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An Oral History of the CCNY 1960's SEEK**

**Interview with Francee Covington
Interviewer: Sean Molloy**

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In 1965, City College launched its “Pre-Bac” program by admitting and supporting 113 poor and working class students who did not qualify under CCNY’s traditional standards. (Levy 1965). Pre-Bac was a huge success. After one year, 72% of its students were still studying at CCNY. Over half had a “C” average or higher. (Berger 1966 3). Renamed “SEEK” in 1966, the program got even better: 85% of the new Fall 1966 and Fall 1967 SEEK students were still studying at CCNY after one year. (Berger 1969 Table 40). Close to 40% of the 1965-67 SEEK students would graduate from City College by 1972. (Frost 1972 1). One of those graduates was Francee Covington. After graduating in 1970, Francee worked as field producer for WCBS. She then earned a graduate degree in political anthropology in Ghana. Over her 35 year career as a television writer, director and producer in New York, Boston and San Francisco, Francee has won many awards, including five Emmy nominations.

Francee Covington: “My mother and I... just the two of us, formed a picket line around the school.” Well I was born at Kings County Hospital in Brooklyn and I grew up in Brooklyn and I had a great upbringing, strong parents, um an only child, uh the first grandchild [00:02:00] on both sides, so I was truly spoiled and doted upon which um I had no complaints about.

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Covington: My father was a truck driver and would-be poet and my mother—when I was very young she worked in a factory, collating papers. And that was before everything was done by machine including putting all of the carbon between sheets a paper to make pads um for taking phone messages and that

sort of thing. And then later she um went to school—to night school—to really brush up on secretarial skills and she worked for quite some time for the State of New York, uh in the speaker's office as a receptionist.

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Covington: And my father, he grew up in Inglewood, New Jersey. So he went to St. Johns for one semester and that was all that he could manage.

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Covington: Well my mother wanted to go to college early on in her life. She was one of five children. She was the second eldest between two boys, before, much later two girls also came along. And she had a conversation with my grandfather which she told me more than once, about going to college to become a home economics teacher. And he told her in no uncertain terms that he would not sacrifice to send her to college, because all girls were going to do would be to grow up and have babies, get married, that sort of thing. So he would send the boys [00:04:00], he would be willing to send the boys—well, the boys were not interested. And so my mother got married and had children.

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Covington: At home our dinner conversations were about work and school and what was going on in the world. So, I got a very good worldview from my parents, uh about the plight of African- Americans, about Marcus Garvey, about Malcolm X, about the work that Dr. King was doing, and about my responsibility to assist in uplifting black people. It was just that simple. It was not that you would sit on the sidelines and do nothing or say nothing and that you would always be someone that people could hold up as an example of how a young woman with a brain would conduct herself.

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Covington: When I was in high school, I was the President of the Youth Branch of the, um NCCJ, which was then the National Conference of Christians and Jews. And we would spend summers at Briarcliff Manor in New York, uh—a week. All of the kids who were involved with NCCJ activities, and we would talk about human relations, we would talk about civil rights, we would talk about so many different things. Um, and I also was a youth member of the Congress of Racial Equality. My aunt, Mary Ellen, who had recommended me for the SEEK program—she was a field secretary for CORE. So, the Congress of Racial Equality was headed by, uh James Farmer who became a cabinet member [00:06:00] uh later on in life. And we were demonstrating against a lot of the inequities in public schools in

New York. Even at that time in New York City, the black schools got the worst textbooks, the most inexperienced teachers. It was a travesty. So there was a big boycott one February 3rd where all of the black children were encouraged to stay out of school. And my mother and I were assigned the school all the way out in Brooklyn and it was cold, it was snowing, when it wasn't sleeting and just the two of us formed a picket line at the school going round and round. My mother took off work that day to be with me. And to this day it is one of the most incredible gifts she could have given me, that I think that this cause is so important, I think that you kids are so important that I will forgo work for this day to demonstrate.

