

RIP PATTON
Nashville Room, Nashville Public Library
Recorded July 11, 2003
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Interviewer: K. G. Bennett, Librarian, Nashville Room, Nashville Public Library
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Please correct spelling if incorrect:

[?Verdena?] Patton

What was the name?

... Pearl High was a school that was a family. Our principal was the father. All the teachers were his kids, and we were like his grandkids, the students.

Notes

And we found someone that would cash the check, who agreed with what we were doing, and he said, "I'll get the other signature." And we got the money to send the first group from Nashville down to Birmingham.

[It was "Good Jelly" Jones who cashed the check. Wonder if Rip went to him about cashing the check, or has other stories about him.]

SIDE 1, TAPE 1 COUNTER: 000

BENNETT: Today is July 11, 2003. We're in the Nashville Public Library. I'm Kathy Bennett, Librarian in the Nashville Room and Project Coordinator for the Civil Rights Oral History Project. And today I'm interviewing Rip Patton, who was a resident here in Nashville at the time of the Student Sit-In Movements, and a participant also in the Freedom Rides.

And thank you for coming today.

PATTON: Oh, it's good to be here. Thank you.

BENNETT: Good.

Would you please tell me your name, address and current employment.

PATTON: My name: Rip Patton. My address is 820 Norwalk Drive. That's in Nashville, Tennessee. And I'm employed at Cassens Transport. I haul cars for a living.

BENNETT: Would you mind spelling that for me, please? Castens?

PATTON: C-a-s-s-e-n-s Transport.

BENNETT: And what -- where were you born?

PATTON: Nashville, Tennessee.

BENNETT: Were you born in the hospital here?

PATTON: Yes, General Hospital.

BENNETT: And where did you grow up, then?

PATTON: North Nashville.

BENNETT: What was your -- what was your address then?

PATTON: Well, I can remember as far back as Hynes Street. I think the 1300 block of Hynes Street, which is located between Charlotte, which was Cedar Street at that time, and Church Street.

BENNETT: What were your parents' names?

PATTON: My mother, [Verdena?] Patton. My father, who is deceased, was Ernest Patton.

BENNETT: Do you have brothers and sisters?

PATTON: I have a half brother, and I had a half sister. She's passed. His name is Allen.

BENNETT: Is his name Patton also?

PATTON: Patton, yes.

BENNETT: And, I asked you earlier, but I want to ask again, where did you go to school?

PATTON: Elementary school, I went to Head Elementary, Ford Green Elementary, and Pearl Elementary.

BENNETT: And beyond elementary?

PATTON: Washington Junior High, Peal High, and Tennessee State.

BENNETT: Were the schools in Nashville segregated at the time you were in elementary school?

PATTON: Yes, they were.

BENNETT: And what about junior high and high school?

PATTON: All the schools were segregated.

BENNETT: So what year was it that you graduated from high school?

PATTON: 1958.

BENNETT: And what -- I wanted to ask about your experience with segregation, both in the schools and in the community, as a child.

PATTON: As a child, segregation -- I think the only time you recognized segregation was when you came to downtown Nashville because of the water fountains and the rest rooms, and most times, some people didn't have money to use the cafeteria or the lunch counters, so I would say, personally, it would be the water fountains, the rest rooms and the theaters. We had to walk down an alley, as a matter of fact, where this building is sitting right now, I think it was The Tennessean, and it was a very steep decline. You had to go down an alley into the side door and then walk all the way up to what we called the Crow's Nest. And you would look at the movies between your knees, you are sitting so high up.

BENNETT: The seats were at a steep angle?

PATTON: Yes. And you're so high up and the screen is so far down.

BENNETT: When do you remem -- did your parents take you to the movies as a child?

PATTON: Yes. Yes.

BENNETT: But then I guess you went on your own too, as you got older?

PATTON: We had what we called -- which was downtown on Fourth Avenue -- was called the Bijou, which was basically a black movie theater, and then in North Nashville there was the Ritz, and I frequent the Bijou the majority of times. You'd find a lot of kids, black kids, there on Saturdays because of for 25 cents you could spend the day and you'd get three or four comics and a main feature -- well, a double feature -- and two chapter plays and get a hot dog and a drink for just about 25 cent.

But when we did come to the Lowe's, the Paramount, or -- I don't know if we could come to the Tennessean. But the Lowe's and the Paramount, it was basically to see topnotch movies.

And I think that's -- my mother says that that's what got me into the Civil Rights, was the fact that when I was in elementary school, I believe, the one kid that I played with was a white -- young white man who was my age at the time. And his sister brought him downtown to see a movie. It was a Western. And he came back and told me about this Western, and I just had to see it.

