

Transcript – Feven Teklu, Staff

Narrator: Feven Teklu

Interviewer: Mary Murphy, Nancy L. Buc '65 Pembroke Center Archivist

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Mary Murphy: Okay, good morning. My name is Mary Murphy and I am the Nancy L. Buc Pembroke Center Archivist at Brown University. Today is June 18, 2020 and I'm sitting this morning with another woman of Brown, Brown University affiliated woman, who's sitting with us today to provide her oral history, not only during the time of COVID, which was the original set piece for this collection of interviews, but also all of the civic unrest that has followed in the subsequent weeks and with the specific police killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis, Minnesota, and national demonstrations that followed. So at this time, I'm going to ask my interviewee to introduce herself. Thank you.

Feven Teklu: Sure. My name is Feven Teklu, and I am the Senior Leadership Giving Officer in the Office of Advancement here at Brown [1:00] University. And I've worked at Brown for over three years now.

MM: Okay.

FT: Oh, and I'm in, I'm in Harlem, New York as we speak.

MM: Right. So, Feven, we, can you, it has been a lot. Our, we have been going through it all, as a nation starting in the beginning of March, actually, even before that, as word of a global pandemic came to New England. And you may have heard at that time that we're beginning to collect oral histories. So I think with all of the complexities, I think I'm going to start from the end and just ask you, why were you interested in contributing your thoughts on this time? What struck out to you from the call for us to collect oral histories? What compelled you [2:00] to record your story today?

FT: Sure, I think it was, it was a, sort of a lot of things. As part of the advancement team, I had the opportunity to hear you speak to advancement and share some of the oral stories that we've received before. This is an area of personal interest. I've been interviewing my grandmother until she passed three years ago, for about the last 15 years, every time I go visit her in Ethiopia, just because I feel like it's important to capture moments when you're in the moment and I also have always worried about losing the significance of things if you don't hear from, from the person at that time. So having you speak to us made me think oh, I should probably do that for myself. For my, you know, for my daughter.

And then specifically thinking about COVID, I thought [3:00] there's so much going on right now from a mental health perspective for myself, it might just be worth it to take that opportunity to reflect because the ups and downs, the roller coasters that are have been in have been intense.

MM: So I'll ask that you, as we begin our conversation here today, that you step back, and if you are willing to, share a little setup, set up your environment and where you are, if you could share a little bit about your family background, if you'd be willing to do that, and what, what brings you to New York and, and tell us a little bit about your backstory.

FT: Sure, it actually plays a lot into why I'm at Brown as well. So I'll give you the abbreviated version, which is that I was born in Kiev, Ukraine. Both my parents are Ethiopian, and during the late '70s, early '80s, the Soviet Union was trying to foster communism in Ethiopia and one of the ways they did that was to educate students in the Soviet Union. [4:00] My parents were the male and female scholarship winners in fine arts, met on a flight over to Ukraine, married, had me, and then when they visited my grandparents, my grandparents said, "You're still students, we will raise her up." And so my grandparents raised me in Ethiopia, in [inaudible] for the first seven years of my life. At that time, there was a civil war that was going on in Ethiopia. My parents were able to get visas to come to the US, and they went to Dallas, Texas, where they have family. And they started, even though they had these master's degrees in fine arts, they started working sort of from the bottom up. My dad was a, you know, janitor, my mom alongside him until they sort of worked their way up to my mom now works in healthcare and my dad was working in the hotel industry until he got laid off during COVID. And the point [5:00] that I just

kind of want to highlight is that when I came, I missed having a lot of kids around me. And I felt like life in America was very lonely. My parents were very afraid to have me go throw out the trash by myself, even outside our apartment. They, they probably were more aware of things than I was as a child and just – and so I saw a brochure for boarding school called Milton Hershey School in Hershey, Pennsylvania. And I begged them to send me at the age of nine, I begged them to send me to boarding school. And they said, you're just nine and I said, "Well, this is an investment in my education," because I was precocious. They sent me to this boarding school, which was originally set up for orphan boys and girls. And then by the time I attended, it was set up for kids that were from financially needy backgrounds, often single homes, single family homes. And I attended school there in Hershey, Pennsylvania. Very diverse school, but very, [6:00] very rural. You know, we had farm chores, house chores. And then I, they announced during my senior year after high school, that they were providing scholarships, full scholarships to college, and then I was able to go to Boston College on a full ride. I should note that from the ages of actually starting to attend Milton Hershey at the age of 11, until I graduated at 18, my full education, health care, housing, clothing, every single thing was paid for. And that's for every single student that was attending the school at the time, which I think was 1100 students. So –

MM: How did you – just to –

FT: Yeah.