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Covington: When the um, World Book Encyclopedias arrived and they were just so stunningly gorgeous and I knew my mother had gotten this extravagance for me in junior high school and I would just flip through the pages and read things, you know. And it was the kind of home where I would say, "oh mom, can I have this new whatever?" "No. We don't have money for that." You know, "Mom can you buy me this?" "No, we don't have that kind of money." And then I will say mom, "I saw this book, that I really want." And it was always, "Well how much is it?" So that was [00:08:00] something that was supported always. And brains in my family were considered paramount. Um, even visiting my grandmother in North Carolina during the summers when I was small, um and she would take me downtown, you know, to get this and that with her. And she would run into someone who knew her or someone who is not negro, uh she would run into someone and they would say, "Oh, Lilly, is that your granddaughter? She is so cute!" And my grandmother would pull me to her and she would say, "And she's right smart too." So I knew smart was an important thing and I knew that college was this enchanted land that I wanted to go to.

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Covington: And I went to PS 3 in Brooklyn and PS 11 in Brooklyn then I went to Lefferts Junior High School and then on to George W. Wingate High School. And I was very active in school. I was in the uh — uh the Human Relations Club. I became President of the Human Relations Club. I worked on our literary magazine uh, in high school. Um, it was called "Spectrum" and um published in that. And just lots of activities, lots of activities including writing activities— because we had an annual showcase and competition called Sing. So each class in the high school—um, each grade—put together the equivalent of a Broadway show. So I was most often on the writing team writing the script for their show and I mean everything was collaborative, so there wasn't just one scriptwriter. And, uh people would write new lyrics to Broadway tunes [00:10:00] that were very popular at that time. And one year in addition to that I was in charge of

costuming and my mother was furious—because of course I didn't do all the sewing, she did all the sewing.

“I was so happy. I was elated. I was, like, ‘Yes! It’s finally going to happen for me, that I go to college....’”

Well, I always knew I wanted to go to college. I was in an academic high school and a lot of my friends were becoming Regents scholars and, you know, this is like May or June. And I knew my parents always wanted me to go to college, but by that time, by the time I was in high school my mother had remarried and the mechanics of exactly how to get from point A to point B kind of fell by the wayside. So, I was left without a choice on — at the end of May, because I'd missed so many uh crucial deadlines. And I went to work for the New York Telephone Company in Downtown, Brooklyn. I was an information operator uh that summer, handling all five boroughs.

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Covington: My aunt called me, my aunt Mary Ellen Fifer called me to let me know that a search was on for students to come into a new program at CCNY, called the SEEK program and she said that I should expect a call from someone or that I should follow up with the person she gave me the contact information. I can't exactly remember which way it went, but at any point—uh, one point—I did go and talk to the lady about uh this opportunity and she was giving me these wonderful ideas about what to [00:12:00] expect. You know, your books will be paid for, you'll get a stipend to cover transportation, and that sort of thing. And I was elated; I was like, “Oh good, I really want this,” and she asked for our address and I gave her the address, because at that time we lived in Crown Heights, right across the street from the Brooklyn Botanic Garden. And she called me a few days later and she says “I'm really sorry, but the address you gave me doesn't fall within uh locations for you to qualify.” And I said “oh, well I was just there with my aunt for the summer since my parents are away.” So then I gave her the address where we had lived for, practically forever on Fulton Street in the heart of Bedford Stuyvesant. And she says “oh that address is fine, you're good to go.” I was like, “Yes!” And I was like, “Oh my goodness, I fibbed but what—what else could I do?” I couldn't do anything because I saw it so clearly it was right there, I was about to lose it. And so I snatched it back.

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Covington: And she said that I was accepted into the SEEK program. I was so happy. I was elated. I was like yes it's finally going to happen for me that I go to college right after high school, which is what I always wanted. And um, my parents were so happy—that would be my mother and her husband at the time, were so happy. I just floated and when they said show up to CCNY,

I'd never been to the campus before uh and when I got there and I looked around, it was so magnificent. It was [00:14:00] um so stunning, it was like an Ivy League University. You know, the kind that you saw in movies with these stately halls and people scurrying about and looking very important and books everywhere. It was great. It was really great.