And so I told my mother, and she said, "Okay." I worried her so that she brought me downtown to see the movie. Well, I walked to the front door, not knowing about the segregation in the movies, and I just -- she says I showed off, because I wanted to go in the front door with all the glittering lights and all, and she said, "No, we have to go down the alley." And eventually we went down the alley. And she says that's something that has stuck with me for years, and got me into the Civil Rights Movement.

BENNETT: Where did you buy your tickets? At the side entrance?

PATTON: When you went down the alley they had an entrance and a ticket person there, that you buy your tickets.

BENNETT: Did they have concessions?

PATTON: It's quite possible that they did, but I don't remember how you would go about getting the concessions.

BENNETT: So the experience is quite different from what other -- what white people experienced.

PATTON: Right. Right.

BENNETT: Now, you mentioned that your friend -- you had a white friend. So the neighborhood, then, was somewhat integrated.

PATTON: It was changing. At that time we lived on 28th and Delaware, and in that area, blacks were moving into that area and whites were moving out. So that was one of the last families to move out, and he was the only male my age in that block at that time, and so we played together. We didn't know anything about segregation. We were very good friends.

BENNETT: Is there anything else you'd like to add about your childhood experience here in Nashville in the #40s and #50s? Any awareness of the time of when the schools were beginning to be desegregated or the bombing of Hattie Cotton School, any of those?

PATTON: No, it was -- I think basically during that time we were just satisfied with the -- what we called the black experience. Just an all black school. You couldn't go to East High or Hume-Fogg, which was right downtown here. You couldn't go to those schools, and we just -- I guess everybody was just happy where they were, until, I think, 19 -- I think it was '58 or -- not '58. Maybe '55.

I graduated with a young man named Robert Kelly, who lived in East Nashville. His father filed a suit, I think,

against the Board of Education, because they lived right next to East High and he couldn't go to East High.

BENNETT: Yeah. (pause)

What inspired you then? You mentioned the movie theater experience, and after high school did you go directly to Tennessee State?

PATTON: Yes, went directly to Tennessee State.

BENNETT: And how did you meet up with the other individuals who were involved here in the Civil Rights Movement?

PATTON: I think I met John Lewis first.

BENNETT: I'm going to stop the tape just a second.

PATTON: Okay.

BENNETT: Sorry. Can you name one person who led you to the Movement at this time?

PATTON: I would say John Lewis.

BENNETT: How did you meet him?

PATTON: I think the Movement had already started, and I met John on Jefferson Street one day.

BENNETT: Was he handing out flyers or --

PATTON: John was -- I think that's when he was getting close to going to Washington, DC for the Peace Movement. I think that was during that time. Just exactly when I met him, I don't know, but he has always been my Number One fan. Yes.

BENNETT: Oh, what kind of guy is he?

PATTON: John was one that was -- we always -- I still tease him about dramatizing the issue. That was one of his things. He -- when someone would say, "What are we going to do?" he would always say, "We must dramatize the issue," -- whatever the issue was. And even today when I see him, I always quote that to him and he says, "Wouldn't nobody else say that but Rip Patton."

We have a very good relationship. Just, I think, a couple of years ago, we -- I went to Atlanta. He called some people to come to Atlanta and go on a bus ride with him that the Greyhound Bus and, I think, Coca-Cola, sponsored that. And I was a part of that group and had a chance to sit with him and reflect, and one of the things I mentioned was, "John, we must dramatize the issue," and had a big smile and he said, "Only you would say that."

John was one who was always at the forefront of a lot of things that went on in Nashville. There are very few photos without him having a patch on his head. They would just aim for his head, and we talk about that sometime. But people like John Lewis, C.T. Vivian and some others were very influential in my being a part of the Movement.

BENNETT: Did you attend a church at that time?

PATTON: Gordon Memorial United Methodist Church.

BENNETT: And that continues to be your church?

PATTON: Yes.

BENNETT: And where is that located?

PATTON: That's located at 2335, I believe, Herman Street in Nashville.

BENNETT: What role did the church play in the Movement here in Nashville? Did the preacher talk about it on Sundays? Were there people --

PATTON: I don't remember the pastor at that time, but they did talk about it. Quite a few of the members of the church were involved -- maybe not in actual sitting in or what have you. For example, Joy Leonard's mother put her home up for bond when we were arrested. There were people who had food for -- well, I'm getting into the Freedom Ride a little bit, but there were people who opened their homes up to the Freedom Riders who came through Nashville. Everybody had to come through Nashville to -- for their training for the Freedom Ride. And there were homes that were opened.

