GREENSBORO VOICES/GREENSBORO PUBLIC LIBRARY ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEWEE: Hobart Jarrett

INTERVIEWER: Eugene Pfaff

DATE: N.D.

[Begin Tape 1, Side A]

EUGENE PFAFF: --obtaining some brief bio--

HOBART JARRETT: I'm, I'm not hearing you too well. Say that again, please.

EP: I'd like to begin by asking you for some biographical background, such as the degrees you received, from what institutions and where you taught and when you came to Greensboro.

HJ: So, you want me just to speak to that now?

EP: Yes, sir, if you would please.

HJ: Yes. I'm a product of Wiley College in Marshall, Texas, where I majored in English and was a very active--well, I was a four-year varsity debater. I, I guess I needn't go into my life at that period. Am I right?

EP: Well, yes, sir. I'd like you to just summarize where you did graduate work--

HJ: I wound up in government, student government, and things like that. When I left there I immediately went to Syracuse University and took a master's in English. And at the end of that year I began my professional career going back to my home state, which is Oklahoma, where I taught at Langston University in Oklahoma for a number of years. As a matter of fact, I believe, for ten years, as I recall. I was involved in administration as well as in teaching. And left there as the dean of personnel, as I recall, and a professor of English.

I came to Bennett College from Oklahoma in 1949, I believe. And I worked there until '61. I came there as the chair of the Humanities Division, which was, as far as numbers are concerned and the numbers of faculty are concerned, it was the largest of the division, divisions of the college at that time.

And, oh, I took my doctorate while I was employed at Bennett College. I had studied--after the Syracuse experience, I studied at Harvard for a while. And then Syracuse offered a humanities degree, a degree in the area called humanities. It was an

interesting tailor-made discipline that one could get into. And I was contacted for that and given an attractive scholarship so I, I returned there and took my degree in humanities.

I might also have said that I had studied at Harvard under the grant from the Rockefeller Foundation years back, a program that was called General Education Board Program with, with the Rockefeller Foundation money. And I remained at Bennett College in the capacity that I've already mentioned until the end of the school year in '61. And I came to Brooklyn College in the fall of '61, and have been here ever since. And I'm a full professor here and have been for several years.

EP: I'd like to be--get right into a discussion of the sit-ins and your role with them.

HJ: Say that again.

EP: I would like to begin with a discussion of the sit-ins and your role in them.

HJ: Oh, yes.

EP: And then go back and ask for a--your views and analysis and experience in the black community in Greensboro.

HJ: My experiences with the black community?

EP: Yes, sir.

HJ: Well, now, if you want to stop me at any point, will you do so?

EP: Yes, sir.

HJ: All right. I would like to correct certain things that I've read in the book by [Miles] Wolff [*Lunch at the Five and Ten*]. And I read something, I read a chapter in a book by [Louis E.] Lomax some years back [*The Negro Revolt*]. Those are only two things that I've ever read. But to correct them, I want to tell you exactly what did happen.

After the, the young men had made their original daring appearance in Woolworth's, they announced shortly thereafter that they were coming back on a Saturday. And Saturday in those days, twenty years ago, were, was a day that all the people from Guilford County tended to congregate. When I say all the people, I mean the farmers did their marketing and so forth and so forth on Saturdays.

And I was called at home by one of the attorneys of Lee and High. It was [Major] High who called me. And he told me that things were going to happen here and that he and [J. Kenneth] Lee were calling a group of black citizens of some prominence together to map out the course of action. And I went to their offices on Benbow Road, [where] they were at the time. And I think that Dr. [W. Lloyd T.] Miller was there. I know a minister by the name of Brown was there. And John Leary who is deceased was there. I can't remember whether Vance Chavis was at that meeting or not. And I'm sure that George Simkins, at least I think I'm sure, George Simkins was there.

During the course of the discussions we immediately saw that what we'd have to do would be to send wires to the police department in Greensboro, to the members of the [Greensboro] City Council, to the chairman-president of the council. And while we--when, when we arrived at that particular point, saying that we would have to send these wires right now, Lee and I were asked to word the messages. And we withdrew from the group to do our responsibility.

When we returned to the group, I discovered that the group had decided that I should serve as the liaison between this group that we were establishing and the students. Incidentally, I was the only college person, professional college person who was called to the meeting. So we sent the wires and things did not explode. The students did go. And the police protection, as I recall, was quite adequate. At any rate, I know that there was no explosion.

EP: And, you say this was on the Saturday following the sit-in, first sit-in?

HJ: To my recollection, this was [pause] on the Saturday following the first sit-ins the students had declared that they--excuse me. Let me get this straight. After the initial sit-ins the students declared that they were going back and they were going to go back on a Saturday. And I think that that Saturday was the next, was the first Saturday after their initial appearance.

EP: Now, was this the same Saturday that the bomb threat was phoned in to Woolworth's?

HJ: Same Saturday that what?

EP: That the bomb threat was phoned in to Woolworth's.

HJ: I'm not hearing your words. It was the same Saturday that--

EP: The bomb threat occurred in--

HJ: The bomb threat?

EP: Yes, sir.

HJ: Oh, yes. This. [pause] Yes. This was that Saturday because the threats included such things as the use of bicycle chains and things of this sort. It was violence that we were summoned to try to, to stop before it ever began. And I think that the concerted action did cause the power of the city to recognize that things have to be taken care of. That protection would be--was very necessary for all persons involved.

EP: I'm sorry to interrupt you. You had said that you sent these wires to the police department and city officials and that nothing seemed to be forthcoming. I was wondering if you could continue the story.

HJ: Yes. Now, you said, shall I continue the story?

EP: Yes, sir.

HJ: All right. After that the, the student group certainly mushroomed, far more students than the original four courageous young men. And the Bennett girls were very much involved in the whole process from that point on.

EP: How did you first become aware of the sit-in?

HJ: Pardon?

EP: How did you first become aware of the sit-ins?

HJ: I guess that the day that High called me because there had not been any coverage. And how far this day was from the sit-ins I don't remember.

