SALYNN McCOLLUM
Interviewer: K. G. Bennett, Librarian, Nashville Room, Nashville Public Library
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[INTERVIEW OF 3/27/04] [TAPE 1, SIDE A] [COUNTER: 000]

BENNETT: This is Kathy Bennett. Today is March 27, 2004, and I'm at the Nashville Public Library, about to speak with Salynn McCollum. She was a student at Peabody, in Nashville, during the time of the Nashville Student Sit-In Movement, and she now resides in Nunley, Tennessee.

Would you please give me your name, address and current employment?

McCOLLUM: Salynn McCollum, 451 Beasley Hollow Road in Nunley, Tennessee, and I'm director of Woodmont Christian Preschool.

BENNETT: Where were you born, and where did you grow up?

McCOLLUM: Tulsa, Oklahoma, and did some moving around when I was very young, and then was at junior high and high school outside Buffalo, New York.

BENNETT: What were your parents' names?

McCOLLUM: Hilda and Walter McCollum.

BENNETT: Do you have siblings, and what are their names?

McCOLLUM: Yes. Rhonda is her name.

BENNETT: Okay, and where does she live now?

McCOLLUM: Nunley.

BENNETT: Oh, okay. And you say you finished high school up in Buffalo, New York?

McCOLLUM: Yes, outside -- actually it wasn't inside, it was outside. It was Amherst, New York.

BENNETT: And was that a public school, private school?

McCOLLUM: Yes, public school.

BENNETT: Would you -- and then following high school, did you go directly to college?

McCOLLUM: Yes.

BENNETT: How did you happen to go to Peabody? You said earlier you went to Peabody.

McCOLLUM: Because my family, even though we lived in the north, identified ourselves as southerners, went to Southern Baptist Church. My folks felt like that was -- I was admitted to Syracuse University, and probably if I'd had my druthers I'd have chosen to go there, but my folks really pressed me, especially my father, to come back south.

BENNETT: What was his connection with the South?

McCOLLUM: This is where they grew up, in Tennessee. My father was born in Waverly and he went to -- oh, I've forgotten the name of the school, but it's a school in Memphis. Southwestern?

BENNETT: And he finished college at Southwestern?

McCOLLUM: I don't think he finished. I think he went two or three years.

BENNETT: And did your mother have the same connection to Tennessee?

McCOLLUM: She was born outside of Memphis.

BENNETT: Was there extended family here?

McCOLLUM: Yes.

BENNETT: So you would have --

McCOLLUM: Right. So they came back here.

BENNETT: Okay. And how did the experience, when you arrived at Peabody, and here in Nashville, in -- would it be 1960, then, around that time?

McCOLLUM: '58, '59.

BENNETT: Did you notice difference culturally, in terms of issues of segregation?

McCOLLUM: (takes a breath) When I got here, I don't think that -- you know, I was young, and excited to be in school, and I don't think that was anything that I particularly noticed.

BENNETT: Let's see -- would you describe briefly your experience, then, at Peabody the first couple of years?

McCOLLUM: Oh, it's probably like every other young woman who was looking around and trying to figure out what life was all about, and have all the experiences, and parties, and playing and trying to get good grades at the same time.

I guess I found, academically, I found Peabody fairly easy and it was an arrangement between -- even though they were separate institutions, it was an arrangement between Peabody and Vanderbilt -- and this was really how I got involved in civil rights. There was an arrangement where you could take -- if you were an adequate student you could take courses at Vanderbilt, registering through Peabody. In other words, you went to registration the same way -- you would go to Peabody registration and just pick up a course or two at Vanderbilt.

BENNETT: And how did you -- would you explain further how you were introduced to the civil rights issues through your course work at Vanderbilt?

McCOLLUM: This was the beginning of my junior year and it was a psych course, and there was a man in the psych course and his first name was Lester, and I haven't been able to remember what his last name was. But he was a professor at Fisk but also taking courses, a student at Vanderbilt. I was taking graduate courses then. I was still an undergraduate.

