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Bridges that Carried Us Over Project

Interview Summary

Interviewee:
Margaret Hill

Interviewer:
Jennifer Tilton

Interview Date:
September 17, 2021

Interview Location:
Highland, CA

Interview Summary completed by:
Jennifer Tilton

Description:

Margaret Hill talks about growing up in segregated Virginia and with civil rights sit-ins while she attended Norfolk State College. She discusses her move to San Bernardino where her brother worked at Norton and lived with his family lived, her first impressions of San Bernardino as a still somewhat rural community; and her experience with racial segregation in housing in the city. She shares stories about her job at Operation Second Chance and working with Frances Grice and details Frances Grice's important contributions to youth empowerment, job training and school integration. She discusses the Black community's response to Mayor Al Ballard after his resistance to integrating the fire department and after he discussed arming fire trucks after the riots, and shares her memories of working elect Bob Holcomb for Mayor and how he supported Operation Second Chance. She discusses France Grice's leadership in the fight for racial integration in San Bernardino schools, in helping San Bernardino win All American City and in working to alleviate poverty as part of the Dependency Prevention Commission's work in the War on Poverty. She talks about her time as a teacher at San Bernardino High school in the 1970s where she served as an advisor for the BSU, her work as an administrator with San Bernardino city and county schools, and her decision to run for the San Bernardino School Board where she served from 2011 until she passed in December 2021.

Subject Topic:

Civil Rights Movement, Frances Grice, School Desegregation, Operation Second Chance, San Bernardino County schools, Mayor Holcomb, White flight, Al Ballard, youth leadership, Wesley Jefferson, Bob Holcomb, Al Ballard, Black Lives Matter protests

Spatial Coverage:

Name of Site (if relevant)	General Location/Address
Operation Second Chance office 1970	Mount Vernon and 16th street

Margaret Hill First Home in SB	State and Nolan in Muscoy
Nice Apartments where moved in 1970	Highland and Arden
Kennedy Beauty Supply	16th and Mount Vernon
Operation Second Chance in 1970	16th and Mount Vernon
Valerie Ludlum Pope Boutique	Mount Vernon south of 16th

Temporal Coverage:

1950s - present

Key Events:

- Civil Rights Movement
- San Bernardino desegregation case
- San Bernardino winning All American City
- San Bernardino School Board Candidacy 2011

Key Organizations:

- Norfolk State College
- Operation Second Chance
- TRW
- Dependency Prevention Commission
- San Bernardino High School, Black Student Union
- The Usherettes, San Bernardino City School Board
- Westside Clubs including: Penguin, Crazy Cow, Top Hat, and Geri's Velvet Lounge

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Full interview transcript can be found below.

Interview Transcript

Start of Interview:

[00:00:00]

Jen Tilton [00:00:00] I'm here today interviewing Margaret Hill for the Bridges that Carried Us Over Archive. And thank you so much for having us today. So we wanted to start by just having you tell us a little bit about where you were born and raised and how you think your childhood maybe influenced the community leader you became.

Margaret Hill [00:00:26] OK, well, I was born in the state of Virginia. My parents were sharecroppers, so I was raised on a farm until our house burned down when I was in high school, they just started high school and they go to the ninth grade. So we moved to the little township of about twenty seven hundred people and went to a two room schoolhouse, from the 1st through the seventh grade. My high school was eight through 11th, graduated at age 16, enrolled at Norfolk State College at the time. But now is Norfolk State University and. When I finished there, I, while I was there, I had a few part time jobs to pay my way to school for the most part, so I worked as a Car hop at a drive restaurant. I worked in a beauty parlor as a shampoo girl. I worked in real estate as a clerk. Then I got my first real job when I got out because it was that was in the late 50s and early 60s. And that part of town was totally segregated. So they were looking for black bank tellers. And I was hired to be a bank teller. It is my understanding, although I haven't found any place in writing that I was the first black bank teller in the state of Virginia, but I can't prove it. So that's why I say I heard.

Margaret Hill [00:02:21] So from there, I worked at the bank, then I worked for civil service during that period of time, I got married, decided we weren't good for each other. So I moved to California and I moved here because I had a brother here who had just retired from Edwards Airforce Base Victorville, but he was assistant fire chief at Norton. I had another brother who was up north at Presidio and I didn't know where I wanted to stay. So I came here first. Seventy some degrees when I got here in December and I said, I'm not sure this is the place for me. So I went up north right after Christmas and it rained ten days. I was there and I knew I didn't want the rain. And what happened to make the decision when I was up north. My brother got his orders to go to Anchorage, Alaska, and I knew I didn't want any more snow in my life. So I came back here. Start applying for jobs. And and all this took only like a couple of weeks because in January of 1970 and I came out December the 19th of 1969, January 1970, I applied for a position at Operation Second Chance and got it, you know, when I went there as a secretary.

Jen Tilton [00:03:52] Before we dig into Operation Second Chance, you know, a lot of people, including myself, wasn't alive in the time of the 1960s. And so I wonder, even before you moved here, when you were back in Virginia, what are your memories of the civil rights movement as it started to bubble up? What did what was that like for you as a young adult watching? What did you see?

Margaret Hill [00:04:15] What was more than watching? I participated in sit ins and demonstrations.

Jen Tilton [00:04:20] Tell me about it.

Margaret Hill [00:04:23] The one I remember the most was the day we went to WT Grant, which was like the Woolworth. And, you know, when it was the seat that became empty,

we would take the seat even though we knew we would not get served. And while I was getting on the seat, man pushed me and I hit the floor. But we were also taught to be nonviolent. So you just get up and wait for the next, you know, seat, well, that didn't last long for me because I was embarrassed when I hit the floor. So I participated in that. The other thing I participated in was going into stores that originally had not served blacks. And so there would be a group of us out in college and that first year college and we would. There was a young man who was Italian Black that he looked more Italian than Black. So no one questioned him and he would go to one of the stores, open the door wide, and we would run in. And the sad part about that, he did get hurt, I think, when somebody here, I think it bothered his back. And so I did that type of participation, you know, in sit ins and things of that nature.

Jen Tilton [00:05:43] How did you get into doing that in college? Like what? What got you motivated to actually act?

Margaret Hill [00:05:49] I mean, you know, I have no idea. I have no idea. I don't remember going to a meeting or anything. I just think that people say this is something we need to do to integrate. But one of the things that had bothered me the most about that was, when I was in school, you know, we were going to stores in my little town and we couldn't try on shoes unless we had socks on. We couldn't try on sandals at all. They wouldn't let Blacks try on shoes if your feet actually made contact with the material, you couldn't try on a hat. You looked at it and you bought it as is. And I remember going in the store seeing the dress I liked and I couldn't try on the dress. At least, you know, you just have to buy it. So I had already witnessed those types of things when I was a teenager. So it wasn't hard for me to get involved, you know, trying to right that type of a wrong. Yeah, yeah, yeah. And I remember when and I never at the time I didn't know, but it was Saturdays when we would go into town and if we were walking on the sidewalk and whites were coming, we had to get in the street. You know, I remember all of that and I remember my mom and dad saying, "When you see people, you speak to them." So I would speak, even though they wouldn't speak back, but, you know, but we would just, you know, just say we know you need to speak to folks. And so I can remember, you know, those types of things. Or going into the... I don't know if it was Greyhound and Trailways or just Trailways bus, but bus station. But you had the whites and you had your colored section. And of course, I don't know what was in the white section, but I know in our section you had to pay to use the restroom, restroom weren't free. And what we would do because if we were, you know, two or three of us, we would just it was like a nickel, but a nickel was a lot in 1957 to 1958. But one person would pay you look around, make sure nobody's watching you and you let somebody else in and things so, you know, so all of those and, uh, it's just, uh, you know, strategies were just there. And I think I remembered all of those. So when I get... I don't think my mom would have approved of anything I did when I was in college with the sit-ins. But, uh, since I was away from home, I just thought, you know, here's my chance to do do my just. Yeah. And so, yeah, that's what I did.