EP: Did you--

HJ: Within a very short period of time.

EP: Did you advise or counsel the Bennett girls?

HJ: The Bennett girls?

EP: Yes.

HJ: Is that what you said?

EP: Yes.

HJ: Actually, the answer to your question is yes. But what happened was that once this group of men saw that the sit-ins were going to continue, we immediately got busy in, in organizing the black community.

A few years prior to that while I had, after I had come to Greensboro, there was an organization called the Greensboro Citizens Association that came together to see to it that the late William Hampton, a physician, would have a fair shake at getting elected to the city council. And Dr. Hampton was elected by the, largely by the results of this organization. And you may or may not know that it made the cover of *Time* magazine. This was the first time that anything like that had happened. And that was some time after the date '49.

I, then, as the liaison with the students and the adults, became the spearhead of the group of men to re-establish the old Greensboro Citizens Association. And we did this very effectively. We did it by going through lists of all organizations. We got information from Hayes-Taylor YMCA files. And we contacted the heads of everything, trustee boards, flower circles, sewing circles, anything that there was a record of, that existed on

Negro life. And we brought this group together in a hurry, soliciting the support of ministers and of some other persons who were prominent. And things started to hum.

Our purpose for reorganizing was to guarantee the support that the community could give to what those young men had actually started. And we met regularly. We met on, on--when any kind of small crisis came up. And we were the source that gave counsel to the students.

They always met with us. I don't mean that every student met, but there were always student representatives there. And the students themselves at A&T [North Carolina A&T State University] named a liaison who worked with me. He would come to my office at Bennett College, oh, several times during the course of the week.

EP: Do you recall his name?

HJ: I don't. He was not one of the four. And I don't know that I would know his name if I heard it.

EP: Do you--who were the other individuals on this committee with you?

HJ: I'm sorry?

EP: Who were the other members of the committee?

HJ: The other adults?

EP: Yes.

HJ: Well, the persons that I named who were there with and, and the High and Lee office were very active. Dr.--it turned out, Mr. Pfaff, that I became the president of this organization. And the burden of the responsibility was upon the president of the organization, who was also the liaison with the students. And it worked, as far as organization is concerned. It worked extremely effectively.

EP: Was there an official name of this organization?

HJ: Yes, the Greensboro Citizens Association.

EP: Oh, I see. So this was one and the same with the organization that met in the Lee and High legal offices.

HJ: Well, it was not the same. It was an outgrowth of that nucleus group. You follow me?

EP: Yes.

HJ: Now, once we were actually in business, the students raised any questions of us. They turned to us when they needed money. They needed very little money by the way. They--I remember that they made posters and we furnished money for that. When the students

were arrested the bond money did not actually come from us but it did come from the black community, which was, of which they were a part. And they were also a part of our organization.

What I'm trying to say is that our organization did not have the kind of capital that was necessary to lay down a bond fee. But I think Mr. [N. E.] Hargett, as I recall, who was a general director--I'm, I'm not positive that it was Hargett. But it was a funeral director who came to the four originally to post bond money. And I remember that the late Dr. [Milton H.] Barnes, who was quite active in our group, was the person who came up the next time bond money was needed. Dr. Miller was--I'm speaking as factually as I can--was, was my right-hand man. We talked about every possible detail before we even brought it to the large group.

And I remember, Mr. Pfaff, that one of the, one of the most important things that happened was that after the youngsters kept going and we saw, particularly Dr. Miller and I saw, that this thing could drag on forever, I called Dr. Miller and said, you know, "I think it's time for us now to do something. Something that will bring, bring people to the conference table." And Dr. Miller agreed with me. And we, we then presented this to the group. When I say group I mean the association. And they agreed. And I chose the people who would go to talk. And the person that we decided that we wanted to talk to was Mose Kiser. Do you know him?

EP: Yes, sir.

HJ: Is he still alive?

EP: Yes, sir.

HJ: Fine. We went to Mr. Kiser. We called him. I called him. And I had, I had, I really had no hearing problem at that time, none that was discernible, as you can discern it now. So I called Mr. Kiser. And he agreed to meet with a select group from our association.

Now this was the very first thing that was done by way of bringing white merchants together with the cause that the black students had initiated. We went to Guilford Dairy and in his offices had a really good conversation. And Mose Kiser said that he would gladly open his doors to Negro patronage provided that we could get one other business, white businessperson, to go along with the idea.

We were, we of the committee, were quite exuberant over what Mr. Kiser was saying to us. And we left there in high spirits. But as we then began to think about who on earth in Greensboro could we get to agree with Kiser, we, we lost some of our enthusiasm because we, we just did not have another place to turn to.

So then, Mr. Pfaff, despite this absurdity that Wolff has written, it was, it was I who, who said to Dr. Miller, "Now I'm going to call the manager at Woolworth and tell him that now's the time." Mr. Pfaff, I'm just a little bit ahead of my story. Do you mind?

EP: No, not at all.

HJ: I want to go back to tell you that the organization of the black community became pretty solidified. And we began going to churches. Reverend [Otis L.] Hairston was the vice-

president of the organization. And it was to Reverend Hairston's church [Shiloh Baptist Church] that we went first of all. And our purpose was to bring people in, to explain to them, Negro people, to explain to them why they should stay out of either of the five and dime stores.

And I remember that on this occasion Dr. George Evans spoke and Ezell Blair Jr. spoke. There were other speakers but I remember those two. And I remember that I presided at this meeting. And there were other similar meetings later on. But this was the beginning of this kind of community education. And now I'm going back to at the time that I called the manager of Woolworth. I think his name was Harris. I can't be sure about that.

EP: Clarence Harris.

HJ: Clarence?

EP: Yes, sir. Clarence Harris.

HJ: Is he still living?

EP: Yes, sir.

HJ: Is that so. [laughs] Well, that's interesting. But I called Mr. Harris and told him who I was and that our committee would like to bring four or five people with me to talk with him about the situation. And Mr. Harris agreed to do that. He set the date and the hour. We actually met in his offices after the store closed on a particular night.