But he and I were in the same psychology course and he had a connection with a program for autistic children at Fisk and it was something I was really interested in, so he and I became friendly. I went over to see that particular classroom, and there was a lot in the newspaper about the civil rights, and I think somehow or another I raised the issue, and had seen college students Downtown, looking very much like I looked, and dressing the same way I dressed, and the only difference seemed to me to be the color of their skin, which didn't make a lot of sense.

BENNETT: How did you eventually, then, learn more and become part of the Movement in Nashville?

McCOLLUM: Lester was involved with the Movement and he said, you know, 'Why don't you come go someday with me, to see what it's -- go to Kelly Miller Smith's church with me, and see what's going on.'

And I went to Kelly Miller Smith's church and the next thing I knew I was walking Downtown.

BENNETT: Do you remember what time of year that was?

McCOLLUM: It had to have been in the early fall.

BENNETT: Okay. So tell me a little bit about how that happened. You said 'all of a sudden.' Did you get signed up?

McCOLLUM: They didn't sign you up. They were just having a workshop and they were en route downtown. It was not organized and orchestrated in the way one might imagine. It was much more -- loose is the only word that comes to mind, but that's probably not as descriptive as I could be, but it was casual. And there certainly wasn't anybody checking to see what your credentials were. If you got up and walked with everybody else -- everybody was in the church and the next thing I knew, everybody was walking out and I was walking out, too.

BENNETT: Was this one of what they called the Mass Meeting?

McCOLLUM: No, this was like a meeting in preparation for a demonstration.

BENNETT: Who -- did you meet Jim Lawson or attend any of the training sessions that he had at that time?

McCOLLUM: One or two, but Jim was really leaving by that time. Jim had -- I've forgotten what time of the year it was that he was asked to leave Vanderbilt. It was either that spring or that fall. So he was not around a lot.

BENNETT: So do you recall the makeup of the group you were with?

McCOLLUM: When we went to demonstrate? There may have been one or two white students who were exchange students from Fisk. Jim Zwerg is one of the people that -- I don't know if he was there that particular time or not. Then there were two sisters who were at Fisk for some of the time. Maybe that was before they were there. I don't remember whether they were there for two semesters or one semester. And everybody else was 'negro,' as we said then.

BENNETT: Were there other students that you know of from Peabody or Vanderbilt, in the undergraduate --

McCOLLUM: No.

BENNETT: And --

McCOLLUM: At some point you should ask me about the basketball game.

BENNETT: Okay. This is a good time. Let's hear about the basketball game.

McCOLLUM: Well, it's sort of out of sequence, because it happened much later, and after I was very involved, and, you know, part of the leadership, and doing all those kinds of things.

But I think it was before the Freedom Rides. And somehow or another we decided -- how this happened, I don't remember -- that we would organize a basketball competition between the women at Peabody and the women at Fisk.

And all I can remember is, I can remember taking a carload or two of women to Fisk University and playing basketball, and having a lot of stress and a lot of tension, I guess is the best way of saying it, but people trying real hard to have a good time. And there was -- and we had a reciprocal game at Peabody a couple of weeks after that.

Our first interracial -- or interracial collegiate women's basketball game. (laughs)

BENNETT: Was it a basketball team or was it like, pickup.

McCOLLUM: No, it was just like whoever.

BENNETT: Was there any coverage of it at all?

McCOLLUM: (laughs) Oh, no. We would have been very distressed if there had been any coverage. That would have been -- that would have finished our careers.

BENNETT: So again, if it was before the Freedom Rides, it might have been about '61 or early '62. So people didn't -- weren't exactly comfortable?

McCOLLUM: (laughs) I would say that's an accurate description.

BENNETT: Now, when you were in between this time, then, of going on your first march with the group from First Baptist to becoming part of the leadership, can you give me a little description of the stages of involvement that you went through?

McCOLLUM: I think that sometimes thing just happen and they're not necessarily deliberate, although after the excitement of the first demonstration I was really aware of, I guess, the possible repercussions or possible difficulties. I knew Jim had just gotten put out of school and I was a junior and certainly didn't want to get put out.