Jim Lawson spoke at our church quite frequently. As a matter of fact, I was watching a videotape -- something that we had talked about earlier -- and I didn't know -- I knew he was speaking in a church, and it wasn't until they took a particular shot of him, and I knew it was my church, because of a -- him standing in the pulpit and on the back wall there are music notes. And I knew then that he was at Gordon. And so, yes, there were quite a few people in our church who were involved some kind of way.

BENNETT: You mentioned the food, too. Was that when the kids were in jail, or what other kind of support?

PATTON: Basically, at that time for the Nashville Sit-Ins, what they were needing was money for bail, and that's what I mentioned about Joy Leonard's mother was one of those persons who -- she put up her home for bail for a lot of kids. And I'm sure that our church raised money for bail, as other churches did.

BENNETT: What -- do you recall them encouraging people to participate in the shopping boycott?

PATTON: Oh, yes. Yes. That -- that was a very successful challenge for us. We were downtown asking people not to shop. It was -- I think it was in the papers and on the radios, and I know throughout the colleges we asked the kids not to go downtown and do their Easter shopping.

And I would say that blacks who didn't shop, who wanted to shop, were afraid to shop -- not afraid to shop, but just didn't want to be seen. And met somebody, said, "Well, I saw so and so shopping," and I think the whites were just afraid to come to town, and so it was just -- no one was downtown shopping.

BENNETT: Did your family support that?

PATTON: Yes. Yes, they did.

BENNETT: Was it a part of general conversation? Did people -- I mean, talk about it, how they were going to support it, or its effect?

PATTON: Well, when we decided to do the boycott, it was very effective. There was a lot of talk about it, because we wanted people to know that this was one Easter you just go in your closet and get what you already have, and you would not shop. And it was very successful.

BENNETT: Did you ever attend any of the training sessions on nonviolence?

PATTON: At the time I was a student at Tennessee State and I had band rehearsals at night. I was with the, as we call it, "The Aristocrat of Bands" and we had -- when they were having sessions, I was at band rehearsal. And I may have attended one or two sessions, but other than that, that was it.

BENNETT: What instrument did you play?

PATTON: I'm a percussionist.

BENNETT: Then -- oh, I was going to ask a little bit about the training sessions, but -- if you don't -- do you recall any details?

PATTON: Okay.

BENNETT: Now, John Lewis introduced you, then, to

PATTON: The Movement, yes.

BENNETT: the more formal part of the Movement. And you mentioned a march. I guess it might have been this March on Washington that he was getting ready? Do you think so? The --

PATTON: No, that was afterwards. The March on Washington was after the Movement here in Nashville.

BENNETT: Yeah. You met him before --

PATTON: I met him when he was a student here.

BENNETT: Oh. You met him when he was at American Baptist.

PATTON: Yes.

BENNETT: Okay, and so is that how you met the other --

PATTON: Yes.

BENNETT: members of the

PATTON: Bernard and

BENNETT: crowd there?

PATTON: -- yes.

BENNETT: Did you sing with them, too?

PATTON: I started singing with them when we were in the Hines County jail. Before that, they -- I guess they had their own group at school, but once we entered Hines County, and we would sing at night, and I had started singing with Bernard and Bevel, and there was one other member of the group. So we entertained everybody doing our services during the day and entertaining the ladies at night.

BENNETT: I guess we'll wait to move up there, to --
How did you participate in the Nashville Student Sit-In Movement, then?

PATTON: Well, I participated by demonstrating. I worked in the office, which was in the 1800 block of Jefferson. Answered the phone, made runs, made phone calls.

We also, other than the downtown, we did the stores -- Kroger and H.G. Hills -- and I was responsible for canvassing North Nashville and South Nashville for the Kroger and H.G. Hills store. At the time they did not have black clerks.

And a young lady by the name of Pauline Knight and myself and I, we canvassed the neighborhood and asked people not to shop at -- let's see, I think it was an H.G. Hills at 16th Avenue South where the Belmont Church

owns that building now. Also, the other one was -- there's a store on Lafayette right across from the Projects. That was either a Kroger or an H.G. Hills at that time. Right next to the -- what else is in that area? -- Cameron School, on that very corner. I don't know what the cross street is for Lafayette, but that was one of the stores we canvassed to get people to -- not to shop.

And pretty soon I do remember that the H.G. Hills on 16th Avenue South, one of the first clerks they had was a young lady by the name of Rose Kelly, who also graduated in my high school class. Her father -- at the time, or maybe before that -- was what we called a truant officer. Mr. Kelly. And you couldn't outrun him. He was a long, tall, lanky person. That's when they had truant officers to go around to different houses to see why you were not at school. And that was her father. And she was one of the first black clerks in the Kroger or H.G. Hills stores.

BENNETT: I've heard Kwame Lillard say he also worked with that effort, to change the hiring, change those practices for H.G. Hill or Kroger.

