. You had a body of people who made decisions, who spoke for the group, so it was more protective of them and it also eliminates some of the interpersonal conflict that leadership structures can create. And of course, as I mentioned before, the consensus model forced us to discuss things, to flesh it out, no one dictates things to you, you try to arrive at an understanding or a mutuality. It really was consistent with the Swarthmore model of intellectualizing everything because we really did do a lot of dialogue, we really did get into exploring ourselves and what we felt about things. We had a lot of conversations, really deeply probing personal conversations about who we were as individuals and who we were as a group, and that again is something that I don't think you'll find a lot of on a lot of campuses. Swarthmore may be more conducive to that because it does promote intellectualism.

On a more negative and painful side, during that period, we watched progressive white students, at Kent State, being slaughtered by the government, and we watched Black students who were protesting at Orangeburg being subjected to the same experience. There was some concern on our parts that the Orangeburg thing was not being given anywhere remotely resembling the attention given to the Kent State when it was very identical treatment, but the bottom line was, anyone who had a progressive thought, whatever their color was, they were going to be viewed as the enemy.

[2] Mary Gatens, Music Department Secretary and mother of a music student wrote a letter to Robert Cross in response to the SASS takeover of the lodge. See Mary Gatens, "[Letter from Mary Gatens to Robert Cross, 03/15/1970]," *Black Liberation 1969 Archive*, http://blacklib1969.swarthmore.edu/items/show/652.

We also had the sort of sad but comedic presence of the FBI on campus – because you have to remember, Swarthmore was considered this really radical campus where SDS was formed and what they considered politically radical groups were formed, so there was scrutiny given during those times. We had these guys – here we were on this campus where we wore jeans with holes in the knees and these guys are in suits and high-water pants. So obviously they didn't fit in and obviously they weren't students. They're in the phone booths on the dorm floors and we're laughing, we're really, like, we see this guy, is this really truly how you guys do this? But then we had something that was more pernicious and more subtle and more painful. During that time period, in my first or second year, I can't really remember which year it was, high school students in Philadelphia, including my baby brother, who was a student leader, the student leadership of the different schools were protesting their treatment in the school system and they were going to have a march downtown in the school district to have this protest. Rizzo, who had come from police commissioner to mayor – I'm not sure if he was mayor at that time – in either capacity he controlled the police and he had threatened that he would do physical harm to them, he didn't care what their age was, if they came down here disrupting. So on some of the campuses, including ours, there was the question, do we assist these students, do we discourage them, how do we protect these kids from somebody who clearly was dangerous? In the midst of that discussion and that dialogue and even in the midst of all the other things we were experiencing, this gentleman comes on campus and he's sort of dressed more like us, he's a down-to-earth labor kind of guy and he presents himself as this labor organizer whose travelled all over the world, who's travelled to South America and helped organize people. He had heard about us and he really wanted to help us develop some leadership skills and some organizing skills and he spent a lot of time, he was so personable – he was a black gentleman, an older gentleman – and we felt connected to somebody. An adult was going to assist us and be supportive of what we were doing, and so we were really open with him. Well, as it turns out, he was on assignment to determine who had leadership skills and was a potential threat. Now, that was very, very painful and very, very disappointing. And it also makes you cynical about who to trust as a young person.

Then we had Vietnam and I think it was the first time in history where you watch war on television, where you watch bodies falling from sniper bullets on television because the press really covered it. It made it so personal and it broke your heart. We were protesting it. It seemed

to be a meaningless war. It had no objective other than to make rich people richer with the oil. One class of students from Edison High School here in Philadelphia, the whole class of Black males was literally wiped out on one tour of duty. Even in war, the racism was prevalent. They were using the young blacks that they were drafting in great numbers, not training them, just sending them right over there, really using their bodies as just fodder. At one point the word was that the Viet Cong would not kill the blacks because they felt that they were not their enemy, you know, you're treated the same back there. Once that word came out they really used their bodies, they put them in the front to take the hit. Of course, that rule dropped and everybody was going to get killed. I lost some friends in Vietnam. I have some family members who I can say that I lost them because they were forever changed. Gentle people became cruel and didn't know who they were any more because war changes you. You have to somehow suppress your soul in order to kill somebody you don't know. Once you've done it, you've done it, and you have to live with it, and the only way to live with it is to maybe change yourself to handle it. I had family members come back cruel, just absolutely cruel, brutal, short-tempered, and all the post-traumatic things. Nobody gave them any assistance or treatment. There was no emphasis on, ok, these guys sacrificed, now let's help them. The same thing people are experiencing who are coming back from war now. They need to be reintroduced into society. One of the funny things, one guy I talked to when he came back from Vietnam, the hardest thing for him was tampon commercials on TV, because when he went that was like, what? And when he came back and there are all these personal things going on on television and he couldn't handle it. Mini-skirts, things had changed so tremendously in that time frame. So that was a difficult thing. Also, remember, we had the draft. One of my silly little boyfriends had not bothered to get his student deferment and he was actually very high on the draft list and was scheduled to be deployed. He did eventually get it together and work hard to get that student deferment but it was a little frightening, the idea that you're going to be snatched up just like that, somewhere that you don't want to be, a war that you don't believe in, that you can't even figure out why you're fighting it, who is the enemy and what's a win or a loss? There was no way to understand that, to see that in this war.

So we had that to deal with, we had, like I said, the Kent States, the Orangeburgs to deal with, while we were doing our personal efforts on campus, and then you also had the women's movement going on at the same time. You had people taking off bras, which of course I just

loved because there's nothing like a sports bra, and at that time, literally, forget the sports bra. That was a kind of an interesting thing too, the women's movement was right there in the midst of that, and literally I think on Penn's campus they had a rally where everybody just pulled off their bras. So some things we did in hindsight seemed silly, but it was setting the tone for more significant issues involving women and blacks. They were not silly. They were, let's get rid of convention so we can redefine what should be. And yes, there's silliness in that process of dropping things because you don't necessarily know right up front where you want to go but you know you don't want to continue to go in that same direction. That was there.