MM: How did you find out about the boarding school again? How did you, did you –

FT: So there was a brochure that was sent to our house. I think one of my elementary school teachers had sort of checked the box, but I don't know, but it looks like the cover – The brochure looked [7:00] like the cover of Sound of Music and that was my favorite movie even from being a child in Ethiopia. And I thought if I could run in fields with other kids this will be great. And so after I went, I never looked back and I think back, you know, to thinking about sort of that one decision and it changed the trajectory of my whole life in terms of, in terms of access to education, being able to study what I wanted to study in college, to just feeling like I had a, I had a real like open slate to do what I, what I wanted with this life that I'd been given. And I

eventually found my way into, I started as a student caller at Boston College asking people for, for money on the on the phone. The main reason I did it in full honesty was because I found I would get nervous when people ask me [8:00] spontaneous questions. And I thought if I can get someone to pay me while I practice this even better. And little did I realize that there would be this would be part of my life's work, right? Because now I get to help do the same thing. I get to help individuals think about how they want to pay it forward. And luckily, it gets to be in a way that, that's personally meaningful to me because it's oftentimes, scholarships and financial aid support.

MM: So how did you come to New York?

FT: So when I was in boarding school, we came on a school trip to New York City and it was through a program to do pure education training for, for our school. And I remember driving through Times Square, and then going to see Cats and thinking to myself, I need to live here at some point in my life. This is the city that's meant to for me. [9:00] I felt the energy. And then after college, I worked two years in Boston, but I just knew it kind of stayed with me that I wanted to live in New York. I quit my job, and I came, you know, got an apartment here in the city, I'd saved up and came here and started looking for work, which probably –

MM: Woa!

FT: Doing that now. But it worked. It worked out. It worked out.

MM: And so what year was that that you came, arrived?

FT: Sure. So I came to New York in 2006.

MM: Okay.

FT: Yeah.

MM: Okay, so you've been there ever since.

FT: Yes.

MM: Okay and so let's fast forward into the beginning of this year, you're working for Brown, you're doing your thing, you're doing development, life is relatively normal. And then tell us what happened.

FT: Yeah, so I wouldn't necessarily call it paranoid, but I like to be prepared for the worst case scenario. [10:00] And I was reading, I read the newspapers. I read the international section and I was reading about what was going on in China. And I thought to myself, this sounds crazy, but this also sounds like it could easily come here. My friends, family, coworkers, thought I was crazy because I think at the beginning to mid-February, I put in my first Amazon and Walmart orders for making sure that we had extra food in the house. I have a two year old I wanted to make sure she had milk so I was researching shelf stable milks. So I mean, honestly, like, I didn't really think that COVID would be here, especially in the way that it is now. But I just thought, let's just get prepared just in case.

And then in March, and then in March, you know, I think it was March 17, or right around that time that [11:00] Brown closed on New York City Office and Brown campus offices also started closing. I had just found out I want to say, two, three weeks, no, eight weeks prior to that, that I was pregnant – that I am pregnant.

MM: Oh my gosh, Well, congratulations.

FT: Thank you. I'm five months pregnant now.

MM: Oh my word.

FT: And as COVID started up, you know, I was of course worried and reading as many articles as I could find about pregnancy and COVID. Honestly, especially in the beginning, there was not much except for women who are in their third trimester. So personally, it also changed sort of the

relationship with my body here. I was like, wanting to be fully excited, but also fully sort of mentally trying to prepare myself if there were going to be complications due to COVID with me having this child. And so [12:00] I was kind of holding those two things but couldn't share that with anybody because, you know, you just, it was too early. And also, because it was early, my first doctor's appointment had to be at my doctor's office, which they change doctors' offices and where the different doctors would be in the hospitals and so actually had to go to the, to the hospital to visit with my doctor. And so there was just a lot of nervousness around that. In New York City one of the main worries is transportation. We don't have a car I normally take the subway everywhere. The doctor's office is three miles away from my house. So I walked the three miles there and I walked back. You know, they hadn't, at my first appointment they hadn't started saying anything about masks. But I was, I tend to be cautious and so [13:00] I, I wore one.