Ask me the question again?

BENNETT: Oh, about describing your stages of involvement and then, you know, how you got from going to one demonstration Downtown to being part of -- let's say, even going to Cairo [Illinois].

McCOLLUM: Well, there's a lot of (laughs) -- lot in between those two.

The students in Nashville were -- I think that probably that, historically, is probably one of

the most valuable parts of that whole time was the way the students interacted and what went on there. But it was an open kind of situation where if you wanted to be part of it, you just showed up. There were some kinds of -- I guess the word is 'expectation' from somebody or another that I'd come back. I don't remember who or why, or -- but somebody said, 'We're meeting again tomorrow night at 7:00. See you.'

And I said, 'Yeah, see you.' And that was that. So I just started to go.

I think I probably got involved in some of the leadership role because I complained a lot. They'd say, 'We're going to start at 7:00' and I was taking all these courses and trying to go to two colleges, and one was on the semester system and one was on the quarter system, and carrying a lot of hours and all that sort of thing.

And they'd say 'we'll meet at 7:00' and people would stroll in, you know, 8:00, 8:15, 8:30 and I'd just be fussing about it and telling them they were not as effective as they might be because of that.

I had to laugh the other day, the recent meeting that was here, because Bevel showed up traditionally -- I thought afterwards, 'Bevel, you haven't changed in all these years, you know -- an hour and a half late.' But that was kind of -- I would say probably the avenue that involved me more deeply, because I felt like we could be so much more efficient than we were. But I don't know if we would have lost a lot of what I valued, from the group, if it had been any more formal or any more efficient.

BENNETT: So there was something to be said for keeping it kind of loose.

McCOLLUM: Well, everything was done by consensus. And everyone was honored in a way that I -- and that was -- I think, to me, the desegregating was important, but probably, historically, that's a major lesson -- equally as important as the actual desegregation.

Because -- I don't know that many people even attempt to do that in any kind of organization. I mean, we'd spend literally hours, until everybody agreed, and everybody understood, and everybody accepted.

If somebody did something way out of line -- one time we had -- we were always having people -- students or newspaper people or somebody or another -- from the North come to visit, and one of the women who was involved in the leadership group took two of these guys downtown -- we were in the middle of negotiations -- and held our own little private demonstration for the ego-trip of doing it. And yet there was never any --

There was not a sense of punishing her or scolding her or reprimanding her, but rather a real sense of embracing her and trying to help her understand the difficulties of what might happen as a result of doing this, that it could be seen as a breach of contract, if you will, or a breach of the process -- the mediation process, is the better way to say it.

BENNETT: Who brought about that model of consensus building?

McCOLLUM: I think it was in part from Gandhi's teachings. And it just evolved, I think.

BENNETT: Do you recall any influence of the Fellowship of Reconciliation?

McCOLLUM: I think Bayard was involved -- Rustin was involved with that group, and certainly I remember some of the -- we had brochures from there. And I think he came and talked, at some point, in Nashville. There were lots of kind of peripheral influences, I guess, is the best way to say it.

But somehow -- and, you know, I don't know that I could identify any of the major influences, other than Gandhi. There was a real sense of trying to love our way around all of this stuff, and when -- the workshops themselves were not tactical, but rather a real attempt to embrace the people that were involved, that were being hostile or aggressive or whatever.

I remember early on, somebody -- a crowd of white people who were Downtown, some guy was standing there smoking and I can remember glaring at him, and he burned me with his cigarette, and I thought, "Hm. That ought to teach me a lesson, because the truth of the matter was, is that I was very provocative in that situation.

BENNETT: Where did he burn you?

McCOLLUM: On my arm.

BENNETT: Did he put the cigarette on your arm?

McCOLLUM: Yeah.

BENNETT: And how did you respond when that was happening?

