GREENSBORO VOICES/GREENSBORO PUBLIC LIBRARY ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVEWEE: Lois Lucas Williams

INTERVIEWER: Eugene E. Pfaff

DATE: December 27, 1980

[Begin Tape 1, Side A]

[Williams informal speech as Pfaff sets up is not transcribed]

EUGENE PFAFF: I'm speaking in the Greensboro Public Library. This is part of the Greensboro Public Library Oral History Project. I'm speaking with Mrs. Lois Lucas Williams. This is December 27, 1980, and we're speaking about the events in Greensboro from 1960 through '63 and her role in--as public relations director of the CORE [Congress of Racial Equality] chapter and the marches sponsored by CORE.

Mrs. Williams, I was wondering if you could you give me a brief biographical background up to the time you came to Greensboro?

LOIS LUCAS WILLIAMS: Well, I was one of two children. I lived in a very small place called Hallison--H-a-l-l-i-s-o-n--you went right in and right out.

EP: In what state?

LLW: North Carolina.

EP: Okay.

LLW: I lived in North--lived in North Carolina until I was--until I finished college. I came to Bennett [College] in the fall of 1960.

EP: What would you say was the background of your parents? Middle class?

LLW: Well, twenty years ago, I guess landowners were described as middle class, you know. My grandfather owned his land. He raised tobacco. No cotton; it's not--it wasn't cotton country. We raised most of our own meat, had, you know, a big garden.

EP: What was your father's occupation?

LLW: Laborer.

EP: You were saying you came to Bennett in 1960.

LLW: Yes.

EP: Would you continue from that point?

LLW: Well, I had a scholarship to Bennett and, of course, as you can imagine, I'm the first college graduate in my family. I was very excited--not very much--excited about the prospect of being able to go to school, not all that excited about what was going on in Greensboro at that time.

I lived in--the town that I lived in was so small we didn't have buses, you know, so very few restaurants for white people or blacks in the town. So the, the, the question of being able to eat out in a restaurant or to have to ride on the back of the bus didn't have very much to do with me, really. You read about it in the newspapers. You know, when I read about what had happened in Alabama, I was very excited and very happy that somebody had finally stood up, but not really on a conscious level, you know, because it didn't affect me one way or the other. Where I lived, you needed a car to get, get around, so everybody who lived in the outlying areas--we were about fifteen miles from the next largest town, which was a place called Carthage--and everybody who lived, you know, ten miles out had to have a car to get around. So the whole question of riding in the back of a bus or what[ever]--and we didn't really get out that much. If you traveled--if we traveled to Greensboro, we drove. And wherever you had to go when you were in Greensboro, you drove.

So that when I did get to Bennett, and, you know, you, you hear all the talk and everything that is going on around the campus about you, then I, I would imagine I started to get a deeper sense of, of what was going on. I never really had any, any idea of what my role was supposed to be in it until I met a man named [Reverend] John Hatchett, who was on staff at Bennett College and who was the faculty advisor.

EP: To--?

LLW: To the, to the students who were involved in the sit-ins, both Bennett and A&T [North Carolina A&T State University]. As a matter of fact, he was--you could say that he was the faculty advisor for the CORE movement. You see, it was a lot easier for teachers from Bennett to be involved in the sit-ins, because we were a private school. We were not

dependent on state aid for our existence as was, you know, A&T. Therefore, I think that made a lot of teachers who maybe would have wanted to participate from A&T a little wary of doing so, because their jobs were at stake. But the greater question was--is that state aid to the school is at stake. And--

EP: Had you been involved prior to meeting Reverend Hatchett, or did your meeting with him begin your activism?

LLW: It began my activism.

EP: Could you describe this meeting and how you were recruited into the movement?

LLW: Well, Reverend Hatchett taught philosophy and religion, and, of course, philosophically what was happening in Greensboro--what was happening across the country--was very easy to relate to the classroom. And you have to meet John Hatchett, you know, and talk to him to realize how one could be motivated by a lecture in a classroom relating philosophy through the centuries, you know, of becoming involved, of doing something. Let's see if I can remember how, how he would put it; that until every black person in this country is free, nobody is really free; until we can all be able to hold our heads up, then none of us can.

And he was a very dynamic man, and he wore glasses at the time, very tall. And he was just dynamic, and he had a certain kind of charisma that was hard to resist. Besides, the logic of it made--the logic of what he was saying made a great deal of sense. Even now, you know, twenty years later, it's very difficult for black people who are middle-class blacks to, to try and say that they have any kind of freedom of movement. When I, when I say "freedom," I don't mean, you know, like the freedom to go out of the house and to get on a bus and not have to go to the back seat. But I mean freedom to actually make it in this society.

Until everybody out there is thought of as an equal, as long as white people in this country can, can look at the person on welfare and say, "Oh, you know, there's that person, that, that person that's black, he's on welfare." That's sort of like, that's not one person that they're looking at and saying that they're on welfare, they're using up the resources of the country, they don't want to work. The--and here again, and I don't, I don't want to lump everybody in a certain class, because this is what I'm getting ready to say that they're doing. But my experience has been is that they look at all black people in this way, you know.

When you read newspapers or if you read the letters to the editor that people write--when they write about, you know, black people being on welfare, they aren't talking about one specific person, you know. Their connotation in the way they are writing, it's--generally, they feel that black people are on welfare. I mean, nobody takes

into consideration that if you do--or look at the, the statistics that are put out, where if you are talking about on a percentage basis--you know, percentage of blacks versus the population, versus percentage of whites versus their share of the population--you have far more whites that are on welfare, except when you are in urban areas, than you do blacks. Nobody looks at that because blacks are the ones that are highly visible in urban areas.

And of course, urban areas are the areas that are, that have the greatest share of the welfare burden. So that no matter if I walk into, you know, the best restaurant in town, or if I walk into the best store in town, you know, I am not seen as a person who has the money to eat in this restaurant, or who has the manners or the class or whatever. I am just seen as another, you know, as, as a black person.

EP: Could we return to the fall of 1960, and you say that you were--became activist, politically activist, as a result of your association with Reverend Hatchett. Were there other members of the faculty or the student body that also influenced you to be come an activist?

LLW: Well, there was Reverend [James] Bush, and Dr. [Elizabeth] Laizner, and a number of, you know, students now who would, who would have graduated that following year, names of whom I don't remember now that were very important, you know. Our first meeting--the first meeting that I went to after going to his [Rev. Hatchett's] philosophy class--and then there were the kids from A&T, Bill Thomas--

EP: You mean they just called a spontaneous meeting?

LLW: Well, the CORE meetings were together as a group.

EP: Looking in the CORE archives, the official dates for actually forming the CORE seemed to be the spring of '62. Does that sound right to you?

LLW: Well, maybe officially. But we had a loose-knit group, and there was a period of time where nobody knew whether or not we were going to set up a chapter of CORE or a chapter of the SCLC [Southern Christian Leadership Conference] on campus. But I think basically because of--let's see--

EP: Who would have been the members of this core group? I mean this, this--

LLW: This--

EP: --group that evolved into the CORE chapter.

LLW: Well, you'd look at [Robert] Pat Patterson, Ezell [Blair, Jr., also known as Jibreel Khazan], the other three guys that participated in the original sit-ins [Franklin McCain, Joseph McNeil, and David Richmond]. There was a core group of Bennett girls--Bennett young women--who would have been the group where the concept of the sit-ins originated. And for more clarification on that, you'd really have to talk to Reverend Hatchett or Reverend Bush. I am surprised--you talked to Dr. Laizner and she didn't mention that?

EP: She did mention some of the names. As a matter of fact, I, I keep getting different names, and I would like to try to get their sequence. For instance, among the very early members mentioned by Ezell Blair have been, of course, himself, and, as you said, the other three original four men who sat in at Woolworth's. Also Wendell Scott--

LLW: Yes.

EP: --Frances Herbin--

LLW: Yeah.

EP: --or Herbin [pronounces name slightly differently], Lewis Brandon--

LLW: Yeah, Lewis, yeah. Can't forget Lewis.

EP: Bill Thomas, of course Pat Patterson, and Artis Hinson. Some of these are just names off of the CORE files, and--

LLW: You know, there is somebody who is still in Greensboro who probably still has a lot of the original records, records of the minutes.

EP: Who would that be?

LLW: Thelma Hatchett, that's Reverend Hatchett's wife. But she's still--you can get--I think the, the listing is under "T. S. Hatchett." She would have a lot of the original minutes for the meeting because she took a lot of notes. Now, she would also have--there's a name that I also noticed that's missing and that's Doctor--Dr. [George] Simkins. I think it's the older one, he's dead now. He used to go--

EP: Dr. Simkins, Senior?

LLW: Yes. I think he used to go our bail, all the time, before, like, a lot of the national

organizations became involved. He would put up the money for our bond or for our bail to get us out of jail. Also have the--as a matter of fact, she probably still has some copies of the bail statements and, you know, and the monies and everything that he put out. So if you contact her, she, she still lives in Greensboro. She, she can give you a lot of the details because she kept a lot of the records, because at the time she and Reverend Hatchett were married. Of course, they're, you know.

EP: When--what, what went on during these early meetings at Bennett?

LLW: What went on? Planning our strategy. Trying to figure out how we could break down the status quo of segregation in, in North Carolina.

EP: The sense I get from the newspaper is that during the summer of '60 is when Kress and Woolworth gave in--desegregated--and, of course, the paper turns its attention away from activities that fall. But I understand that there were still primarily planning and strategy meetings, as you mentioned, but that occasionally the S&W [Cafeteria] and the Center Theatre and several other places were, were picketed. Is, is that correct?

LLW: Yes, there were still a lot of places that you couldn't go in, like, you could go in, well, S&[W]—Woolworth's and Kress' were places were people went in and you just sort of sat down because you were shopping there and you were already in the store. But most of the other restaurants--as a matter of fact, all of the other restaurants still maintained their white-only policy unless you, you know, bought something and took it out or went around to the back door.

You could--still could not go in, you know, and sit down and order a dinner. If you did, you were very politely asked to leave, and if you didn't leave, the police were called and you were escorted out. You still could not go and sit in an integrated theatre. There were still white-only water fountains around most places in town. Even though you could ride, you know, most places that you wanted to ride on the buses, a lot of black people still didn't feel comfortable riding in the front seat. It was almost like, automatically, you know, you found a lot of blacks, especially older blacks, who went to the back of the buses.

And I think that, of course, we realized that you can't--you couldn't, and you still can't--legislate attitudes or thoughts or the way people think. But what we were trying to find was something that was dramatic, yet practical and believable enough to get people to start acting, taking advantage of the little gains that we had won, acting on the premises that once they started to put this in action, that other things would, would come, and that they would start to be comfortable, and that we could all start to be comfortable in that situation.

EP: Do you remember the first activities, such as sitting-in or picketing, in which you engaged in?

LLW: Well, I think probably the most dramatic one was when I was arrested at S&W Cafeteria on a Thanksgiving Day. I spent my Thanksgiving in jail. We had decided--and that, too, originat[ed]--again, by this time, you're going like a year and a half, 1962. I think the pic[keting]--the, the arrest in S&W occurred on Thanksgiving of 1962. We're talking a year after the sit-ins at Kress's and Woolworth's. And we're still talking about a recalcitrant town with, with store owners or restaurant owners and hotel and motel owners who were still saying, "Well, you know, maybe a few of them gave in, but we're going to hold out to the very end. We're, we're, you know, we're still not going to integrate."