Jen Tilton [00:08:46] And so when you came up to San Bernardino, what was it like to arrive in San Bernardino? What did you kind of hope for out here and what are your first memories of the city?

Margaret Hill [00:08:58] When I first got here, I remember my brother, sister in law and their three year old picking me up at the bus station because I came out here by bus and as we were going to their house and they lived on State Street, which was not the greatest area still. And what do you remember, State and Nolan someplace in that area. And they said what people consider is the ghetto. Well, I just came out of Norfolk where I said this

would be middle class in Norfolk. And so that was my first impression. What people thought ghetto? I say, you don't know ghetto. And so I just I just liked the open land, the open areas. And so my impression was I still wasn't sure where I wanted to because I was still focused on the heat. But then when I got to San Francisco and it was it was altogether different culture and everything else. So it didn't it didn't bother me that much to have to move, you know, back here because it was more country like where I came from and then the Bay Area. So I was able to really adjust and assimilate.

Jen Tilton [00:10:20] Now it doesn't seem so country now. So what made it feel country then?

Margaret Hill [00:10:26] I think because of the, open areas that we had, the one I mean, there was some cars, but I can remember driving through the grapevines to get to the airport in Ontario, you know, so there weren't all those houses out there. So I think I think that was it because, you know, it didn't seem like people were on top of each other. And I don't remember that many apartments around or anything. Yeah. And and you didn't have a lot of freeways, you know, like you did back east and it was just more of a cozy environment.

Jen Tilton [00:11:10] Yeah. And so where did you live. So you live with your brother?

Margaret Hill [00:11:14] At first I live with my brother in Moscoy.

Jen Tilton [00:11:17] In Moscoy.

Margaret Hill [00:11:17] Um, and after I was here about two months, my ex found out where I was and he came out and didn't call until he got to Barstow and never heard of Barstow six in the morning. And I asked my sister in law, "Where is Barstow?" She said, "about 80 miles from here." I said, "what?" So he came out and we gave it another try. So at that time, we moved to, uh, we stayed with them for maybe a week or two. And then we moved into the apartments right off the Highland had Highland and Arden, so we stayed there for a while. Those were probably the best apartments in San Bernardino at that time. And we stayed there for a while.

Jen Tilton [00:12:07] And was it easy to find housing back then? I mean, I hear I've heard some stories about some racial segregation in the housing and kind of that it was harder to find apartments and homes sometimes for folks.

Margaret Hill [00:12:18] The only time I had a problem with that was when I was teaching at San Bernardino High School and they had built a nice apartment complex not too far from the school. And I was having at that time, I was living on the Bench, which is right off of Foothill and Mesa. And I would I knew I was on the verge of separating again. And I just happened to see these apartments. And I said, well, I don't have to worry about traveling anything if I can get there. So I went over and I went to the management area and the manager said, this guy, middle aged guy, came out and I said, "I just want to know if you have any vacant apartments." He said, "no, we don't have any vacant apartments." And I said, "well do you anticipate some soon?" "No, we don't anticipate any soon." You know, very brief, very blunt. And I said, well, the reason I was asking, I said I was looking for a place. So I put my name, where I worked because I was a teacher at San Bernardino High and my phone number. So when I got home, he had called me to say that he discovered they did have a place. I mean, I knew why he told me, you know, he didn't have any place.

And I said, you know, thank you. Have someone look at my other options, you know, so. Right. So that that was the only problem.

Margaret Hill [00:14:02] Now, the other thing, when I get ready to buy my first house, which was which was with my ex, we. There were certain areas they wouldn't show us, we would go and realize, and they said, "No, you don't want to live over there." You know? I mean, I ain't know why then. But it didn't take long to figure out. Yeah. And they wouldn't even bring us to Del Rosa or Highland, you know. So we bought a house in Rialto.

Jen Tilton [00:14:36] Oh ok, on the bench in Rialto or?

Margaret Hill [00:14:38] Pretty much was right off of Meridian, really between Meridian and Pepper. And then we were the second black family to be there. And but the neighbors I mean, I think they started packing the night we moved in.

Jen Tilton [00:14:54] Really?

Margaret Hill [00:14:54] Yeah. Yes. A number of people, they just kind of let- it was it was [a] flight out of the area.

Jen Tilton [00:15:01] Yeah. Yeah. And any kind of overt hostility or folks just left?

Margaret Hill [00:15:05] Folks just left. Yeah. Folks just left.

Jen Tilton [00:15:07] Yeah.

Margaret Hill [00:15:08] And then, and that was long after I was working you know. Well I already stopped working for Operation Second Chance and that was, you know, teaching.

Jen Tilton [00:15:17] Yeah.

Margaret Hill [00:15:18] What have you.

Jen Tilton [00:15:20] Yeah.

Margaret Hill [00:15:20] But as far as housing [is] concerned, I can't say, you know, I witnessed a problem with housing.

Jen Tilton [00:15:30] Right.

Margaret Hill [00:15:31] You know, other than that-.

Jen Tilton [00:15:32] Those stories. Right, yeah yeah. Those are important stories, but. Yeah, yeah. OK, so let's go back to Operation Second Chance.

Margaret Hill [00:15:38] OK.

Jen Tilton [00:15:38] How did you first hear about it and tell me your kind of first impressions of both the organization and Frances Grice when you first met her?

Margaret Hill [00:15:49] I have no idea how I heard about Operation Second Chance. All I know is I needed a job. I didn't know anyone who worked there or anything. So when I

showed up, Wesley Jefferson, who is since deceased and was very influential in the community, gave me the shorthand tests. And, you know, I could easily do shorthand over one hundred words a minute, but I could not do that shorthand test he gave. But but then I knew it wasn't me. I knew it was him. He didn't know what he was doing, which I got around to telling him. But when I left after the shorthand test, I said, "Well, I won't get this job." So I waited a couple of weeks and I called and they said, "Come in." And they did — Wesley talked with me again and he said, "OK, congratulations. You're hired." And then that's when I said, "Thank you." I said, "You sure I'm hired?" And he said, "yes." I said, "Can you tell me who taught you how to give a shorthand test?" He said, "I guess you figured out I didn't know what I was doing." I said, "You didn't have a clue. I said, well nobody talks that fast." And so we had a chuckle over that. Yeah. So when I started working for Operation Second Chance, again, I had no money pretty much 'cause my ex, he was not one who would knock down a door looking for a job, you know. So, um, in the complex where Operation Second Chance was, which was on Mount Vernon near Mount Vernon and 16th Street, there was the beauty supply place, the Kennedys. And I would get my supplies for my hair and the wigs I bought from there. If you go down a little further, Valerie Pope Ludlum who ended up being— well actually Francis' aunt and also city council member had a little boutique. So she was a hairdresser and in her shop; she had a boutique. So I probably still owe her money, but she would just do my hair. She said, "You can't go to work looking like that. Come get your hair done." And she would let me have clothes, you know, on consignment. And so I did that. And then a little further down there was Bob Parker who had Hudson's shoes. And so that's where I got my shoes from. And, um, and that's where I bought my first car: from him. He for some reason he had, it was — I don't know, I think it was an old Ford. But — nineteen fifties Ford — but I bought it either in January or February and I didn't know, you know, you don't think about checking on air conditioning. And the car didn't have air conditioning so I had to get rid of that, you know, real fast. So that was it. But I encountered Frances was a workaholic. Yeah. I still, I still remember the New Year's Eve that we couldn't go home until we finished some contracts. And so when the New Year rolled in we were all just this working 'cause Frances said, "Nobody gonna leave until these contracts are done," or whatever, whatever we had to do. There, I know it was the end of the year report, they had to go in. So we got along, we got along quite well. She knew what she wanted and she insisted on getting what she wanted, which was, you know, good for the company. But at some point, I remember getting angry at Frances. Again, I don't know if I was angry at Francis or what. But I went to my office and I typed my letter of resignation and I was scared to give it to Frances. So I waited until the next day. And before she came in, I put an envelope, put it on her desk, and so she called me on the intercom and she said, "Can you come down and see me?" And so I went to her office; she hadn't opened the envelope. She said, "What's this?" And I said, "Well, I think you should read it." So she read it and she looked at it and she looked at me. She balled it up and put it in the trash. She said, "Now get back to work." And I said, "Yes, ma'am." And that's what I did. And so that's where I worked until I got the job with [the] school district. And she was happy that I got the job in [the] school district 'cause she was a big one. And she was a part of the League of Women Voters. And so I would travel with her. The other interesting thing is I remember the first time we came up here to Serrano, which is just right around the corner, there was nothing here but a school and orange trees. I said, "Who in their right mind would build a school up here near these orange trees?" And never thought I would live up here. But she— I learned a lot about civil rights. I knew a lot of things that she was doing for the community. I was aware of many of her fights with people in the community and her fights with people, you know, who just felt her dream was unreal.