McCOLLUM: Oh, I just pulled away. But it was -- I mean, I confronted him. I mean, I was not appreciating his position or his emotions or his humanness. It was very much a confrontational kind of thing that demonstrated to me the difficulty of trying to use nonviolence as a technique rather than a real philosophy.

BENNETT: When you went from these practice sessions and then took them to the street, how did that -- what was the sense -- I would imagine there was a heightened -- I just wanted you to kind of tell -- describe the feelings of being there, such as in that situation, and then afterwards. Did you have a time of decompression or talking out, or talking through stuff?

McCOLLUM: Yes. But I can also tell you that one of the very first times that I went on a demonstration, and I don't think it was the first -- but I was so intent on -- there were captains, or I forget what term we used, who kind of monitored the line and would tell people what to expect, or to move or not to move, and that kind of thing.

And somebody had told us to move and keep our eyes straight ahead, and I was so intent on

following those directions -- I was so busy watching the person in front of me that I just didn't even see the curb at all. (laughs) I just fell off the curb because I was following the directions.

And afterwards the CORE leadership group would spend time socializing and eating. A lot of times we went to -- I've forgotten -- a little restaurant. I think it was on Jefferson, but everything has changed so much I can't tell where anything was any more because of the interstates. So yes, we spent that kind of time together. And that would then also be a planning time.

BENNETT: Was there much in the way of people saying, 'I've tried it, I can't do it. This is not me.'

McCOLLUM: Oh, yeah. Well, there -- no, I would say that probably people didn't say a lot but would use it as a technique. But there were some people who said, 'I can't use it. I can't do that. I mean, I'm too angry,' you know, 'It makes me too angry,' or 'That's stupid,' or, you know, 'It's time we fought back,' or --

BENNETT: In reading a little bit of this memoir of John Lewis, it describes the transition between SNCC as being very nonviolent, to one where the questions of leadership and so on came up, especially regarding Dr. King. I know I'm jumping forward a little bit here, but the change in tactics.

McCOLLUM: Well, SNCC itself, when it became a national SNCC and no longer Nashville -- when I'm referring to the Atlanta-based SNCC rather than the Nashville student group, my sense was that King played a really important role, because what happened with SNCC was that none of us was crowned and nobody stepped forward to be the banner person.

The only difficulty was that Martin was raising all the money and we were in the trenches doing the work. But in a sense, he was the lightning rod and he was the person who was identified as, you know, for lack of a better word, the crown prince. And that served to keep us from ever getting into a whole lot of backbiting or a whole lot of competition, which was so important in relationship to trying to maintain this very fragile, very unusual means of interacting. So that I felt like it served us well.

BENNETT: Did you meet Martin?

McCOLLUM: Oh yeah.

BENNETT: What was your personal response to him?

McCOLLUM: I thought he was an eloquent speaker. You know, I think he was a genuinely nice man.

BENNETT: What was your role within SNCC?

McCOLLUM: Well, it was different depending on where I was and what was happening

with SNCC. First I was -- after I was on the Freedom Rides, Peabody -- my father went and got me out of jail in Birmingham and brought me back and apologized to [Coordinator of Special Education Lloyd M Dunn, B.Ed., M.Ed., Ph.D.] for my behavior, and they kind of agreed that it would be unwise for me to come back to school. But Peabody was unwilling to follow in the steps of Vanderbilt and actually expel me. [Dunn said a rather unusual thing during that meeting -- an oblique statement like, 'Sometimes history looks back on events and sees them differently.']

So at that time in history, women lived in dormitories or lived at home or lived with relatives or something like that. So they agreed -- my father and Lloyd Dunn -- agreed that I should not live in the dormitory because I would unduly influence the women in the dormitory. And the only way I could return to school was -- I'm not answering the question.

BENNETT: That's fine.

McCOLLUM: was that I either live with a relative or a guardian. So therefore, they could control my behavior without expelling me -- or, my participation, without expelling me. And I then went back to school and was campused, meaning that I had to be in my dorm room within half an hour after my last class and couldn't leave, etc. -- you know, some of those rules and regulations.