We had a number of students on Bennett's campus, as on A&T's, whose fathers had, you know, fought in the war. A lot of them didn't come home. Or if they came home, they were messed up for life in, in some way or another. And a number of those students felt, and we all did, that our fathers had sacrificed their life for this country. And that certainly of all days, on Thanksgiving Day, we had a right to be able to go in a--any restaurant in this city that we wanted to and be served.

EP: The paper mentions that Reverend William Brown led a pray-in in front of the S&W, and as a result, I believe it says, some forty-five people were arrested. Is this the incident to which you are referring?

LLW: Well, I, I don't remember the pray-in. It, it could have happened, you know. You're, you're talking about two or three hundred people that are marching on a restaurant and trying to go in and attempting to get served. I, I do remember, I think, one of the most striking incidents of that, on that particular day, is that we had a student [Tommie Miller] who spoke fluent French and fluent German. And she put a, you know, one of these African headbands on her head. And she was speaking French. And, of course, they didn't know that she wasn't black, I would--a black American. I imagine that they thought that she was an African or some kind of diplomat because she had the headdress and the African, you know, robes and everything on. And they were able to let her in, but not us.

EP: So they did allow her to go in because she was not a black American?

LLW: And, and then she told them, you know, of course, who she was. And if she could go in, why couldn't the rest of us go in, which almost resulted in, you know, their closing the restaurant. Some people managed to slip in, you know, one, one way or the other, through the back door and then come in and sit down and ask to be served. And of course, they

were asked to leave. And when none of us left, it's very possible that there was a pray-in at the head of the line somewhere. Frankly, I don't remember.

EP: So some people actually got into the cafeteria?

LLW: Yes. Some people were carried out of the cafeteria to wait in vans to go to jail, only the jail couldn't hold all of us. So we were fitted into the armory, where we stayed for about four or five days.

EP: In this incident, or series of incidents in the fall of 1962, again, the paper, anyway, indicates that it started out some time in October with picketing and a call for boycotting of downtown--

LLW: Downtown stores--yeah.

EP: --stores, do you remember these incidents?

LLW: Yes.

EP: Were you involved in the planning sessions that, that resulted in these actions?

LLW: Well, when you say, "was I involved in the planning sessions," exactly what do you mean? Do you mean that I actually sat down--

EP: Were you one of a group of people that sat down and said, "Listen, one option we can do is to call for a boycott to put pressure on the downtown merchants. Let's start it such-and-such a day," that kind of strategy planning.

LLW: Well, we had strategy planning. I mean, we planned, how do you say it? We discussed the best possible way of our actions having an impact on eradicating further vestiges of segregation in Greensboro. Now, in terms of, you know, you actually sitting down saying, "All right, we're going to have a boycott, and we're going to plan it for, you know, October twenty-sixth or October twenty-fifth." I just don't--you know.

No, I think a lot of what happened in terms of the boycott was spontaneous. You know, people just made up their own minds. "All right, we are not going to buy at this store." And then in talking with somebody, somebody's going to say, well, you know, "Well, we aren't shopping here anymore. We simply aren't going to shop downtown at Prego-Guyes." Or, "We are not going to shop because they don't have any black salespersons in there. [There] certainly are a great number of qualified people who can work, you know, as a salesgirl." Or, "Well, we, we are just going to take our accounts

out, you know, of Wachovia Bank, because there certainly are a number of black people who can qualify to be tellers in Wachovia Bank."

EP: So it was a lot more informal--

LLW: So--

EP: --than what I suggested?

LLW: --yes, you know, to say that a group of people got together and said, "All right, we are going to bring downtown Greensboro to its knees,"--I don't, you know, have any recollection of it.

EP: Could you tell me how the CORE chapter actually was formed, and who were the initial officers and the sequence of officers up to the spring of '63?

LLW: Up to the spring of '63. Let's see, as I remember it, Bill Thomas was--no, Bill Thomas wasn't the first president of CORE.

EP: I do--I am pulling from some records, that is, for instance, I mentioned Wendell Scott's name. I have a--we have a letter that he wrote to the CORE home office in, in New York. And he indicated some initial officers, and asked for brochure information--"Freedom Now" brochure or, or pamphlet--and several other things. And he indicated that in the spring of '63--'[6]2 rather, there were about eight or nine members. And that the first--he was listed as the first chairman, but he gave it up in the summer. And he listed Ezell Blair as the vice chairman, who then was elected chairman--

LLW: Chairman, and then after that, Bill Thomas--

EP: Right.

LLW: --I think would have gone on to be the president.

EP: And he listed Mrs. Betty Wall as secretary and Evander Gilmer, Jr. as treasurer. Do you recall these individuals?

LLW: Betty Wall, I don't recall a Wall. That must be her married name. Wendell Scott I know vaguely. Ezell Blair, of course, I know. Bill Thomas--

EP: In other words, these individuals didn't stay with it very long?

LLW: No, but Ezell Blair was on campus a lot. He stayed with the CORE group, he just gave up the presidency. Artis Hinson--

EP: Okay. What, what Ezell told me on the telephone was that, as you mentioned, they were having a series of these meetings that grew, that grew out of the sit-ins--the initial sit-ins. And he said that they invited a CORE representative, who was Reverend [B. Elton] Cox from High Point. And he gave them some advice, and CORE literature, and procedures for setting up. And that they then proceeded to, to form a CORE chapter.

LLW: Well--

EP: Does this fit in with what you remember?

LLW: I think it was probably [both speaking at once]-- [laughter] it was probably a little more practical than that. When we all got arrested in November--there was an arrest on Thanksgiving Day, you know, because we couldn't get in to--for dinner. And then I think that, you know, the day after that, or the day after, there was another group of arrests. So we had, you know, three or four hundred people who were in jail. And I think that CORE was the organization that, when our, you know, for that large group of people that stood good for the bail, of course, which meant that, you know, we could be released. And I think that that, probably more than anything else, was one of the things that helped us to finally evolve into a CORE chapter, because it was a national organization and because--

EP: I--[pause]--I'm sorry.

LLW: No--because it was a national organization and because it had the money and the wherewithal, you know, to get us out of jail or to be there with lawyers and whatever when we needed it.

EP: Several things that come out of CORE archives is very interesting. For instance, that Greensboro was selected as a site, Bennett--here again, because of Bennett College, for the three-week training session for the Freedom Highways Project. Do you recall those, those classes and those sessions? This, I believe, this would have been June or July of 1962.

LLW: Vaguely. What--

EP: Well, basically, I, I was just wondering is it correct to say that Greensboro was selected because of the publicity of having been the site of the first sit-in of the sixties, and, and,

as you mentioned, the strength of Bennett College in that it was independent and not beholden to the state legislature?

LLW: Yeah. Yes. I think that that would be, that would be, you know, an accurate assessment. Bennett had an awful lot of--I can remember when we were in jail, after we had been there for about four or five days. And we were in the armory. And you can imagine what, you know, bathroom facilities and everything and, you know, [not] being able to take regular showers and all that was like. And I can remember our president, who was Dr. Willa B. Player, coming down to make sure that her girls, her young women, were all right. And I can, you know, remember the guards and everybody, you know, just standing up looking at this regal woman coming in and with her white gloves, and taking her hand, you know, and going over to see that there--you know, there's dust here, of course--but, you know, that she finally decided that, that we, we were all right.

Yes, the strength of Bennett College, the strength of the fact that, that we were independent. The fact that there were faculty advisors like Dr. Laizner and Reverend Hatchett and Bush who were on campus, who were very articulate, who could speak out, who had a great deal of organizational ability. And that there was a president, who no matter what, you know--and a board of directors--who would stand behind us. And that yes, we could be the host for this group of people with little or no fear of, you know, of any kind of repercussions.

The other thing that I don't know whether you've gathered from your papers, if you've done a careful reading of it--you probably have. Because of Dr. Laizner's background--you know she was German--we had a lot of really nasty stuff in the press that, you know, Communists had infiltrated the group and that we were being led astray--all of us "nice little black children" were being led astray by, you know, Communist people who were working--

EP: And this was the local press that was saying this?

LLW: This, this was the local press. And our administration at Bennett had managed to withstand that. You know, there's no--simply no truth to it. It doesn't even dignify a response. And, of course, if you can't get people to respond and deny things, then it sort of--you know, pretty soon it, it ceases to be worthy of putting it in print.

EP: I understand there was a faculty member, not Dr. Laizner, but another lady [Alice Jerome] whose husband at some point had been involved in some kind of alleged Communist activity years earlier, and as a result was forced to resign from the Bennett faculty. Do you recall this incident?

LLW: Well, I remember the allegations. In terms of whether or not it was ever proved--proven

to be true, or whether or not they were forced to resign, or whether or not they left on their own, I don't know. All I do know is that they had little or nothing to do with what happened in Greensboro. You know, after the movement was started, they probably did come to meetings, you know, like a lot of people came to meetings. They probably came to see what was going on. But they had no input, you know, into, in terms of deciding how we were going to do things, or what strategies we were going to use. A lot of our strategies evolved just out of, just out of being some place at an opportune moment. For an example, we went down to the theatre, a group of us, to go to the movies. And of course we couldn't get in. We couldn't get in on, on the main floor. And, all of a sudden, we found ourselves arrested, because somebody just decided, "Well, you know, I'm, I'm not going to go up on the balcony, and I'm really not going to go home."

So, when things happen sort of in, in a spontaneous way, you really can't say that somebody is planning it, or somebody is sitting up there, you know, putting out a--laying out the rules for a game, and to say that these people are going to follow it.

The Communist ruse didn't work very well in Greensboro.

EP: It never really got off the ground.

LLW: It never really got off the ground. I mean, you know, there were a few nasty articles in the newspaper as far as those two, you know, people were concerned, but nobody really believed it.

EP: Do you remember their names?

LLW: I can't, I really can't. Thelma Hatchett probably would, though, or she's got it in, in--the one thing that I intended to do was to go through some of my newspaper clippings and bring them with me. And I got--went to the attic, and got them out of the attic. And I had ready to bring them and we left a lot later.

EP: Did you hold any other offices in CORE besides public relations director?

LLW: No.

EP: When were you elected public relations director?

LLW: It was probably in the fall or winter of 1962, after the, after the sit-ins--after, after the arrest at the S&W Cafeteria.

EP: What were your responsibilities in that office?

LLW: Well, we just tried to--we had a lot of negative publicity, you know. The, the Communist threat was one. There were a large rash of articles coming out about that time that, that blacks were inherently, you know, inferior to other people, therefore they didn't--if we associate, if, you know, the whites associated with us somehow or another, this inferiority would rub off on them. That we were prone to commit crimes, because it was our nature to commit crimes. And my function, you know, very simply, was to try and defuse some of the negative publicity by proofing whatever statements that we put out as a group, and by, as an individual, writing letters to the editor and just seeing how many of them you could get printed. Most of which didn't get printed, by the way.

EP: Is that right. Did you originate--did you write these press releases yourself? You mentioned you proofed them. Did you write them yourself?