PATTON: Right, right.

BENNETT: How long -- do you recall how long it took between trying to call attention to it and to them actually making a change?

PATTON: Well, I started, I think, during the summer on canvassing the area.

And sometimes during -- I guess it was early part of the year -- I'm not really sure about the date -- Martin Luther King came to Nashville and spoke at Tennessee State. Well, that weekend that he came, I left and went to New York for a weekend, which turned into a year.

I stayed in New York for a year and I spoke for CORE. Congress of Racial Equality. They found me a job and an apartment, and I was the only black Freedom Rider from the South in New York. And so they utilized me as a speaker. Every weekend I was going to somewhere in New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and speaking to raise money for the effort.

BENNETT: Was James Farmer director of CORE?

PATTON: James Farmer was the director.

BENNETT: So you had contact with him at that time, too, I expect?

PATTON: Yes, mm-hm. Yes. And one of the things that I had mentioned to you about trying to find some memorabilia from my being a part of the Movement was that I do remember that the airline ticket that I had cost me somewhere between \$49 and \$53, to fly to New York at that time.

BENNETT: Were you -- did you continue on at Tennessee State while you were a part of the Movement?

PATTON: We were -- after we were arrested in Jackson, Mississippi -- there were 13 of us that were expelled from Tennessee State.

BENNETT: You were among

PATTON: I was one of the 13.

BENNETT: the students who were expelled? And what was the charge?

PATTON: Uh -- I guess just being a part of -- being a part of the Movement.

BENNETT: How were you notified that you were expelled?

PATTON: Through the newspaper and through attorney Looby?

BENNETT: Attorney Looby notified all the individuals?

PATTON: Yes.

BENNETT: Who was in charge of that effort to expel the students?

PATTON: I think it was the Tennessee Board -- state board.

BENNETT: Okay. The State Board of Regents,

PATTON: Yes.

BENNETT: in charge of it.
And I read later that that decision was overturned.

PATTON: Yes, it was.

BENNETT: And was that attorney Looby's -- through his efforts also?

PATTON: Yes. Mm-hm.

BENNETT: So you also knew attorney Looby at some point.

PATTON: Yes. Yes.

BENNETT: Would you describe him for us?

PATTON: Quiet. But when he spoke -- it was like E.F. Hutton. When he would speak, everybody would listen. I knew also Mr. Lillard, who worked with him -- Bob Lillard, who worked with him. As a matter of fact, Bob Lillard's son and daughter, we all graduated from high school together, so I knew the family. And so -- Nashville, in the black community, was, I would say, a very close-knit community. And I guess during the Civil Rights Era that it became even closer.

BENNETT: Do you know of any people that actually had any -- suffering -- hurt in any way because of their participation, or family members who were hurt? Not necessarily physical, but as -- in your -- the students' case -- being expelled from school.

PATTON: Being expelled from school. I think that was just about it, as far as I know. Physically, of course, there were some -- during the demonstrations. But as far as your parents were concerned, if they lost their job or any of those things, I don't think so.

BENNETT: Okay.
I wanted to ask, then, about how you became involved in the Freedom Rides.

PATTON: The Freedom Ride was after my experience with the Movement here in Nashville. One of the things that I said was I would not be going to Mississippi or to any part of the South, simply because I didn't feel that it was safe. And I said that I wouldn't go. I said, "I will work in the office, I'll do anything you want me to do, but I will not go."

And as it turns out that even a higher power said, "Yes, you will go." And on the day that I left there were five of us. I think I left Nashville with James Bevel and three others. I don't remember who was in the car with us. One of the jobs that I had was to inform the FBI that we were sending people down, whether they be on a train or in a car. Whatever their mode of transportation was, we had to let the FBI know. And what they would do was to actually follow these people all the way down, I guess to protect them.

So one day they needed riders. I went home and changed clothes, and the next thing I knew I was on my way to Montgomery. And I felt no pain.

BENNETT: Do you remember what day this was, by any chance, or what month?

PATTON: No, I don't. I would have to look at the records and see.

But we met up with the Nashville group that was already in Montgomery, and we met with Jim Farmer, Dr. King, Shuttlesworth and some others at a doctor's home. I don't remember his name. But that's when I first met Stokely Carmichael, Hank Thomas. Hank Thomas is the one that's with the burning bus. He was with that group and he came back to go again. So we were all in the same room. I was with some powerful people and didn't know it then, but I was there just to take that ride from Montgomery to New Orleans. But we only made it as far as Jackson.

BENNETT: Who were some of the other Nashville students with you?

PATTON: John Lewis, Bernard Lafayette, Freddie Leonard, and I think some other Tennessee State people. Pauline Knight may have been on that trip. The majority of them were Tennessee State people.