Jen Tilton [00:21:16] Yeah.

Margaret Hill [00:21:17] So my first involvement— so when I was in Virginia, I don't remember doing any volunteer work. I probably did at the church and... but I don't remember doing any nonprofit type stuff. So when I got here, one of my first political things was walking and passing out fliers for Bob Holcomb when he became mayor,

Jen Tilton [00:21:47] Oh when he was running for mayor?

Margaret Hill [00:21:47] When he was running for mayor the first time.

Jen Tilton [00:21:50] Oh yeah. What do you remember about that? That seemed like an important race.

Margaret Hill [00:21:52] It was, I'm sure. But I knew Al Ballard was the mayor, the outgoing mayor, and because of things that Al Ballard had done as a result of the Watts riots and the spillover here, that I was supportive, even though I didn't know Bob Holcomb. But Frances said, "We need to get out and walk. We need to let people know he needs to be the next mayor."

Jen Tilton [00:22:20] Can you tell me what- how did Ballard piss so many folks off in the Black community? I read a little bit in newspapers, but tell me from your perspective.

Margaret Hill [00:22:28] The only thing you know, I can remember he... the big thing in the community was when people say you need to hire some Black firefighters, you'd probably read that one in the paper, where you say, "The only thing Imma have black on a fire truck is a gun" or a shotgun or something like that. I didn't listen to city council meetings and I was not that involved, but it just came out that he was a racist. And I have no proof of that. That was just based on what people in the community were saying. But I never met anybody who liked Al Ballard. And believe it or not, when I became principal of San Andreas, Al Ballard was, I don't know if it was a wife or a significant other, but one of the kids ended up over there with me and he would bring him the school. And we had some good conversation but of course we didn't talk about him being mayor, but we talked about other things. And so that was a good conversation. There was some good conversations, but that's all, all of my information about him are more or less hearsay. The thing that I remember that, you know, about "the only thing black being on a firetruck." So I do remember that. So I stayed with Operation Second Chance from January of 1970 until July of 1971.

Jen Tilton [00:24:05] Ok, alright. So that long.

Margaret Hill [00:24:06] Yeah.

Jen Tilton [00:24:07] Now tell me a little bit more about the organization first. I mean, when you were working with them, what was the work of Operation Second Chance and what was her vision of really- what was she trying to build in the community?

Margaret Hill [00:24:20] Her vision was to empower youth and work with young — that was her primary vision. She just wanted young people to do the types of things they need to do to move the world. And so she had a youth group called... shoot. Why, I don't even remember the name of the youth group, but in there some leaders came out of that. I remember she had to go to the school district. She was a good friend of Jerry Pettis, who was a congresswoman at the time, and there wasn't much Jerry wouldn't do for her. And

he arranged for either eight or 10 kids from the West Side to go to Washington, D.C. and to the capital and do those types of things. Kids came back, schools wanted to mark them truant and not give them credit. And so she got involved in that and so that changed. So that was her biggest push yet, this youth group. And she wanted them to just stay in school, get an education and move on. And then she got into the business entrepreneur. And so she started another program that would help businesses, you know, get the capacity [so] that they could be successful. And so that was the second one. The third one she decided she wanted to do a training program so that young women especially could at least if you couldn't get anything else you could get a clerical, something in the clerical field. So she set that up, and those were the biggest. You know, she did some other things, but those were the big ones.

Jen Tilton [00:26:28] Yeah.

Margaret Hill [00:26:28] Yeah.

Jen Tilton [00:26:29] You mentioned that a number of leaders came out of those organizations. Can you tell me a little bit about some of the leaders that came out of Operation Second Chance?

Margaret Hill [00:26:35] Well, Kenny Hobbs, who was a part of the youth group, became the city manager in Hesperia. He now lives in Palm Springs, and he owns a casino someplace in the south. Um, I spoke I, I don't talk to him often but I spoke to him right after Frances died. Keith Lee. Keith Lee was in pretty much, not the top, but he was in high management for the county of San Bernardino. Greg Nash became a firefighter, Van Howard, he's a local photographer around here now. Um...

Jen Tilton [00:27:29] So those [folks] were kind of in her youth group

Margaret Hill [00:27:31] They were in the youth group.

Jen Tilton [00:27:32] Yeah.

Margaret Hill [00:27:32] I even heard from one person who contacted me — and I hadn't heard from him in 30 years — contacted me during the last election because either his daughter or granddaughter was running for some political office. But I don't know what he was doing. And then there was Armando Maina who he started doing some things at the state level. So when Francis... So that's it. I mean, she didn't save them all.

Jen Tilton [00:28:11] Right.

Margaret Hill [00:28:11] She didn't save them all, but she saved a lot of them, got a lot of them through.

Jen Tilton [00:28:14] Yeah. You mentioned earlier that you knew a lot of the fights she had been involved, the struggles. Can you tell us some of the stories to kind of help understand the role? Because she ran this organization, but she did so much else in terms of activism in the community.

Margaret Hill [00:28:31] Yes. Well, you know, she pushed again for the integration of the schools. And I was with her at the courthouse when Judge Egly made his decision. You know, we weren't allowed in the courtroom, but we were in the courthouse when that

happened. And so she was always fighting for students, as well as the need to hire Black teachers and administrators. She really pushed that a lot. A lot of people didn't know that but she did, you know. Behind the scenes, she did a lot of pushing on that. She had a dress shop where she sold African clothes, she worked a lot with — his last name is Smith, he was killed in a car accident — but he did a doll called Shinada — Shinada? Shi-Shinana Dolls? It starts with an S, Sh-something. Shi-Shidada Dolls or what have you.

Jen Tilton [00:29:42] And was that like an early sort of kind of Black pride doll?

Margaret Hill [00:29:45] Yes.

Jen Tilton [00:29:46] Yeah.

Margaret Hill [00:29:46] Yes, exactly. So we moved out of the Mount Vernon and 16th office into a house on Base Line, and that's when she really started the school, you know, training people to be secretaries and clerks.

Jen Tilton [00:30:05] What was that? On base line, on base line. It would have been either one or one or two houses, you know, where I am, a poor, polla Amphipolis, a baseline. And, um, Mt.. Mount Vernon. OK. OK, yeah.