And then of course I can't talk about Swarthmore without talking about that amazing little Afro-centric Kathryn Morgan. Just to watch her strut around that campus in her little head wraps and her little afro and her little feisty self, who was much older than we thought she was because she was absolutely beautiful and young looking. It was like, if this woman, an adult, can walk around with her stuff like this and her arrogance, obviously we can do and say whatever we want to do and say. It could make you more brazen about things. One thing I blamed her for, I had a course called "Africa." I thought I was taking a Black Studies course but it really wasn't, we didn't really have Black Studies at that point. It was taught by a white professor who vacationed in South Africa, and part of the course involved him showing us his home movies of him vacationing in South Africa and how the system insured he was going to have babysitting services and everything for his children because the white guy got treated well. I'm watching this stuff and saying, oh, he didn't, no he didn't. He not only had no problems with it, he was having a great time in South Africa, just, it is what it is and I'm cool with it. So we fought a lot. Kathryn once told me that after I left Swarthmore he referred to me as that black bee, which tickled her. One of the things I did do, I said, look Kathryn, so I don't kill this man and lose my scholarship, I have to do something. One of the things he said was, liberation was brought to Africa by the Europeans, that Africans had no concept of liberation, of being liberated and independent. And I'm like, oh no, he didn't. So I challenged him, let me do my paper and make you wrong, and he said fine, whatever, but you won't find any literature that supports what you're saying. So I said, Kathryn, give me a reading list, give me a list of all these liberation fighters. Of course she loved doing that, and I submitted my curriculum, my paper to him and all my material – colonial and pre-colonial Africa – talking about concepts of unity and liberation, all that kind of stuff, and of course he never ever forgave me. But he did subsequently incorporate some of those materials on

his syllabus. Little things can make a difference, little protests can make a difference. While it's true, you do have to pick your battle, in the time of your youth, if you don't at least decide that this is important, you'll never get the courage to do it later on. And I'll say that during that time frame there was a wisdom in our youthful naïveté, and if we had not expressed it, we would never had come to it as adults. So I think I've given a summary of how I viewed it but you can ask specific things and I can talk about it.

ARP: Thank you, that's a really helpful amount of detail. Could we back up – so, you got to Swarthmore in the fall of 1969, and did you get involved with SASS as soon as you got there?

RPF: I got involved with SASS when I came for the party during orientation. My counselors back in high school were saying, oh, you can't go there, they're radicals. And I'm like, OK. At my high school, they didn't really have anything for Swarthmore. My brother taught at Central. I had refused to go to Girls' High. I wanted to go to my neighborhood school because my thinking was, if you're smart, you're smart anywhere. I wanted to go to my neighborhood school. He had never forgiven me for that, so he was determined to get me into an all-girls school and I was determined not to go to an all-girls school. The compromise became Swarthmore. When I introduced it to my counselors at my high school, they were like, no, no, no, they're radicals, we can't have you doing that. And so basically, I went through the Swarthmore process through my brother and myself, not through my high school. When I first came to the campus and I saw this Alice in Wonderland walkway with the trees, and the lodges, I was like, oh God I am so here. And then I was like, ok, where are the black kids? After the initial interview I was a little concerned – where are they? But I did see someone in the admissions office, and I said, well they have to be here because there was this protest, so they've got to be here somewhere. Then they sent out this invitation for us prospective students to come to one of the SASS parties and that did it. You guys party too? You know, we read, we write, we intellectualize, and we get down? That was it. I was already without the card a card-carrying member of SASS when I first arrived. My only thing was, where do we meet and when? Plus, there had to be something to follow up the takeover because we still were being in isolation. I was a dorm monitor and in that capacity I could reserve the reception area for parties for us, but even in that capacity there were protests when the black students partied, they objected to the music, they objected to everything and anything. Even though when they partied, their music was loud. It was just so disconcerting to have that notion put on you, that whatever you do is wrong. So we said, we don't want to fight

everything, we want our own place. That's why we pretty quickly went back to, we got to follow up on this takeover.

ARP: Can you give us a little bit more detail on that push for the Black Cultural Center your first year there?

RPF: Yeah. That was interesting. I'll tell you the silliness of it too. At that particular point, after we had the takeover and we had the press conferences and we were expressing why there is a need for this and why it actually advances the objective of the campus in multiculturalism and all that kind of thing, a lot of the student population came out in support of us. They actually had a big rally in the auditorium or else the field house where they were saying, let us discuss this, because it's disrupting the campus so let us express a position on what's going on. They, by majority, actually agreed that this is something that can end this issue, it's not disruptive to the campus, and so as far as we're concerned the only issue becomes the Board of Managers, and that's where the objections were coming from – not from the President, which might actually account for the prior President's heart attack. He was in a conflicted position, and certainly this president in my time – I liked him. He wasn't the strongest person. I met with him because I did a fundraiser for a scholarship for Chester High School students and he supported me in that and actually came up with matching funds. He was not hostile to us, but he was not the decider in that situation. I think at some point he succumbed to drinking to deal with the difficult position he was in. But ultimately we prevailed and the issue became, even if we were to do this, what would be the location? We said, the Robinson house. It's a dorm, but there are very few rooms in it so it's not going to be a huge impact. It's really the seniors who deal with it. The end of the year's coming so no one's assigned to it. The response was, well, that was given as an endowment and the Robinson family would object. So we said, well, we actually hired a lawyer and as it turns out the Robinson family had no problem whatsoever with it. Later on in our situation as the word got out about what we were doing, Michener gave a big piece of money to this multiculturalism concept.[3] It was supposed to be a Black House for activities and trips and stuff. It got routed a little differently than it was intended but it was there. People in the community, in the cultural community, in the arts community, some of them began to come on campus and be supportive of what we were doing, what we were asking for. And then we did

[3] James Michener donated funds for Black Studies and a Black Cultural Center.

something to make sure to seal the deal, we pulled out a Ouija board and we talked to the ancestors and the ghosts in Robinson House to make sure they didn't have any problems. As it turns out, some of them did, but since the new family was agreeable we'd overcome whatever little demons might still be around. It was fun, turning the Robinson House into the Black House was an absolute treat. I worked on the library. We had an old Dewey system at that time. I got to select material to order, and also records. You guys don't do records, but we had a record collection of really classic stuff. We had catalogues so that could be signed out, we had the machinery so you could come into the library and play it. We set up a really nice situation once we got a budget for that. It was to be a cultural center, it wasn't just a hangout. We had the African room, which is the first floor far to the left. That's the room where a lot of the activities take in. we had it all decorated with Afro-centric stuff. And then we had our slave room, which was the TV room. It was the room to the right. We'd come in and watch Star Trek and be silly and be our age. We laughed at ourselves about the dichotomies and stuff. We would analyze Star Trek, Kirk is the West and Spark is the East. It was just so much. In the midst of seriousness, we were still our age and we still knew how to have fun, we still knew how to handle the pain that was happening around us and the disappointments and the conflicts to our understanding about how the world worked as opposed to how it really worked.