LLW: Well, the letters to the editors I, I wrote myself. The press release was usually written with the--was written by the pres[ident]--by the president. And of course, all you did was just make sure that it was firmed up. You know, everything was said the way that it was supposed to be said, that it read nice, that it flowed easily, and that everything that you said, as far as you knew, was the truth. And when we had--

EP: Were you the contact person with the press?

LLW: Well, not really, because the press chose to do whatever it wanted to do. If they didn't get the right kinds of information--see, the press was looking for a lot of, you know, in-house bickering, a lot of fighting. You know, "Was there friction between this group and that group? Was, you know, somebody supposed to be trying to take over from this group? How much animosity was there in this group?" If they couldn't get this from you, then they, you know, they'd go to somebody totally and completely different. Or they'd just call some--or a reporter would be walking through campus or--and just single somebody out, "Well, what do you know about what CORE is doing," or, "What do you know about what is going on?"

As you've probably figured out over the last twenty years, the press has very ingenious ways of trying to get the information that they want or taking none [sic] information and printing it as information. So, no, not all of the time. If it suited their purposes, you know.

EP: Were there ever any reporters who seemed to be fairly accurate or sympathetic, at least anxious to get the truth, that come to your mind? I know that many of the articles written either by Dorothy Benjamin or Jo Spivey--do these individuals stand out in your mind as being positive, or were they part of this whole press structure that you just described?

LLW: Well, I think that by the time we were--in the beginning, the members of the press were just as frightened--were just as, were just as frightened as all the rest of the establishment in Greensboro. They didn't understand, you know, what had happened to this nice quiet little, you know, black sub-colony that had been the black people in Greensboro. They didn't understand what had happened, you know. Why, all of a sudden, wasn't going around to the back door good enough or, or taking something out? Why were people suddenly becoming dissatisfied with their, with our role?

I mean, you were here, you were getting a good education, or at least an education that was better than a lot of people in the South could, could attest to that they were getting. And what had they done to deserve, you know, all that we supposedly were giving them? I think that's the attitude that most of them expressed right down, probably until, well, the March on Washington, where you, where you started to get a lot of national figures involved, where we really started to see the, the coalescence, I think, of Martin Luther King's philosophy that, basically, we really weren't talking about--even though here in Greensboro and here in the South, it, it turned--just so happened that it turned into, you know, a problem of color. But that basically across this country, that what we were talking about is a question of the haves versus the have-nots, and I think [W.E.B.] Du Bois said that more clearly than, than I could say it.

EP: I'm sorry.

LLW: No, go ahead.

EP: You mentioned that you chose to go to CORE, but you were considering setting up other chapters, like SCLC.

LLW: Yeah.

EP: Why did you finally decide to go with CORE over these other organizations?

LLW: Well, as I said before, my, my feeling is, is that because CORE was there when we had that tremendous amount of bail money to be, to be made, and it was middle-of-the-road, not perhaps as passive as some of us thought the NAACP [National Association for the Advancement of Colored People] was at that time, not quite as radical as SNCC [Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee]. It was moderate, middle-of-the-road. James Farmer [CORE founder] was a, a magnetic, charismatic type of person. When we were released from jail, he came down. We also had Floyd McKissick. I don't know whether you've interviewed him.

EP: Not yet.

LLW: He's another important--well, he's another important person that you should talk to. Floyd McKissick was also here and, I, I--he was, I think, he was president of the Durham chapter of CORE.

EP: That's what I have in my notes.

LLW: Yeah, at that time. And he, he was an attorney, and he was close enough, you know, a phone call away and an hour's ride away. And at that time, CORE was a, a, was a viable organization.

EP: Did it have anything to do with the fact that it had more or less focused its recruiting on college campuses and that a lot of the membership were young, activist, black college students?

LLW: I would imagine, probably.

EP: Whereas the other organizations tended to be older adults?

LLW: Yes, I would imagine that had a great deal of appeal, and we didn't get an awful lot of support from a lot of the older established, you know, black adults in this country. Because here again, the professional blacks, for the most part, their jobs depended upon the largesse of the state, you know. You're talking about school teachers, you're talking about people who worked for the state in other capacities who made up the bulk of the professional black community, you know.

I can remember older, established blacks saying, "Well, why do you want to do this? Why do you want to tear, tear down--I mean, you know, this is what we have been working for all of these years, you know. We've got these really beautiful brick homes and sure, we've got our own area of town. It's segregated, but it's ours. And now what you are doing threatens all of this." And they felt threatened, and you can't blame them for feeling threatened.

EP: Would you say this was a predominant opinion in the older black community in Greensboro, at least at the beginning?

LLW: I think that it was a predominantly--at the beginning, yes. Public, at any rate. I'm sure that there are--were a number of those people, you know, who said, "Well, I just don't understand what you're coming to, you know. Everything has been going along fine," and who said that to us publicly to try to stop what they could foresee as being a disaster. Because, you know, our lives were physically threatened. And I, I'm sure that that came

into play or came into their minds when they were, you know, trying to stop us, or at least give us reason to, to pause and reassess what we were doing. But I am just as sure that when these people went home, or in the backs of their minds, they were saying, "Hallelujah," even though it, you know, they couldn't say it out loud. Because to say it out loud would have meant then, had there been a disaster, that in some way they probably would have felt responsible, or probably would have felt that their giving us the encouragement could have been responsible and they would have felt guilty.

EP: Did you have much support from the NAACP here under Dr. Simkins?

LLW: Yes.

EP: So he was supportive?

LLW: Yes.

EP: If I could follow--

LLW: But before--

EP: Oh, I'm sorry. Go ahead, please.

LLW: As I said before, and this information--why did I want to say Dr. Simkins? [pause] Anyway, I was getting ready to say again that before we get into--I think I'm confusing two black dentists; the one that originally won our bond money--you see, we're going back twenty years and again, a lot of things are, are unclear in my mind in terms of people and places and at the exact time that it happened. But if you will call Thelma Hatchett, she, I am sure, because I talked to her earlier--about two or three months ago--and I'm sure that she still has a lot of the original documents. And I wanted to say that the elder Dr. Simkins won our bond in the very beginning. But I'm beginning to think that it was another, another black dentist so I'll just hold on that point and you can clarify it with her.

EP: Sure. Of course, I'm going by the sequence that I got from the various newspaper clippings. And correct me if I've got it wrong, because it could well be not as the newspaper reported. But I--what I got was that there was this push in October, and culminating in the large number of arrests over Thanksgiving. And then the--there was a Human Relations Commission--it may not have been by that title--but they asked for a halt or a moratorium on, on picketing and demonstrations of that nature and--while they did a, a report. And Dr. Laizner said that they--the CORE chapter debated whether or not

to go along with this, but they did. And that the report came out sometime in February [1963] and it said it expressed sympathy with the goals of CORE, but said, "We urge merchants to desegregate, but we do not advocate any kind of enforcement--power to force them to." Does this sound right?

LLW: Yeah.

EP: Do you remember the debate that surrounded whether or not to go along with it?

LLW: Well, remember it--I remember it in the sense that some of us felt that two hundred years was enough time, you know. There were others who felt, the, the more moderate wing, that felt that since we were the ones that were pushing--and I use that word lightly--since we were the ones that were--well, yeah, we were asking for something, something that we shouldn't have had to ask for. Yet at the same time, we were still asking, you know, that the state of North Carolina, that the community of Greensboro, the City of Greensboro, make a reality the Constitution of this country that we all lived in. That we stand by the fact, you know, that in fact, at least in our Constitution, constitutionally, all men are created equal. And that we had the right to the same rights, to the same treatment that everybody else in Greensboro had.

And that since we were here, once again asking, after all these years, that this in fact become a reality, and that since we had waited so long, that we could in fact wait to give the commission time to do its report. And that maybe in that, in the time that they were planning the report, that they would be able to exert some pressure in the form of goodwill, in the form of saying, "Well, this is really what is best for Greensboro." You know, that it--to go along with this, that Greensboro really can become a model for the rest of the South and for the rest of the nation to look at and to follow. And that it does not have to be done in terms of, of violence, you know. That it can be done peaceably. That there is no need for violence. That what these people really want is not going to hurt you. That as a matter of fact, financially, it can be a boon, a boom, for Greensboro.

EP: Dr. Laizner mentioned that she more or less designated the executive committee and the officers of CORE into two camps, very loose camps, she said, "activists" and the "moderates."

LLW: I'm curious, how did Dr. Laizner designate herself?

EP: She said, she said she was an activist. She characterized also Reverend Bush and Reverend Hatchett as activists. Bill Thomas as activist. She, she looked more--she designated Lewis Brandon, if I recall correctly, as more of a moderate; Pat Patterson as more of a moderate. Would you agree with these assessments, and, if so, what would you

mean, what would you mean by the terms activist and moderate?

LLW: How did she designate me?

EP: At the time, I did not have your name, so I did not bring your name to her mind. She did mention you and several other young ladies' names in connection with the founding of the CORE chapter. But I do not recall her placing you in a camp.

LLW: Okay, well I'm just trying to see, you know, what her criteria for her camps are.

EP: Well, she said, she said, "Now, you're trying to make it seem like we were bickering." And she said, "Not. That's not it."

LLW: Right.

EP: "We were just presenting different points of view." And she said, "I just use these terms as convenient labels." And if I recall correctly, she was saying the activists were saying, "Come on, let's do this now. Let's do something now." The moderates were saying, "Well, wait. Maybe we ought to--we all wanted to do something," but they didn't agree as to what would be--

LLW: The timing.

EP: --the right approach and the timing.

LLW: The timing. That, that was the--the critical issue was, all right, how much time do you wait, you know? We have made our position plain; we are not asking for anything that's not guaranteed by the Constitution. Blacks spend a great deal of money in Greensboro and, one way or the other, that money gets back into these establishments that are still saying that they are going to keep us out of the front door. And I guess basically, it got down to, How much time do you want to give them, over and above the time that they've already had? And I--yes, I would go along with her. Although I don't think that Bill Thomas was an activist, you know, an activist in the sense--I think that Bill was more a moderate. He was more of a person who would want to say, "Well, okay, let's stop, let's wait, let's look at it this way. Well, maybe you have a point here, and you have a point there. Let's try to bring all of these things together into the middle and, and see where we stand." What we finally ended up doing was waiting to see what happened.

EP: What--how would you characterize yourself, given these two labels, or whatever way you would like to characterize yourself?

LLW: Well, middle-of-the-road. I guess you'd have to characterize me, not as--if you want to use the term activist as somebody who wants to jump ahead without thinking about the consequences, then no. But if you want to use the term activist as somebody who thinks through the consequences, and knows what the consequences are, and yet decides to act, then, then, yes.

EP: One reason we characterized it--"we" meaning Dr. Laizner and myself in our conversation, is--and this fits in with, with timing, too--she said a crucial problem was do you try to work up some kind of activity for this spring, meaning the spring of 1963, or do you wait until the fall--because we are only a few weeks away from finals, students will be leaving. If we gear something up, right when we're in it, we'll lose our troops--

LLW: Momentum.

EP: --momentum. Do you--people who'll be here in Greensboro this summer, do they really work up a program for the fall? And so we were kind of using the terms activists and moderates to mean activists, who wanted to work up something in the spring, and moderates who wanted to wait for the fall.

LLW: Oh, then I am an activist. Then I was an activist.