MM: You did?

FT: I did. I did. And thank goodness, my doctor just kind of reaffirmed to me, she said, "You know, you're, you're at risk, because you're, you know, you're immunocompromised because you're pregnant and therefore you need to wear gloves and, and masks everywhere." And so, you know, there was a bit about that that calmed me down, because then I knew it wasn't just me being paranoid. But at the same time, you're kind of thinking to yourself, man, wearing gloves. Okay, you know, I'll start. And just, yeah. So. So it's had this layer of sort of complication, right? Of just wanting to be careful because it doesn't feel like it's just my own life, right? So.

MM: I felt you know, I think that's really interesting about the, almost like a paranoia. Like, I felt like am I being paranoid by doing this? Or like, [14:00] am I being weird by, by, by being concerned about the mask? And now, I'm furious that they, you know that it was like don't wear a mask for so many weeks. And there was a suggestion that was all good when they didn't know. And so I've kind of, for my own self, like it's been, it's this, the pandemic makes you kind of question yourself in some ways, especially as it started. So.

FT: For sure, and I think it's also, you know, I think it's also sort of brought into light this sort of

feeling like, like, government is not necessarily here to just protect you, right? And that, that's a theme that I'm sure will play out during the course of our conversation. But I think we all kind of thought, like, why not wear masks originally, it's, you know, it didn't. It didn't make sense. And so a lot of us sort of doubted it, but why would you tell us that? And then you kind of get this understanding, [15:00] okay, maybe they're accounting for human behavior, and there's a limited supply, and things like that. But then, but then you just, it leaves you with this feeling like, if that wasn't true at the time, it makes you doubt sort of everything else that comes afterwards. So then you're like, you know, your paranoia with everything that's out there. And I know at least in the beginning weeks, I consumed so much media, so much that I had to force myself to, to limit how much media I would consume, because I was trying to sort of do my own analysis of everything that was out there, right? On top of just trying to stay safe, just trying to see what else is coming next. So it's been that part has been also a lot.

MM: So if I can now ask you, you know, so then suddenly, we all became locked in in many ways. And specifically [16:00] given that you're pregnant, you know, it's like frozen in time being in your home and maybe if you could explain what that experience, now we've been in this for a series of months, but that first couple of months where it's like 30 days, then 60 days. What was that period like for you?

FT: Sure, sure. So, I mean, one of the first pieces is that because I was immunocompromised, we had we had a nanny for childcare and we basically had to say, you know, we can't have you right now until we know what's going on. And she still is not back with us yet because of course, the situation really hasn't changed. And then my husband who travels a lot, and usually has government contracts with the Department of Defense, all of his contracts started getting cancelled. First officially delayed and then canceled. So financially, you know that piece, [17:00] we're thinking like, wow, our financial situation is changing quickly. So like, holding all of that, simultaneously with having a two year old who's very active, she is like, she is a ball of energy, but just trying to figure out how I could get work done and take care of her, and, and him having things that he could do here at home to do work. But just this feeling of, a feeling like the walls are kind of closing in around you. And also the idea of like, grocery shopping and did we truly, you know, had I calculated enough food for how long we would need to be here and what about

fresh food, and you'd go online and all the Fresh Direct slots, all the Whole Foods slots, Instacart, everything would just be, would just be [18:00] full, like you couldn't get a slot I would – I, it's kind of funny to me – but I would at night when I would go to sleep, you know, I would think about my grocery list and think about my two closest grocery shops. And my, my counting sheep or my way of calming myself down would be to mentally walk through the grocery stores to choose the most efficient route to get the groceries that I needed. And I could just visually do that. And that was like, my calming exercise, right? Which kind of shows you that I probably wasn't that calm. So yeah, so just all of this.