“Everyone knew that this was an opportunity not to be wasted.”

So by the time I got to City College, I had an idea of what I wanted to do and that every person could make some small difference.

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Covington: I went to the March on Washington with Congress of Racial Equality, August 28th, which was also my mother's birthday. We gathered at 5:00 AM and I went down, and all through college – high school and college um The Women's Movement, uh the mobilization against the war in Vietnam, classicism, sexism—all of those issues were important to me. And I was a part of a lot of conversations related to that: um, the moratorium, just so many things. So, I say that in addition to the fact that the first campaign I ever volunteered on was Shirley Chisholm for Congress.

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Covington: So my first semester at City College, um I met Dean Ballard and I was so impressed. I was like, “Wow, he's a Dean,” because in high school we didn't have deans; we just had principals, and vice-principals, and that sort of thing. And he was such a warm man, big guy. I became friends with him and his [00:16:00] wife, Audreen, and actually I used to baby-sit their daughter later on. But at first blush, he was just a great guy. He welcomed us all there and told us where his office was, to see him at any time if we had any problems. We received our schedules and started our Pre-Bac classes as well as I think one um you know, regular class. And it was on; it was to the races. And we did not know each other previously, the SEEK students, we come— we come from all five boroughs. Um, no one from my high school I knew and I—it was the same with most of the students, that there were people—that we were all new. We were all—we had new teachers, they were new to the program, we were new to the program. And, uh it was impressed upon us that as pioneers, uh we would be paving the way for future classes if things went well. And we wanted things to go well. We wanted things to go well for us and we wanted to go— things to go well for the people who were to follow us. And our teachers were, were you know, very supportive, but very, um rigorous in their training of us. And it was such, um an intellectual environment. You know, the kind of thing that usually doesn't happen to you really until you are in your junior or senior year. The idea that it's a small gathering of people, most of whom were

learning, one who's leading, and you're exchanging ideas and you're shouting things out [00:18:00] to the teacher. She's asking questions—Toni Cade—she's asking questions, you're shouting, “Oh, this is this,” “Well what does that remind you of?” “It reminds me of that! It reminds me this!” And so everybody is jumping in and learning from each other, um and supporting each other, and doing the very best that we could. I mean there were no slackers, cause everyone knew that this was an opportunity not to be wasted. “You felt that you could tell your instructors-- Barbara Christian, Addison Gayle, Toni Cade of course-- anything that was happening with you.” So we could talk to anyone on the staff. We could talk to Dean Ballard, we could talk to the Assistant Director who at that time was Ann Cook, um she changed her name to [00:18:51] Shiko Quianna, and uh, we could talk to the teachers once we got to know them. There was a person, Mr. Bernstein, who was working on his PhD in psychology, so I think they felt it would be very beneficial for us to have group sessions where we could open up about the experience of being on campus and any difficulties that we were having. However, the um—the group sessions were very quiet. He would start with an open-ended question regarding how we're doing, how classes are, how our home environment was, because we were all at home at that time. And no one would respond, because it just was not part of our culture, not part of African-American and Puerto Rican culture to express uh things that are happening in your home with perfect strangers. It just was not done. You handled family business [00:20:00] within the family. You might tell your aunt, your uncle, your cousins, definitely your siblings if you had them. Um, so that particular construct did not work so well. It may have worked better later on, but people were reticent to be forthcoming about what was actually going on in their lives in that setting. But outside of that setting you felt that you could tell your instructors: Barbara Christian, Addison Gayle, Toni Cade, of course, anything that was happening with you, because you had established a rapport. And in your writing classes you were talking about various things. So that served as an entre to talk about other things as well. So even if you didn't open up in the counseling—the formal counseling sessions—you were able to get counseling. And also, um later on Charlie Russell was a counselor and a lot of people gravitated to him, especially the young men, so...