EP: So you wanted to do something that spring, right away?

LLW: Yes.

EP: Did you have in mind what you wanted to do? Or, what were some of the suggestions? Excuse me.

LLW: Well, here again, you go back to the same central thing, you know. What are you going to do--what, what can you do when a community, when the businesspeople in a community allow a few stores or the majority of the stores to say that we're going to, we're going to behave this way against one segment of the population, which spends all of its money, you know, either in rent or food or mortgages or whatever, to support these institutions, all of whom become interdependent on each other through the economic ties in the community, you know? Do you continue to picket? That, that takes an awful lot of time. And it takes an awful lot of people to go around to each one of these establishments to picket them every day. [pause]

Or do you just decide that you are not going to spend your money there? You know, what do you do that, that's legal, that you can still do, be within the confines of the

law, and still do something to, to attack the problem? I can remember groups of people going into Wachovia Bank and taking like fifty dollars in pennies, and giving it to them to deposit, which meant, of course, they had to use all of this time to count it. And after a point it just became a lot simpler.

EP: What was the reason for this? Were they not accepting black bank deposits? Or not employing--

LLW: They were accepting black bank deposits. They didn't employ blacks--

EP: So this was--

LLW: --in any capacity other than, you know, sweeping the floors.

EP: So you were pushing to have tellers, management positions?

LLW: Yes. Yes. And it worked. We stopped buying. And again, as I said before, I don't think anybody actually sat down and planned that we were going to boycott, you know, Greensboro, or we were going to boycott certain stores in Greensboro. I think that people just walked into the places where you were treated the worst, or places where, you know, people still, even if you walked in with a credit card and if there was an initial, tried to find out what the initials stood for so that they could have the pleasure of calling you by your first name. Who just absolutely refused to address you as Mr. or Mrs. or Miss. And it didn't matter if you walked in in a hundred dollar dress or a hundred dollar suit with hats and gloves, you know, which was a traditional Bennett outfit, you know the hat, the gloves, you know, all of this. You were still "Lois" or, or "Betty Jo" or whatever, if they could figure out what your first name was. So it was just a question of, well, I'm not going to shop there any more, you know? And sort of like word of mouth, it got around. And then in some places where it was really bad, the places were actually picketed. And we--

EP: Do you recall what the worst places were?

LLW: Thalheimers, Prego-Guyes. You know, none of them were good. I mean, you know, if you were going on a scale of one to ten, you wouldn't have any tens. I would imagine that Meyer's and Belk's were probably better than a lot of the stores that tended to be, you know, on the more exclusive side, or to cater to people who happened to have more money. Because in Meyer's and Belk's you had, like, a wide range of merchandise, you know, where people could afford to buy different things. And they were accustomed to

seeing blacks in the stores more than--

EP: Prior to the big push in the spring of ’63, what were some of the stores that would--did have black patrons that didn’t practice segregation?

LLW: That didn’t practice segregation?

EP: Or were there any?

LLW: There weren’t any.

EP: Well, you mentioned that you could buy at Belk’s.

LLW: Well, you could buy at Belk’s, but I’m talking about people that hired. You could buy at all the stores. All of them accepted your money. But the question--they accepted your money, but the questions was that, you know, how they accepted it, and the fact that they didn’t have any blacks who worked there behind the counters. I mean, blacks apparently couldn’t count money, or weren’t to be trusted running a cash register. I mean, you know, you could run the elevators and you could sweep the floors and you could even cook in the places like Woolworth’s and Kress’s. But you did[n’t]--you didn’t wait on tables, you know; you didn’t take money from people.

EP: One of the events, or at least the first one that I’ve seen in the newspaper, after this committee--the Human Relations Committee--made its report, was the picketing of city hall twice in, in March. And at one of these, I believe the first one, the reporter was interviewing Reverend Hatchett, and Reverend Hatchett said, “Well actually, it wasn’t my idea. It was that young lady over there. She is our public relations director,” referring to you.

LLW: [laughter]

EP: Were you the motivating force behind the decision to picket city hall?

LLW: Yes.

EP: How did you arrive at that?

LLW: Well, it’s the place where government is made, right? It’s the place where laws are made. If anybody has any respect for the laws in this country--I know that buildings, buildings in this country are very symbolic. I mean, look at the churches, look at all of the money

that is spent on churches and the synagogues and everyplace, you know. Sure, they're places of worship, but when you start thinking about the citadel of power in this country, we go to, you know, starting at the capitol in Washington, to the state houses, and then you get down to the local levels to the city, to, you know, our city hall. We--I felt that this was a way of dramatizing that we wanted to be law-abiding, yet we wanted somebody that sat in those rooms, around those tables, and made decisions that affect the lives of all the people, to take notice of us.

EP: Do you recall what happened? Was there any harassment? Was there any dialogue with any city officials, police, anything? It says that you picketed for about half an hour during the lunch hour, something like 1:30 to 2:00.

LLW: There was no, there was no violence. In terms of what came out of it, as a result of it, it was simply more letters stating, you know, "Just have a little more patience. Can't you wait, you know, just a little longer? We're working behind the scenes trying to do the best we can, but when you come out and picket us, you know, this makes our job a little bit more impossible."

EP: So you did get behind-the-scenes correspondence from city hall as a result of this?

LLW: Yes.

EP: From the mayor or city council, that kind of thing?

LLW: Well, the mayor wouldn't demean himself, you know. So to answer us, he had a spokesman who sort of sent us word via somebody else. You know, nobody wants to be quoted in the newspaper. Nobody is going to write a letter that is going to, to put them in a--in one camp versus the other.

EP: So the spokesman actually came out to, to the Bennett campus?

LLW: Yes, to say, you know, "We're doing all we can do, you know. Can't you please understand this, and you know, go slow? It'll take time, but, you know, eventually we'll, we'll work it out."

EP: Again, here again, I'm just going by bits and scraps from the newspapers. And Dr. Laizner said nothing came out of these picketings. She said Bill Thomas called a meeting--I don't know if it was the executive committee or the mass meeting of CORE--at the Bennett Campus. And she says--I believe she said it was at Pfeiffer Hall. And she says that she recalls him leaning against the piano there and just putting it to the

membership, saying, “Do we do something now, or do we wait until the fall?” Do you recall this? It seems like a pretty crucial meeting.

LLW: Yes.

EP: Could you describe what went on or characterize it or whatever?

LLW: Well, we had received nothing, you know. The picketing of city hall had led to nothing, except “go slow” and more promises. So I guess you could accurately characterize it as saying that nothing came, came out of the meetings, except that they didn’t want to see us back downtown again, you know, because it would be detrimental to our own causes, according to, to them.

John Hatchett was also present at that meeting. And I would imagine that that would have been one of the meetings where she was talking about the moderates and the activists having--being strongly opposed, you know, to what the other was trying to get over. We decided to act. We decided that it, it was no, you know [laughter], it was, it was just discussing what each faction wanted--well, faction is not a good word--well, I guess it is a good word--to wait, to actually try and see if over the summer the, the city fathers could come up with something that would be more acceptable. Weighing that against the fact that when we came back in September we would have to mobilize all over again, you know, and get people up again and, and the decision was that we needed to do something. I don’t think we decided what to do at that meeting, because if it’s the same meeting that I’m thinking about, I think it ended with both groups being, you know, completely unsatisfied with what the other had wanted to do. And I really don’t think that the--I think that our next mass arrest came shortly after that at the theatre--at the local theatre.

EP: Well, as I understood it from Dr. Laizner, the executive committee then decided to picket at McDonald’s. And this is the one on May eleventh, where--the incident on May eleventh where Reverend Hatchett, Bill Thomas, Pat Patterson, and--I’m not sure who the fourth individual was--Reverend [A. Knighton] Stanley--

[End Tape 1, Side A--Begin Tape 1, Side B]

EP: What theatre are you talking about?

LLW: About two, well, really about two hundred of us were arrested at the local, at the downtown theatre in the spring of 1963, I think.

EP: Do you remember whether it was Center or the Carolina?

LLW: I think it was the Carolina.

EP: Okay. Do you recall then the--well, would you care to describe that incident?

LLW: Well, we went down to see a movie, and we simply could not get in the main entrance, you know, without being told that we had to go to the balcony. I remember that we had marched all the way from A&T's campus, again using their lettermen as flankers, you know, to--here again, not trying to take anything away from what happened at A&T's campus. But a lot of things we simply did from Bennett's campus because, again, we were in a better position to do it. And now since we are talking for the record, it's my understanding that the original concept of the sit-ins began on Bennett's campus, with, you know, a group of Bennett girls.

EP: Going all the way back to 1960?

LLW: Going all the way back to 1960. Now, somehow, probably because, you know, the guys on A&T's campus felt that the girls would be hurt, you know, they sort of preempted the, the time, because it was planned to take place at one time and then it was sort of preempted. And the four guys from A&T went down and sat-in anyway. And I would imagine that, here again, that was to protect, you know, the Bennett women from any violence that they felt.

EP: But you were definitely going to do something like that?

LLW: Yeah. And again, another good person to talk to about that would be Reverend Hatchett, because it's my understanding that he was in on the original planning, you know, for the sit-ins in the beginning.

And we, we marched, you know, down Market Street, which meant that we had to go past certain portions of A&T's campus if we went from Bennett. And we picked up the lettermen as flankers, and we marched downtown to the theatre. And, of course, we tried to get in, we tried to buy tickets and were unable to get in. Again, our friend who's name was Tommie Miller, our, our linguist, went to the window speaking, you know, French. And I would imagine by this time she didn't--it wasn't successful, because apparently, you know, the people from S&W had already passed the news on that this had happened, or it had been in the newspaper that this was one of the things that had happened. And she was unable to get in.

And, of course, they threatened to call the police unless we left. And we refused to leave, and a number of us were arrested. My understanding, and again we're going back twenty years, is that that event took place before the arrest of members of the executive committee at McDonald's. And again, you know, we really didn't, or at least I

didn't--I felt that for the most part, well, maybe it's just because of the times that I was arrested--that we had young police officers, and by and large, they were basically young, and they weren't violent.

EP: They weren't part of this "Old Guard" segregationist status quo?

LLW: Right. You know, they were really not violent, and most of them really weren't nasty. You know, they had a job to do. And a lot of them seemed just as embarrassed at having to do it, and having to do it that way, because in their own way I thought--I think that they realized that times had to change, and that they had to change with them. And, for the most part, you found some of the guards who were nasty--but for the most part, the guards that served us our food at the armory and everything--it wasn't totally depressing. I mean, you know, to be in jail on Thanksgiving Day or any day has a certain amount--

EP: When you were arrested on Thanksgiving, were you taken down to the city jail or the armory?

LLW: Well, we were taken to--the first of us were taken to the city jail. We were taken to city jail and booked, you know, fingerprinted, and, and all of that. And then, of course, the jail was overcrowded, so the overload had to go to the armory. And they tried to--first they tried to, you know, like, to put all of the females in the armory so that we would sort of be separated from the males. But then it just got so filled that eventually they had to open up another room of the armory and bring some of the guys out there, too.

EP: Was there communication with the campus? Were there people who were designated as liaison to communicate with those inside and those outside?