BENNETT: It seems this might be the one that Jim Zwerg was also on? Is this the --

PATTON: Jim Zwerg, I think, made it as far as Montgomery. And I don't recall if he went from Montgomery to Jackson.

BENNETT: I think he was beaten in Montgomery.

PATTON: I was in Montgomery, yes.

BENNETT: Okay, so you met up with that same group

PATTON: Same group,

BENNETT: to continue on.

PATTON: To continue. Yes.

BENNETT: So, you made it as far as Jackson. What happened in Jackson?

PATTON: Well, we were the second group. There were 25 that went in that first day, and they divided us up into two groups. There were supposed to be twelve and twelve, and actually Jim Farmer was not going to make that trip. And a young lady encouraged him to go.

She said that -- he went to the bus depot with us in Montgomery, and she asked him, "Aren't you going?" He said, "No, I'm not going." His father was sick at the time. And she told him that she came because of him. And so he bought a ticket, and that's why we had 25.

And we were the second group, and the first group was worried about us. And I do recall that John Lewis -- I was on the same bus with John Lewis. And I was watching a video a few days ago and John Lewis stepped off the bus and I was right behind him coming off the bus.

And we were arrested for misconduct and breach of peace, and they just marched us right over to the city jail. We were booked in the city jail and we stayed there until we filled up that jail, and then we were moved to the county jail, which we had to clean it up. It looked like hadn't been anybody in that jail for years and we had to clean it up. And we filled the county jail, but they always would move that 25 first. Whenever they moved us to a new facility they always moved that 25 first.

We filled up the city and county jail and then they moved that 25 to the county farm. If you've ever seen the movie "Cool Hand Luke," it was just like that. It was a county farm just like that with the stripes and everything. We stayed there maybe two days and then they sent us -- I think what was happening was they were making provisions for us in the Parchman State Penitentiary. And then we went back to the county jail, and shortly after we were moved to Parchman.

BENNETT: How long were you in jail up to the point that you went to Parchman?

PATTON: I had a 67 -- I think all of us had 67 day sentences, or \$200 fine. And I think I stayed 60 -- about 59, 60 days and then I was released.

BENNETT: Did you then wear the prison stripes?

PATTON: No, in the penitentiary we had t-shirts and shorts. There were two to a cell. And that was it.

BENNETT: No blankets, pillows --

PATTON: We had blankets, sheets and I don't remember if we had pillows or not. And the way they would punish us would be to turn on the heat during the summer months, turn off the air conditioning. Or turn off the water system. I remember the 4th of July that they turned on -- it was very hot, and they turned off the water and the air conditioning during the 4th of July.

BENNETT: Was this punishment for any specific behavior?

PATTON: Singing or any kind of demonstrations that we could do, which wasn't very much, two to a cell. And the only time you ever saw the other people would be when you take a shower, which was twice a week. They let you shave with a razor. No soap, nothing like that, so -- that's the only -- and you -- you got used to voices more so than faces. You forgot what people looked like but you could remember their voice.

BENNETT: Did you have a court hearing? Did you go before the judge?

PATTON: We went before the judge when we were first arrested and then we went back for arraignment and I guess after everybody was released or had served their time -- well, those who served their time didn't have to go back, but those who were released before they served their 67 days went back to Tougaloo College. We met a Tougaloo College. I think it was over 300 riders, and we all were arraigned on the same day at -- in Hines County, in the city.

BENNETT: Now, you -- when I said I was going to ask you later about Hines County -- you said that you did some singing there. That's when you first started singing

PATTON: Yes.

BENNETT: with Bernard and Bevel and a few others. Did -- what kind of songs did you sing?

PATTON: Freedom songs. Then we would have service, I think, every day, and we'd do some congregational hymns. But basically at night we would do some of the freedom songs and the girls could hear us, and we'd aggravate the guards because they'd tell us to stop singing and shut up that noise, and we'd just keep singing.

BENNETT: I think it was Bevel that told the story about somebody confusing the singing for a radio, "Who has the radio?"

PATTON: Yes. Yes.

BENNETT: Were you there at that time?

PATTON: Yes.

[END OF TAPE 1, SIDE A]
[START OF TAPE 1, SIDE B]
[COUNTER: 000]

PATTON: -- every day, two or three times a day, we got pretty good at, and I guess that's what that story is about. It -- it had the sound of the radio and, of course, the steel is all around you to amplify the sound. Inmates on other floors didn't want us to sing and then we could hear them arguing back and forth about, "Let #em sing," "Be quiet," and what have you. So we had a pretty good group going.

BENNETT: Did this affect -- though, that's a pretty long stretch in jail.