So, let's see how to shorten this. I then went home to New York, through -- I don't remember how, but somehow or another, an African-American newspaper had me writing articles. I remember the man who was in charge of that section of the newspaper. And I started writing articles for them. And through him, I guess, well -- I already, by then, had a reputation, because my picture had been all over the papers and all of that kind of thing.

I met a minister and his wife who lived here in Nashville who were African-American and agreed to be my guardians. So I came back with -- my parents wouldn't pay for my schooling any longer and took my car away. Martin, however, had given me some scholarship money, and Jim Zwerg had gotten -- the ten of us who had gone on the first Freedom Ride had gotten -- I don't remember how much money, from Martin, in a presentation here in Nashville.

And Jim Zwerg said he didn't need the money so he gave me the money, and that's how I came back to Nashville, to go back to Peabody, living with a guardian. We had notarized all that stuff and everything. But I just -- I didn't say anything to anybody, I just showed up at registration. And my card was still in the file box, so I got registered. So I was in school at that point, living in the African-American community, being harassed by the police every morning when I was trying to go to class.

I had a double major, one in Elementary Ed, Early Childhood, and one in Special Ed, and I had registered to do my student teaching at Clover Bottom [Developmental Center, the state-run residential facility for people with mental retardation], and the State of Tennessee wouldn't let me student teach at Clover Bottom because of my participation -- because I might corrupt (chuckles) the mentally retarded children living there.

Anyway, that's how I got to Cairo. I went to Southern Illinois University. One of my professors [Leonard J. Lucito, B.S., M.S., Ed.D., Associate Professor of Special Education] actually arranged for me to go to SIU, and I just had one semester left and a couple of courses to do. Primarily I needed my student teaching and he set that up.

BENNETT: Do you recall the name of the family that you lived with in Nashville?

McCOLLUM: Jim and Nan Woodard -- Woodland -- Wood something. Maybe Woods.

BENNETT: Do you remember the church they were with?

McCOLLUM: No.

BENNETT: Okay, and to -- so you -- I just want to wind up the education part. Then we'll go back to Freedom Rides, okay?

McCOLLUM: Okay.

BENNETT: So you want up to Carbondale then?

McCOLLUM: Yes.

BENNETT: And did you end up finishing up school up there, or how did that go?

McCOLLUM: I just did one semester there. I took a couple courses and did my student teaching -- did some more student teaching. And I student taught on campus at the kindergarten on Peabody's campus.

BENNETT: Now, you mentioned the scholarship award that Dr. King gave you? Do you recall if that was after the Freedom Rides, when you and Zwerg and others had come back to Nashville?

McCOLLUM: Right.

See photo with Dr. King and Freedom Riders in Catherine Burks Brooks' clipping of from Pittsburgh Courier of September 27, 1961.

BENNETT: And so, during all this time, then, your own family was upset. Your parents were upset by your involvement?

McCOLLUM: (short laugh) Yeah, that's -- an under-estimation.

[END OF TAPE 1, SIDE A]
[COUNTER: 431]

[START OF TAPE 1, SIDE B]

[COUNTER: 000]

BENNETT: Did your family -- extended family -- here in the Middle Tennessee area know much about your involvement?

McCOLLUM: Oh, yeah, because it was all over all the papers all the time. My -- the aunt and uncle who actually lived in Nashville at the time didn't want to see me or talk to me. My father's deal was -- came and tried to talk me out of staying -- was that, you know, I could go to school anyplace that I wanted to go in the North, but he wouldn't pay for me to come to the South. He wouldn't -- they would no longer continue to give me any money if I was going to do this.

BENNETT: Did you leave the semester before you completed it at Peabody and then go up to SIU, or did you --

McCOLLUM: No, I did that first semester here, because that's when I did my student teaching in the kindergarten. And just -- the interesting thing was -- is -- that probably twenty years after that -- fifteen years after that, Peabody got in touch with me and asked me to come back and teach. After all of that.