LLW: Well, we had a--yeah, a line of communication in case that, you know, we were arrested. Because we went down there, we really thought that by it being Thanksgiving Day and, you know, being so many of us, that the S&W would be so glad to get the money, that they would let us eat, especially since it was Thanksgiving Day. But it didn't turn out that way. And we had our, our campus was set up--there were people on our campus, you know, who would relay the information that, yes, we were in jail, that, yes, we were doing fine. Once the--of course, once the information hit the news, then everybody knew. And we had--

EP: As a CORE officer, did you have a key role in this?

LLW: In setting up the--

EP: Communications.

LLW: The communications channel?

EP: I guess keeping morale up--

LLW: Keeping morale up. You know, making sure that people understood that even though we were spending Thanksgiving Day in jail, that, you know, it was still there for a purpose. And that the purpose was that so our children on some future Thanksgiving Day or, you know, some future Thanks[giving]--next Thanksgiving--that, that we would be able to eat.

EP: I guess one key question is, is how did your role as an officer of CORE and your role as a college student conflict?

LLW: Well, that's a good question. And it gets back to something that we were discussing earlier. [pause] I had a--my role as a CORE officer, I just made it a part of my role as a college student. It didn't supersede or take over the fact that my primary purpose was that I was there to get an education, you know. And by being able to, to get an education would certainly mean--and it has meant--that I was able to move a lot easier, you know, in, in the larger society, and that when the changes came, as they had to come, that I was then prepared to take advantage for them.

You see, I didn't make the movement my life. I didn't make it a career, as did a lot of students, not just at Bennett and at A&T, but throughout the country. They became the movement, you see. There was no separation between where the movement began--or where the movement ended, and where their own lives began. Their life became the movement. Consequently, when the movement was over, or when, you know, and when jobs opened up, these were people who were still out there. Their only job was the movement. So when the movement was over they didn't have any jobs. Their only education was the movement. And when it came time to need an education, or to move ahead, or to use skills that they should have acquired during that time, they didn't have the skills. These are the people that the movement burned out. They gave their all to it--

EP: What do you think happened--

LLW: --and have not been able to get anything in return.

EP: What do you think has happened to people like these?

LLW: Well, some of them have gone on to--went back to school, you know, found it to go back

to school. At then at that time, of course, we had this other great big, you know, American whitewash of black studies and all. Setting up programs and degrees in black studies at some of the best universities across the country. And you found a lot of these people saying, "Oh, well, you know, here I go. I've had all of this for the last ten years or so. And now I can channel it right back in here, and I am comfortable, and I am at home." Which is one of the biggest hoaxes that, you know, that's ever been perpetuated against blacks. It's--black history has to be taught. It has to be taught in the schools, and it has to be taught in the home. But there is no viable job market for a person who majors in black history unless he intends to teach.

EP: Is the hoax in the programs themselves or in the expectations that they arise, in terms of jobs and futures and so forth?

LLW: Well, I think that the hoax was in the design--in the way the program was, was designed. I think that you had lots of universities and lots of, you know, liberal minded people who are saying, "Well, we need a certain number of blacks at certain universities. One of the ways that we can have blacks in our universities and not have them is to set up something that's for them and for them only. And we're going to make them feel really great. We're going to set up this whole program where they can get this complete degree in black studies." And it looks good, you know, you get a lot of press. "We're teaching Swahili, we're teaching all of this." But what can you do with a degree in black studies or in black history unless you intend to teach it?

If you want to say, "Okay, we're going to offer black history. We're going to offer a program in black economics. We're going to offer a program in, in, about Africa, you know, African nations, et cetera. And we're going to offer this all for the edification so that you know something about yourself, so that you can further determine what your identity is and how you fit in the larger scheme of the whole world." Then that's fine, but, "We're offering this in addition to offering you," you know--

EP: In other words, the hoax was in, in making it a degree program and, and people directing their attentions that way, and then when they get out--

LLW: They have, they have nothing else.

EP: So it should have just been a part the broader liberal arts curriculum?

LLW: Yes. Yes. So a lot of people went into that. And there are a lot of people that are still just out here, that, that are just out here now. You know they--by the time, you know, that the colleges opened up with these programs, they were either married, they had a family, and they couldn't go back to school. So they're out here with two and three years of college

and very bitter--with a right to be bitter, you know, because the movement is over. Because, you know, people in the North started to find out that they had just as many problems as Southerners had with, with school integration and with all of these other problems. And these problems were becoming very evident. So they couldn't jump on television and talk about that dirty Southerner, or that Southern--that ignorant Southerner, you know, who didn't know what he was doing. Because they had to face the problems that were in their own backyard. So they started retrenching and pulling back. And--

EP: When you say the movement is over, do you mean the overt part of it, like the demonstrating, the picketing, or do you mean--

LLW: Well, I said that the--when they--the movement was over then, like by '65, '66, '67 there was little or no activism in terms of, you know, where blacks were coming from in the South. By the time the voting rights bill was passed [in 1965], you know, and then everybody started to go home. The Northerners, the, the kids who came down, they started to go back home. People were able to vote. People had started to sit down then really, and start to assimilate the gains that had been made for the movement. There were promotions in job areas, blacks were being hired in areas that they hadn't been hired in before, and they were working. Mortgage money was more accessible to blacks. So those people who were able to move and to capitalize on the gains that had been made by 1965 and 1966 were starting to sit back and enjoy that.

EP: Yet in 1980, there is kind of a resurgent--

LLW: Yes.

EP: --even stronger discontent, particularly in the black communities.

LLW: Yes.

EP: So if there was assimilation and promotion, why is there this resurgent--?

LLW: Because there was an assimila[tion]. Remember, I said that there was an assimilation of the gains that we had won--and maybe I should have said that we thought we had won. There were some jobs, there were some promotions, but most people tended to find that they were a dead-end, that even though you found blacks with titles who sat in offices, but who still couldn't make decisions. Okay. You found blacks being hired for corporate jobs, and that's all it was, window dressing. They were being hired, but there was still someone above them who made the decisions that they should have been making. And that's still happening today.

You find that there are still a lot of places--restaurants, if you want to talk about, hotels, if you want to discuss, in this country that are still segregated. There are no "white only" policies--"white only" signs written on the doors. But money-wise, it's far outside--you know, there are all kinds of ways of, of achieving segregation.

You talk about equality in the schools, and whites simply move to the suburbs. You know, so you re-segregate the schools again along neighborhood lines. Then you talk about opening up schools, you know, to make them more desegregated, and you're talking about busing black children a half-an-hour, forty-five minutes, sometimes an hour from home to get to these schools. And then they find themselves in hostile environments. And how can this be conducive to learning?

So, it takes--you have to assimilate. And I think that, that the latter part of the sixties was a process of assimilating the gains, at least the overt gains, what appeared to be gains that had been won. The latter part of the six--the sixties, the first part of the seventies, and then the last half of, of the seventies, has been doing an assessing [of] what is in fact reality, and what is in fact a fantasy.

EP: So it took a series of years to find out, "Hey, I'm in the corporate office, but they are not giving any weight to what I'm saying." That kind of thing?

LLW: Yeah.

EP: That this is not really--

LLW: Or "This is really--this is not really corporate America that I am in, you know. I'm out here and I am a window-dressing. And sure, they've given me a desk and a secretary, you know, and I can play at being an office manager. But when it comes down to making the, the decisions, no matter how qualified I am, the effect--the economic outlook of this, of this company, or that decides or determines the economic policies, or even the community policies of this corporation--that I really don't make the decisions, that somebody else makes the decisions." And then we get to the point of saying, well, you know, how much of this do you--can you expect, you know, people to realistically say is progress? Are we really any better-off now?

EP: I'd like to return to this point, but I'd like to go back to, to '63, if I could--

LLW: Okay.

EP: --and work up to this point.

EP: I didn't want to interrupt you, because this is a very strong point, but I'd like to try to

make this our conclusion--

LLW: Oh, okay.

EP: --and kind of a "where do we go from here," perhaps.
Were you amongst that group that first went to McDonald's on May eleventh?

LLW: I wasn't arrested. I was probably there picketing.

EP: The way I read it in the paper, and again, it wasn't until a couple of days later that it was reported, and from what Dr. Laizner recalls, she says, "The first day, they got arrested and the rest of us went downtown and made attempts to enter the--as a matter of fact, several people did enter both the S&W and the Mayfair, sat down, were asked to leave by the managements, and picket lines were set up outside." Were you amongst that group that went in--went in one of those two places or, or picketed outside?

LLW: I don't know if I was there on May eleventh or not, but I went there after. You know, we were arrested there in November, so--and it was in the spring of '63--so whether it was May eleventh or not, I don't know.

EP: I suppose one thing I'm very interested in is that, okay, this was done, and it was never sure whether it was going to spark the big move or if it was just going to be kind of a token gesture until the fall. What was the attitude of the executive committee when people started showing up in, in large numbers? I mean, did they realize, say, "Hey, this is our chance, let's grab it, let's, let's go with it?" Or did it come as a surprise?

LLW: I think that it probably came more as a surprise. You see, I think you--there was no--at least not that I'm aware of--there was no planning to use people's getting arrested as a way of--if, if somebody went downtown and decided on their own--and there were instances where a group of people had gone down there and just decided, you know, well, we aren't going to leave, or that, you know, we are going to get arrested--there was no "We'll run back and let's quick call an executive committee meeting and see how we can use this, you know, to, to push ahead or to gain our own goals immediately." There was more concern about, well, you know, what's happening to those kids that have been arrested, you know? Are they going to get through this? Are the police going to be more brutal this time, or brutal this time, because this thing has happened to these--you know, happened to them, you know, three or four times in the past? What is their attitude going to be? You see what I'm saying?
There was no saying, "Well how can we capitalize on this?" You know, not that I'm aware of. Maybe, you know, somebody else has, has different feelings. But I'm not aware

of any “How can we capitalize on it? How can we, we make this happen?” I can remember being very, very upset when, towards the very end of that, of that summer, and it had to be towards the end of May when a group of high school kids got arrested. Do you, do you know what I’m saying?

We had had a church meeting, and I think that, well, Bill Thomas spoke. I think probably Jesse Jackson spoke. And it was shortly after some dogs had been turned on some people in, in Alabama or in Georgia or, or one of the Southern states. And everybody was like highly excited about it, and it was a church meeting, and, you know, you get into the kind of “We Shall Overcome” and we’re going to overcome and we’re going to do this and, you know, we’re going to go down there and it’s going to be “jail over bail.” And you get people all worked up into a frenzy.

And then people, without realizing and without thinking through the consequences of what they’re going to do, march downtown and they get arrested. And among this group was a large number of teenagers, young teenagers. And I can remember being very upset about that. I remember being very upset about the fact that, that it was almost frenzied. Do you know what I mean? It was my feeling that, whereas some of the older ones may have known what they were doing--certainly the college students may have known what they were doing--that the tenor of the meeting did not allow those kids to think through what they were doing before they went down and were arrested.

EP: Was there a conscious shift from the kind of small number picketing to the mass street marches?