PATTON: Yes. Yes.

BENNETT: And did you -- were you able to receive any mail or get any visitors?

PATTON: We received mail, yes. The mail would be -- they'd go through the mail, first of all. But we did receive mail. Only visitors would be maybe some church people from Jackson. Local church people from Jackson.

BENNETT: Did you know how your mom reacted?

PATTON: My mom didn't find out until I was in jail. I didn't go home every night when I was in Nashville working, because something was always going on and I was at the office.

And a friend of hers was watching the news and called and said, "Where's your son?"

And she said, "Well, he's over at the office on Jefferson," because she figured that's where I would be all the time. And she said, "I think you need to turn the news on. He's down in Jackson, Mississippi."

So she did call Jackson to make sure that I was okay, as a mom would do. But other than that -- that's when she found out, watching it over the news, because I knew that if I had said something to her about it before, then she would probably say No.

But something just said, "Get your clothes on and go," and that's what I did.

BENNETT: Did you know Diane Nash also?

PATTON: Yes. Yes, she was a student at Fisk at the time.

BENNETT: How would you describe the leadership among the Movement in Nashville?

PATTON: I think we had very good leadership in the students and with the adults. I do recall that when we first wanted to continue the Freedom Ride, we had to meet with the adult group to get the money to go, and that was an all night thing.

Back and forth -- "It's too dangerous" -- "You don't need to go" -- "Why do you want to go?" -- et cetera, et cetera. And so they finally wrote a check, but the check needed two signatures and only one person was at the meeting that night to sign the check. And he signed it -- he or she signed it -- and I think the adults' general attitude was, "They can't get it cashed with the one signature and maybe this thing will blow over."

And we found someone that would cash the check,¹ who agreed with what we were doing, and he said, "I'll get the other signature." And we got the money to send the first group from Nashville down to Birmingham.

BENNETT: And that was that first wave that was sent back immediately?

PATTON: Yes.

BENNETT: And that then Kwame met them?

PATTON: Kwame met them, and I was in the office. We were the only two in the office that night, when the call came in, and so he got a car and then I stayed at the office to -- either to hear from him or to hear from them and to coordinate that.

BENNETT: When you met with the adults, do you recall where that meeting took place, about whether or not to participate?

PATTON: First Baptist, at the church.

BENNETT: Okay. And -- so -- but it sounds as if you're saying that the adults did say, "Yeah, well, you can do it -- "

PATTON: I think what sold them was, there was a gentleman there, an old man -- I'll never forget what he said. And he said, "There's no price tag on freedom."

And I think that's -- after all the back and forth about the money, when he said that, I think that just put the seal on it and they just -- "Okay, we'll sign it."

BENNETT: How would you say this experience changed you?

PATTON: I think I've always been the same as I am now. I've always believed in equality for blacks and whites. I just happened to grow up at a time of segregation.

I do say that I'm glad that I was a part of the black experience in school and during the efforts that were made here in Nashville. I have a son who's 31 years old. He never went to a segregated school, and there are times when I talk to him and I think if you'll ask any black that has a child that didn't go to a black school -- all-black school -- will say that they missed the black experience. And it was quite an experience.

And I think that my growing up here in Nashville, I had a chance to see what it was like and to see the change, and I -- I enjoy the change.

I think the kids nowadays -- I don't know if they really realize what happened here in Nashville -- that they are aware what happened in Nashville. I have a friend who came to Fisk shortly after everything was open, so they missed that experience of segregated Nashville.

And sometimes I ask people do they actually realize the shoulders of the people that they're standing on. And I think that's important when I think of Bernard and Bevel, John Lewis, C.T. Vivian, and all the others that were here -- Jim Lawson, Diane Nash, all those people.

"Do you really know who made the changes here in Nashville?"

And I don't want to omit the Nashville community, both black and white. Because there were some whites that actually gave us a lot of information on what the Chamber of Commerce of doing and what their plans were.

BENNETT: Would you describe that a little bit?

PATTON: I think that it was the wife of one of the big store owners down here. Her husband would come home and tell her what was happening. Or she might ask, "What happened in your meeting?" and he would tell her, and "What are you going to do?" and he would tell her. And that information would get back to us through her. And so there were people like that who really saw that segregation was wrong and did what they could in their own way to make Nashville a better place to live.

BENNETT: What about the issue of nonviolence? Is that a philosophy that you embraced?

PATTON: Yes. Yes. Because that's what we were taught. I'm thankful for Jim Lawson and what he brought to Nashville and the Movement, and making us understand about nonviolence. Because there were some people in the Movement, young people in the Movement, who will tell you that to be hit or spit on or have something poured on them, to be nonviolent was just like black and white. It was different and they abided by the rules and it changed their lives from being a violent person and being able to take the hits and the insults and what have you.