Jen Tilton [00:30:22] So a couple houses and

Margaret Hill [00:30:23] a couple of houses there. Yeah. There was a barbershop realtor and then I think this house was next door to that. OK, and so you know, we moved into that and then that's when she got the funding to construct the two buildings on Highland Avenue and she had to go back to D.C. quite a bit, you know, on that. But she she got it done. She got it done. But it was also during that time and I didn't understand why she was fighting so hard, because I didn't understand that much of the political era. But the city ended up with the property,

Margaret Hill [00:31:08] The city ended up with the property. And so and I don't think there was a lot of support from the community, you know, out there to support her at the time. And so she started that training program and in those two buildings. And I just think Frances just got tired because she lived in San Bernardino the whole time. And that's when she moved to Redlands, I think. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Jen Tilton [00:31:40] Now, the school campaign to bring us back to that for a second was a very long campaign. Right. The desegregation campaign, that court case, I mean, they started it in the mid 60s and then the court case finally ended way later, right? Yeah, it was. And it was in the 70s, like in the mid to late 70s, that it was completely done. Right. So I guess I wonder, having been watched some of that with her, what made it such a long fight? And what do you remember about that sort of struggle? Because I think the kind of opinions, even in the West Side black community shifted a little bit over time and there were these divisions between organizations, she said in her interview with the archive at some point that like she sued the NAACP and then I didn't understand that. So so I wonder if you can help us understand.

Margaret Hill [00:32:36] I don't know about, I don't know about the suing of the NAACP. I simply I don't know anything about that. I seemly heard, you know, about it. But I can't give you any any background, because at that time we had the NAACP, we had Urban League, we had James Farmer's program. I can't think of the name of it. Yeah.

Jen Tilton [00:33:08] Yeah, CORE?

Margaret Hill [00:33:09] Yeah Core. And so I so I didn't know a lot about what was going on with any of that. We always had. We always laughed because when Frances, once the decision was made by Judge Egly and they were able to bring the busses in, to bus the kids, the bus was full, and she still had to drive her son to school because there was no room for him. So she always said, I did all the fighting and I couldn't even get my own kid on the bus. And so. But I don't remember. I know there was some dissension in the community, but that's one thing Francis didn't talk to me much about.

Jen Tilton [00:34:03] Yeah, right, right. When you got that decision down and you were with her at the courthouse, how did she what do you remember about that moment?

Jen Tilton [00:34:10] I remember Francis saying, yes, yes, yes, yes, yes. And then we were all clapping because we knew it was good news. Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

Jen Tilton [00:34:22] And do you remember sort of so there was then some busing and some kind of process of some integration. Did you feel like was she sort of satisfied by that outcome or did she sort of continue to fight for more changes in the school?

Jen Tilton [00:34:38] Well, I think she was pretty satisfied at that point with that. But, you know, as you talk about the longevity of getting that through the the the school board, that was very conservative, you know, for the most part. Yeah. So that in itself, you know, created some concerns. But, yeah, she always would. She she always did fight for the schools. But the emphasis after that was put on youth leaders and then and she was to get to create these jobs for people. Yeah. Yeah. That's what she. Yeah. Her focus was on after that.

Jen Tilton [00:35:20] The one thing I don't know. So I think Operation Second Chance got some money from the federal government right through in part the expansion of the war on poverty programs and funding coming into the city. And as I've been trying to read about it a little bit, I see that the Delinquency Prevention Committee might have been part of that, too. And I wondered if you ever knew much about what that organization did or how it interacted with Operation Second Chance or anything about it. Delinquency Prevention Commission, I think.

Margaret Hill [00:35:53] I think you talking about dependency dependency.

Jen Tilton [00:35:57] Yeah, maybe.

Margaret Hill [00:35:58] Maybe. Yeah, she was very involved with that. And that was a poor people program. Yeah. They came in on President Johnson. OK, yeah. And so yeah she was, she was, she was there. She Pauline Marillo who was the matron up here on the reservation. Vinne Newman. They were all involved in that in trying to restore know good living conditions for those in need. She was a big part of that. I didn't know I didn't know what she did with that. But I knew she was a part. The Dependency Prevention Commission.

Jen Tilton [00:36:43] OK, that's what it was. OK, thank you. Thank you. Yeah. And those are some of the leaders you remember that worked with you OK. Yeah. Well yeah. You can try to dig in more to figure that out. And um, so one of the things I remember seeing

the name of also that John Woods had been an organizer with Operation Second Chance. Was he working there when you.

Margaret Hill [00:37:06] John didn't work there? John was on the school board. John was the reason I got into education. Oh, really? He was a friend of Bob Hodges who worked for TRW and TRW had Bob on on loan to work with Operation Second Chance as they are trying to empower these businesses and encourage people to go into business and things of that nature.

Jen Tilton [00:37:33] What is TRW?

Margaret Hill [00:37:36] It was it was a program out of there. It was on the Norton Air Force base,.

Jen Tilton [00:37:42] But I can't tell you that's OK. Acronyms

Margaret Hill [00:37:48] Yeah, I could find out. So I was doing some work in my office now. John Woods was the first black school board member we had, but they did a recall and then he was out. But, uh, but he was very active. John was very active in the community. Yeah, he was he was active in the community.

Jen Tilton [00:38:18] Do you know why there was a recall who tried to recall him and succeeded?

Margaret Hill [00:38:21] Um, I, I don't remember. The name I remember was Chuck Chinescu. He's the one I used to talk about who was on the board. There was a Herbert Fisher was his campaign manager. And then when it was time to run again, John didn't make it. So I think there was a big group that had recalled somebody and the reason John had gotten in.

Jen Tilton [00:39:00] I see that's interesting. And so during all this time, when you're working out operations, checking chance, you're living kind of in Rialto at that time as well, or you're still living in San Bernardino.

Margaret Hill [00:39:13] I was in Rialto

Jen Tilton [00:39:15] when we got to. OK. OK. And I know you didn't work with them anymore, but I guess at some operations, check and check got pretty big and built that big building and was running all these programs, got a lot of kind of federal money

Margaret Hill [00:39:32] Did a lot they can get credit for, you know, the All American city. Yeah. Tell me about that. Yeah. Frances is the one who's responsible that I don't think they talk about because I don't think they know it.

Jen Tilton [00:39:45] But how did she do that?

Margaret Hill [00:39:47] Well, there was a there was congregation of people who went to DC to have the city. I guess it must have shown that it was a finalist of something. I don't know what happened, but but they went to D.C. and D.C. turned them down. Frances went back on her own and she said, we are not the best city. But she talked to them about what the possibilities and things were and that's how that came about. Yeah, but she but she's the one. Not too many people know it. I don't think too many people care, even ones who

know it, because it was Frances cause Frances. She's she didn't have a whole lot of you know, I guess she had more political enemies than friends.

Jen Tilton [00:40:41] So why.

Margaret Hill [00:40:42] But because she was I think a lot of things that happened with Frances. And it's a culture of black people, you know, the minute you start doing things and it happens even to this day, people will say, "Where did you go to school? You know, where you get a doctorate from?" And you know, they want to know all things. Frances had a high school education and and she was dealing with people on the westside with college degrees. And sometimes you bump heads because, you know, you think of it and you think of things at different levels. And then Francis was a doer. So if she thought about it. She would do it. Other people thought about it. They waited for others to do it. But even with giving her the Black Rose Award, it took a while. It took a while. And I proposed giving her that award because I work within her and I saw the struggle and a lot of both her kids and all of that. And I was saying we need to honor this woman. But there were people on that committee who felt we shouldn't do that. But so she was even building and building and getting it to be a career training. She went back to D.C. and I understand she grabbed both sides of Hubert Humphrey's desk and said to him, she said, I need money to set up a program to train people in my city. And he said, "We don't do careers. It's not what we do." And she said, she grabbed both sides of his desk, and she said, well, you need to do this. So, Frances said, "I guess I scared him because we got it, got the money to do it. Yeah. So that was unheard of, you know, unprecedented.