LLW: Yeah. I don’t know whether you could say it was conscious or not. But I think that the--the marches that Martin Luther King were involved in, the publicity that it got, how the various communities reacted with the dogs and the water hoses and all of that, the freedom rides, and what happened to, to the people on those freedom rides--that all led to our sense of frustration that trying to do things in a, in a genteel way, to try and to wait and mark our time and just say, well, you know, “Please, if we just stand out here with our picket signs, you’ll notice us soon. And you’ll finally come around to doing what is, what is real and what is right.” That the frustration of what was happening around us in other places in the South sort of got through that, that way of working through the problem in a, in the kind of genteel fashion that we had become used to.

Yes, and I think that that tended to make people more passionate--if you want to--passionate in their appeals, tended to make people want to see things happen in Greensboro. Because even though we had suffered like, you know, like the abuse of some of the people in the stores or in the restaurants, you know, people throwing cigarettes, you know, patrons who would come in and pour hot coffee on you or try to, you know, get a cigarette, stick you with a lighted cigarette or something like that. To my knowledge, we really did not receive any, you know, overt brutality from the policemen.

EP: I suppose one thing I'm getting at is Bill Thomas indicated that, he said, "Well, you know, one thing we can do is put economic pressure on them by making them show that if you do not serve black patrons at the theatres and restaurants, then you are going to lose money. And another thing is we're going to expose this, you know, Greensboro is known nationally as a moderate city, and if you continue to refuse large numbers of black patrons and the newspaper picked it up and it's nationally publicized, we are going to expose this hypocrisy. So we're either going to expose it or force you to live up to this reputation and now we have the troops to do it." Was there that sense, or am I misreading? Am I kind of reading something into it retrospectively that wasn't there at the time?

LLW: Well, you, you know, discuss alternatives. You discuss what you can do, what you have, what you have the tools to do. Again, as I said before, I don't remember any hard and fast rules that, you know, yes, we are going to boycott. It's something like people staying away from stores and then other people picking it up.

Now, in terms of our conversations with representatives of the mayor's office, in our own press releases, in our own individual letters to the editor, yes, the, the genius of the thought that you either have to put up or shut up--either Greensboro is going to live up to its commitment to all of its citizens or we are going to, or everybody is going to know that. I mean, that's just natural.

If you are picketing in that particular time, you know, you've got newspapers, you've got reporters, you're on television. So naturally, it's going to be known. I don't think that that had to be said, because everybody knew it. And you aren't going to be picketing some place if you can get in, if your reason for picketing is to be able to get in and eat. If you're asking me if a formal declaration of this kind was made to the mayor or somebody--is that, is that what you're--

EP: No. I was speaking more in terms of the discussions within the executive committee itself, these strategy sessions.

LLW: Oh, well, yeah, that, that's one of the ways of getting the city fathers to see themselves. You know, as they were, or as, as, as the situation was, which was if you claim to be the moderate city that you are, if you claim that, you know, this is a city for all of Greensboro's people, us included--

EP: When did you--were you one of the advocates, for instance, of "jail over bail?"

LLW: No. For myself, yes.

EP: But, but not as a policy?

LLW: But not as a policy. Especially not when the younger children in Greensboro, the high school children, the junior high school children, became involved.

EP: Okay, the reason I ask that is because that first week, that is, say May eleventh through May eighteenth, as I recall, there was a major--mass arrest on Wednesday. And then there was a mass march but no arrests on, on Thursday. And then Friday, presumably the executive committee decided to go "jail over bail," saying, "Well, if they are going to mass arrest us, process us, then turn us loose, we're going to put pressure on them. We're going to show them that this doesn't work, doesn't break our resolve. We're going to stay in jail." Was that deliberate policy? I mean, was that discussed within the executive committee?

LLW: Yeah, well, I think that it was discussed after the first arrest. Because as I said before, we were discussing it. There was a church meeting, there was quite a bit of fervor, and, you know. And I had felt and some members of the executive committee felt that these high school children, these--and junior high school children--had no idea of what they were involved [in]. They had just been worked up to a, to a pitch. And at that point they were ready to go out of the church and do just about anything.

I didn't feel that they had any idea, any idea of what they were getting themselves in for. And that the next morning when they woke up--well, you know, the first day, it's sort of, it would have probably been a novelty--but after the first day or two, when it started to wear off, that they were going to be a little more than upset that they were in jail. And after those first arrests, there was quite a bit of discussion in the executive committee about the pros and cons of what had been done. I felt that it was perfectly all right for those of us who had been arrested a number of times, who were older, to make that decision. But we did not have the right to make the decision for that great number of children. And they were children. But, of course, here is where the moderates sort of lost out, and, then as you said, there was another march on, on, over the weekend, and a large number of people were arrested.

I think that we did manage to get in one point and that is that if you're going to have all these other people arrested, then the executive committee needs to go to jail. I mean, you know, some of you people that have been sitting out here on the sidelines, in--you know, like Jesse Jackson, for an example, and never been in jail--go down and get arrested. You know, you go to jail, you stay there over bail. And by that point, you know, there were parents, you know, who were also starting to come in from the community, who had had--whose children had been arrested, who were starting to voice the same opinions. And they--and by that time, they had had some feedback from their kids who were in jail who didn't realize, you know, exactly what they were getting into.

EP: One of the people I have not talked with yet, although I hope to, is Lewis Brandon. Now how would he figure in this?

LLW: Lewis was very, I guess you could describe him as a moderate. A moderate in the sense that he, too, wanted to think through very carefully the consequences of what you were going to do, that precipitous action doesn't guarantee you anything most of the times, that usually it can end up making things worse. Lewis Brandon is a very good person to talk to.

Probably of all the people, he probably has the longest-running association with the CORE group. I mean, he would have been there for its inception, he would have been there in the beginning of the sixties, and he was in Greensboro still at A&T working on a double master's or a double degree of some kind after we, after 1964, of course, which is when I left. So he would be a very good person to talk to, a very good resource person. I--

EP: So he was one of the moderates?

LLW: One of the moderates in the sense that he felt that, you know, that we needed to keep everything together, that we needed to keep everything in perspective. That there needed to be a kind of cohesiveness, and that nothing occurs in a vacuum.

EP: In other words, have a direct purpose for everything you do--

LLW: Yes.

EP: --and be willing to follow up on it with a definite program?

LLW: Yes. And very much the kind of person who, who was--he knew who he was, his own sense of identity, you know. No question about it. This was not a, you know, like, all of a sudden I am finding out that I am black and have reasons to be proud of it. He was black all of the time, and was very proud of being black all of the time. So--

EP: Were--you were arrested and taken out to the polio hospital, is that correct?

LLW: The first time was the armory.

EP: Well, what I am talking about is--

LLW: Okay.

EP: --after the Friday arrest, according to the paper and a couple of people I've talked to, the city was just flabbergasted that these people were not going by what had been in the past. They weren't accepting recognition or bail. And that suddenly they had to find places to put them. And the processing went on through the night. And somewhere in the late afternoon of nineteen--of Saturday, the next day, the eighteenth--the sheriff's department got permission to house them, the students, in the polio hospital.

LLW: Because the armory was overflowed or overfilled or--

EP: Right.

LLW: Yeah.

EP: Were you in this group that was taken to the, to the armory? Were you arrested Friday night, that Friday night?

LLW: That was our last big offensive. I don't--let's see, I was arrested--yes, yes, yeah, okay, yeah. Because that was just before finals, and I was hoping that I would be in jail for finals. [laughs] Not really.

EP: [laughs] What were the conditions like there? Were they very bad?

LLW: It all depended on where you were.

EP: Well, for instance, I know that some people have said--

LLW: The sanitation facilities, you know, the bathrooms, you know--

EP: Brackish water, that kind of thing?

LLW: Yeah. No privacy because we were sort of like all overcrowded. [pause]

EP: I know one incident--

LLW: It wasn't as, what's--none of the experiences you know, you could characterize as, as pleasant. But they weren't--but there were some that were, I guess, a little more pleasant than others. And that, that May arrest was probably one of the least pleasant ones.

EP: So you, as a member of the executive committee, got arrested under this feeling that you mentioned before, that, well, if people are going to be arrested in large numbers, the

executive committee should be there, too. Is that right?

LLW: I figured that certainly all of those people that were sitting up there talking about, you know, "jail over bail" ought to have a try at it to see how it felt.

EP: How did it feel, incidentally? I mean, the knowledge that you weren't going to get out the next morning?

LLW: Well, like a caged bird who wants to fly and can't. Again, a lot of us, we--you know, I made a joke about, you know, hoping to be in jail be, before finals, which really isn't true. Because a number of us had taken books, because we figured that we were going to be there, you know, for a long time. So we took books so that we were able to study. After our first night there, we got assurances from the college that we would be able to take our exams when we got out, that we would be able to take make up exams should we be there through exams.

I guess [we felt] frustrated, that after all the trying, that after the--after all the moderation, after all the waiting, that still we were reduced again, you know, to doing this, to having to go through this again. And it's just like saying that, that nothing works, you know. That unless people are forced into dealing with you, that they don't want to. That people really don't want a peace--peaceful solution to a problem. That people prefer to settle problems by violence.

EP: Is that the way you felt that the city was feeling?

LLW: Yes. That unless something drastic and overt happened, that they were just going to continue to ignore us. You know, because they could afford to ignore us. That unless there was like some terrible bloodbath or something, that this thing would just go on and on, you know, year after year, with more and more people being arrested and being in jail. But I think that by the time they finally realized that they weren't going to be able to just release us, and it would tie up so much manpower, and then the food and everything to feed us--it was getting to be, you know, an economic burden on the city--that then they probably started to get the sense, to feel that, that this was different. You know, that maybe now the time had come to settle down and, and start to, you know, start to deal with us.

EP: What did you do while you were incarcerated there?

LLW: Well, a lot of us spent a great deal of time trying to keep the morale of the younger kids up. As I said before, that incarceration involved a lot of high school kids, junior high school kids.

EP: How did you keep the morale up?

LLW: Just talking to them, trying to be a friend, you know. Trying to be a surrogate parent. You know, letting them know that it was their future. That they had a stake in it, and they had laid claim to that stake by being there.

EP: How were you treated by the sheriffs? I mean, you have mentioned pretty positive treatment by the police department on the, on the scene. Was there any difference by the sheriff's deputies?

LLW: Oh, yeah--

EP: How so?

LLW: --because they tended to be older. I guess, just, nothing physical, just nastier, colder.

EP: Comments?

LLW: Comments, you know, about, you know, what do the niggers want now, and about what could have happened, you know--if this had happened thirty years ago, what would have happened. You know, not overt threats, but subtle kinds of threats.

EP: You mean, the kind of thing like if this happened thirty years ago we'd have known how to handle it?

LLW: Yes, that kind of thing. As to what, what we did, we studied, wrote letters, waited for care packages from home and from school.

EP: Do you remember when Dr. Player came and visited?

LLW: Yes.

EP: What happened then?

LLW: Well, it was like [laughs], it was like Queen Anne had walked in, you know. The guards stood at attention and--did you ever meet Dr. Player?

EP: I've spoken to her on the telephone--we conducted a telephone interview, unfortunately. She was here but there was no time in her schedule for us to talk, so we just did it by

telephone.

LLW: She was, and is, a very regal woman. If she walked into a prison, probably with some of the worst cutthroats in the world, she would command their attention and their respect simply by the way she carries herself. And she came in, and she had words of encouragement. She told us not to worry. She gave us like the important news that the board of directors had met, and they had been on campus and that they understood our position. And of course, you know, Bennett was dependent on a lot of private funding, outside funding. A lot of those people who submitted that funding were on our board of directors. So for her to give us their support, you know, was, was very good for us.