But the crisis itself, we were literally sitting on the floor, we slept there, as I said, we had rotation where we would bring food to the next group. Groups were assigned. We had schedules so the room could never be locked by anybody, and the same thing with the lodges. I did my stint over at the lodge. During that time frame, we were really close. That's probably why we were like family, because we were always huddled, and while we're doing that, we're talking, we're sharing our fears. Our fears didn't change our actions but I cannot say that we did not have fears and concerns because you don't know who's supporting you when you go out on a limb and also, as I say, there was scholarship money involved. For me, I was the first female in my family to attend college and could never have attended it without scholarships. I had one scholarship, I had the mayor's scholarship at Penn but Swarthmore was where I was and where I wanted to be, and it would have been very disconcerting to me to have lost that opportunity. But also, I don't know what I would have done with that opportunity if I had not had the opportunity to become who I was intended to become as a person. Any more detail?

MM: I'm really interested in the sit-in, so can you tell us a little bit more about your involvement with that? I know you mentioned that there were concerns about retribution from the university and that you guys were really strategic about taking turns. Can you tell us more about that was like?

RPF: What it was like then? That would probably be more fun if you had the other girls on the line at the same time because we could talk about it. It was a surprise to them. By the way, we still tried to go to classes, we tried to schedule so we could still go to our classes. It was a surprised to them because we basically walked into the president's office, the first group, and sat down. And stayed. And they were like, why are you here, what's going on here, and they really had no idea how to deal with that. They should have, because it had happened before. But it was disconcerting to them. There was some desire to remove us, physically, but they didn't. Some of the leadership had effectively gotten the media involved so you're also under scrutiny at this Quaker college, you're supposed to be open and progressive and that kind of stuff. And then the next group would come in and take their seats. We really were not confrontational at all. We did the silent protest, we did the Quaker way. There was, from the steering committee, a request for meeting to discuss the issue, but nothing confrontational. One of the students who was actually a Quaker – I'm not sure if she called her parents or if her parents called her, but the bottom line is, her parents got persuaded to be supportive of what we were doing as opposed to, have you lost your mind? They actually called the administration protesting her child having to protest. It was interesting, there were times when folks who might have gotten resistance from their own home front felt they got something different, and the reason for that is because we had gone through so much dialogue with one another that we truly had internalized our position. It wasn't BS. We were able to be persuasive to make other people understand the value of what we were doing. As I said, the majority of the other students on campus supported it and didn't see any harm. Even if they didn't agree, they didn't see any harm with what was being requested. There was obviously some degree of persuasion involved in our effort. As I said, it's hard to describe for you – in the office, it was more of a visual. Less dialogue, more sternness, taking the position, you're going to have to lift us all to get us out of here. In the lodges, it was more informal. We had come there for a different purpose. It was more comfortable. We chatted, we were able to sleep there. So when we did that, we just would stay there. We were sleeping on the floor, but they were more comfortable. I don't know what they look like now but then there was a reception area, very

comfortable, couches and things like that. I think there was even a kitchen in one of them, so it was much more comfortable. In the lodges, we got to know one another better. Some of us were freshmen, so we really got to talk to one another and know one another much better than we knew before. I think it was during that time frame that I found out the details of people's lives, that maybe we never would have gotten into in social meeting, in a social setting because people would have been on guard about what to say. We were a really interesting group. We had people from farms, a really diverse kind of group that was coalescing on a single thrust. You would not have expected some people – the young lady who was involved in the music situation was a very quiet person, you would not have expected her to show up for the protest but she did. It was very interesting how we coalesced in that way and how people who may not have vocalized what they viewed about things vocalized it through their behavior, through their conduct and their participation. Again, I cannot emphasize, I don't know what it's like now, but I can't emphasize the degree to which we had dialogue. The degree to which we really flushed out issues. We even talked about social issues, how males and females – we're talking from the perspective of black – we were talking about how we should regard one another, how we should treat one another. We really, really explored deeply the relationships that were traditional in our community and how they need to be improved and how we need to regard one another differently. It wasn't just political in terms of us and the administration, it was really us and us. Us and ourselves. One time I was in the lunchroom talking to a friend and I said, I was just telling, and I realized, the person I was getting ready to refer to was myself. I had had dialogue with myself and flushed out issues with myself and was sharing that conclusion that we had come to with someone else. That's how much we were involved in self-reflection and also in dialogue with one another. It gave us kind of a youthful wisdom. We still liked to get up on the big chair and play with the balls – we still liked to be kids, we still liked to be young, we still liked to have fun, but we could also be very, very heady with issues that were important to us. We could switch.

I don't know how to channel that takeover for you. I can't channel the fear for you, but there was fear on our part. We didn't know what was going to happen to us. Remember our age, we were kids. You don't know the time but it was a frightening time because black people were not really allowed to do anything. There were places where you were not even allowed to look a white person in the eyes without that being viewed as an offense. So this was quite courageous on our part. Some of our parents would be, oh my God, oh my God do you know you're destroying your

life? They could legitimately feel that way, given the way things were in this country. I can't replicate that fear for you, but I know because you're at Swarthmore I can make you understand the intensity of the intellectual dialogue that we engaged in. It was sort of like seminar. In fact, at some point, we actually decided we wanted to set up a seminar on lordship and bondage to really deeply get into that relationship and how that comes about and how you stop it. How that manifests in you, in yourself. We said ok, that's obviously not on the Black Studies curriculum list, so we're going to set it up ourselves. We wanted to have this class, but you got to get credit for it, you got to have a sponsor. I recommended a professor who nobody felt would have anything to do with Black Studies. He was a black professor but he had issues – we all did. I liked him because he had a humanity about him and he was struggling with these issues. I said, I'll go to him. I will share this without sharing his name. We had an interesting dialogue that made me feel that he would come around. He was very antagonistic to the idea of us asserting ourselves in this way and us doing the Black Studies thing and all that kind of stuff and expressed it. I brought things out of people because I asked questions all the time, I'd come right at you. We were talking, he said something, he was very upset because his brother who was a laborer was raising his children without the thrust of college and that sort of thing and he was very upset about that, how he couldn't influence him in that way. My response to him was to make him understand – I wish I could remember the words because it was like somebody put it in me to come out and say it the right way, probably my mom. Essentially what I said, we all have value, and they will make their own decisions. You create an option, but you don't have to have an issue if they take another option. When we finished that dialogue he felt that there was something adult about my response and we became friends even though we disagreed on everything, we became friends. I went to him with the idea of sponsoring this class on lordship and bondage and he said yes, immediately. And so we had this seminar class where a few of us got together and we had different assignments. We conducted the class, by the way. We gave assignments, we created the syllabus, and it was an intense class and we had different areas that we covered. We were dealing with consciousness, sub consciousness, all kinds of intellectual kinds of stuff. It was a wonderful experience. We had to submit papers and everything to him. We were not playing around. One of the things about the Swarthmore thing was, we did not play. We played, but we did not play when it came to real, legitimate issues and information. We were very serious about it. We were not, oh let me take a Black Studies course so I can sleep. No. It

was very intense. If you took something with Kathryn Morgan, you were not going to go to sleep. You were going to work harder. That was another surprising thing, the intensity of our seriousness influenced other people.