“... all of us as students being excited, sharing ideas, writing ideas down, getting feedback-- and the feedback was constant and it was positive.”

I was a student in Toni Cade's class and as a student in those days this—the classes were not large for Pre-Bac students. They were small like seminars and that was very good so that the instructors got a chance to know you, you got a chance to know them, and you work closely together to improve your writing if you were in a writing class and I was in one of her writing classes. And it was just marvelous. She was excited about teaching. Uh, it was clear to me that it wasn't just a job [00:22:00] to her and that we weren't just any

students that this was an opportunity for someone who was a bit older—she wasn't terribly much older than we were— who was a bit older than we were and had this wealth of knowledge and had seen the world and interpreted the world for herself and was helping us to get the skills to do the same thing. So, it was great, it was great. I had her the first year of class, so that would have been 1966, and it was a Pre-Bac class, so I don't think I got any credit for that class but it didn't matter, it was part of that process of being in the SEEK program the very first year. And the details of how the writing was handled and how it was evaluated, um I don't really remember exactly, but I do remember her being extremely supportive. And all of us as students being excited, sharing ideas, writing ideas down, getting feedback, and the feedback was constant and it was positive. And that really gave us the platform that we needed to succeed later on, because we went into other classes uh full of confidence that we could do this work that we had rigorous training with our teachers in the SEEK program and that we were ready.

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Covington: A lot of work, but very well worthy effort to—to have what is in your heart and your mind put on the paper by you and to have it critiqued, not criticized, but critiqued by someone with an enormous brain and an enormous heart like our instructors [00:24:00] and it was an amazing experience. And Toni Cade, um looking at my work and giving me such positive reinforcement, um led us to be great friends. And she helped all of us. Barbara Christian helped all of us. Barbara Christian was amazing. She was tiny—she was a tiny person with so much knowledge and so much ability to analyze things. Not just to analyze the work that you were given or the work that you did participating in class, but giving things a larger context and “What does that mean? “And what does this mean?” “And how does that relate to this?” “Okay, are you going to mention this as well you know, in your—in your papers or you're going to take a different stand?” Um very, very good...

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Covington: And Addison Gayle was a tough marker. He was a tough marker and he took pride in being a tough marker. But he was also one of the instructors that we would sit around with and have coffee with and just laugh and joke and just talk about current events. And what was going on in black America particularly, really good.

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Covington: We had papers that we had to do, um we of course were graded on class participation. Everybody aced class participation because New Yorkers love to talk, so there you go. Um we had smaller papers and larger [00:26:00]

papers that we had to turn in. We had to—uh we would have quizzes, we would have exams. Uh I don't remember large final exam, I remember a final paper and papers going through the course of the entire semester and that was good, because we had pressure for final exams in our other classes.

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Covington: We were given lots of assignments about current events and books and that sort of thing, but actually no matter what the assignment was, I would always put in something about black people or poor people. Whether it was okay that NASA—I love NASA—NASA putting a man on the moon, okay, that's great. But we still have people who were concerned about kids eating peeled lead paint in Spanish Harlem. Instead of putting a man on the moon, can we put some men in these apartments to clean up all of this mess so that kids don't suffer mental illness as a result? It's a—it was always in the front of my mind of what was going on in my community. And I would give all of the details, whatever professor would want concerning their broad view. But I also wanted to make sure I included my view.

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Covington: And the English teachers and the English classes, uh were very good, because you had to debate, um not debate so much as to support your position, whatever your position was. Whether it'd be verbally or on paper. You know, and to be able to [00:28:00] get the skills necessary to really lay out your ideas, your opinions of how things are and how things should be.

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Covington: During that time ah Leontyne Price performed Cleopatra for the Metropolitan Opera and I wrote a paper about why did it take so long for a black woman to play Cleopatra. I got an A on that one, I was glad, but it took a special professor to say okay, I see that you're not just ranting, you have actually laid out an historical analysis of why this should have happened earlier and it shouldn't be a big deal by this point.