And we were quite surprised to find that Mr. Harris had invited a large number of people. When I say large number, I mean he'd invited a select group to join him. It didn't bother us. It's simply that our agreement over the phone, his with me, was that my committee would come and talk with him. He had invited, and I think he was absolutely correct in doing so. He simply hadn't told us that this was going to happen. He'd invited the manager of Kress and representatives of the city council.

Waldo Falkner, who was at that time the second Negro person ever to become a member of the city council, was on the council, and he was there. Ed Zane, a very effective person in Greensboro politics, was there. Other names I think I could dig up but I don't remember them as I am talking to you now.

Mr. Harris responded when I said, "Oh, Mr. Harris, I didn't know that we were going to see others than you."

He responded that, "Did you think that I was going to meet you people alone?" Some such thing as that.

And I said, "Well, yes, I did. That's what you had said. And then I--he didn't know it but I was aware of what Mose Kiser had done with it. So it turned out to be a quite, a good and very important meeting. Harris took us to task over the fact that he wasn't doing any business with black people.

And the truth of the matter, Mr. Pfaff, is that by this time, students from Woman's College [WC, now The University of North Carolina at Greensboro] and other schools in the, in the area were sympathizing with what the A&T boys had begun and what the

Bennett girls were doing with them. And the truth further of the matter is that a lot of people, white and black adults, were absenting themselves from Elm Street. There was the air of tension, and people, either ruled by their conscience or by their fears, stayed away from town. And it, it was, it was quite obvious to any observer, to anybody who walked the street.

At any rate, we knew, my committee knew, that we had, we, we had the opposition in, in a difficult spot. And Harris began--well, for history's sake, I suppose I should be as honest and as objective as I can be. Mr. Harris was quite flustered. He, he, he brought out emotional comments, made emotional comments. He told about a Negro woman of some years who had come to the backdoor of Woolworth and had knocked, and had asked him or somebody if she could come in. And she didn't know why they didn't want her and this kind of stuff. So we listened.

And I was very pleased to, to see that George Evans and Johnny Leary, certainly, W. L. T. Miller and myself. I know those four and, and I--oh, Vance, I'm sure was there, Vance Chavis. And we were, we were extremely calm. The word is cool. We, we, we--our feathers could not have been ruffled. We were ready for anything that was said. And the result of that meeting was that the group there decided, yes, the counters must be opened. And--

EP: Who first broached it? Was it broached by--

HJ: Pardon?

EP: Who first suggested that? Was it your group or was it Harris?

HJ: Was it who?

EP: Was it your group or Harris that first--

HJ: Our group, our group all the way. Harris wanted to hold off until the end of time. As a matter of fact, when, after Mose Kiser had said to us what he did say, we were trying to get anybody other than Woolworth because the, the story was in our community that Harris was going to keep that place lily-white until death came.

So there was no suggestion on anybody's part that we begin to integrate until we ourselves simply said, "Well, now, Mr. Harris, all we can tell you is things are not going to get any better financially for Woolworth. And they may get worse because of the conscience of the community. And we, we can assure you that Negro people are not going to be coming here at all." So this was the tone and this was the fact. Are you with me?

EP: Yes, sir.

HJ: Okay. Then the decision was that a, a specific day would be named. And that this day--and, and hours during the day would be named, specific hours. They, they--and the students would be told what day and how many, as I recall, how many students would come to both Woolworth and Kress on these specific hours.

And I do remember that a plan was that there would be a few students at first, very few. How many I don't remember. And I remember also that they were not to come during the rush hour, during the lunch period when, when the normal, big flow of traffic would be present at the lunch counter.

So far as I know, Mr. Pfaff, nobody other than Harris and the Woolworth, the Kress manager and the waitresses in both places, and the students--so far as I know, those were the only people who knew the exact hour that the people would be coming in. I think my group did know the exact day but we did not communicate this to anybody.

The plan was--and it was followed--that my group would now apprise the, the black community of the fact that integration was to take place in the counters during a specific week. I remember this very, very clearly. And, oh, this was exciting, Mr. Pfaff. I'm getting excited now as--I'm tingling as I recall the electrification of the period. A strange thing had happened. School was just about out, I think, or maybe it was already out. I don't remember. But I know that it was either--school had to have been out.

EP: The date that I have for this is sometime in early July.

HJ: Sometime in when?

EP: Early July.

HJ: July, yeah, yeah. This makes sense because on the night that we invited the ministers, the black ministers, to come to Hayes-Taylor [YMCA], where we held all of our meetings, to be told about what was going to take place in the, the next week as I--I'm sure that it was the next week. On that same night, [Horace R.] Kornegay, the district attorney--am I getting this right?

EP: I believe that is correct.

HJ: We, we had to see him. We had to see him because the students who had been arrested were being or were to be summoned back to Greensboro during the summer for the trial. And we had no idea how this could possibly work.

First of all, people were scattered all over the United States. And certainly, we didn't have any money, that kind of money, to bring people back. And we thought that Kornegay was a very hard, hard nut to crack.

Mr. Kornegay agreed to meet us, as I say, on the same night that the ministers were to meet with us at just about the same time. Well, Kornegay was apparently riding circuit some kind of way. And what happened is that Miller, and Leary, and Chavis, and Evans, I think, went to hold Kornegay while I went to talk with the ministers. You got the picture?

EP: Yes.

HJ: And, the only real disheartening experience that I had in this--and, and I want you to--I, I wish you could really see, Mr. Pfaff, the involvement that my group was in and the center, at the center of that was I. The disheartening experience was that when I went to

this meeting with the ministers, and joyfully explained to them all that we had done in the Citizens Association, and culmination that is now imminent, the ministers agreed that they would explain to their congregations on the following Sunday that during the week integration would take place. And that they would explain to the congregation the significance of what the students have really contributed to life in Greensboro and life in the world.