We also did things at the Black House. We would bring out musical groups. You're probably too young to know Gil Scott Heron, who died recently. He was spoken word, jazz, he was a college student when we first brought him out. He was just somebody hitting on the girls to us, but he became really fabulous. He would put the current spoken word people to shame because he was a poet and he had a good mind, a solid mind, an understanding of the issues. At the time he had African drums behind him but eventually he had a tight jazz group behind him. So it was a good jazz, hip hop type of combo that he presented. We met a lot of interesting people who came there. Ozzie Davis and Ruby Dee visited with their daughter as a prospective student. She didn't come there but they sat with us at our little black table and protested that their daughter wouldn't come. They engaged with us in a fun and a direct way. We were star struck, you know. And of course, we had some interesting students there who had famous parents as well, whose parents would visit and give us a nice little treat.

I have to say that with all the pain and all the things that were going on, that was a fun time in terms of human relationship s and human interactions, it was a fun time. Let me give you something silly. We fought about what we were going to put in the Africa room. Was it going to be painted black? We fought about silly little things. We had our little spats about things like that. Showing our immaturity. But at the same time we ended up having a nice little Africa room – which we hardly ever went into unless we had a seminar or something. It was sort of like the living room that you don't use because we were always in the slave quarters watching Star Trek.

The crisis thing is just hard. You have to be there. One of the things about my class, they had suggested that they were never going to come back to Swarthmore ever, and they rarely do communicate with Swarthmore but it's not the problems with one another, it was the problems with what was going on in the country and everywhere. It was a painful time. I try to balance things out. We do sneak back, a few of us here and there, we sneak back when other classes are doing their thing, we slide on in there and say, what's happening? But that was a very, very hard year for cynicism. I actually got an ulcer that year if that gives you an idea of the intensity of things.

MM: Can you tell us about the end of the protest? When the college announces that Courtney Smith had a fatal heart attack, SASS decides to end the protest, can you tell us about that?

RPF: That was the first protest. Ava was there for that. We were the follow-up protest.

MM: The 1970 protest.

RPF: What happened was our president actually took to alcohol and when he presented himself to this rally of students demanding that he resolve this issue and get the campus back to stability, he was incoherent in his responses and contradictory. As I say to you, having interacted with this gentleman, he did object to us having this. It was the pressure on him. He had no authority to make that decision. We had to make a sufficiently disruptive situation administratively. We didn't disrupt classes. As I said, we still went to our classes. We had schedules, and your schedule was, in between your class you come back up. But we were disruptive administratively to make the Board of Managers capitulate. It was at that level, no matter what manifested on the campus in terms of an announcement, the decision was made when the Board of Managers made the decision, alright, stop this madness. That was a behind-the-scenes decision. Ultimately when it came down to it, you meet with the steering committee and talk about the particulars of where would this Black House be, that's when it came into the steering committee to say, hey look we're looking at the Robinson house and they're protesting the idea of this is an endowment and then their decision to communicate with the Robinson family. Basically, it was follow-up by our leadership, follow-up to any barrier put in the way was responded to in a very mature fashion. I think that was more surprising to them than anything because what it did was it forced them to keep moving, there was nothing that could be presented except those ghosts from the Ouija Board – nothing that could present a barrier to that ultimate objective of getting the Robinson House. Later on when you got Michener and people like that involved it was, oh yeah, great idea, then it becomes a question of, here's the budget and who's going to stay in it – the logistics. We had someone staying in the apartment to provide security for it and also so it's open certain hours, because it was open during the day at all times at that time, and then the evening hours would be around their schedule. We would pick who would be the person who would get that as their dorm room, so to speak, their apartment in exchange for being responsible for maintaining the security of the facility and having it open for us. It just really broke down to the logistics once the Board of Managers capitulated. Unfortunately, as I said, [Smith] lost his life and the

second president actually ended up taking his stress in the bottle and both of them were sad, because I suspect [Smith] was in the same position where they don't have the authority but they're being the ones attacked because they're the visible voice for the college until somebody gives them the right to capitulate to you, they're just standing there fumbling speaking words that they don't even believe themselves.[4] Certainly that's how I saw the second president – I saw him as weak, but I did not see him as an enemy to what we were asking for.

MM: So you felt that he wanted to be more supportive of SASS but because of the position of the Board of Managers he didn't necessarily feel comfortable doing that , so he was feeling pressure from that end. How did the rest of the faculty and the rest of the administrators see your push for the black cultural center of the other things that SASS was fighting for during that time?

RPF: Different people felt different ways. We had some faculty that would be great tea party people today and on the other hand we had some very, very radical faculty. There were some faculty that came out and actually voiced support. The philosophy department professors were usually very intellectually progressive, open to things. In that situation, it's not so much a question of, do they support us as much as, what is your opposition to it? How does it harm you? And that's really where the students came to. Even if I don't care one way or the other, what is the problem with them having a cultural center. Even if they don't get the pros of getting it, what's the problem? We're talking about this small place, there's certainly enough black students to warrant it. Even though we didn't formally have fraternities and things, there were houses that used to be used for that. The concept was not foreign to them. A lot of people fell within that area of, let's just get on with the business of the campus, why is this being stretched out this way? Why are we allowing ourselves to be subjected to this public scrutiny, because it was being covered in the press. Sort of akin to the recent embarrassment with regard to the reporting of rapes and stuff on campus, it's like, why are you allowing yourself to get to the point where you're being exposed in that way, when some matter of cooperation, capitulation can address the issue without harming anyone else? Because certainly what we were asking for did not harm anyone else. Certainly it was a much easier solution to the problems we were confronted with than people suddenly overnight getting over their racism. That was not going to happen. They're not going to wholesale invite us to participate in campus wide activities, not at that time. It took

[4] Courtney Smith was the President of Swarthmore College from 1953 until his death in 1969. Robert Cross served in this position from 1969 – 1974.