“Great universities are not judged by their incoming students; they're judged by their graduates.” So when SEEK started and we began with it, um not everyone on campus was pleased — I'm talking about the faculty. I think for the students, some students felt that we were undeserving to be there, once they heard the barebones of what the program was about. And some of the teachers were openly hostile. Um I had an instructor in History, Ludmilla [00:29:31], I can't remember her last name, but I think Russian accent who on the first day of class asked everyone who was in the SEEK program to stand. And so we stood, we're all like okay, we're standing and then she proceeded to tell our fellow classmates that we were part of this

new experiment and we hadn't gone through the usual channels to be at a university like [00:30:00] City College and that—after that my mind kind of shut off until she told us to sit down. So I thought wow, this is absolutely amazing. We have been called out unjustly and um certain assumptions have been made about us that I wasn't aware of before, uh certain assumptions have been made about us by people who are there to teach us. And it was a history class and I thought to myself you know what, I am going to pass this class, I know that. But she has told me that she has set the bar for me and for my fellow SEEK students really, really high and so now I know who she is. She has no idea who I am, but I know who she is. And of course, you know, we shared our experience with the SEEK staff and they were appalled. Um, I cannot imagine being at a university where if your father is the head of IBM, you're called out. So, she immediately saw us as vulnerable, unworthy and ignorant—that we would never measure up. And the most stunning thing about it is she never realized that one: the people that she was castigating were the people who built the country that she now lived in and two: that [00:32:00] great universities are not judged by their incoming students, they're judged by their graduates. So if I have the ability to get in and get out with that sheepskin, it was equal to anybody else who graduated from that institution with the sheepskin. "It was the SEEK dorm, so people from all of the campuses were there." Oh, I went to college expecting to major in Journalism, which I did, at the very beginning. But at the same time I was going to college, I also worked uh, at WCBS TV in New York and I worked um in the evenings—three evenings a week—answering phones, pulling wire copy, we're talking about the olden days, when there was wire copy to pull and be distributed and assembled for the teleprompter for the anchors. So I was able to do a lot of my homework at night at the desk, that's what it's called, the assignment desk um, at WCBS. And so I was talking to Jim Jensen who for a very long time was an anchor at uh, the Flagship Station. And he told me one day, he said, "You know, I'm not sure you need to major in journalism," he said, "you already know how to write, why don't you major in something that you can write about?"

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Covington: So I was a Political Science major, I took a lot of history courses as well. Um, I took any course at all related to African-Americans and [00:34:00] related to the African continent. And those classes were very good. We were also able to um uh, work with a few other students at the Alamac Hotel [00:34:14]. I lived there for a of couple years. It was the SEEK dorm, so people from all of the campuses where there. And it was the kind of hotel that had its own kitchenettes, which was great. So that you had a roommate, you had a little lounge area, you had a kitchenette, and the phones were out in the hall, just like most dorms in those years, the phone was out in the hall. Whoever was passing by the phone would answer the phone and then walk down the hall and knock on the door. And we had a door mom and uh, the

first year was a young woman from Cleveland, Ohio and then the second year it was a couple. She was the door mom, but her husband was there as well. And so there were 50 girls I think and 50 guys that first year. So the girls were on one floor and the guys were on another floor and we would get together and study together and do all kinds of things. And I started along with my fellow residents at the Alamac hotel. I started a newspaper called “The Paper” and Eugenia Wilshire worked on that and Jackie Robinson—yes he had the same name as the famous baseball player. He was uh a correspondent on that. And so for the couple years that I was there, we had poetry readings and all kinds of things that we would organize [00:36:00]. You know, of course we would organize parties, but we had the ability to um, encourage each other and if you were a slightly upperclassman you know, to tell people about the experiences that you had had—positive and negative—uh, to that point at college.

“Without the SEEK Program, there never would have been [The] Paper.”