Jen Tilton [00:42:53] So it sounds like she wasn't afraid to push either. Oh, no. And sometimes,

Margaret Hill [00:42:57] Oh, she went back to Washington, D.C. on a one way ticket to get something done. And I remember saying, actually, you got to be kidding me. She said, no. She says, I'll figure a way to get back. She said, somebody will help me to get back. And she did she got back. But that's yeah. That was Frances.

Jen Tilton [00:43:17] Yeah. I know that in those years, particularly in the 70s and early 80s, there were also a lot of fights she was in that were about how the West Side should be redeveloped. Do you remember anything about those fights and kind of what was sort of shaping those?

Margaret Hill [00:43:33] I don't remember them, OK, you know, and as I said, once I left Operation Second Chance

Jen Tilton [00:43:40] You were less involved.

Margaret Hill [00:43:41] Yeah, well, I did teach a couple of classes there. You know

Jen Tilton [00:43:46] what you did what you teach?

Margaret Hill [00:43:48] typing and short hand nd record keeping, But basically by 1971, my time with Frances with very limited. So so I spent a good year. Yeah, yeah. But we remained friends. Then there would be times we would get angry each other, but more frances at me than me at her because I never knew who I was angry. But she either wouldn't call me if I called her or what have you. And I get worried because I was a friend

of her sister, Marlene. Well, she was Frances angry with you because of blah blah blah. And so it got to the place that, you know, we'll start talking again. Yeah.

Jen Tilton [00:44:36] Um, Amina has told me that everyone has a lot of Francis stories. Yeah, yeah. Yeah. And I wonder if there's any particularly from that time you were working really close to her and the other stories that really stood stand out in your memory that help us kind of understand her as a leader and as an activist?

Margaret Hill [00:44:53] Um, well, if she made up her mind to fight for something, she would. She fought to get a school named after Bob Holcomb. And there was a board member said long ago on this board, we'll never have a school named after Bob Holcomb. So Frances just waited it out. And she had already heard, you know, the board member say that. And when I got on the board, Frances called me and said, Margaret got to get a school named after Bob Holcomb. And she said, you know, the kind of work he did actually. Yeah, I'm very aware of it. And she came down to the school board meeting one night and she wanted to plea for Bob Holcomb. I had to stop. I said, Frances. I said, Frances, we're going to name a school after Bob Holcomb. And so she was she was pleased. She was pleased when she went to her grave knowing that she had. You know, because, I mean, he did a lot.

Jen Tilton [00:46:00] What did he do? Tell me more about kind of what you feel like Bob Holcomb did for the city.

Margaret Hill [00:46:04] Well, well, for the city or for Operation Second Chance?

Jen Tilton [00:46:09] Both for Operation Second Chance and the city.

Margaret Hill [00:46:10] Operation Second Chance. You know, being an attorney, he did pro bono work for Operation Second Chance, attended their events, made sure the paperwork and everything was in order attend an event in a lot of events that, you know, Bob Holcomb's funeral service was on the West Side, right?

Jennifer Tilton [00:46:34] I was struck by that. Yeah, yeah, yeah. [Telephone ringing] OK, we'll pause and we'll start right back. OK, so you were telling me what Bob Holcomb did for Operation Second Chance?

Margaret Hill [00:47:03] Yeah, he was very Operation Second Chance friendly. And he was that way until his children, I think his daughter, one of them went to school and took some extra classes at Operation Second Chance. But he was very involved in the community and very supportive of the community. And whenever Francis called and say, this is a little unrest is over here. Their relationship was so good that he was aware of it.

Jennifer Tilton [00:47:31] Yeah, yeah. And it felt so he had very close relationships with other folks in the black community, too, and sort was he seen as a civil rights advocate? Like what did he do more broadly for racial justice?

Margaret Hill [00:47:44] He was more of a civil rights advocate than any mayor that I've known. Yeah, yeah. He really was. And for the city, the same thing. He had, there was more diversity in the city when he was there than it is right now. Really.

Jennifer Tilton [00:48:02] Really? Yeah. Like in terms of the city government and stuff?

Margaret Hill [00:48:04] Yes. Yes. And especially in top management. You know, he believed in putting people in who were capable, competent and experienced and that and he believed in putting people who lived in San Bernardino in those positions, which is something that doesn't happen now. Yeah. So he had his share of fights. Um, he and Jim Penman did not get along and. But he had a vision, he had a vision, and he's the reason we have a Cal State San Bernardino here right now, because his push for that and there's a water, something to deal with water that he was involved in that they tried to keep him, keep him out of that. And I don't know that for sure.

Jennifer Tilton [00:49:04] OK, that's helpful. What were the other important sort of black political organizations or civil rights organizations that you remember playing an important role in the 70s or early eighties? Do you remember kind of any leadership of the NAACP or core in that early period when you were here?

Margaret Hill [00:49:24] No, because I. I was not I was not involved. You know, by the time I found out who they were, I was with the schools and I did a lot of. I was adviser to the Black Student Union, advisor to the Usherettes. I had two or three groups I was advisor of.

Jennifer Tilton [00:49:45] So when did you start working at the school district?

Margaret Hill [00:49:49] In August of 1971 71.

Jennifer Tilton [00:49:51] Yeah. And then you were at San Bernardino High School from the beginning.

Margaret Hill [00:49:54] From 71' to 78'. Yeah.

Jennifer Tilton [00:49:57] Mm hmm. So what was that period like for students? What was the BSU doing at that San Bernardino High School then?

Margaret Hill [00:50:06] We were doing what we could to let our students know that it was an organization for everybody. And so we did activities where we invite the entire student population because there was a lot of unrest going on right after the Watt's Riot. So we had our share of concerns and we had some uh, actually we had some instructors there who, uh, you know, would have probably preferred being anyplace other than there.

Jennifer Tilton [00:50:42] But so what we're seeing since, you know, part of what we're trying to do here is bring those moments to light what were some of those concerns or problems that students would bring to your attention?

Margaret Hill [00:51:00] Well, the main thing that the kids were concerned about was walking home because most of the problems, even though the population, the black population always been the smallest population on any campus, but the big problem was with the Hispanic students. And everybody was walking across the bridge, the 16th Street Bridge to get to the West Side because that's where we lived. And so so those are some concerns. You know, we talked about how do you deal with and then just just dealing with the just dealing with the culture of people who just didn't understand black kids. I can remember the day we were on the steps, it must have been about 50 of us taking a photo for the yearbook and one of the secretaries in the office called the Campus Security to come out. And she said they're getting ready to riot. [Laughing ruefully] And and so, you know, we had things like that going on. And then after all of those things, we just have a

discussion, you know, like would why would people do that? We talk about the unknown and and things of that nature. So, yeah, yeah, yeah.

Jennifer Tilton [00:52:31] I'm afraid there's still work like that to do.

Margaret Hill [00:52:33] Yeah, yeah.

Jennifer Tilton [00:52:36] Um, uh, any other sort of things you remember the BSU being involved in in those early days?

Margaret Hill [00:52:40] We, we just

Jennifer Tilton [00:52:46] Or the Usherettes? I don't think I've ever heard of them. You said you mentioned the usherettes.

Margaret Hill [00:52:49] Yeah. That's the group I was with them for about a year. And and the reason I wanted to advise them, the Usherettes were primarily Anglos, not even Latinos. And so I just wanted to diversify the group. Mm hmm. And and they would they would usher at the California theater for the symphonies and what have you. Um.