time for them to adjust. There was one young lady on campus who really liked to antagonize us, she had a little hot-dog dog that she used to call Sambo, and whenever one of us walked past, she'd say, Sambo. So we had a lot of that. Swarthmore has all sides of the coin even though in that time frame the progressive side may have been a loud voice, but it certainly was not the only side. There were professors who were antagonistic to us being in their class. I had issues with professors in my classes. The issue is when you're dealing with your final paper that they're harmful to you. I think Kathryn Morgan, in my instance, I brought her on as a cosponsor to protect myself to a department that was somewhat hostile to me. However you see Swarthmore, it was not a homogenous population in terms of faculty or the student body. I think the commonality in the student body was they didn't want to be disrupted; they wanted to be able to get on with their lives. With the faculty, I had the Africa professor who was perfectly content that I be a babysitter for his kids and not in his classroom. But again, people spoke out. Particularly in the philosophy Department they would stand up and speak out. I tell you what spoke volumes: after the situation was put in check, when Michener put money on the line, that was a public affirmation to multiculturalism because he understood it at that other level. Beyond the idea that we should have some place to be ourselves, was this idea that we want to also get real and in touch with our culture. That is something that can be beneficial, and I think is now, beneficial to the campus, because campus-wide you can have activities that people can come to at the Black House and participate in and see things that they never would be exposed to before. We were at the early stage, which was, let us get back to a culture that we've been separated from ourselves and understand it. Then we can share it at some point. I can't be more specific than that except that the politics of it was really behind the scenes, the politics was really from the Board of Managers and there were some professors who spoke out in support of us and there were some professors who didn't say a word, who absolutely objected not only to the Black House but to our presence on campus, and that was always clear to us. All you had to do was attend a class. They didn't verbalize it like they verbalized it when I went to Harvard and they were very direct about their stuff there, but it was there. But we overcame it. We took it as, ok, now it's been approved and there are no obstacles that you can introduce that would keep us from getting to the end result of a facility, and we picked the Robinson House. I don't know who on the steering committee put that forth but I'm sure it was one of the older people because they would be more familiar with the off-campus housing and the sizes of the off campus housing.

We knew it could not be something that was going to be disruptive to the campus, we wanted a certain degree of separation so we could be comfortable, but when we say off-campus, we're talking about off-campus in Swarthmore, you're talking about a few feet away, across the street, right. But that's very off campus as opposed to a room in Willets, you know what I mean? It really does give you a place where you cross the street and you say, ok. Ok. Now we can talk. Now we can be silly in our way of being silly, and that was really, really important.

ARP: Do you remember any black students who weren't involved in SASS?

RPF: Sure. My favorite thing was outing the black students. I liked to grab them and bring them over to the Black House and make them get involved. I was really aggressive. I think, one time, I grabbed this guy. He swore to me on a stack of Bibles that he was Jewish and not black, and I still didn't give up. I was like, come on! Yeah, there were absolutely some. And there were some that were sort of borderline. They were more involved in maybe labor or something of that sort. There was one student in particular who, I liked to challenge him intellectually on where he was coming from because he considered himself to be radical in the labor sense, communist party way, which basically professed disdain for black culture. That was part of his philosophy, that European culture was the ultimate. We had constant conversation. I brought him over to the Black House and fussed at him. I think today that he's a total flip; he's more like a black tea party person. I never did trust the real, real, real radicals, that if you really examine what they're saying it seems more like wanting to act out than it's based in a real sense of who they are. Because you can't trust where they're really coming from. That's what I liked about the group with SASS, I think we pretty much stayed on. We're older, so there's different degrees of how we do it, I know I may have just gotten worse in terms of being aggressive, but I think we pretty solidly held on to the principles that we developed at that time. But it was very few, very few who did not on some level participate in SASS. That participation came from anything from coming to the meetings we had. At that time we had the mimeograph machine for the notices and stuff. I liked to message things, get the stuff out. We had chores to do as an organization too, and we had subcommittees and gave people opportunities to manifest their skills in different areas. SASS didn't require that you had a certain politic other than a politic of cultural family. As I said, decisions were made by consensus so there was an attempt to incorporate the other side of the coin about what to do and not do. That's why we ended up not having a black room in the Black House, because, we could talk about, there would be no harm to it, but if you talk about it

through consensus you arrive at something somewhere in between that works for everybody. It's a good tactic; it's a good approach and process to use in decision-making.

MM: You mentioned that the consensus model and the steering committee went together because you didn't want to have one person at the forefront. Can you tell us more about your responsibilities as part of the steering committee or who were the officers in the steering committee?

RPF: It worked as a system of elders, too. When I came as a freshman, the steering committee members were the more senior students. Eventually, by sophomore, junior year I was a member of the steering committee and some of my classmates were members of the steering committee so we could give guidance to the underclassmen. We had also had the opportunity to watch the operation of the steering committee. You don't come into it cold; you understand that this is how it works. You do know that, with kids who view themselves as smart and moving ahead, the potential for their ego being tapped into is clearly there. We governed ourselves in such a way to keep anyone on the steering committee from getting out of line – they're talking to me – oh no baby, that's not how it works. Even if they are, it's a game, don't get played. You self-policed, so that's part of how it worked. They never stopped trying to isolate members of the steering committee to get them to voice their opinion. There were slip-ups, but it was never really harmful because we were so involved in consensus dialogue with one another that we kind of agreed on things, so even if you slipped up and said something, as long as you didn't tell them our particular plan that was happening at a given time that we had agreed on, you're not really going to mess up on anything. But you do potentially put yourself in a position of being isolated and getting played, and so we policed ourselves to keep that from happening. If somebody got out of line and spoke as if they were the leader, we just brought them back on in. The good thing too was that it allowed people who may have been more reserved to develop leadership because they could comfortably move into that process as part of a group and then become more dominating and expressing their opinion as part of the group. I can't remember any steering committee meeting that we had where it wasn't alright in the end, even if we fought through the process, it was always alright. We had at one point a member of the steering committee was someone who you should least expect to be, somebody who was not all that aggressively involved in SASS at the beginning but they got involved. The crisis actually brought people to an involvement with SASS that might not have come to the parties and gotten involved on a more