Then after that, the one minister whom I thought very, very highly of--he was an articulate, intelligent challenging person--took me to task. He, he said, "Brother Jarrett, I, I want you to know that though these things are what we should be getting, we want you to know that the citizen committee went about this whole matter in the wrong way."

And Mr. Pfaff, I was flabbergasted. It turned out that what he meant was that there had been no, no minister in the, the process, no minister in the negotiating group, et cetera. What he did not know is that Otis Hairston was extremely involved in everything. But Reverend Hairston was in this little city and this little hamlet. And we were there. We had to take the iron when the iron was ready to be put on the anvil. And that's the only reason that Hairston wasn't there.

We had not thought in terms of the fact that there was a physician and a dentist and a schoolteacher. We were not thinking. We were thinking about the fact that there were black people who had come to the response, to respond to what four little black boys dared say to the world. So I, I was--I was very much put aback by that.

EP: Who was this minister?

HJ: Huh?

EP: Who was this minister that took you to task?

HJ: Oh, well, I've never--well, this was Reverend [Julius T.] Douglas. He was a Presbyterian minister [of St. James Presbyterian Church]. He's now dead. And, and a man who I, I had to admire because he was just a fine man.

I, I think on reflection that the ministers were a little bit put out that they had not, in this era of Martin Luther King Jr., that they had not spearheaded this movement. And I regretted that. Oh, yes, at the initial meeting in Lee and High's office, the minister Brown was there, Reverend Brown. There are several initials in his name. The Methodist minister. I knew him rather well.

And Brown had been asked to serve as, well, actually a kind of vice-liaison officer under my direction. I don't mean it to sound as I'm hearing the words. But he was to, to--he was to work with me. And Brown came by my home a couple of days later to tell me that he, he could not work. And I assumed then that, that he couldn't work because Brown was a good solid man. And he could have led the group but he had not been asked to do so.

And I think that he--this that I'm saying now is not historic fact because I don't know. My assumption was that Brown withdrew because Brown was not named the leader. But I do know that I had--I'm doubling back in time now to this meeting with, with the ministers. Am I coming through?

EP: Yes, sir.

HJ: I do know that I had talked with Reverend Douglas many times about taking an active role in our group because we needed what wisdom there was in our community. And for some reason or another, he just never, never became active with our group. That, that really hurt me, though, about that experience. It didn't bother me that my own minister was sitting there and didn't, didn't make any response, because my minister was not of the caliber of mind that Doug, Doug was.

So when I left that meeting knowing that the ministers were going to tell the, the, the congregations what was going to happen, but sick at heart, I, I got to Kornegay's office in the city buildings where the, the other members of my group were waiting. And I think that Kornegay had just come in. And I remember that Slick Miller--that's Dr. W. L. T. Miller, said, "Hobart, what's wrong?"

And I told him that, "I, I'll tell you about it later."

And then we talked to Kornegay, who had never heard anybody say that it would be difficult for those students to get back, and who immediately agreed [that], "Yes, we will, we will not schedule the case for this time." And the students--I mean, the case will be scheduled after school begins, which was a--it was a victory for us. But it was an easy victory. We, we had assumed that this man must be a man of no feeling. This was not true at all. And I was very happy about that, particularly after having had the, the experience that I've just told you about.

So, also, at the, the meeting with Harris, it had been agreed upon that Jo Spivey would know what was going to happen when. And Jo Spivey has always remained in my very high in my regard over the, the very fine way that she was able to sit on the news until the, the, the news item--I mean, until the news action actually did take place. And I liked very much the manner in which she supported this thing.

One thing that I--one name that I have not mentioned, save in one instance, which will have to be mentioned, is George Simkins Jr. But Simkins was the president of NAACP [National Association for the Advancement of Colored People]. And all of us, incidentally, who were active in the Greensboro Citizens Association were members of NAACP. But the, the, our community reacted to our organization rather than to the NAACP. I don't know why, but this was--

Greensboro was not an NAACP town. Simkins, George had agreed that the NAACP would work hand in hand with the citizens association of which George was a member--and, incidentally, I was a director of NAACP group, also--in that any legal matters that came up with the students' involvement would be handled by the NAACP, and all other matters, non-legal, would be handled by us.

We brought--George brought in two attorneys. One's name was--I, I can't remember the older man's name at the moment. But I certainly will never forget the younger man's name. Oh, Conrad [Pearson] was the older man's name. And the younger man was Floyd McKissick. It's--we, we met with these two attorneys and talked about the situation and they gave some advice to us. And then several times--well, certainly more times than one, Floyd McKissick returned to us from Durham, where he was located, to talk with groups.

And I remember one night George Simkins, W. L. T. Miller and I met with McKissick and the student leaders at A&T, on A&T's campus. I don't remember that

there had been any Bennett girls. Maybe there were; I just don't remember. But I, I do remember that we met with McKissick. There had to be Bennett girls there because they were quite interested later on in McKissick. And I remember that whenever a situation would come up that seemed to involve legal action I would simply go to see George Simkins or give him a ring and we worked out the situations very effectively.

EP: What sort of issues and procedure did you discuss?

HJ: Well, I remember once, some--an officer had accused a driver of a car at A&T who, who was bringing students to the picket line. Somebody had accused him of indecent exposure. And this, of course, was--it turned out that the case was dropped. But I immediately got on the phone and talked with George about that. This is one of the, the illustrations of the kind of critical matter that sometimes arose when, when we were not anticipating any such thing at all.

And then, of course, when the students were arrested, George and I and McKissick and some others had to, to talk together about what was the, the logical procedure and so forth and so on. I remember that. You, you, you know, of course, from the records that the students were not prosecuted. They, they--what was it--

[End of Tape 1, Side A]

EP: So the charges against the students were decided by a plea of no contest. Is that correct?

HJ: Yes. They, they were--the charge against them, of course, had been [unclear] or whatever the law was. And with the no contest plea was the plea that the attorney suggested that we follow. I, I think I'm right on this. I know that no contest was the, the problem. I mean was the, the stand that our group had to take.

EP: Do you know when this actually took place? Was it some time in the fall?