All of this and at the same time needing to be productive at work, which looked different. So my job is to raise money for the university and to create relationships. I work with about 200 alumni, and so initially just [19:00] reaching out to everyone and making sure that everyone was okay. And, you know, 200 thoughtful emails is also a lot. And so and so just trying to balance all these pieces and feeling physically, because I was in my first trimester, exhausted. And so, you know, there were nights when I would fall asleep before the baby would fall asleep, because I was just tired from the mental weight and also just from the, just from the pure exhaustion of having to balance it all.

MM: So it, yes. So then, so this is this is the part of the story in our lives that then I feel like as I've been doing, like, how, then there's another. So we're in the middle of this, this thing, this global thing. [20:00] And this is what I think makes this time so historic is we think we're on one story. We're on one path. And it's very hard. We're in one dip, I should say.

FT: Yeah.

MM: And we all go over the edge on, on another with, to another crisis globally. This is a global crisis.

FT: Yeah.

MM: So, tell me, if you are open to discussing, where – tell me about the first time as you're dealing with COVID and your family, or the pandemic –



FT: Yeah.

MM: Where you hear George Floyd's name, enter the conversation.

FT: So I actually I'm going to go a step back and start with the Amy Cooper incident in Central Park because, because I live [21:00] you know, 20 blocks away from where that happened. And so –

MM: If I could stop you and for our listeners 100 years from now, they're going to need the context. And so if you could tell the story of what happened.

FT: So, Amy Cooper, a white woman walking in Central Park is walking her dog and Christian – and I'm going to blank out on his name right now – a Black man who was birdwatching asks her to put the leash on –

MM: His last name is Cooper as well.

FT: Is it?

MM: I think it is Cooper. I think so.

FT: Maybe that's why I'm blanking.

MM: Yeah.

FT: So she, he asks her, Black man birdwatching, first of all, that's an oddity in itself, right from what we expect. She, he asks her to leash her dog and she says, "No." He ends up you know, he's done this often and that he goes on walks in this part of the park and this is where you can see a lot of birds and he has some dog treats. [22:00] You know, he goes to give a dog a treat. She gets really upset and she says to him, "I am going to call the, call the police and tell them that a Black man is threatening me." And at this stage, he has been walking with someone else, I believe his

sister, who starts taping that, the, the incident and she makes that call. And what is what is most poignant about this moment is that she realizes that as a Black man he should be afraid of the police, right? That he should be afraid of the system. She's using words like "Black man," "threatening me," and that that alone should have him cower. He just stands his ground. But the the, the fact that she was tuned into the racial inequities and the structural racism that exist, it was what was most felt by I think me and others. And so, so that that just really, that really hit me. [23:00] That really both in proximity to home. And also, oftentimes when we talk about racism, we talk about how people are sort of ignorant and not aware that they're being racist. And here she comes out after this instance saying that she's racist. And I'm sorry, saying she's not racist. And, and I'm like, if this situation doesn't embody it, like, what does? And so in the course of this, I have a group of friends that we have a WhatsApp chat, that we chat back and forth, and it's women from you know, Black, Asian, white, you know, we're all kind of, it's a pretty mixed group and, and we're having a conversation about this incident, and another friend messages me separately and says, "I'm having a hard time thinking about the Amy Cooper incident while thinking about George Floyd in Minnesota." And [24:00] I'm like, "What?" And I hadn't seen that on the news yet and, and so then I went looking and I saw the video of him getting murdered and, and I just like I, I couldn't, you know, you look at something and you just almost can't comprehend like, why is this happening? Like a human is being hurt, like stop. And I would say that things were probably quiet even about that incident even for three to four days afterwards. You heard it in, in, in some circles. You saw it in the paper. But it didn't quite have the, the call to action that it has now.