social basis; it got them involved because wherever they were coming from in their heart of hearts, they agreed with the idea of self-determination and self-strengthening through culture. We have an issue, we present something before the steering committee, the steering committee arrives at a consensus itself about how to present it to the group, or what the parties are in terms of presenting it to the group and what to recommend to the group, and present it to the group, and then we discuss it again, so we had consensus a couple of times. That might actually inform you on the steering committee by having that discussion and those ideas, we hadn't thought about that. It was an open-ended kind of thing that prevented dictatorship from evolving. There was not even a dictatorship of the steering committee because there was always going to be feedback and there was always going to be an interplay with the larger group, and again, we also had committees and things, people who were dealing with certain issues who would report on issues – what's the status of the library, what's the status of this, what's the status of that, and so we had a really efficient governance that stayed somewhat informal, as efficient as it was. It stayed friendly, it stayed familiar, it stayed sort of like hanging out at the Black House one day, ok, let's talk about your piece. We could do the Roberts' Rules of Order, but we also had the comfort level where it didn't get out of control. Well, I won't say that. Sometimes it did get out of control, we'd fight about things that people were strongly opposed to, but it would eventually come to a place that we could live with. It worked hand in hand. The steering committee concept worked hand in hand with consensus and the steering committee members would discipline themselves, govern and police themselves to stay in line and the group itself, by virtue of their input in the consensus process, policed the steering committee in terms of directions to go in and the openness of it was what was helpful because we really did learn to put our egos in check, because we had big egos. We were a bunch of kids who grew up and thought we were smart, smarter than everybody else. We had huge egos. It was very helpful, it was humbling, and I think that, unlike the situation where there's a big fight and somebody just capitulates, the consensus thing was not a capitulation, it involved compromise, it involves taking everything into consideration. It doesn't involve a win or a lose, it involves a workable resolution. Our president has tried that, it's a very hard thing to accomplish if you don't have cooperation from the other parties involved in the process. But if we had a congress that worked like that, where you're not going to get everything you want but you don't need to give up everything that you want, if you try to arrive at a consensus then you can govern. And we did it, we really did. I don't think we

had any decisions that were made that there was so much objection to that people would leave the organization. There was never that kind of conflict.

ARP: We found a document saying that you were on the Black Studies Committee. Can you tell us a little bit about that committee, or any other college committees that you were a part of?

RPF: Yes. But you do know that I'm 63 years old. I have to remember some of these things. We had the Black Studies ad hoc faculty selection committee. Swarthmore was big on ad hoc committees. We said, we want black faculty. That became our next fight by the way, after the takeover, we said we've got to have black faculty because here we are walking around here and the hostility that we sometimes get the lack of mature adult involvement from faculty members, and so we did that. They said, we're not going to have a protest again so here's the ad hoc black faculty selection committee, you guys go run with it. So that's how Kathryn Morgan came about. We had several others, we had Mr. Legesse, he was fun. He wasn't there very long. He was in religion. He had a wonderful course in African religions and African influences in Christianity and all that kind of thing.[5] Really, really bright people. Kathryn came through that process, and we had several other people come through. Kathryn became the most lasting one. As a matter of fact, I was in law school when she was up for tenure, and myself and I'm sure some others in my class sent very intense letters of support, like, you better, in support of her tenure, and she became part of the institution of Swarthmore. That was about the idea, ok, now that we're here, we have this Black House, we have the opportunity to express ourselves and to examine our culture, we need a real Black Studies course. I don't need to sit and fight with a professor about Africa who starts out with the presumption, you guys are not intelligent enough to understand what it's like to be free, what it means to be free, or to even want it, when we're at the same time involving ourselves in Afro-centric concepts that are much more progressive than some of the things that we're learning here. When you talk about a system of elders – we understand that within the African cultural community there's a much more sophisticated understanding of how systems work, which makes us immediately reject this nonsense. We began to say, we want to have black professors, we want to have people on campus who offer another perspective on things. Kathryn came with this wonderful folk piece because that is a big piece to how African and even early African American history is recorded, through the oral tradition. That has as

[5] Asmarom Legesse was the one black professor at Swarthmore at the time of the 1969 sit-in. He was from Ethiopia and taught in the anthropology department.

much value as any other form of recording. In fact, the Bible is just a recording of an oral tradition. It came from the recording of people's voices saying this is what transpired. That allowed us again to explore our culture and introduce our culture to the campus. She would insist that we go to talk to our parents and record their history and collect history. I went back down to north Carolina to record my grandmother, but the intensity of what she expressed to me was too intense for me to share so I instead turned my project into a research project on the creation of the public school system in that town which was created by blacks and open to Native Americans and to poor whites until it was taken from the black community and segregated at the turn of the century when the Black Codes were put in place. I found out through that process that in North Carolina – there were no public schools, you could either afford to go to school or you don't go – so the African American community created a public school system that was open to everyone. Their love of education was a tremendously satisfying experience and explains why we held such great value for teachers down South where I was coming up. The experience of my grandmother was just to devastating to share with anyone but family. It was just too heavy. Nevertheless, through history, her involvement as a faculty person introduced us to another way of learning about our culture, of learning about it in a real way from real people, where that's not something that was taught to us in school. I have to disagree to this extent: I learned a lot of it going to a segregated black school. That's what we learned, one of the things about segregation was, my hero was Harriet Tubman. We all had different heroes, we knew these people; we didn't need Black History Month to tell us because that was what we were taught. We had this idea that being a credit to your race was not something diminishing, it meant that every accomplishment of the individual benefits the group. When I saw the consensus and the Africanisms that I learned in college and I translated them to the cultural way that the Southern African American community had expressed itself, it was totally consistent. The idea of not isolating the individual, that the individual is part of the group and benefits the group as a whole, so that faculty thing was really important. To get us some black folk in there who could talk with us, who would sit down with us. Even the professor I told you about who was not so much geared towards us but he still came through this ad hoc black faculty thing and he ended up giving us one of the most controversial courses you could have, lordship and bondage. The navigation of that was that we fought the school, we'd pick people, we'd fight, we'd object, we'd fight through it, we'd lobby for certain professors, and the end result is people like Kathryn. Initially it was a concession to

get the other professor but once you got them you worked them. Mr. Legesse was charming and also quite handsome, he really was. He was from the islands, I don't know what island, but he had a beautiful accent, gorgeous. Anything he taught was fine with me. Just to have that difference on campus, just to have adults who you could look up to, that you could admire, that you could go to to ask the difficult questions, you can't imagine how important that is to a young person, to see an adult peer that they can share issues that they have. There were things I'd share with Kathryn that would be similar to things I would share with a parent. I felt that level of comfort and I'm sure a lot of other students did as well. I know I always get off point and go to the personal.

MM: It's good to hear about this. Going back to your relationships with faculty and administrators again, did you think that they took the women in SASS seriously or did they defer to the men in the group when they were interacting with you guys?