HJ: It was some time in the fall. I don't remember the exact date.

EP: What was your continuing activity after Woolworth's and Kress?

HJ: What was what?

EP: What was your continuing role after Woolworth and Kress announced?

HJ: Oh, Mr. Pfaff, you're reminding me of a very important situation that I forgot to mention. At the end of the school year--how I forgot to mention this, I don't know--

But after I had talked with the ministers and had talked with Kornegay, I was to leave Greensboro within a few days to go to some school in Missouri, where I was to teach a class for a Methodist sponsored group, a class of adults and the Bible as literature or some such thing as that. And how happy I was to get away from Greensboro because I needed a vacation very much. I had just been offered a, a deanship of a graduate school in, in Durham and I was quite--well, I was pretty sure that I was going to go. And it was

challenging and so forth. And [former Bennett President] David Jones had long since been dead and so forth.

And, so, I, I went with my wife. We took a plane to Missouri. And on that trip during that night--now this is purely, completely personal--but at three o'clock in the morning, I, who was sleeping on the lower bunk in a drawing room, went into the, the toilet and while I was in there I discovered something very odd. And I knew that something was wrong. And I did not know what it was. It turned out that I discovered that the train was making no noise. And this was, oh, this was a frightening, traumatic experience.

The next day there were--my wife and I talked that night. The next day we arrived in St. Louis where we had--this was on a Sunday, I remember--we had a brief layover. Well, we had a layover long enough for my wife and me to go to hospital. And they, there was nobody in the hospital who, whom we could see who could tell us anything about what had happened to my, my hearing. And we went from there to Kansas City.

And I think I wired or my wife called the host person in Kansas City who was going to convey us by car to the college. And she had made arrangements for me to see an ear specialist. And I saw this man and he told me--well, he didn't tell me too much, but he let me know that there wasn't very much that I could do about it. And he did not know why it had happened. I spent a small fortune from that point on to the present, really, in trying to do something about my hearing. It was, it was a very difficult experience.

So I went on and, and taught the class for a week. And there I decided not to, I think it was there, that I decided not to go to Durham. Oh, no, no, no, no. I called the people in Durham and told them what had happened to me and that we had better talk again. I'd have to see how I was coming along with my newfound deficiency.

We went from, from Missouri as planned to my home in Tulsa. And there the exhaustion really showed. I, I can remember it now. My, my people were worried about me because I would go to bed at the normal time and would sleep until three o'clock in the afternoon. I, I'm using the words three perhaps incorrectly. When I use the word three a while ago I admitted it was three o'clock when the hearing problem was announced, when it announced itself to me. But I would sleep later in to the afternoon.

And while there Dr. Miller--while I was there Dr. Miller called to let us know, to let me know what was happening in Greensboro. And what was happening is that the high school students, I think, had turned their attention to Meyer's Department Store. And they had agreed somehow that Meyer's would open its lunch counter, which is downstairs in the basement, as I remember, and that the blacks would not ask that the dining room [Meyer's Tea Room]--it was the swanky place--would be opened. And the black leadership had agreed to that. So Dr. Miller told me about this. And just wanted me to know what was going on and that the fort was being held.

And, of course, I let him know what had happened to me because he had no way of knowing. And we stayed in Tulsa, my wife and I, until the end of our vacation and returned to Greensboro in time to get started for the new year at Bennett. The--I, I made the decision not to go to Durham. And that's rather personal and involved.

But I saw that there was a great deal of tension among the blacks, because representatives of our group had agreed that Meyer's dining room would not become a target. And if I don't say this, if I don't interrupt myself and say this right now, I'll forget

it. We were criticized over the no contest clause. I, I think that Ezell's father felt very strongly that we had made a mistake in accepting that. Now I'm going back to, to what happened in that fall. Are you with me?

EP: Yes, sir.

HJ: Okay. So, I called a meeting of the organization and heard what anybody wanted to say. Incidentally, students were always present at every meeting we had except the negotiating meetings; students were not there. And it was agreed that we would go to, go back to see the new manager of Meyer's, whom my group had talked with in the first place. This time there was a student with us. I, I remember because I remember that the rest of us were a bit more seasoned and we could let the fire burn without burning ourselves.

At this meeting, I, I was very pleased to hear and see my, my dearest friend, I guess, I don't guess, in Greensboro, Vance Chavis. I was so happy to see and hear the way he put things. As the leader of our team, I, I announced to the gentleman that we were there. There were dissatisfactions. And he was aware of the dissatisfactions and here we are.

And I remember that he, a very polished man, explained, "Well, I did exactly what your group had asked that I do, and I was told by Mr. Chavis here that this would be satisfactory." And then Vance Chavis said, called the man by name, and said, "You know, I, I did say that but I was wrong." He said, "You have to recognize that the course of action that we're interested in taking is an unchartered one. And what appeared to us to be what we were really looking for when we talked to you was not what we really were looking for. And we want you to know that we're now saying that your dining room should be opened."

And this man was an outsider, as I recall. I think that Meyer's had recently become a part of a chain. At any rate, this man knew that what we were saying is something that he had to live with. So he agreed, "Yes, we, we can integrate this."

And here again, we made the careful decision, similar to the one that had been made before when, when the students went into the, the, to five and dimes. We decided that four people would go to Meyer's and we would go to-- we'd go there again shortly after the bulk of people had, had the opportunity to go out. I think that this is--I don't like to hear myself say this, but this was very, very important in those days. It seems odd to know now how many remarkable things have happened in race relations. And to think then of what courage and daring were required for four boys to want to sit and eat a hamburger.

EP: Was this the--

HJ: Huh?

EP: Controversy over the tea room, was this a situation where Dr. [Willa] Player [president of Bennett] and other members of the black community turned in their charge cards until Meyer's agreed to desegregate the tea room?

HJ: Yes, I think this was it.

EP: And you're saying that when four individuals would go there after the main lunch hour--this was after Meyer's had agreed to desegregate?

HJ: Right.

EP: How many meetings did it take with this new manager of Meyer's to get them to come around?