By the end of that week, I was on another call, a work call. And this had been weighing heavily on me, but on any of the work calls that I've gotten on it hadn't been mentioned and this one group, it was [25:00] a leadership group for women, and two of us in that group are Black. And somebody asked, "How are you doing?" And my colleague said, "I'm, I'm sad and I'm angry." And I thought, "Me too." And I hadn't let that part of me show up at work, right? Kind of try to, you try to compartmentalize, especially right now that there's so much going on. And over the course of the next week, that's all that, that was two weeks ago, that that anybody could talk about. And because I am one of four Black women in a team of approximately 60 frontline fundraisers, and because, I should mention, I'm also in an interracial relationship, my husband is white, I've had people coming [26:00] to me from in my workspace and in my personal space

and asking questions like, “How should we, how should we be reacting to this?” Asking questions for me to explain what happened. And asking, “What should we do now?” And it was a period of two weeks where I just cried like every day part of it as being, part of it is being pregnant, sure, but the other part of it is because of COVID, and this is where I’ll stop, because of COVID my husband can’t come to my ultrasound and prenatal visits, and we had planned on not finding out the gender until the baby was born. However, he wanted to feel a sense of connection to the baby, which is hard. And so we decided to find out the gender which we did a week before the George Floyd incident. [27:00] And it’s a boy. And although we are fully excited about that, it has tempered some of that excitement honestly with fear and, and so I’ve just kind of been trying to hold that, right? Of, of trying not to let the world in, I’m trying to sort of keep this baby protected, but also feeling a sense of real urgency about this moment because I want my boy to be able to, to live freely in this world. You know, and I found myself thinking, how old will he have to be before he feels the sense of danger? Or before the danger starts coming at him, right? Of, will it be when his voice cracks, [28:00] when he stops being cute when he’s a teenager. And so these thoughts have, have, you know, at times consumed me, and I’ve tried to move away from that because it’s emotionally just exhausting and difficult on top of everything else. So I, I’ll let you ask any questions, but I mean there’s, yeah.

MM: Yeah, I’m thinking a lot about Black women and prenatal care and all the articles and reporting on that subject in the last year. I feel like I’ve heard a number of things in the last year on that topic and, and the compounding of stress in people’s lives and everyone’s lives on prenatal care, but and for Black women specifically in urban centers, too. So have you found yourself, are you – this is a random – are you talking with other pregnant women in your community? Has there been solace through solidarity at all for you? [29:00]

FT: Well, it has. The other pregnant women that I know from my life here in New York are not Black. And so we’ve been talking but I’ve talked to other more, other Black mothers of white, of Black boys who worry about a lot of the same things. Part of my mom’s group – honestly, you know, living in New York you think about your space and what you need, especially thinking how long is COVID going to last. And we’ve thought about at times moving from New York but the maternal health piece is what keeps me here. I really trust my doctor, and I don’t want to, I

had a high risk pregnancy the first time around. I had preeclampsia later on in my pregnancy. I don't want to take any unnecessary risks and while it feels like you know, we're walking in a minefield of risks, [30:00] it's really important to me that I don't compromise that piece. I will say that I have never felt like a statistic as much as I did reading, reading about Black woman and maternal health.

I should just sort of pause here for a second, because I think it's important to note that I grew up in Ethiopia, in the sense that, you know, it's the only African country that has never been colonized and we take really great pride in that. Unfortunately, what often translates is when you come to America, you think of yourself as separate. You don't think of yourself as Black, you think of yourself as African. And unfortunately, or fortunately, I'm not sure you know, I think it's important to recognize that, that I am Black and I'm part of their, the African American history in America has been passed down to me, [31:00] not because my family has lived it but because of the color of my skin. And, but it wasn't until college that I truly recognized that I was Black until I was at Boston College and a cafeteria worker refused to serve me pancakes. And I didn't understand that. And after, like 45 minutes, I just got something else. And the other kids explained to me, that's what it was. And I hadn't, I hadn't, it was a real jarring moment for me because I had never had that. And, and I say that now because there's this idea that like, we're always kind of the exception to a rule, right? That there's, there's something different or special about us and for all of us as humans and, and reading about Black women and maternal health, I just kind of realized, wow, this, like sure socio-economic factors play into it, but actually, it is women like myself who consider themselves to [32:00] be successful, who are well educated, who are not being listened to when they're asking for, for, they're explaining their pain or asking for help, right? Serena Williams is a great example of a Black woman who right around the same time that I had a baby who had to make a case for her own needs as a, as a mother. And they didn't realize that she had an embolism or something like that at the time. Yeah. So, so it just, I feel like all of a sudden, like there's this recognition that, that yeah, that that I am part of something that I'm part of this group and therefore need to think differently about my health. And so it's played a lot into sort of the decisions that we've made during this time and how we move forward. Sorry I hope that answers your question.