BENNETT: Peabody College?

McCOLLUM: Yeah. (laughs)

BENNETT: Did they know your story?

McCOLLUM: Mm-hm.

BENNETT: Oh.

McCOLLUM: Well, I think that probably, politically, they were trying to redeem themselves somehow or another, and it would have been, you know, to their advantage to have me return. That would have been something -- a hatch mark in the positive rather than, as they saw it at the time, a hatch mark in the negative.

BENNETT: You said, then, that being in southern Illinois got you to Cairo.

McCOLLUM: Yes.

BENNETT: How did that happen?

McCOLLUM: I was taking a speech class and there was a woman in the class -- Ethel Fletcher, I think is her name, who came from Cairo, Illinois. And there was a NAACP -- National Association for the Advancement of Colored People -- (there's an NAEYC in

Education -- Early Childhood Education organization that I confuse the letters with). There was a group already formed in Cairo, and they were having both lunch counters and recreation -- the bowling alley and the little single movie theater, etc., continued to be segregated, and some kids and some adults, too, were meeting in Cairo.

And she -- she had family there, I don't know -- she was not from there. She was from St. Louis but she had family there -- an uncle. And she asked me if I would go to Cairo and meet with the kids and tell them what to do, help them strategize or something. And I said yes, that I would. And -- I mean, things tended to -- at that point in my life, especially -- to take on a life of their own.

I got there, I met with the kids and did a nonviolence workshop, and they were persistent in terms of wanting to demonstrate, wanting to demonstrate, wanting to -- and these were high school kids. Half a dozen or so. No, I guess there were more than that. Twenty, maybe.

Anyway, I'm trying to make sure that this -- the time frame may not be exactly right on this, but it's my sense that it's correct. I went back and forth a few times and then we set up a time to demonstrate. And we were demonstrating.

By then, tactically, I understood a lot about the tactics of a demonstration, and one of the major attributes is that you follow the instructions of whoever is the designated authority person during the time that you're demonstrating. Everybody's life always depended on being -- on understanding that, and nobody -- I mean, if you were told to walk, you walked. If you were told to stop, you stopped, even if it wasn't your judgment of what you felt like needed to happen then.

Because very often, especially if you were standing in the line, you couldn't see what was happening in other places, up and down the line. So you had no way of knowing -- you know, you didn't have the same information, usually, as the leader had, to make the decisions, so you just had to rely on the leadership and follow the instructions. And that was -- we talked a lot about that and we talked about how to protect yourself and those kinds of things.

We went downtown to this little tiny lunch counter in Cairo, Illinois, with about ten kids, and we demonstrated, and things got really heated and awful. And so I knew we had to get out. Because -- well, one of the things was that you use to judge some of that was the distance that the crowd kept from the demonstration. And they were pushing closer and closer.

So I -- we started to exit. And somebody had driven us. I don't remember who. I think maybe it was the minister from the church where we had had the meetings in. Anyway, when we -- the last person was kind of the leadership guy -- young guy, high school kid, who was very dear.

And I told him to go ahead, because I didn't -- another kind of tactic you use is not to turn your back, unless you're protecting yourself -- But you don't turn away from -- You can kind of hold the distance, is the attempt. And I told him to go and he wouldn't.

He said, 'No, you go first.'

And I said to him twice, 'No, you go.'

And he didn't go. And he finally did go, but by then there was -- there was a lot of tension, and a man from the crowd stepped forward and cut me across the back of the leg, and that created Cairo, in that then, you know, the New York Times was there and everybody else was there.

BENNETT: What did he cut you with?

McCOLLUM: A knife.

BENNETT: Did you have to get stitches, or --

McCOLLUM: Yes, and that's -- I went to -- I was cut quite badly, actually. Probably it was four or five inches, all the way across the back of my thigh. It was a bloody mess. We went directly to the hospital and the hospital refused to stitch my leg.