HJ: One.

EP: Just one.

HJ: The one meeting that took place when I came back. They had met with--I don't know how many meetings that had taken place to get them to open the, the lunch counter or the tea room. I'd forgot what it was called.

EP: Was this in the summer or the fall?

HJ: School was going on. Definitely in the fall. It'd have to be in the rather early fall because the first business of the association once September came around was to iron out the problem with Meyer's.

And I remember--how could I ever forget--that two coeds, one from Bennett and one from A&T, and Mrs. Susie Jones, the widow of David Jones, and I were the four persons who integrated the, the tea room. And this was a joyous experience, black waiters who apparently were quite thrilled to see this happening. Now that really is, is the story about--I know that there are many things that are somewhere in the back of my mind that have not come to the fore.

EP: Dr. William Chafe and his--

HJ: Dr. who?

EP: Dr. William Chafe, C-h-a-f-e, from Duke University--

HJ: What about him?

EP: He has written a book which has been published in Greensboro entitled *Civilities and Civil Rights*. And he discussed the sit-ins. And he says that Edward Zane, when approached by your, members of your committee and students about further desegregation--

HJ: About what?

EP: About further desegregation.

HJ: About Southern?

EP: Further desegregation of Meyer's Tea Room. He says that Zane refused to work with negotiations with you.

HJ: Wait. You said that Zane refused to do what?

EP: He refused further negotiations because he said that it was his understanding that once the lunch counters were integrated that would be the end. And what is--what was the reaction of Zane and the other business leaders and the city officials when they discovered that the students and the black community had additional demands after the lunch counters? Did--

HJ: I cannot make a contribution to that. I, I would simply be going on rumor or things that I think that I remember. But I, I can not factually answer that question.

EP: You never had any additional dealings with Zane after the lunch counters were--

HJ: Yes, I think I did. It seems to me that we met in two different places. I think we met once at A&T. And I think we met--oh, we met two or three times at Hayes-Taylor, even at a luncheon that the association was not sponsoring. But I, I remember that there was some kind of altercation with Zane and--but, I, I just can not answer that. And I don't want to try to guess.

EP: You were described by Frank McCain and Ezell Blair Jr. as being their Ralph Bunche and their "diplomat extraordinaire."

HJ: Mr. Pfaff, you say I described what?

EP: You were described to me by them as their "diplomat extraordinaire."

HJ: Oh, yes.

EP: Could you describe your role in this capacity in the negotiations?

HJ: Yes, if I haven't already done so. The negotiating process I began. Wolff says something to the effect that after negotiations had started that my group came in and people were reacting against my group. In the language of the street, that's bullshit. It is pure rotten tommyrot. The negotiations began as a result of the effectiveness that the students had wielded in a community that was intelligent enough to respond to what was taking place in a revolutionary way. And as a result of our calling, the, the shots as far as timing was concerned, no negotiation took place to my knowledge. And, and I'm as sure as I can possibly be that my knowledge is completely accurate, until I got with those people. There was a woman with us, Mrs. Feaster[?], and we went and talked with Mose Kiser.

EP: Did you--

HJ: The rest of it takes place as I said.

EP: Did negotiations occur on a daily basis or infrequently?

HJ: Infrequently.

EP: Where--

HJ: Very infrequently. As a matter of fact, the major negotiations were the three: the meeting with Kiser, the meeting with Harris and company, and the meeting with Meyer's Department Store.

EP: Did--were you responsible for bringing together members of the Student Executive Committee for Justice and the store managers? Or did you deal directly with the store managers yourself?

HJ: Directly with the store managers.

EP: And you say--

HJ: And then the students were told exactly what had happened.

EP: Did, did you then go--what, what advice did you give the students?

HJ: The only advice that I ever gave the students was to be calm and certain about their positions so that they would take the best care of, of themselves that they could. Not to incite any violence if they could keep from doing so, but to remain on the dignified level that they themselves had initiated.

EP: Did you give them any specific advice on strategy or what demands to make?

HJ: Any specific advice as to what?

EP: As to strategy or what demands to make.

HJ: No. I don't, I don't recall that we did this. But I do know that the students told us what--oh, yes. The students told us what they were going to do. And we reacted to it. We never put any strings on the students. We buttressed them. And when we--the only thing that we could do, as I remember, was to be cautious, to advise them to be cautious because lives were at stake. Their lives were at stake. And a whole new era in human relations was afoot.

EP: How many times did you meet with the students?

HJ: That's a very difficult question to answer.

EP: Very frequently?

HJ: Whenever--you see, I met with this young man several times during the course of any week, the, the liaison from A&T. And whenever we had a meeting of the association, the students were apprised and came. And the students knew from the very outset that any advice we could give to them they had but to let us know. Any help we could give to them they simply had to let us know. We also let them know that anything that we saw that we thought they should be aware of, we would contact them to tell them about it. And that's where this young man and I had these day-to-day, or every other day, or something, conversations.

EP: A number of organizations have been mentioned that gave support to the sit-ins, to the students and to the Greensboro Citizens Association--

HJ: You say another organization?

EP: Well, several of them. Among them the Greensboro Council of Churchwomen, the YWCA, the Unitarian Fellowship, the two local ministerial associations, the Greensboro Men's Club and the *Greensboro Daily News*. Would you agree that they, in one way or another, lent support to your efforts, or not?

HJ: I'm very embarrassed. If they were supporting us, I didn't know anything about it. You see, when you mentioned the Greensboro Men's Club, I was a member of the Greensboro Men's Club. Slick Miller was a member. There were several--Vance Chavis was a member. Johnny Leary was a member. There were many memb--George Simkins was. There were many people who were involved, black people, black men, who were involved in this activity who were members of the NAACP and the Greensboro Men's Club. And, certainly, the Greensboro Men's Club was represented by all time, at all times.