RPF: You have to understand, there were some powerful women that came out of SASS. Before us, they had already been educated on the black women coming out of SASS with Marilyn Holifield, Marilyn Allman. They may have tried, but that was just not a realistic thing to do. That is something about Swarthmore. I don't think that, maybe I'm wrong, but my perception and experience was, the women at Swarthmore were rough. Not just the black ones, I think that they were as involved in things as anyone else. It was a different kind of a campus than maybe you found other places because so much was defined by your intellect and your ability to navigate that. Again, in terms of, they did try to go to men in terms of statements but I think that was more the media orientation, the societal orientation. On that campus, there were some powerful women who preceded the second crisis who made it very, very clear, you don't bypass me. I didn't really get the female part from Swarthmore and I'm disappointed to hear about the recent publicity about the sexual piece. I'm a little surprised that the campus didn't get right on that. I felt the female issue more on other campuses, more in grad school than I did at Swarthmore. I didn't think there was any deterrent to you rising in a leadership position being a female there. Now, professors, that was a different matter. They had whatever issues. They had them. You had race, you had gender, you had all these things going on and usually they're wrapped up in the same person, the same professor has got issues with all those things. But not like other campuses because we did not play the female card at Swarthmore at that time like you might do at other campuses. We played the intellectual card and that has no gender. We played that dynamic. They

might call us ugly because we didn't glamorize, we were very down to earth in our approach. You understand what I'm saying about the dynamic, we didn't get into it that way, so even if it was there, it couldn't get mileage.

MM: Yeah. You've talked so much –

RPF: I'm sorry.

MM: No, in a good way. You've just said so much that I want to ask about all of these things but I also want to be mindful of the time. Another question about your relationship with the adults on campus: can you tell us about how you interacted with the black staff, the dining services personnel or the maintenance personnel?

RPF: Oh yeah. In our naïveté we did something that may have been good or bad. When I came to campus we had maid service in the dormitories, they would come and make up our beds and clean our rooms. My mom was a maid so I was offended by the idea that someone should have to clean after our nasty selves at that age. We gradually were like, huh, out of concern and respect. We also messed around and tried to organize the cafeteria workers. We were really naïve. We tried to organize the cafeteria workers and what happened with the maids was, they cut it. It meant people lost jobs. We meant to do good, but the end result was, no need no job. With the cafeteria workers it got pretty testy there. I'm trying to remember the particulars, but it got pretty testy there. They did try to organize, they did start protesting about how they were basically being treated like people in a household rather than professionals, rather than dealing with this large population, and we came out in support of their efforts. I dare say we probably inspired some of it. I don't remember the total outcome for the cafeteria workers, but my sense in looking at what the outcome was for housekeeping was that there were some good and bad results. Part of our naïveté in terms of how to approach it was, if we had a little bit better understanding at that time of the whole labor game – and it is very true, they were treated like people who work in a household, they were like undocumented workers almost in terms of the amount they were paid, the manner in which they were treated, the disrespect they were accorded – but if we had been less personal and more understanding about how to play it, how to do things in such a fashion that jobs would not have been lost and we still would end up with the same result. And maybe approach it more with a position of respect for the labors that they did. Certainly some people really did need to have their rooms cleaned, they were filthy, and that's what offended me

the post – some of the degree of filth that they had to deal with from people who were adults. My end take on that was, some good some bad. It was excellent that the workers themselves could see that they needed to stand up and demand better wages and maybe better treatment in the cafeteria. I don't know what the ultimate outcome was, and it was good that we understood that we should not be pampered at that age in our lives, but I'm not satisfied with the way in which we informally handled the housekeeping staff. I think that in hindsight we could have been more helpful to them. They really existed at the total discretion of the campus. I hope it's better now, I hope that the situation is better now, do you guys know?

MM: They don't have personal maid services.

RPF: No, we killed that.

MM: They don't go into individual rooms, they do go into the dorms and clean, and I think there's still a lot of issues with that, and when you were talking, that resonated so much with me because I see how the students treat the environmental services workers right now and it's just a very disrespectful way, just feeling like they're supposed to clean up after you, instead of respecting that they're doing a job that needs to be done but that doesn't mean that they're your personal maid or your personal clean up person.

RPF: Right. And that's what actually pissed me off. Again, I was a hall monitor, I had responsibility for my floor, and I was like, you are not going and cleaning up after that nasty person. That was my attitude. I resented the way that they treated the worker on our floor. I had a personal thing because my mom was a maid and I did not have any desire for anyone to be disrespected because I also know that there are skill sets involved in that and you need to respect those skill sets. You're absolutely right, part of my initial reaction to the housekeeping thing was the way the students treated the staff. Our concern with the cafeteria workers was wages, treatment, benefits, and things like that. That was more of a question of how the college deals with them. They don't have to have as much direct interaction with the student population other than serving. Even though they may get disrespect, it's not as impacting as it is when you're in somebody's room on their floor when they're just disregarding you, throwing stuff on the way out the door kind of thing. I'm disappointed in Swarthmore students when it comes to that, and that was disappointing then. I ruled my floor like a tyrant, I just wish I had not reacted emotionally and maybe even discussed it with her a little bit more, how I could have better

assisted her in getting a result that she wanted, because I certainly didn't want people to lose employment or have their employment reduced. Heck, I'll dirty up the room for you. But I did clean up myself so she didn't have to labor herself for me. I'm very disappointed that Swarthmore students haven't progressed. I thought they would have gotten a little bit further along down the road. The cafeteria thing, what's that situation, benefits? I'm interviewing you, right?

MM: I'm not very familiar with how the cafeteria workers' pay structure or benefits work, but I do know that there's one employee – there were rumors going around that the college was trying to fire him before he could collect on his pension. I don't know what happened with that, that's all I know really.

RPF: That's the kind of thing.

ARP: They won a living wage agreement about ten years ago, but it hasn't been updated in the past ten years, so it's not really a living wage anymore.

RPF: Yeah. So, they're still treating them like they're working in a household. That's unfortunate, because certainly the college has more than its share of money as opposed to some other schools. So we didn't solve that problem. But at least we got them to the point where they were looking for a wage, and as you said ten years ago they finally got some kind of concession out of the campus without major retribution and that's a major accomplishment. Trust me, this goes back to the Board of Managers.

ARP: Yeah. So this is a bit of a digression. I was wondering if you were involved with any of the other groups started by black students, such as the Gospel Choir or the Dance Troupe, or if you have a sense of what role they had on campus?

RPF: Yeah. It started with us. The dance group, we were the first. Just the females, we formed it. We got a dance teacher. We have some photographs in fact. I have it on my facebook page, a Swarthmore album. You should go look at some of the photographs of our dance poses and stuff. JB,[6] who is now passed, from Chester, played organ in his church. He eventually played with Girl Washington, a jazz band, before he passed. JB was like, anybody that wants to be in the

[6] James Batton '72. Isaac Stanley '73 and Ava Harris Stanley '72 established a Black Cultural Center award in his memory for students demonstrating personal or career growth.