There was an on-campus newspaper called Tech News and it was supposed to be about the things of interest to people in the Engineering Department. But Paul Simms worked on Tech News as a Writer and knew a lot about the newspaper business and wanted to change it—wanted to change Tech News. So I joined Tech News, not being part of the engineering department, Louie Rivera joined Tech News, he also was not part of the engineering department, and Paul who was actually a premed student, um with the three of us we changed Tech News to something that was totally different. And that was about the surrounding area, about Harlem, about what was going on in the world in general, the war in Vietnam, uh prisons, a lot of things that were going on on-campus that could have been improved. The whole debate about African-American and Puerto Rican studies, whether or not there should be a school of that. Of course, we thought there should be a school of [00:38:00] black and Puerto Rican studies, so all of these things. Even though the mastheads said Tech News, it was The Paper before it officially changed names. We voted the staff of Tech News out and we voted ourselves in.

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Covington: It’s amazing that without the SEEK program there never would have been a Paper, because the three of us who started The Paper, out of those three, two of us were SEEK students. Louis Rivera and I were SEEK students and Paul wasn’t, but he was the mastermind. And I had a conversation with him about this and he said there is no doubt that there wouldn’t have been a Paper if there hadn’t been a SEEK program.

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Covington: And the larger connection is that with SEEK being on campus, there was a pool of people from which we could draw to work on The Paper. And then those people along with other people who are not in the SEEK program um, could all come together and write about the issues that they thought were important.

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Covington: Tech News was fortunate enough to have Paul working on Tech News. And with things that were going on on-campus, we met each other and Louis I already knew, because he was a SEEK student along with me, but Paul was not a SEEK student. So the—the process of Tech News changing to [00:40:00] The Paper was something that was spearheaded by Paul and Louis and I joined in that effort. We did most of the writing with and without bylines. Uh Paul is an excellent writer, of course Louis was an excellent writer, and I wrote articles as well and I served as copy editor. Paul handled all of the layout, the travel to the printer—you know, you couldn't just hit a button and send uh the text to the printer with the graphics and everything—but he was a layout wiz. He also um as I said, took everything to the publisher and he picked up the newspapers and brought them back to campus. We were responsible for everything going into the newspaper. It was a big task, but it was a task we loved. We worked around-the-clock—uh every week—we worked around-the-clock and then other people joined and this is before the official switch of the name from Tech News to The Paper.

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Covington: It was an issue every week that came out and we became known on campus as the newspaper to read. We were not as storied as Observation Post, but we were very good and we were very well received.

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Covington: We were basically on our own, in terms of production of the newspaper; we were on our own. We didn't have a faculty advisor, we didn't have somebody who was saying "You can't say this," "You [00:42:00] gotta do it this way." So we invented what we thought would work and it worked well. As copy editor, I will go over people's work, um not trying to change things, just bringing up questions and looking for, you know, grammar, syntax, verb agreement and all of that—just making it as clean as possible without messing with the heart of the story without cleaning it up if it seemed too radical. If it was radical then that was great, just put a period right here.

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Working against a deadline on any newspaper is something that's like the—sword of Damocles, you got to get this done. Okay time is up when it's up, because you have a slot at the publishers and that's your slot and you cannot miss it, otherwise you would miss a week of publishing. So we were working around-the-clock um, and enjoying it—exhausted, bleary-eyed, trying to do our assignments at the same time we're trying to put out a paper. So we would take a break, you know, hop in Paul's car, go to an Indian restaurant, get something to eat, come back again, finish up as much as we could and in the meantime as things went on, other people were dropping in and out. And there will be discussions and debates about what to put in the next issue. And sometimes we had so much to say that things would become somewhat condensed. We were never at a loss for words or topics or passion. It was us, as this solid core, the solid group [00:44:00]. We never argued about anything; we were on the same wavelength and we wanted people to get the information, to talk about the articles. We wanted to spark those conversations about world issues and world events.