At that point I -- I guess I called -- Ethel called her uncle, who was a doctor, and he stitched my leg. But he was really afraid. And that night when it hemorrhaged, he refused to come back. So I ended up having to have somebody drive me all the way to East St. Louis, or St. Louis, to add some stitches to it.

BENNETT: When you say, 'this started Cairo,' would you elaborate a little bit more on that?

McCOLLUM: Well, those incident -- kinds of incidents are headline-grabbers and interest-provokers and all that kind of thing. I think, you know, that was -- (laughs) I barely finished the last -- that semester in Cairo, and I just moved to Cairo, that that's -- that was one of, you know, my involvements there. John Lewis came and joined me there.

BENNETT: Did you get other support from some of your former Nashville colleagues?

McCOLLUM: Oh, I talked to people on the phone all the time, and certainly got -- I mean, the support was -- you know, this was seen as an extension of SNCC. I mean, Atlanta SNCC was formed by then, and so it was seen as an activity of SNCC, if you will.

BENNETT: One of my questions was, how did you end up in the leadership role in SNCC. And this is the --

McCOLLUM: Oh, I probably was in a leadership role in SNCC in Nashville, before this time.

BENNETT: Okay. You mentioned that you had visited Highlander, too. Was that as part of SNCC?

McCOLLUM: Yes.

BENNETT: What kind of meeting was held there?

McCOLLUM: I don't remember too much about it. Mostly, I remember sleeping. You know, and there was a really nice camaraderie, but it was -- it was at a time when -- well, it was physically very exhausting, but of course I was eighteen, nineteen, I guess at that point, and, you know, trying to carry a full load at school and trying to participate. You know, we'd be out really late. Sometimes I'd have to sneak back into the dormitory in order to get back into my room.

So I really recall Highlander as a kind of letting our hair down, and everybody socializing, I guess. I know that there were some kind of workshops or something, but I don't remember any of that.

BENNETT: Did you ever make it over to the Fusons' home near Fisk?

McCOLLUM: I knew them, yes. I did not spend a lot of time -- I know a lot of people spent a lot of time with them.

BENNETT: You said that you wrote for this African-American newspaper. Was that one published up in the Buffalo area?

McCOLLUM: Yes.

BENNETT: Do you remember the name of it by any chance?

McCOLLUM: (chuckles) I might one day be able recall that. I don't remember it offhand. Unfortunately, all my stuff is kind of scattered hither and yon. Either I left stuff in somebody's basement -- that's just what happened a lot at that point, because I'd be traipsing across the countryside someplace.

BENNETT: Now, do you -- were you part of that march following the bombing of Looby's home?

McCOLLUM: I don't remember that very well, but I do remember it happening.

BENNETT: Then, to move out past -- by the time you were in Cairo, that was the time you finished up college, too, at the same time.

McCOLLUM: I ended up having to -- I'd forgotten -- take another course. I was short a course or had some Incompletes. So I didn't immediately graduate. I graduated considerably after that point when I finished -- I stayed involved with SNCC for a while after that, probably a year and a half or something like that. Then I worked for the American Friends Service Committee for a year.

BENNETT: Where did you work for them?

McCOLLUM: Des Moines, Iowa. Peace education.

BENNETT: And did they put you through some training, too?

McCOLLUM: Yes. I think I must have -- I think I conducted some workshops for them. One of things that I did was to take a whole busload of kids to the UN and Washington.

BENNETT: Did you make it to the March in 1963 in Washington?

McCOLLUM: No. I had -- crowd phobias, is, I guess the best way of saying it. Especially after Cairo, because that sense of not having leadership in a group of people felt very threatening to me.

BENNETT: I wanted to ask you, too, about -- did you ever get to a meeting of the minds with your parents?

McCOLLUM: Yes. (pause) I'm trying to think when.

I guess I was never totally disconnected from them, even though, when I talked to them they would just harass me about the terrible things that I was doing. We still spoke every three or four months, or two or three months, or something like that. And it just kind of evolved. I don't -- they -- I don't think they ever really 'got' that (laughs) there were people that admired the behavior of some of us. It was really -- it was a disgrace to them, essentially. Particularly my mother.