Jennifer Tilton [00:53:17] And so were you able to do that? And diversify the group?

Margaret Hill [00:53:20] And I was able to. But also I found out that there was some of these people down at California Theater that didn't care for the kids, you know, you know, being there. Yeah. So I actually got that for about maybe a year, a couple of years. I don't that's not one of my success stories.

Jennifer Tilton [00:53:44] You tried and hit some barriers and yeah. How did you decide to get involved in politics yourself?

Margaret Hill [00:53:58] I hadn't planned to. When I retired in 2003, I started getting calls from managers and everybody said, "Margaret, we need you to run for school board." I said, "Don't ask me. I'm not going to do it." And they said, "Come on." And I said, "I'm serious. I'm not going to run for school board." So after being in retirement for three years, I went to work for San Bernardino County School as Assistant Superintendent. And while I was there, things were happening that, you know, I mean, I'm still part of I still want to be part of San Bernardino because I live here and I care about these kids. But I had people calling me about stuff they wanted to do and they were not getting any bites from the district. And one, Feeding America wanted to go to Lincoln School and do a food thing and no one would call them back. So I get a call about that. And I said, "That's one of the poorest areas in the city. Why would we not have people go there to have free vegetables and fruit and stuff for the kids?" So I called the superintendent. And so I think they're still there to this day. And that was in maybe 2006, 2007. Then it was another time again, a guy said, "Margaret, there's a five hundred thousand dollar three year grant and San Bernardino fits it perfect. He said, "I'll write the grant. I know you'll will get it." I called the district to find out, you know, told them about this and they said, "Well, we don't hire anybody for three years." You know. And I'm sitting there saying, well, you don't hire anybody for three years. You hire someone to do the job. If they know it's for three years, they need to get some experience to go out, get a job elsewhere if that's what they choose to do. So they wouldn't do it then. I when the superintendent left and the Superintendent, Delgado, they wanted consultant firms to do a search. They they asked San Bernardino County schools at that time, Dr. Thomas got Dr. Kagome to put him in charge. Well, they

decided they wanted me to serve on the committee. I didn't want to do it. And then the superintendent said, "Margaret, you live here. You know, you're more ideal than anybody on this campus working for county schools to do it. So I agreed to it. So when we went over to put in our proposal at the board at the time, just talked about us like we had a tail. And then one community member get up to say, well, you know, "All Margaret is going to do with everything you say. She gonna can take it back to the superintendent. It won't be her voice." So I put in the speaker stood up and I said, "I don't have to be on this committee." I said, "but I don't think it's fair for you not to give the county a chance to look for who's best to come into their county." Because the other two agencies were outside of the county. And so. Well, one of the two at least so well. So we were the last one to interview. You know, once you interview, they can stay in and so they made us number three out of three. We had the lowest contract. They wouldn't give it to us and they said we aren't giving the county anything. So we shouldn't even have to pay for them to come in. blah, blah, blah And, you know, and then the president said "and they haven't hired a minority superintendent," you know, and I'm saying, you got to have an opening before you hire someone. And so this went on and on. So it was embarrassing how they talked about us. And to me, they were talking about me, of course. And so we left out of there and said, "oh, well." About two weeks later, I was at a conference in New Orleans and my husband, who never answered the phone, decides to answer the phone, calls me to say the call came in from school district. He said, "They want you to call because they want to talk to you about who should we select for the next superintendent? Since you answer the phone, when you call them back and tell them it'll be a cold day in hell, before I call them for anything involved. He said. "I'm not going to tell them that." I said, "you don't have to, but I'm not calling them in case they call back. Say she's not going to call you. So I didn't get a call. About a week after I get back, I get this letter on my desk and the superintendent said, "Margaret, see me?" So I read the letter and it said, "we would like for someone from county school to come over and meet with the consultants to talk about blah, blah." So I went to Dr. Thomas and I said, "Please don't do this to me." And he said, "Margaret, I have to. He's said you the best choice, I have to. So I my secretary was out. I went back to my office. They even gave us the time that we could if there was a good time. I went back to my office and I called myself and I said to Brenda and I talked to Brenda Sanchez. I said, "Brenda I said this is Margaret Hill. I got my letter here." I said, "I'll be there representing the superintendent." She said, "oh, thank you." So the day of the event I'd asked this other lady who was an assistant to the superintendent, if she would go with me. And so when we got there, we went to the room that they told us it would be there. And we open the door and the consultant looks at us, you know, like, what do you want? And in there was Ernie Garcia. He was interviewing Ernie Garcia. And so I said I had my letter. I said, "We have an appointment so and so time." And he looked at his list. He said, "I don't have you down. He said "I don't have you down." So I said, "OK." And Ernie said, "I know both of those ladies. They can come in we can do interviews us all at the same time. And so that's how we did the interview. So about an hour later when it's time to leave I get to. Now now, I would have been upset at my secretary because I didn't think she was the best, but I did it myself. So I was getting ready to leave and I said, no, I need to go and check on this. So I go to Brenda, "Do you remember me calling you and said I'll be here?" And she said, "Yeah," I said. "Um, do you know why I didn't have an appointment?" And she said, "what do you mean you didn't have an appointment?" I said, "Well, I was not on the appointment list". And she said, "Well, you need to talk to Jennifer." I said "no I don't need to to Jennifer." I go. "I know Jennifer well enough to know that Jennifer would not take me off the list." I said "somebody told her to take this off the list and I'm not going to put her in a position to snitch on anybody." And I just left. I left. So. So then they. Before they hired somebody, it was that day I had made it my mind to.. this is my long story about why I decided, I'd run for office. That's what made me run for office.

Jennifer Tilton [01:02:04] So that day you decided I'm running for office.

Margaret Hill [01:02:06] Well, not really. That day I went back to work. I was so angry. And one of the guys reminded me, he said, you know, you know he used to tell me you used to always tell your students when they said they got a bad teacher, you said you need to go to school, get an education and replace them. He said So if you don't like what they did, you need to run. And I thought about it. So I came home, I talked to my husband and he said, "If that's what you want to do." So the next day I got up, went to work. I met a friend at the lunch at Mitla's and Virginia Marquez, City Council member was in there. And I told him, he said, Margaret you got to run. Then Virginia was there. She's said, "Margaret I'll be your campaign manager. You got to run." By this time I get a call from Mayor Morris, "Margaret you got to run." Now the word's getting around and that was either the last day or next to the last day that you could run. So I said, well, when I get in my car and go down Fifth Street, if I turn left, go to my office, I'm not running. If I keep straight, I just go to the registrar of voters. But then when I get to fifth and E I just went straight to register voters. So then I still wasn't sure that's what I wanted to do because I knew I still had to change my mind. So I got home, I got on Facebook and I said, this is what I did today. And I said I put in the paperwork to become to run for the School Board. I said, I don't know if I made the right decision or not. That was about five or 5:30, by 11 o'clock that night, I heard from almost one hundred people, which most of them were former students who said, you got to do it, you did it first. You need to do for all kids. And then I so then I decided, that's another reason to run, not because I'm angry, but I really ran because I originally ran because was angry. So then once I ran, they treated me like dirt. The board members. They even took down put my.. I put up signs one night next day all my signs were gone. The next day all my signs was gone. One Sunday night at midnight, there's one person who running for office calls me to say this man said your sign shouldn't have been on this post. And I just want you to know I got it. I said, yes, somebody caught you stealing it and probably told you you better call Margaret. And to this day, I never get to sign. And and then I will go to events, to represent the superintendent, and they wouldn't introduce me. Then they get bold enough to call the superintendent and tell him that I shouldn't be representing him places. And so I came in a night before they did the groundbreaking for middle college high school. So I, I said to the superintendent. I said, what do you have any problem with me being there he said, no, I'll never stop you from going. They just don't want to representing me. So he sent someone else to represent him. So I got there early enough. I could sit on the front row, you know, so that they could see me.