MM: Yeah. I want to ask you about the [33:00] subsequent demonstrations that you maybe heard

from, I don't know if you participated, especially with being pregnant, but if you heard demonstrations or taught – tell me if you could paint, people who will be listening in years from now, a picture about the sights and sounds of the city as demonstrations began to pick up in your community.

FT: So the, you know, we knew the demonstrations were going on, but we, I think – we live on 113<sup>th</sup> and Manhattan Ave in, in Harlem right across from Morningside Park. It's a little bit secluded, in that it's right next to a park. And so we weren't hearing a lot, especially because we weren't leaving our house. One night, two weeks ago, I was feeling particularly exhausted mentally and thought, [34:00] you know, I need to meditate. And so I went to the same corner that I'm sitting in right now in our bedroom and I, I did a 10 minute meditation. And near the end of that I could hear police sirens. And I was surprised because it was about 9:45, 10pm and city wide curfew had been set in for 8pm previous night, maybe two nights before. So surprised that I that I could hear not just these police sirens but, but voices, people chanting and so I looked, you know, out to my left and saw protesters marching with police at the front and police at the back and they were chanting, "no justice, no peace." They were chanting George Floyd's name. They were chanting Breonna Taylor's name. And it was just [35:00] sort of unified voices. And it was, it felt really powerful to me. And then I went to take a picture and when I did, there was a row of policemen that were behind the group and they were, it was all peaceful, but as I was standing there, taking this picture outside my, my own window, I thought to myself, Oh my god, like, what if they look up and think that I'm a threat and want to shoot me, right? That was like my first thought, because there was this like, it was literally a row of maybe 10 policemen walking behind the whole, all the demonstrators. And so you know, I just kind of retreated to our living room. The next maybe two days later, we're outside our, outside our living, or inside our living room looking out the window and again, protesters were marching on the streets, saying "no justice, no peace." [36:00] And there were so many people and they were spaced out there were people with kids and our daughter stood at the window and I stood the window and we looked out and we opened the window and we shouted along with them and it felt like oh, we're, we're part of this. And I'll be honest, I'm not a big fan of large crowds. So I wasn't partic – on a normal day, let alone during COVID and let alone with the threats of police brutality, even in peaceful protests. But my husband said to me, "You know, I think for her for our daughter, like I

think it's important that she's out there. I want her to know that she was a part of this history in some way." And so for the next weekend, we knew there was a march that was happening near us. We have a set of N95 masks, we decided we would wear them. We would keep our distance but, but go. Made a sign that, small sign for her that said, "my life matters," [37:00] and on the backside that said, "Black Lives Matter." And, and there was a moment when everyone kneeled and raised a fist, and we were right there with them. And you could feel – it was Black people, it was white people, it was I think there were about 2,000 people visible from where we could stand in the circle at Frederick Douglass and 110th. And it was, although we were we had to leave before the full start of the march because two year olds don't last too well in protests, it felt really powerful to be a part of that moment and there. And my decision making finally about whether or not to attend had to do with the fact that I felt like I needed to do this for my son, if not else for all my, for all other Black people in that – [38:00] Here I am fearing for my life, but here he will be fearing for his life if I don't help fight for this change right now. And so it just felt like the choice became clear in that moment when I just it was. Yeah.

MM: I think it's such a really poignant thing that you're sharing about, and it's making me think about the power of moms at this time during the demonstrations. And the fact that George Floyd called for his mother, like, that's so powerful, and for you, that must just be, just being pregnant and like feeling that, that central focus on motherhood and the power of moms, do you have any thoughts on that?