BENNETT: Were there people in the community that helped pay attention to your needs? I know you mentioned, you know, gathering up the money for the Freedom Rides, and that sort of thing. But I imagine, too -- you were living at -- were you living at home?

PATTON: Yes. Mm-hm.

BENNETT: And I didn't know if you ever went to another family's home for a break, or if there was sort of an informal meeting place? I've heard the Fusons opened up their house some.

PATTON: Yes, mm-hm.

There were quite a few informal meetings at different homes. So people were doing what they could. Maybe not down here demonstrating, but they did what they could. They opened their pockets. They opened their homes.

BENNETT: Do you recall the Otey family involvement? I heard they brought food. They helped provide food.

PATTON: Well, they owned the grocery store, so I'm sure they had something to do with it. And they were located right there at -- on the corner of 18th and Jefferson. They were right in the middle of it, so --

BENNETT: I wanted to ask you, too -- moving up to Fayette County, Tent City and -- that was probably a little bit after the Freedom Rides.

PATTON: Mm-hm. I did not take part in that.

BENNETT: Okay. I didn't know if there was anything.

Now, Nashville is known for many great leaders that moved on to further leadership in the South and in the Civil Rights Movement. Gee, we could go on forever -- C.T. Vivian and Lawson and

PATTON: The South, if I were to say they owe a lot to Nashville and the people who came from Nashville. Could we cut this just for a second? I need to take a break.

BENNETT: Sure.

PATTON: Well, speaking of -- I'll get to -- we'll get to that.

BENNETT: Okay.

PATTON: I think you had asked me about

BENNETT: Significant leaders that came out of Nashville.

PATTON: leaders that came out of Nashville. Yes.

And I was thinking on my way back upstairs that they were here for a reason, and I don't think it was an earthly reason as to their being here.

I would say that there is a reason for Jim Lawson going to India and studying, because what he learned, he brought that back to the Movement, about nonviolence.

I think there's a reason for Diane Nash being a student at Fisk other than the fact that she came to Fisk for an education, because she was not used to segregation and no parts of segregation, coming from Illinois. There's a reason for Lafayette, Bevel and John Lewis sitting on the Cumberland River discussing desegregation. John Lewis was one who was -- came to the school because of Dr. King. He hadn't planned to come to Nashville. C.T. Vivian was supposed to be in Florida but he ended up in Nashville.

So there's a reason for all these people, not only in the leadership but in those who participated. Catherine Burke from Birmingham. She was in the Movement because of when she was a young child in Birmingham and her grandmother would take her to town, they would have to step off the sidewalk to let the white males pass. And at that time you did not look at whites in the eye. She'd have to get off the sidewalk, walk in the street until they passed, and then get back on the sidewalk. And that was one of the things, in talking to her, that got her into this Movement.

So there are, I would say, unearthly reasons for this Movement, the Nashville Movement, coming together as it did. I don't think -- I don't think anyone on this earth could have orchestrated what happened here in Nashville from beginning to end.

BENNETT: One name, too -- Kelly Miller Smith.

PATTON: Kelly Miller Smith was like the father of all the students. We all respected him, had great respect for Kelly Miller Smith.

BENNETT: How -- would you describe him a little bit for me?

PATTON: To me he was just a tall statue, someone who cared about Nashville and what was happening to Nashville, and also about the students. I was not close to Kelly as some of the other students may have been because in my church -- we were also involved in our church and so I was a little bit closer to the church that I attended.

BENNETT: What facts or memories do you think are important to preserve regarding the Movement here in Nashville? I think in a way you've answered it -- part of that -- with your observations to

PATTON: Well, one of the things I would like to see, and one of the things I've talked to that a lot of the people who were in the Movement would like to see, is a museum. There are other places that have museums and Nashville should have a museum -- Civil Rights museum. And I think that's long overdue.

BENNETT: Do you continue contact with the people that you participated with in the Nashville Movement?

PATTON: Yes. And one of the things about when you see people that participated in the Movement, it's just like they -- there are years since I've seen them but it's just like yesterday. There's something that just makes you want to cry, or gives you a feeling to know that -- I guess it's like Army buddies, being in the Army together. One thing about the Movement is that when we were demonstrating downtown, I learned that you did not worry about what happened to you, as an individual. You were worried about the person in front of you in the line or the person behind you.

And usually it was a black, white, black, white situation, and you knew that the whites were going to get hit more, or they would suffer more than the blacks. But I think you thought about -- more about the people that you were with than you did your own self. And so when you see them, you're so happy to see #em. It's just like yesterday.