Jennifer Tilton [01:05:21] What was behind the animosity?

Margaret Hill [01:05:27] Because I have done so much stuff in the community and they knew I knew a lot of people, And a lot of people who knew me, I really no one told me that. But I'm pretty sure that was it.

Jennifer Tilton [01:05:36] was it, that it felt like a threat in some ways because you had the kind of base of power in some way.

Margaret Hill [01:05:40] Yeah, yeah. So then I just written my first book. San Andreas said we want to host the first book signing. So this is before I decide to run. This was in, I decided in August and this was even September, October, they had ordered all this food. They had made all these signs, they had did all these nametags with my photo on it. They had invited all these former students and everybody. I picked up newspaper one morning and it said, uh, retired educator is having a book signing, which was OK, I thought. But

then at the very end, the writer said she is also a candidate for school board. You know what I did put newspaper down and sat here with the phone next to me because I knew just a matter of time before the phone's gonna to ring. And lo and behold, and within an hour, the phone rang and the acting superintendent at that time say, Margaret, you can't have a book signing on campus. This is a day before the event. And my only salvation, although I didn't sell, I think I sold 11 books, was the Highland Senior Center let me move over there. But, you know, nobody knew pretty much where to come to or anything. So and I think out of the 11 books, I think one lady bought six and seven. Yeah. So only in about four or five people to buy books. Right. But um. Yeah, but they were horrible. Yeah. They were horrible to me.

Jennifer Tilton [01:07:25] What do you feel like. You want your legacy on the school board to be. What do you feel like it's most important that you've been fighting for and trying to make happen?

Margaret Hill [01:07:36] The most important thing. The most important thing is making sure every student gets an opportunity to succeed. Yes, that's my that's my goal. And some of the things I get frustrated with now, we talk about the ten percent of the kids who don't make it, which is very important to talk about. But I think if you talk about the 90 percent that made it, that 10 percent would change because they're looking at the success, not the failure. You know, people look at ten percent. Well, that's not many know it's too many, 10 percent too many. Let's take a look at the good things, you know, that kids are doing. So that's what started me writing an article for the newspaper, you know, write an article for The Sun and the press. In fact, my article that came out today or I need to post it on my Facebook page, the article came out today was students should celebrate themselves, you know, and I would just tell them, if you're doing these things, you need to celebrate. If you're respectful to everybody, celebrate, you know, celebrate being you. And so so that's when I started celebrating students. But so that's my biggest goal, just to make sure things are in place so that every student and we know we can only assume every student is not going to take advantage of everything. But I think it should be there for everybody. I know when I was the principal of San Andreas, I had teachers who say things like, well, you know, all these kids aren't going to make it. I said, well, since we know that, let's identify the ones that aren't going to make. Let's kick them out now and then we can give one hundred percent to the rest of them. But no one ever gave me a name. You know, the same thing when being a small school, being an alternative school you weren't supposed to have anymore than twenty five students in a class. Some classrooms had thirty. And I would say and they would say to me, you know, I have thirty students in my class. I said, tell me the five you want me to kick out because I knew only twenty two. Twenty three was showing up every day. I never got a list, but you know, so, so just removing those types of barriers, you know, and making the playing ground equal for everybody. When I got to San Andreas, they had a rule in place that if a student is tardy six time, five or six times, you drop them from the class and they have to go to somebody else's class. And I'd say, I don't have a problem with that. I said, but what happens to the teacher who's absent five or six times. So they dropped it. I always did stuff so they can take a look at it. Yeah, I said, but what do we do with the teacher? I said, we can't have two sets of rules here. And I knew on that campus there were some teachers who were coming in late. And so so I just want to make the playing ground even a good and accessible, you know, for all students.

Jennifer Tilton [01:10:52] Do you feel a little bit like the fight you're engaged in now is similar to the one that Francis Grice was engaged in way back then?

Margaret Hill [01:10:59] Yeah, yeah. I'm fighting the same fight Frances fought. Yeah, I do. I do feel that. Yeah, it's just a different time, a different day, you know, with different circumstances. But it's still there. Yeah. It's still there.

Jennifer Tilton [01:11:17] One thing we've been asking people, because, you know, young people who will listen to this tape in the future are living right now through the Black Lives Matter protests and other kind of movements that are fighting for justice in different ways. And I think it's really interesting to hear folks who lived through earlier eras of social protest to kind of tell us what's it like for you to live through this moment of protest and what are you thinking and feeling about that?

Margaret Hill [01:11:48] Well, there's so many similarities it's unbelievable. So many similarities. I know with the pandemic, I mean, even things people blame on the pandemic, kids have gone back to school and there are a number of fights. So people called and said, look, I don't know what this pandemic did, but the kids are fighting, I said they were fighting for the pandemic. I said I went to elementary school in late forties, they were fighting then. You know, I said I don't know what the problem is other than you tell them this is the reason you don't fight. You know, these are the consequences and things of that nature. I said, but, you know, it's still there it's how we deal with it. You know, we didn't have to deal with 40000 students in my whole city. I didn't think there were two thousand students going to elementary or high school. But in fact, I know they weren't. But, you know, I just said that you just kind of got to kind of deal with the circumstances. When everybody was saying, well, I can't wait to get back. I said, get back to what what was going on that was so good. I said, we didn't have 100 percent kids graduating. You know, I said, who wants to get back to that? You know, I said, we need to take a look at the past and build our future. Now, don't worry about what happened in the past. You know, and I feel the same way when they said, look, kids are behind a full year. And I'm saying, behind who everybody was out of school its not like California was out and everybody else was in. I say everybody's out of school. What do you mean behind? You know, I don't I don't see I don't see where that's a big problem, you know, I don't see why that's a big problem at all. I knew when I graduated from high school, I didn't know everything. And I don't think school is set up for, you know, everything at a certain time. But but yeah.

Jennifer Tilton [01:13:50] Yeah. And sort of as you kind of watch the Black Lives Matter protest now, you said that it seems a little bit like some of the protests when you were a kid, when you were younger. What does it, what does it seem like to you?

Margaret Hill [01:14:04] With the protest? I'm not a protester. When what's his name? Martin. The one who was killed by a security guard. The young kid in Florida was killed. I can't think of his first name, but I know I got a call from some organizers in Los Angeles. They say, Margaret, we want to come up there and organize a protest and we need your support. And I said, I can't give you my support in organizing a protest. I said I've been there, done that, and I said all I can remember, Jose Belardo having his back, having a problem with his back, thats the only thing I remember from that. I don't remember a whole lot of good. I said. So I don't, I don't protest that way. I said, and the other thing that happens, you going to come up here to protest, you have the knuckleheads going to go out and get arrested. Parents can't pay the rent now. They got to pay to get them out of jail. And I said, someone subject to get stabbed, someone subject to get shot. And I said, if you want to protest, I'll tell you how to protest, I said, if you want to start, because I understand Martin was a B student, college, you know prep, type student. I said, if you want to raise some money, you know, or have donations of money so we can set up some scholarships to say to kids, you don't have to protest to get better. You can go to college,

you can go to a trade school, you can do whatever you want to, and we're going to pay for it. You know, I said I said that's the way you change the world, you know, not by protesting, but through education. And if you want to do that, I'm on board. And that was the end of that conversation. I said, but no, I'm not going out in the streets and I'm not going to encourage anybody to go out in the streets. Yeah, and I said it's based on what happened in the 50s with me. Right? Yeah, right. Yeah.