FT: Yeah, you know, I it's interesting to me that a lot of this movement specifically has been led by Black women, and that there is a reason for that. Yes, he called her his mother and I think you know, there have been signs that say, you know, when George Floyd, when George Floyd called for his mother, all mothers are you know, need to respond to that [39:00] call. Also, as a mother, I have to tell you like the sentiment of not being able to breathe amidst all of this, all of this stress, exhaustion, pressure of needing to talk about this with everyone. This element of like you just you really can't catch your breath. But to go back to the point of, of women, I think that there, you know, there's an element for Black men where when they go out there, they're, they're at risk. And it's not like we as Black women aren't either, but they're, the aggression is, is tied to Black men a lot quicker than to, than to women. And so, I think that there's an element that has

meant that we feel the weight of having carried these men and boys, right, [40:00] and therefore, feel that urge to protect. I can't tell you. I mean, the sentiments I've had out often of just wanting to keep this baby in my belly and keep this baby safe, right? And, and I think there's an element of when they, these kids go out into the world and not being able to protect them in the same way and feeling like we need to do our part to take care of all of the Black men, women, children that are out there that that I feel very linked to right now as, as a pregnant woman and as a mother.

MM: Well, I think is, I don't want to take too much of your time today. But I do you know this interview, your interview today, will join a set of gosh, I think we're nearing in on 300 interviews in total that are part of our oral history project. We've collected dozens during this time. And the oldest interview we have is from a graduate of the class of 1911 [41:00] from Pembroke College, so I like folks to think about the long game when they're recording these interviews. And I want to just offer a free space now, if I have not asked you about something that you wanted me to ask you about, that I missed, or that you just want to make sure you get on the record, as you think about researchers, students, the public 50 years, 100 years from now listening to your thoughts today, is there anything else that you want to make sure you get on the record? And now I'd asked you to do that.

FT: Yeah. I've been involved in many conversations with many people. I've had a family member, white family member, part of the family of married into, that has asked me to explain why Black lives matter if all lives matter. I've, I've had, you know, coworkers, well-meaning, that have asked, you know, what should we do? And I in this moment, I find myself [42:00] desperately, desperately hopeful that this will be a moment of change. But also just really worried that this will be another headline that will have been a surge in awareness, but that will be forgotten. That we will go back to the way that things were and I, I really hope that people have been changed by this. I think a lot of what I'm hearing now, which I, is a difficult space, is that that white people are being asked to do the work, that it's no longer just up to us Black people to, to understand racism, that it doesn't need to be just our lived experience that informs it, but that, that, that there is a necessary space for [43:00] white people to be a part of the change. And I'm seeing more, more white people being a part of that. It also makes you very aware I've, I can't help but notice in conversations that I've had, big group conversations that are

all on zoom these days, you know, doing online calls, that people are very nervous to use the words “Black” still. And part of, you know, part of this moment, I think calls for education of everyone and I have tried to do my part in saying to people, you can use the word “Black.” Kids at the age of six months recognize racial differences. Like this is science right, but there’s nothing wrong with that. But also, I have been, I personally have been trying to be intentional about what I ask of people, which has been really hard to, hard because oftentimes people are coming to ask something of me and will say, you know, “Know that I’m [44:00] an ally.” And those are important words, but I think this is a moment of action. And so as a Black woman, I know that me and other Black women bear a lot of the burden of, of needing to educate, and that shouldn’t be the case. And so I have just tried to be thoughtful, but this is uncomfortable, kind of conversations for people. I’m trying to be compassionate in my, in my, in my interactions. And I’ve also been very open. Like I’ve had very open relationships with people and I know that that’s why they come to me. But also I’m sort of realizing the burden that’s been put upon me and I recently read a quote that has been, I won’t get the exact quote right, but it’s Audre Lord, Black [45:00] writer lesbian feminist, and it talks about how when the body is political, self-care self-love, self-compassion is, is an act of political rebellion. And I’ve really taken that to heart. And trying to protect myself while still trying to create a space for people like that I can help educate and it’s a fine, it’s a fine balance. And I feel it especially so because I’m pregnant, that I feel the need to not just protect me but this baby. And part of that is knowing that I need to do, shape the world in the way that I want it to be but also to truly like protect myself. So there’s, there’s a lot that this moment asks of us and I just I just hope that it, it, that this will truly be a mark in history that, that changes how things go forward. [46:00]

MM: Okay, well I think that is a really lovely and important place to stop. I want to thank you today for opening your heart and sharing your thoughts with us. This now does become part of a historical record so I want to thank you for that and I will stop the recording now.

FT: Thank you.

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