Now, I know that the YWCA, the downtown YWCA, was always quite liberal in the city. And I'm sure that--I'm not being kind--I'm simply saying that I am sure that there must have been things that they were doing. But as far as my awareness of support was concerned, I, I simply knew that a lot of good people in Greensboro were conscientious in wanting the problems that were there in our city to be solved amicably for the benefit of, of human kind. You see, Mr. Pfaff, I'm not attempting to hedge. It's simply that when you say, you list these organizations, in my memory from twenty years back, I don't recall any kind of actual contact that was being made.

EP: How about members of the white community? You've mentioned Edward Zane. Were there other members of the white community as individuals that you worked with or lent you support?

HJ: Well, I, I would not have mentioned Zane as, as a supporter. I would say that Mose Kiser was really a strong supporter.

EP: How about McNeill Smith? His name is mentioned?

HJ: Who?

EP: McNeill Smith.

HJ: Smith?

EP: Yes.

HJ: What's the first name?

EP: McNeill.

HJ: Oh, yes. Tell me, who is McNeill Smith? I remember the name.

EP: He is an attorney here in town.

HJ: Oh, a very bright man. I, I remember his name because of something that I read about him. Now, I don't remember that there was any--we made no overtures to him and I don't remember that he made any overtures to us. But I do remember that it is a name that I think highly of.

As, as far as members of the white community are concerned, in the actual working out of this group, I mean, of the problem, I can't name anybody other than the names that I've given. And the, the very positive statement that I would make would be the one concerning Mose Kiser. And I would have to say that Jo Spivey was extremely reliable. And it was good to know that there was such a person as she.

Well, now, there was Warren Ashby, who was a member of the faculty at the Woman's College. I don't know whether Ashby ever did anything, but he certainly was a strong moral influence in the city and he worked with us at Bennett College in many different ways. And I, I know that the rumors were that the women of Woman's College were supporting the group. But there was no organized relationship there. You, you, you see what I'm saying?

EP: Surely.

HJ: Okay.

EP: This same man that I mentioned before, Dr. William Chafe, who wrote the book *Civilities and Civil Rights*, he indicates that there was a subtle racism in Greensboro.

HJ: A subtle racism?

EP: Yes. Covered by a moderate reputation that really was just a disguise for maintaining the white-dominated status quo. Do you think this was true of Greensboro during the time you were a resident?

HJ: Yes, sir. I think it was true. I think that the racism was, was there. I think that it was--subtle is a good word. It was much more subtle than it was in many communities that I've known anything about.

EP: How, how was it subtle? How did this control by the white power structure manifest itself subtly?

HJ: A very good question. Are you a librarian?

EP: Yes, I am.

HJ: [laughs] You sound like something else, right now. I remember once that there was a move afoot to try to get black people to stay away from those segregated movies. And there was one art movie in the city over somewhere near WC. And there was a white faculty member at my college who took a black faculty woman along with his wife to this art movie. And I remember the consternation that quietly, that smoldered. There was no publicity over anything like this.

I remember that a man, a black man, who at one time was responsible for contributing, for distributing the *Greensboro News* and/or the *Record* in the Negro community. I think he was over the, the boys who threw the paper. [He] was told that the Woman's College and Guilford College and Greensboro College students bought the newspaper. And Bennett students and A&T students didn't buy the newspaper. And the man, the spokesman for the newspaper did not understand that the Woman's College student was pictured in the newspaper. And he, he thought that the Bennett girl and the A&T student were not interested in the news as these other people were. And it had to be pointed out to him that these are human beings.

I, I, remember many incidents like that. I, I, I myself went to a specialist on an occasion and I sat in his waiting room. And immediately the nurse came and, or an attendant, and escorted me back to a small, very neat room and said that, "This is the colored waiting room." And she said, "Are you comfortable here?"

And I said, "Miss, I was quite comfortable where I was." And I had to come back to this specialist on more than one occasion and every time that I got there, immediately I was taken into the office, the examining office so that the waiting room--there were these kinds of subtleties.

The, the community was rather kind when--I shouldn't say rather kind--was kind when, when Bennett College was raising money, had to raise money. And, and I, I worked in the drive with Mr. Jones, the late President Jones, to collect money from--eventually, I, I was his--I was the person who collected money from the white people. And while this was a wonderful contribution that was being made to our college and, and to the city, at the same time, the labor problems that Mr. Chafe would recognize were, were right there. At the same time, one could not come into the, the bus station without the indignity of having to go in a particular spot. And the railroad station, I remember, the Bennett girls began to sit in the white waiting room sometime in this particular period.

Mr. Pfaff, I've lived long enough to know that there is a great deal of racism in, in wherever one has races in the United States. And sometimes this is quite pronounced and

sometimes it is, it is an undercurrent. But you sense, rather than, than that you can actually put your finger on a very definite thing.

Now the kind of experience that I've just mentioned I could, I could mention many times. I never went to a movie, for example, in Greensboro. I, I went to one movie in Greensboro and that, that was on East Market Street. I saw some African business that was advertised and I went to see what that was like. But because I could not bring myself to the, the position of subscribing to the kind of segregation that was self--to me, it was a self-elected segregation. For me to pay my money to come someplace and sit in the, a seat that nobody else, that would set me apart from everybody else--so there was segregation there. And I'm sure that there is segregation there now. There is segregation in New York City where I've lived since 1961.

EP: This same researcher, Dr. Chafe, also says that there was a legacy of a rising level of black--

HJ: A legacy?

EP: Yes. Of a rising level of black protests in Greensboro from the 1940s right on through the 1960s to the present time. Would you agree with this assessment? And, how did this--

HJ: Excuse me. A legacy of rising--

EP: Black protests.

HJ: White protest?

EP: Black protests.

HJ: Meaning that whites began protesting and continued, is that the--

EP: No, sir. He's saying that every year from the 1940s on, there were more and more incidents of black protests in Greensboro. And that this was continuous right on up to and beyond the sit-ins. Would you agree with this?

HJ: I'm embarrassed, Mr. Pfaff. I, I don't really get the question.

EP: Basically what I'm saying, he's saying that the sit-ins were not an isolated incident, that there were many, many instances of black protests in the 1950s and the 1940s.