Gospel Choir can be in the Gospel Choir. It's not like that now, I understand it's much more professionally picked. What our thing was, it was like you're in the church, you join the choir. It doesn't matter if you can sing or not, he could get it out of you. He'd say, you do alto, you do this, he would get it out of you and anybody could be there and do it. Yeah, I was in it, even though I couldn't sing a lick. I would carry whatever he needed us to carry just to get the sound. You have to remember, it was not very many of us. So he kind of would have to take everybody in order to have enough for a choir. I don't remember the exact numbers my year. That was the first year that they really brought in any real flux of African American students, that year. Partially, as part of the protests that the students had conducted before, they got that out of them even if they didn't get the Black House they got that stage, and we just followed up. Having gotten us there we followed up and did the next step. That was when I was there. I was part of the people that did that. I was certainly very involved in dance. That was my thing. I had to put my country feet to use. It was fun, it was part of the thing of, we're not having the opportunity to have involvement in other activities but we had our own, and we were so excited about it. It was really great, in the instance of the dance group, I can't remember her name but the person who volunteered to work with us, the adult, people were responsive to us, adults were responsive to us out in the community. I think they knew we were serious about getting it done; we were serious about what we were saying. It was not like we were going to miss a class. We were going to be there, we were going to do this thing. Whether we could dance or not, we were going to do this thing. Again, I know that the Gospel Choir has come a long way. We did have some real, true singers on campus with magnificent voices, and it went that way. I have to say though, at that time, what was needed was the grouping and the opportunity to interact more than the singing part. We got what we needed to have, and having formed it, it's alright that it evolved into something different. Because I assume now that there's more opportunity for the black students to be involved in college wide activities, is that a fairly accurate statement? Like theater, they can join theater and things like that?

MM: Yeah, I think so.

RPF: That's great. I'm telling you, we were not welcome in the college-wide activities. We even did our own basketball thing. We created our own cheerleaders. Like I said, some of those things you can find on facebook. We created our own little cheerleading group. We would go out and cheer on one another – the shirts and the skins.

MM: Another question that's not really related, but we want to know about the Black at Swarthmore booklet. Where you involved in editing the booklet or composing it? The revised version came out in 1973, which was when you graduated. I don't know if during your time at Swarthmore you worked on it.

RPF: No. Don Mizell was really instrumental in the first one. My picture was in there.[7]

MM: Yes, your picture was in there. We saw it.

RPF: No, he really just – beautiful poetry. If you read it, he just beautifully and simply laid out the backdrop for the pictures. I don't know who else he worked with in regards to that, but the photography came from different sources. We had Leondre Jackson, he did oodles of photographs, he was class of '74 I believe. Lots of photographs of the campus and things like that. His photographs were utilized in that. In terms of participation, who contributed to it, I don't know, but in terms of who put it together, I believe that was Don. He may have worked with some others to do that but essentially it was his artistic piece. I don't know about the revised one. By the time I graduated, I was student teaching my senior year so half the time I was off campus teaching in Chester High. I did get a chance to meet people but I was really floored. I was getting my thesis, my final paper done, doing extra classes because the teaching thing was extra, that was not part of my major. My major was English but I wanted a degree in teaching and a concentration in psychology and stuff like that so I had to get those things extra and still get all my credits. So my last year was pretty tight.

One of the things I do want to tell you about was, part of our giving back thing was, part of just a follow through to our sense of community that we were developing was we also created a big brother big sister thing. We reached out to the young black folks in Swarthmore beyond the Ville, because there's a black community there. We mentored and offered ourselves, and that was so much fun. And then there was Upward Bound, I was an Upward Bound counselor and initially a tutor. We interfaced with students from Chester High and brought them on campus and involved them in the experience of college life. Once we raised our consciousness to understand the importance of standing up and also the importance of giving back, and reaching and giving

[7] There were several editions of Black at Swarthmore. The first came out December 1st, 1969, the second March 2nd, 1970, and the third in July, 1973. Rosalind Plummer Ford's picture appears in the 1973 version.

other people the experience that we had. We really, as I said, we really took on, without outside stimulus, adult behaviors in terms of our values. I'm very proud of that. We created our own big brother big sister. We didn't join other big brother big sister organizations, we created our own. My little sister, her mother and father had both attended Swarthmore, she was biracial, but her father was I think still a professor at Swarthmore. An interesting thing, because God is good, out of the relationship that I had with his daughter I got my first summer job at Penn science center, because he was into computer technology back before it was user friendly. My first job, he was my boss, that was when it was four thread, they were trying to do the basic language. I got to edit the first user-friendly IBM computer. They still had the big menu frames and the little local stuff. The way I edited it was: if I could teach myself how to use it, it worked. If it didn't take me where I had to go I had to figure out what happened and reedit it. He said, you're from Swarthmore, you can handle this. It was very positive both from the mentoring piece, the giveback piece, and also it gave me something I needed, coming from my economic background, to transition with.

MM: Do you have any other questions?

ARP: I don't think so.

MM: Do you have any questions for us, or is there anything that we didn't ask you that you think we should ask you?

RPF: Hm. No, I think I kind of covered everything that impacted me, even if I did it in a general way. I would like to ask, how are you guys utilizing the videos that you're taking?

ARP: Right now what we're working on is, we're making this online archive that's available to the class in the fall. We're going to put the video into that archive so that students can watch it and use it in whatever research they're doing in the course.

RPF: OK. So, I like to think it's current events, but it's so long ago it's history, right?

MM: It's history now, yeah. But a lot of what you're saying resonates still.

RPF: I think the only thing I'd like is to just reiterate the difference in our experience of the Vietnamese war. If you can imagine yourself sitting in the living room and watching it, watching the battle as if it's a movie, except you know that people are dead. There were some really brave media people who dedicated themselves to getting into the knitty gritty of positions in the war,

taking pictures while it was going on. If you had that same thing going on now, we would be out of this war and we would not be starting new ones, which is why, when you watch the bodies of the children at the UN schools and the Palestinian ones, you watch enough of that and you force a ceasefire. It's a good and bad thing. It's a good thing, like they say, if you want to be against the death penalty, go watch somebody be executed. When you watch civilians who have nothing invested in this game of leaders just be shot down and just try to get away, then you think differently about whether there's a side to be on or not on. That's what the televising of Vietnam did for us, which is probably why you're not going to get the others televised. It hurt us; it pained us to watch it. But I think it would behoove us to, any time we're thinking about starting a new war, to say, ok, let's get the cameras set up. Make it a reality show. See how long it stays on the air. That's really my last point about that time frame. It humanized us a lot better.

It was great, meeting you guys this way.

MM: Thank you so much for speaking with us. Everything you said has just been amazing, it's really nice to get an insight into what it was like to be a student at the time, a young person at the time, a black woman at the time. Thank you so much for speaking with us.

RPF: It was fun. It was a real hoot. And I'm now experienced in this process, so I'll be using it now, probably be playing with it constantly.

ARP: Thank you so much for sharing all that you did.