Jennifer Tilton [01:16:16] That that visceral memory of sort of.

Margaret Hill [01:16:18] Yeah, yeah, I see. But I'm not saying I'm not willing to do anything. That's it. But it has to be meaningful to me. Mm hmm.

Jennifer Tilton [01:16:25] That's really interesting. Well we have been talking a long time and so I think maybe we should sort of end it there. I guess I'd say if there's any last thing you feel like we didn't talk about that you feel like it's really important either from your life or from that you think maybe Frances would have been writing in her autobiography, which we don't get to have, that you'd like to end us with?

Margaret Hill [01:16:54] I wish I had more information on Frances. I was going over to see Frances quite often. I mean, to the extent I had a key to her house, which I guess the saddest thing I regret the most is I didn't go over to get her papers because the caregiver, not the caregiver, the executor said someone else is picking them up and I should have just done it and I didn't. So I feel guilty about that because I could have saved she had boxes of stuff. And as we talked about photos, as I would go through stuff in the house when I found out that she wanted to put her book and get her book done? I would take them to her. Whenever I would go out. I said, oh, look at these pictures I found, and I even had a copy of her son's obituary. I don't think she knew where her's was. So she was grateful for that. So that's the one thing that I regret the most, you know, not being able and knowing I was just a door key away because I had the key to the house. Yeah. And so other than that, she began to share some things with me. And I think I have some on a video. If I do, Jennifer, I'll send that to you. Yeah. Yeah, I'll send the video to you. Some things that she shared with me, but all I can say, she was a great woman. She was a great woman who was not appreciated by a whole lot of people. But but she cared for San Bernardino. Yes, she really cared about San Bernardino. And for someone to give up both of your kids, you know, and I pretty much saw her giving up her kids.

Jennifer Tilton [01:20:17] What do you mean?

Margaret Hill Well, because she was such a workaholic, she, both her kids were overweight and Francis would take them to food like 10:00 at night, 11:00 at night, and, you know, it's not time to eat hamburgers and fries and drink Cokes and go to bed. So she loved them. She loved them. But she she fought for everybody's kids and hers didn't come out, you know, the way she wanted them to. So she did, she talked about that, you know, quite a bit losing her kids and. I got the. Um. And I probably keep it forever, but I have. Let me see if I can find it. Did you ever meet Francis?

Jennifer Tilton No, never.

Margaret Hill [01:20:19] Well, I hope I haven't lost it.

Jennifer Tilton [01:20:30] Is it a photo?

Margaret Hill [01:20:32] No, it's the last voicemail

Jennifer Tilton [01:20:45] What do you remember about it?

Margaret Hill [01:20:48] It was just basically her voice. Mm-Hmm. Yeah, it was basically her voice. I'm just wondering over a period of time.

Jennifer Tilton [01:21:01] If they disappear.

Margaret Hill [01:21:15] Hmm. OK, these were text messages, but I thought I had some voicemails from her, but she died January the.. No, I got a recording from her someplace

Jennifer Tilton [01:21:37] She died January when?

Margaret Hill [01:21:39] Either the first or December the thirty first She died, um, New Year's Eve or new Year's Day.

Jennifer Tilton [01:21:53] And what do you feel like her legacy is in San Bernardino?

Margaret Hill [01:21:57] Um, she was a builder. She was what you call a true entrepreneur because she she dealt with things that she didn't have a lot of knowledge about, but she knew how to get it done and she knew how to involve the right people to get it done. Um, that would always be my, that's the legacy that I feel she left, that she was courageous enough to step out there, even though she was out there by herself. You know, she did that.

Jennifer Tilton [01:22:35] And and why did Operation Second Chance kind of crumble in the end and not, not be able to kind of sustain itself through the kind of 80s?

Margaret Hill [01:22:45] It crumbled because the city wanted those buildings and it was after Bob Holcomb's days. And I don't, I don't know how, you know, what strategy was used. I remember Frances she did I think, she tied herself or had somebody tie herself to a tree when they said they were going to take the property.

Jennifer Tilton Really?

Margaret Hill Yeah, it was, it was to that extent. And and I'm going to call her sister..... And I'mma call Marleen and ask what is the story? How did Frances lose that.

Jennifer Tilton [01:23:31] Well, see if Marlene would talk to us too, to tell her sister's story, because was she hear during that whole time too? That would be wonderful. She probably was in some of those League of Women, League of Mothers meetings in those early days, even maybe?

Margaret Hill [01:23:46] don't know Marlene get involved to that extent.

Jennifer Tilton [01:23:49] Yeah, but she would know her sister at least.

Margaret Hill [01:23:51] But she would know. She would know some of it, yeah. I will Jennifer.

Jennifer Tilton [01:23:59] Yeah, that would be great. Well, thank you so much for talking to us and telling these stories and remembering. We really appreciate it.

Margaret Hill [01:24:07] Well, thanks. I'm probably 10 years ago, I would remember a lot more

Jennifer Tilton [01:24:11] True for all of us. All right.

Jennifer Tilton [01:24:19] Tell me about some of the places on Mt. Vernon that you remember some of the businesses, OK?

Margaret Hill [01:24:23] There was Geri's Velvet Lounge and I think the place was called Crazy Cow. Top Hat. And then there were a few barber shops there and know Aces was one of the barber shops there. A beauty barber shop with Artelles and Pierce had a gas station at Mount Vernon near 16th. the Kola Shannon was on Mount Vernon. We even had a Bank of America, believe it or not, on Mount Vernon when I got here. Then as you move south, you get into the Hispanic places. I know Mitla's Cafe, Mexico Cafe was down there, I believe, on Mount Vernon. Where else do I remember

Jennifer Tilton [01:25:21] You were talking about the Penguin Club?

Margaret Hill [01:25:22] OK? The Penguin Club was not on Mt. Vernon. It looked like it was about the size of an outhouse, but it was on Baseline almost across from California Street. And those are the places that I think most people went to. Now, I don't know if I mentioned the Elsa Lounge, which is on Mount Vernon, yeah.

Jennifer Tilton [01:25:46] And would these were kind of just social places or would sound like, you know, political meetings and things like that happen at them?

Margaret Hill [01:25:53] They were social places. Yeah, social place. Yeah.

Jennifer Tilton [01:25:58] And if you have to if you tried to describe what that kind of community felt like in the early 70s when you would kind of walk down Mt. Vernon or go out there, what what did it feel like? What was it? What was exciting about it? What was?

Margaret Hill [01:26:10] Well, people were friendly, you know, for the most part. There was still some issues, especially, you know, there were a couple of gang activities going on in this city. So you just have to be careful, you know what you saw and what you do and where you were at different times. But I don't ever remember being afraid to go any place in San Bernardino, you know? I mean, I'm not afraid now to go any place, but I was not there either. Yeah, but I feel I felt pretty comfortable. I felt the places I would shop at on Mt. Vernon and the places I would go to. I felt very respected. Mm hmm. Yeah. Yeah, yeah.

Jennifer Tilton [01:26:56] And people really knew each other

Margaret Hill [01:26:58] and people knew each other. Oh, and then I forget about Kennedy Barber and Beauty Supply, Bob Parker had Hudson's shoes. Then Valerie Pope Ludlum had a boutique and a a hair salon.

Jennifer Tilton [01:27:15] You remember what that one was called?

Margaret Hill [01:27:16] I don't. Yeah, I really don't. Right? And. I can't think of anything. We mentioned the Kola Shanna. And I know Mr Johnson had a garage out of place and yeah, and other than that, it was churches for the most part. Lots of churches.

Jennifer Tilton [01:27:42] Yeah. Well, great. Thank you.

End of Interview:

[01:27:39]