And at that time, I think there was a lot of pressure being put on A&T in terms of cancelling their accreditation, or withdrawing funds, or asking the administration to kick the students out who were being involved in it. And I don't--I don't know whether you came across it in, in your coverage of the press, but there's a statement that she made to the press around about that time that the only people that Bennett women had to be responsible to was to the Bennett administration. And that, you know, our administration was behind us 100 percent. And that she would not knuckle under to any kinds of pressure tactics.

EP: I seem to recall several quotations, statements like that.

LLW: And, well, you can imagine what that did for us and for our spirits.

EP: Dr. Laizner very--indicated that there was quite a dramatic moment when the--

LLW: Dr. Laizner is very dramatic [laughter]. I think she is [laughs], you know. Okay.

EP: Well, the night that the A&T students were taken from the facilities, and the Bennett girls were not--Bennett students were not because Dr. Player said, "I refuse to accept them in the role of jailor and they will remain there until." She says that a number of students were very frightened. And she said there was a very obnoxious matron there, and that the girls had been dancing in the hall, and they were told, "Well, you're going--get your stuff together, you're going to clear out." And she said some Bennett student pointed out that they still had the locks on the inside of the doors. And she said, "Well, you go to those rooms and lock yourselves in, and they can't force you to leave tonight." And she said they did that. And that when the matron came and found out that they had done this, that they removed Dr. Laizner to the High Point jail. Do you recall when the male students were removed?

LLW: I know that the male students left before--you see, I--we had like two or three facilities.

They had people in the jail, they had people in the armory, they had to open up the polio hospital. I was in the armory. Dr. Laizner was probably at the polio.

EP: Right. So you were at the armory?

LLW: So I was at the armory.

EP: Ah.

LLW: Okay. So I don't remember that. I do remember that the A&T--the men--A&T students had to leave before we did and that we could not go, because, as you said, Dr. Player wouldn't--would not play the role of jailor. And again, you see, you have people that were in one place and people that were in another place, and you had like different people with different people being in there with them and different matrons and people who acted differently. And I, I, I don't remember that--that matron had to be--

EP: Yeah, she was at the polio.

LLW: --at the other--at the polio hospital with Dr. Laizner.

EP: At the armory, were there adequate blankets? Were there adequate lavatory facilities? Were you cold?

LLW: There weren't adequate lavatory facilities. There was, you know, well, it was, it was like, sort of like springtime. You know, it was sort of warm, but they weren't--you know, nobody was cold, nobody was freezing, let's say it like that. You could have used more blankets, I'm sure. But we shared, you know. People doubled up, or you know, you slept sort of like three people to a cot. I mean as overcrowded as it was, you had to do that anyway, and it was hot. We would have appreciated, you know, being able to take a bath, or to be able to get sanitary, you know personal items, personal hygiene-type things, rather than having to--somebody from Bennett came. You know, we were allowed visitors. And we were able, you know, to tell them what we needed, and then they were able to bring it back in. For jail, food for the most part, you know, it wasn't terrible. I mean it didn't look like anybody had, like in some cases in some of the places, people put terrible things in the food for the people to eat. We didn't have that.

EP: Oh really? You know, because in the public statements to the press, the sheriff's department made a big thing about saying, "Well, they're being fed like rolls, hamburgers, and beans. And they're being fed on time. They're being fed hot food. And it's being catered." But you're saying that this is not necessarily true at every place?

LLW: Not at every place, no. Because I've heard, you know, like some of the other kids when we got back talking about the kinds of food that they got. And it wasn't that it was served--it can't be hot and be served on time if it's, you know, if it's being catered, because you had like hundreds of people to feed. So by the time that you got to somebody, then it had to be cold.

EP: But were you fed fairly regularly?

LLW: Yes. We were fed breakfast and, and dinner. I don't much remember lunch, because by the time that you got through with breakfast, you know, it was almost through the afternoon.

EP: In other words, there was no kind of pressure on you all by them [the law enforcement] saying, "We're going to make this as hard or difficult on them as possible so they won't want to come back?"

LLW: Not generally. I didn't find that to be the general feeling. As I said before, some of the guards were nasty or the sheriff's officers, you know, were a lot nastier than the local police.

EP: Do you remember anything in particular?

LLW: Just the, you know, the subtle threats about, you know, what would have happened. Or, Bull Conner [Commissioner of Public Safety in Birmingham, AL], he really knows how to handle his niggers. And stuff like that. You know, it was supposed to make you be afraid and supposed to I guess, make you not want to come back again. But we had--

EP: Do you think that this was effective on anybody?

LLW: No, we had a certain amount of safety in the fact that there were quite a few of us I think. And as I said before, not at the armory--I don't know what happened at the other facility--but there was no taking one person, or one or two people out at a time to try and scare anybody. I think that beyond talking, for the most part, the people who were charged with our care were just about as bewildered as what, as what, at what was going on as, as everybody else.

And there probably had come down some statement from the mayor or from the city--I say probably, I don't know--that everything was supposed to be handled with a great deal of restraint, or with as much restraint as possible. Because there were a lot of reporters in town, and there were television cameras, you know, from all across the

nation. And again, Greensboro did have its reputation as a, you know, a moderate Southern city to think about.

EP: As I understand it, when the A&T students were released, they went immediately to Harrison Auditorium and there was a lot of anger and frustration and feeling like well, they've, they've done it to us again. And, but unknown to them, behind the scenes, the members of the coordinating committee were meeting with Mayor Pro Tem [William] Trotter, and he agreed to a Human Relations Commission headed by Dr. George Evans. When you were released from the armory, was there this sense of frustration, or by this time did you know--

LLW: We knew.

EP: --that some deal had been worked out?

LLW: We knew by the time we were released.

EP: How long did you spend time in the armory?

LLW: Oh my goodness, about a week. Because we had the whole thing to be worked out of--see, a whole question of the charges or going back to school under house arrest and all of that had to be worked out before we could go home. So that by the time we were released, we knew, you know, that a compromise was in the making, that, you know, that out of this, something was to going to come, but it was not going to be just like the other time. And to tell you the truth, the only thing to think about then was to get back to campus and get the exams over with, you know, because by then it was just about time to go home. Our school was over.

EP: What was your feeling about when the coordinating committee was formed with--I believe Bill Thomas and Reverend Stanley were on it for CORE. There was Dr. Simkins for the NAACP. Dr. [Otis] Hairston for the Greensboro Men's Club--or the Greensboro Citizens Association, excuse me. Did you feel good about that, or did you feel that CORE was being preempted?

LLW: I think I found that, you'd say that we sort of--I felt that we had [pause]--well, we were being preempted in a way. All of a sudden, you know, the city was saying, "Okay, we're going to deal with you, but were not going to deal with you as students, or we're not going to deal with you as a CORE group. Now we're ready to go back into the larger community and get all of, you know, the members of the establishment out and we'll talk to them and we'll make a deal. You can sit in if you like, but what we're going to do now

is going to be done with establishment versus establishment."

EP: In other words, people we can make compromises with?

LLW: Yes. Yeah. And I guess that, yes, preempted a little bit, sold out. But yet at the same time, realizing that, you know, this, this is--it wasn't a movement to get CORE what it wanted, right? It wasn't a movement to get just young college kids what they wanted. It was a movement to benefit black people everywhere, which included the established black community in Greensboro. So, even though we had borne the brunt of the struggle, you know, we had been out there on, on the front lines, so to speak, it--now was the time when it came down to, to saying, well, you know, this is--these are the results. And if they wanted to give it to somebody else, you know, if they had to call somebody else in to give it to them, and let them relay back it to us, well, what are you going to do, you know? What other choices do you have?

EP: How did you feel about Jesse Jackson? For instance Jibreel says, well, most of the people saw him as a front man, that they really looked to leadership to the people who had been providing leadership for the last three years. That simply because he was there in the forefront of the marching and the media was focusing on him did not mean that the large majority of the demonstrators, the marchers, had accepted him as their leader. Is this a fairly accurate assessment?

LLW: Yes.

EP: Was there resentment?

LLW: Well, I am going to make one statement about that and I'm not going to say anything else, because, here again, I don't think, I don't think it pays to deal in personalities. Again, we were, we were talking about who was the spokesman for CORE, or did the media get in touch with me directly. And I mentioned the fact that reporters would go to anybody that they felt could give them a story. And when all of us were in jail, including Reverend Hatchett, Bill Thomas, and most of the people who were directly involved, I think some reporter went across campus and didn't see any familiar faces, and Jesse Jackson was there.

Jesse Jackson filled a void at that time that promulgated Jesse Jackson into the limelight in the Greensboro movement. And from there, Jesse Jackson went, you know. He really did not have that much of a following in terms of the people who had been out there on the front line and who had been struggling all of that time. And, of course, I would imagine that that reporter saw that as a chance of getting another voice and, if possible, playing one person off against another person, and creating a little division that

would be destructive to the movement.

Fortunately, Lewis Brandon and Pat Patterson, being two of the people that I can remember, were, were very adamant--as were all of us, but they were more publicity adamant than some of the rest of us--about not letting that happen. So, we let Jesse have his limelight. I mean, after all, it really didn't matter who was out there talking. Maybe what--if we said anything in the, in the executive committee meetings or in the executive committee sessions, that was there and it was between us. But as far as the public was concerned, it really didn't matter who was out there talking, as far as we were concerned, as long as we were getting the job done.

And we were all concerned that there be no division, at least the kind of division that could have destroyed the movement or destroyed what we were all about. So I think that, you know, Ezell summed it up fairly well. Jesse walked in at a time when there was a void. He filled the void at that particular time and he didn't leave it, you know. And we sort of, we refused to allow it to disrupt what we were doing or to allow the media or the press to pit us against each other.

EP: In way of summing up, you, you said that when you got out, you had to be concerned with exams. Did you then kind of play down your participation in the subsequent events and take your exams, or did you continue to be involved and take your exams all at the same time?

LLW: Well, you know, involved in meetings, you know, a few--a couple of meetings after we got out, but then it was exam time. And I worked my way through college, so I was holding down a full time job, too.

EP: What, what job did you have?

LLW: I worked at L. Richardson Memorial Hospital, when it was, you know, when it was in its old location, as a nurse's aide. And most nights I worked eleven to seven, and I had a full day's class. So that meant that I had, you know, in addition to doing exams, I also had to get back to work. And then I was working for the summer. And the only time I took off was, like, for the March on Washington.

EP: Could you describe the March on Washington and your participation in it?

LLW: Other than the fact that it was just a huge mass of people and everybody had tried to get buses to go to Washington and to be in, to be in the march and that I was some place like maybe two miles back. No--the feeling. The camaraderie that existed between people of all ages, all races. The hope.

EP: Did CORE, as an organization, work up the buses that left from Greensboro or was it a larger group than just CORE?

LLW: It was a larger group. It was like a--like the coordinating committee, you know, like all different factions, all different levels. You know, the churches. CORE probably played a, a larger role because we had been, you know, working and participating, but it was a, it was a community effort. It was, it was a coordinated effort.

EP: Did you participate in the sit-in on--sit-down in the street--on Greene Street on June fifth, or the sit-in, sit-down in the square on June sixth?