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Covington: Our audience for Tech News/The Paper was anyone who was on campus who wanted to read about um, these ideas and these positions that we had. We also covered, you know, some general campus things. The President of the college at that time was Marshack, first there was Gallagher —President Gallagher—and then there was President Marshack. And so we would attend their press conferences if they had one, um get information, um report about it and then we would have an editorial about what they said and whether or not we agreed with what they said. We were able to actually have quite a large following, not just um people of color, but also progressives. Remember, this is again, during the um height of the Vietnam War, a lot to be said about that, a lot to be said about poverty in America, um poor people's March on Washington, um, just so many things. It was a vehicle for us to bring up the discussion or enliven the discussion about equal rights for women, equal pay for women, all of these things. They were very adult subjects. And we also had [00:46:00] classified ads that people wondered well—we had ads, I mean legitimate ads with graphics and everything—but we also have some classified ads and people would say, “Where did you get those classified ads?” We never told them we make them up. We made up the classified ads and they could be pretty wild.

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Covington: The Paper is still in existence. We thought we might last a few months before we were shutdown, but we were never shutdown and now there have been actually a couple of generations of people who have worked on The Paper staff. And we are in the process now of putting together a scholarship in the name of The Paper. Uh we wanted to make sure that even though most things have gone electronic that the spirit of The Paper continues; that

people who work on this school uh, paper can move in all realms of journalism to express their ideas and to again spark conversations about the plight of poor people, of what's going on in the world concerning black people, women's issues—which are not just babysitting, but are truly economic uh in nature—and to have a vehicle for their creativity. So we hope that we will be able to raise a lot of money for The Paper scholarship and start handing that money out very soon.

“I would not have the life I have now if I had not been a SEEK student.”

[00:48:00] And I was working very hard at CBS during college and then afterwards I worked as a researcher/reporter. They created a position for me and it was basically a field producer position. And then after that I moved to um Ghana, West Africa to do my Post-grad degree in Political Anthropology. And when I came back I returned to television after a while and altogether spent about 40 years—mm, about 35 years—being a television producer, director, and writer, and then opening my own business in San Francisco.

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Covington: Being a SEEK student and having gone through the rigors of the Pre-Bac program and having people like Toni Cade and Barbara Christian, Addison Gayle, um Betty Ralls, Ann Cook and Dean Ballard, I mean all of those people and many more that I'm sorry I'm not mentioning now, because it would be a long list, it gave us as SEEK students the confidence that we needed, uh nurturing that we needed to move forward, to excel in our classes, to um, know that we had a home base that we could touch if we needed to. You know, you left the cocoon of the Pre-Bac program and then you were in the larger campus where if things did become hostile, uh for me, I just had that one experience, but [00:50:00] other people had other experiences. But that you could go to the SEEK office, express yourself, say what had happened and they would as much as they could make sure that it didn't happen again in that same way. Uh, you had the support of your fellow students. We were not in competition with each other at any time. If one of us did extremely well, we all celebrated, because we thought that person was an envoy to the larger community. If someone was um, felt disheartened, we tried to give them heart, um because we were the “change generation” pretty much. We were the people that our ancestors had envisioned. And we were making sure that we supported each other as much as we could and we were delighted to do that. And I cannot think of a time when anyone asked me for help that I did not drop what I was doing to help them, because that's what people did for me, including the SEEK instructors.

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Covington: SEEK was a tremendous blessing to me, um, to be able to be in a nurturing environment, discussing real topics, gaining marketable skills. SEEK gave me a platform [00:52:00], a foundation that I could build on and build a life for myself and my family. I had a great career as a television producer, director, and writer. I had the skill and the confidence to move ahead in my life. I made friends for life; uh Eugenia Wiltshire and I, who was—she was in the Alamac Hotel with Marvin White, they were roommates, she is like my sister. She is my son's auntie. Without the SEEK program I never would have met her, we never would have been friends all of these decades. Paul Sims and I are still great friends and Louis Rivera and I, he would—every now and then he would send me um, you know, a poem or two. A really, really fabulous experience. I would not have the life that I have now if I had not been a SEEK student.

Credits:

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“Put Love in” by Linda Draper (2013)

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