HJ: Oh, yes. I would agree with that. Such things as what, what was happening in the railroad station was, would be evidence of the fact that people were kicking their heels at that--

EP: What, what happened there?

HJ: Sorry?

EP: What happened in the railroad station?

HJ: What, what'd you say about the railroad station?

EP: Well, I was wondering. You said that as an example. What happened in the railway--

HJ: Oh, oh. Bennett girls refused to wait in the Negro waiting room. And they waited in the white waiting room. And they got away with it. They were able to do it. When we bought tickets to get on the train we were supposed to go to a particular window. And we refused to go to that window. And sometimes the clerk would be a little nasty about it. But by being calm and kicking, I mean standing for what we believed we were able to--I've done this many times in, in buying tickets to come to New York City. Things of that sort.

People would, would try occasionally to sit in the bus in the places that they were not supposed to sit. And certainly when, by the time the Martin Luther King march had come in to Greensboro [?] there were more evidences of that and also that black people stopped riding buses. There was never any concentrated drive there. But this was the day-to-day reaction.

EP: Dr. Chafe, once again, says there were two forms of black protests in Greensboro.

HJ: He says the two--I just didn't get your words.

EP: He says there were two forms of black protest in Greensboro.

HJ: Two forms of black--

EP: Protests.

HJ: Prejudice?

EP: Protests.

HJ: Right. I'm getting the word [?].

EP: Okay.

HJ: Put it in another word.

EP: All right. He says that there was a combination of direct challenges to the white power structure, and that-- such as when Randolph Blackwell ran for the General Assembly in 1948. And that there were also kind of very subtle cautious protests for black advancement characterized by Dr. [Ferdinand D.] Bluford of A&T.

HJ: What specifically--what about Bluford?

EP: Well, they're saying that his was an indirect way of advancement for the black community. Would, would you agree with this?

HJ: I, I would agree that there was an overall consistent, fairly consistent determination of black people to change things. You, you, you know that William Hampton's election was a black revolutionary victory. You know that.

EP: Yes, sir. I was wondering if you could tell me about that and the voter registration drive of 1951.

HJ: I had just come to, to Bennett College at the time. And the Greensboro Citizens Association had just been established. And its one purpose was to campaign, to organize, to articulate the demands--that was not the current word in those days--that this man have a fair shake. And he, as a result of the forcefulness of Negro people, he was really elected.

Now, you know, of course, he couldn't have been elected without white votes. But there were--the community of Greensboro was of such nature that cooperation could be counted on in many instances, though the subtle effect of race relationships or prejudice were still right there.

This, this same group, the Citizens Association, once the sit-ins were all over, did not disband this time. We became a political force. And I'm very proud of that fact. When people in Greensboro wanted, were running for city council, white people in Greensboro, they came to us and asked for our endorsement. They asked us the opportunity to, for the opportunity to speak to our group. In some cases, this did take place. I mean, we, we granted them the opportunity.

And we were visited by Terry Sanford's forces. And we heartily endorsed Mr. Sanford [for N.C. governor]. I remember we met in the Presbyterian church one evening about twelve, fourteen of us to talk with representatives who, of Sanford. And in the course of conversation it turned out that this man had no idea that black people in Greensboro were members of the NAACP. He thought that the NAACP was something radical I suppose, and communistic. At any rate, we assured him that everybody sitting in there and talking with him was a member of the NAACP and had been most of his life.

And the, when, when there were--whenever there was an election, there was reason to get in touch with us. And, and we, we were accused of block voting. And the accusation was completely correct. The only way we could be effective was to organize ourselves. And this was our way of protesting. We continued to, to work politically until the day I left. And, and I was happy upon leaving to know that attorney [Henry] Frye was my successor as the president of that organization. I don't know what the organization ever really did once I left.

EP: Do you know who--

HJ: Huh?

EP: Do you know whose idea it was to block vote?

HJ: I'm sorry.

EP: Was there any one person's idea to block vote?

HJ: It was his idea to--

EP: I was wondering, was it any one person's idea to block vote?

HJ: I seem to be running out of hearing ability.

EP: You mentioned that the black community block voted. Whose idea was this?

HJ: Oh, this was our idea. This was an idea of the association. The only way we knew that we could be effective in getting candidates whom we wanted in office was to line up the vote. And this we did unabashedly. And papers in Charlotte were criticizing the Greensboro Citizens Association for the stand that it was taking. But this was tommyrot. It, it was our small political machine that was well oiled, and we got out handbills and we did whatever we had to do.

EP: Were you politically active before 1951?

HJ: Was I, is that what you said?

EP: Yes, sir.

HJ: Was I--what did you say?

EP: Did you participate in politics before the voter registration drive of 1951?

HJ: Oh, yes. I, I participated--well, I, I really was never a member of a, of a political party in, in, in its executive stances. I became involved in Greensboro politics when I discovered, coming from Oklahoma as I did, that there was a black person who was running for our city council. And it turned out that I had already met Dr. Hampton. And he was a fine person, a member of the Greensboro Men's Club which I eventually became a member of.

And from that time on, I was associated with people with a great deal of savvy like John Leary, who is a principal of a small, I mean a junior college, a junior high school, as I recall. And we, we were all quite political minded. And that's what drew me in. The Hampton situation drew me in. I was amazed that here in the late forties, or early fifties, whatever time it was, that in the South there was the opportunity for this kind of political move.

And Hampton was a good, solid man. I would not have been amazed if Hampton had been somebody whom I could not have intellectually, or with integrity, supported. And all of our decisions were made like that. We had no personal agendas, Mr. Pfaff. This, this interests me very much.

The, the Wolff story certainly highlights Ralph Johns. And I, I think that it is a distortion. The Greensboro Citizens Association did not have--and, and I think that Johns was a member of it, by the way. But it did not have persons who were trying to push themselves to the fore one way or the other. It so happens that Waldo Falkener became interested in politics, in running for the city council. And we were tickled that he would do so and we supported him.

[End of Interview]