LLW: No.

EP: Pat Patterson indicated that there was a, that there was an example of conflict, if not conflict, radically different point of view. He, for instance, he thought it was a mistake to do that, because he thought that was bordering on violence [coughs] and that he left to take a job for the summer in New York [coughs] and that there was a great deal of feeling that a lot of the students have left or they were taking their exams, and that these were really high school kids--

LLW: Yeah.

EP: --and they're not as well-disciplined and trained as we are [CORE members]. People are frustrated, people are tired.

LLW: Yeah. Which was why I didn't--

EP: What was your feeling?

LLW: The same, which is why I didn't participate, you know. After we had--I sort of felt a responsibility with the May sit-ins when there were high school children involved. Because I figured that a lot of people came into that church not realizing what they--that they were not going to leave there without going to jail, that after they had gone to jail, I felt that, you know--and then Jesse Jackson and somebody started talking "jail over bail." And I figured, well, those of us who had been a part of the movement had a responsibility to those kids that were out there. So we, too, had a right to go to jail and sort of make it, at least try to make something happen out of it. But that was as far as I was willing to go at that point with, with the tactics that they were starting to get involved with then. Because here again, high school kids, not well-disciplined, anything, you know.

EP: Would you say that there was a spirited debate in the executive committee about this? Or is this just something that happened through the planning of a few people?

LLW: Well, we debated it. We debated other forms of, of action. This was one of the things that was debated. And those of us, like Pat Patterson, and myself, Lewis Brandon, who were opposed to it, were, you know, turned down. The majority rules. They, they went ahead.

EP: Was this a meeting of the executive committee or of the CORE membership at large?

LLW: Well, I think that the executive committee met and discussed other forms of, you know, other alternatives. Everything was presented to the general membership, you know, afterwards--the opposing views as well.

EP: That summer, did you continue to be involved or were you just working, like at L. Richardson?

LLW: I worked. The March on Washington was my only involvement that summer.

EP: What other CORE activities did you participate in before you left in ’64? [pause] I understand there was a voter registration drive to get ready for the fall.

LLW: Voter registration, getting people out, registered to vote. We did some--as a matter of fact, I think we, we did some training work with some kids from Jackson, Mississippi, on, you know, working with them--

EP: In other--training them?

LLW: Yeah.

[End of Tape 1, Side B--Begin Tape 2, Side A]

LLW: --and I think he wanted a bit more dramatic support from the administration than we were getting. And, of course, Dr. Player is very low-key and felt that that should have been enough. And I think that he probably did make some demands. And I understand that as a result of it, and, of course, as a result of alienating certain other faculty members or whatever, his contract was not renewed.

So, we talked about the people, you know, who sort of burned themselves out as a result of the movement and then ended up with no place to go. There were also people who lost jobs, who found it difficult to secure another position later on because they had lost a job, you know. Twenty years ago, you lose a job and you’re teaching and it’s like

you've got a bad record, you know--something across you, branding you, forever.

These, these are the people, you know, that helped to make the movement what it was, and that really helped to make it a success. That little, that man out on the street who was waiting for a truck to come and pick him up and take him to a job and saw a group of people on the picket line, and who kind of stepped in and took a cigarette in his face, or a mouth full of saliva that somebody was spitting, you know. That guy out there who didn't have anything to lose because he didn't have a job anyway. So it was easy enough for him not to go across the picket line and stand there and glare at anybody else who wanted to go across it, you know.

That kind of support that we got from those people, the, you know, regular people in the community, those people, those--who were doing those menial jobs, who sometimes, very possibly, could have saved us our lives or kept us from being permanently disfigured. Those were the people, when people were assimilating the gains of the movement, who got nothing out of it.

EP: So, there were some people who, although apparently the Greensboro marches were successful and violence was averted, particularly as compared to Birmingham, still there were people who suffered?

LLW: Yes. People when, when it was time to say, okay, this is going to be given out, and we're going to give that and you can have this share of the pie--small though the pie was--even if there had been a piece of the pie for those people based on the terms that they were setting up for them, they couldn't have qualified. You see what I am saying?

EP: Sure.

LLW: They didn't have the skills to, to be promoted from floor sweeper to clerk. And nobody was prepared to give them to them. Because, you see, a lot that happened after the sixties, after the movement of the sixties sort of died down, was that people said, "All right, well, we'll give you these jobs if you're qualified." But it turned out that you had to be twice as qualified, you know, as your white counterpart. You had to have twice the education, you know, and twice the experience. And then, if you did get into the door, it turned out to be that you were still basically just a step above doing, in lots of instances, menial labor, or whatever. I mean, it was all dressed up and it was all fancy--a title--but that's all it was.

EP: The racism just got more subtle?

LLW: It became more subtle. One of the things they used to say about the South versus the North, and one of the reasons why I think that to a great extent a lot of blacks felt comfortable living in the South, is that you knew where you stood. You knew that there

was a certain section of town that you couldn't rent a house in, or that, you know, you couldn't have an apartment in. There were certain stores that you just didn't go into because of the way you were treated. There were certain restaurants that, you know, you didn't go into, because no blacks were allowed in them, you just simply didn't go. As opposed to the North, where it was all far more subtle, you know.

If you wanted--I remember in 1965, 1967, I, I trained as a medical technologist at Public Health Service Hospital in Staten Island, and I worked there for a while. And then when I left there and went to work for a large international corporation in New Jersey, I had to get out and find a place to live. Before that, I had lived on a government, you know, premises. I had, you know, like the nurses' quarters and everything, so there was no problem in terms of finding a place to stay. And this is like June of 1967. And I'm looking for a place to live in New Jersey. And I was sick. After a week of looking for a place to live, I was physically ill. I broke out in hives, because I didn't know how to deal with the, with the stress. You know, there's all these ads in the paper, "equal opportunity housing" and everything. And then you call somebody up on the phone--and I don't have a discernable, what people consider a discernable black accent, over the, over the telephone. A lot of people used to think that they could tell that you were black simply by the way that you talked on--over the phone. And there were instances in which they got fooled. And when I would get there, ah! The apartment would just be rented. Do you know what I am saying?

Or you go into a restaurant, and of course there are no signs on the door that says, you know, "Blacks Not Admitted." Or you're in the North and you don't assume that there are places that you go and--or that you can't go. And you get a table that's next to the kitchen, or when the food gets to the table--you see, there are all kinds of ways of--you know, go back again, so the place is for all intents and purposes, is segregated. So, there are all kinds of ways of, of having segregation.

So, these, these were the people who did not get their share of that dream. These are part of the people, the younger ones, I think, that were part--the part of the, the riots, you know, the Watts [riots], and Newark, and all of the other large cities. Those of them who were not prepared to be a part of that solution to the problem, then or now, people who have seen the last twenty years of their life go by with very little hope, and who may be a part of the next confrontation that this country finds itself in. Because you see, they paid their dues. They've done--they've, they've followed step-by-step, systematically. They've done what they're supposed to have done. And some of them feel that they're owed something, because they gave up their lives, you know, so that all of this could go on, so that you could have this picture of Americans working side-by-side, irrespective of their color, building this, this greater world. But only it's not a reality for them.

EP: Just by way of summing up, I was wondering, could you summarize the different career jobs that you have had since leaving Bennett?

LLW: Well, I really haven't had that many different career jobs. I worked as a research medical technologist when I got out of med[ical] tech[nologist] training. I went from there to work for Hoffman-La Roche in Nutley, New Jersey, as a research biochemist. And I went back to grad--went to grad school, got halfway through it, and got a job in marketing as a market research analyst, which I held until I left Roche. My husband was transferred to Connecticut, so I left.

So, really, I have worked for two, you know, at two places in the last twenty years. And basically the job as a market research analyst I was still dealing with products that I had developed in the lab, so it was really sort of interrelated. I sued the company that I worked for while I was there. [I] took them to court on a--in order to get the job as a market research analyst, you see. I had to take them to court on a sex and race discrimination--discrimination charge, which I won, which opened up a lot of opportunities and a lot of doors for a lot of other women and minorities.

EP: What year would this have been?

LLW: Nineteen sixty--1972. And the case was finally settled in 1974. So you can see how long--we started--I started this suit in 1971, the summer of 1971, or the spring of 1971, and it took until 1974, the fall of 1974, to settle it. So you can see how long it takes to go through, you know, the process and, and to go through due channels.

And when I talk about--there, there were certain jobs then, as there are now, that they didn't want blacks into. We'll use your brains and your resources if you can work in the lab and you can discover all of these little products, and you can help us make millions and millions of dollars by your input into it. But when it comes to putting you in a, in a position where you are going to be more visible and where by, by virtue of the job description means that you have to get into making management decisions, we, we can't do this. And I found myself in a situation where I had seniority.

Roche had a posting policy. I don't know if you've ever worked for a large corporation or no, but a lot of them--okay, they have positions where they promote from within. And any job that becomes available has to be put on a board and it has to be posted. And you have--people within the company are given the first chance at it. And they make their decision, supposedly, based on your qualifications for the job, which include education and experience. And then, if there are two people equally qualified, then you--the person with the most seniority gets the job.

And it, it turned out, you know, that I had applied for this job as a trainee, as a market research analyst, and I didn't get the job. And when I went to find out why I didn't get it, first they said, "Well, you know, somebody had more seniority." Well, I happened to know the person who had the job, so I knew that that wasn't true. I knew it wasn't a question of education. Not possibly a question of experience, because I had

developed two of the products that were being marketed, or that the person would have been responsible for marketing. Then it came down to something simply as nebulous as interpersonal sales skills. Well, you know, this person has more interpersonal sales skills than you do.

EP: How do you determine what defines that?

LLW: That was my question. And I think that that's what the commission based their finding in my favor on, you know, how does one determine interpersonal sales skills. And, you know, and then you go--well, by the time that they realized the suit was filed and that they did not actually have a very good case, "Well, we'll give you the job, and you can have it, but, you know, you got to drop the suit." You know, no way. By then there's too much at stake, you know.

By that time there was on active group of NOW [National Organization of Women] people in the company and, of course, they wanted to get involved. And I said "No, you know, I'm pretty much a loner, basically. This is the way it was started, this is the way it's got to go. Are you going to benefit from it as a result of it?"

Then the other, the other end--answer to that, too, is that to become affiliated at that time with a group like NOW, it becomes the same kind of pressure that you find yourself in when Dr. Laizner joins the CORE, you know. We became Communists because, you know, she was German, and she was linked with Communism, and she was a part of our group. For me to have become affiliated with NOW--

EP: What, what--National Organization for Women?

LLW: Yes, National Organization for Women. At that time, they were very radical, you know. They were burning bras and everything. It all--it would have taken a lot of the validity away from what I was trying to do. So we said no. Anyway, the suit, as I said, was finally settled, and it was settled in my favor. And they had to post all these, you know, strange-looking equal rights notices all around the company, and upgrade women and, you know, and promise that they wouldn't do this again.

EP: So your job now is [pause]--

LLW: My job now is wife and mother.

EP: Wife and mother.

LLW: Yes.

EP: I see.

LLW: [laughs] Very satisfying and rewarding.

EP: Well, thank you very much Mrs. Williams.

LLW: Oh, you're welcome.

[End of Interview]