BENNETT: We heard a little bit -- one woman's experience at Parchman. And it was really pretty devastating for her. Would you call that experience -- did that

PATTON: I only know one person -- female -- that may have had some problems, and that was at the county farm. And of course the Mississippi guards, they look like they stood about seven feet tall, 300 pounds, with these long Magnum guns and what have you. I recall an incident where a guard wanted this lady to say "Sir." "Yes, sir."

And the only thing she would say was, "Yes" or "No," depending on what the question was. And a young man by the name of Leroy Wright -- actually as we might say, got in the guard's face and told him to leave her alone. Now I don't know why, but he did, and the guard left the young lady alone. But that was just where he wanted her to say "Yes, sir."

BENNETT: What final thoughts would you like to share regarding the Sit-In Movement and the actions of the city's leaders, government, and business and churches? So that was one area we didn't really talk about, with the government, the city government response.

PATTON: Well, I would like to see -- we're having a lot of talks about racial injustices, which are still going on. Nashville is known as the Athens of the South -- the best of everything is supposed to be right here in Nashville. And I would like to see that happen across the board, with everything that Nashville has to offer people. I'd like to see us live as one, and get rid of -- I know that we have a lot of, for example, Hispanics coming into Nashville. They're a part of the community, and I think we should accept them as a part of the community. It's happening worldwide -- people are just relocating, and we need to get on with the business of desegregation, making everybody equal.

BENNETT: When you say -- do you mean actual meetings about race relations, having people talk some stuff out?

PATTON: Yes, yes. Mm-hm. And trying to understand different cultures. We need to come together and try to understand different cultures. I think that one of the things that's good about kids going to -- black and white kids going to school nowadays is that hopefully there's a program in the schools where they can talk about the different cultures, to get to know each other. My high school history teacher was one of the last teachers to leave Pearl High, to retire. And the thing, in talking to her -- she's deceased now -- but the thing that -- the reason she retired was, she wanted to teach black history to the white students and they didn't want to have anything to do with it. And she knew then that she would have a hard time teaching history, and so she retired. And that was one of the things that she talked to me about before she passed on.

BENNETT: Was Minerva Hawkins --

PATTON: That's exactly who I'm talking about.

BENNETT: Well, I would like you -- if you have a minute to talk about Minerva Hawkins -- I knew of her as the secretary to Dr. Charles S. Johnson, who was the President of Fisk University, and also she worked -- did research -- sociology research herself.

PATTON: Yes.

Well, first I have to tell you about Pearl High. Pearl High was a school that was a family. Our principal was the father. All the teachers were his kids, and we were like his grandkids, the students. [What was his name?] Minerva Hawkins was a very special teacher, as all of the teachers were. They were concerned about the students and their welfare, their getting an education. There was contact with the parents. The PTA was very strong when I went to school. They would call your house wanting to know what's going on -- what's happening in the home that might cause a student to start failing, getting low grades.

Minerva Hawkins, she was -- you can't say enough about her. But, as I say, I think she was one of the last ones, when the school was finally integrated, to leave. And her reasons for leaving was because she felt as though she wouldn't be able to teach the subject that she knew how to teach, that I wouldn't be accepted, because she wanted to include black history in her history course. As a matter of fact, I had her for my history teacher.

BENNETT: I've heard very fine things about her, too.

PATTON: Yes.

BENNETT: Well, I think that ends our interview. Unless you have anything else for us to share, I think we've had a --

PATTON: Well, the only thing -- I guess, as I said earlier, I would love to see Nashville come together and at least have a museum. Not only about what happened as far as the Freedom Ride or the demonstration, but overall. Even the part we took in the War, the Civil War. Just a museum that covers a lot of things that Nashville was involved in. That's my concern.

I'm going to work on a project that I've spoken to you about. It has to do with the Freedom Ride. I would like to get in touch with -- I've tried to get in touch with John Lewis, to see what he could do, and maybe I'll try some people here, you know, along with yourself. I would like to see the news reporters -- or, to say, the media -- that covered Montgomery the day that the bus rolled into Montgomery. Because I believe that a lot of lives were changed on that day, not only the Freedom Riders, but those who were covering that story -- the press, the photographers, the people who were going to do the writing, the TV, the camera people. I think their lives have changed on that day.

Because one of the first things that happened when the bus rolled into the Montgomery station -- the Freedom Riders expected something to happen. But it didn't happen when they expected it, because what -- the people of Montgomery attacked the media. Tore up all the cameras so that they wouldn't have pictures of what happened in Montgomery. But then they turned on the Freedom Riders.

So I would like, if we could in some way, get in touch with those who are living, bring them all together in one room and sit and just listen to what they have to say about that day.

BENNETT: That's a great idea. I think I'll turn this off now. Thank you.