BENNETT: You mentioned the out-of-body experience.

McCOLLUM: The experience that I identify that way probably could give -- perhaps could give people some insight into sometimes what happened in a demonstration. It didn't -- it certainly didn't always happen. But we were in Cairo and we were demonstrating outside of a bowling alley, and there must have been thirty kids there by that time, because that kind of incident always creates good results and bad results.

And one of the positive results, I guess you might say, for that -- having, you know, had that kind of violence happen -- is, it encourages a lot more people to participate. But we were outside a bowling alley, lined up in a long line across the front of the bowling alley, and practically out of the blue -- we were totally unable to prepare for it because we didn't see it coming --

Some men pulled up into the parking lot and jumped out of cars, and were swinging tire chains, and hitting people with tire chains -- hitting us and swinging them over their heads, and hitting folks with tire chains. And my experience was of looking down at this whole experience, but no longer standing in the crowd, but having this kind of global sense of -- physically.

The experience was like I was physically actually looking at the tops of people's heads and making decisions about what needed to happen, totally icy, as if -- I mean, as if nothing terrible was happening, just like, you know, just as if I was telling somebody to move the dishes over there and go into the other room. And the only way I know to describe it is, it really is like you are out of your body.

BENNETT: Was it effective?

McCOLLUM: Did we desegregate?

BENNETT: No, were you able to take care of that situation.

McCOLLUM: Oh, yeah. That probably is the only way I could have done it, because it -- it gives you a whole sense -- you're not just looking at the kids that are falling down -- or being knocked down -- they weren't falling down.

BENNETT: And were you able to desegregate?

McCOLLUM: Yes.

BENNETT: What was the sequence there?

McCOLLUM: I think everything went at once, if I remember right. Maybe not. Maybe the restaurant happened first. I don't -- I've forgotten some of that now.

The other thing that I don't -- I mean, I guess that I feel like it's important to share it -- the bad as well as the good -- one of the things that happened to me in Cairo was, there were some African-American men who were not nonviolent. And I had never had this experience before. They would arm themselves and stand around the house that I was staying in, and that John was staying in, and in the church at night, because they were not going to let us get attacked.

It would have been very unusual for -- well, it wouldn't have been unusual for us to be bombed, but it would have been unusual for whites to attack in a way that they'd have to get out of their cars in the (chuckles) African-American community at night.

But it was never clear to me that that was not going to -- that there would not be some awful blood-shedding in Cairo. But it didn't happen.

BENNETT: How did you -- how long were you there altogether.

McCOLLUM: (sighs) Months. I don't know.

Then you asked about things afterward. I could hold it together all day long, but as soon as we would get -- and John and I were staying in the home of an elderly African-American couple. I'm trying to think of their names. Anyway, she made me sleep in the bedroom with

her, and John slept in the bedroom with him. They split up where they slept in order to chaperone us.

But I would literally, physically, tremble for an hour or so at night. I looked like I had palsy or the shakes or something. Very different kind of experience than Nashville.

BENNETT: What you're describing sounds like it was more isolated for you.

McCOLLUM: Oh, absolutely.

BENNETT: And then you'd always have the group in Nashville.

McCOLLUM: Right. There was not. It was not a group. And the kids who were there were kids, and it was not a shared leadership experience. John and I certainly shared the leadership, but it was not a shared experience. It was also not -- there was a lot of stuff that felt very out of control.

One of the things that happened there was -- I didn't get arrested. I think they -- I don't remember how this happened, but some of the kids got arrested, had been in jail and were getting ready to go to court one morning from jail, and somebody went down and bailed them all out so that they -- the momentum and the experience of going from jail to the courtroom, etc., was lost because somebody (laughs) decided to do something different.

And that made for very -- for me, and exceedingly difficult situation, because it would feel like there wasn't any group that was (laughs) -- that had a consensus, and there wasn't a shared experience of leadership.

BENNETT: And there would be some value to them, going to the courthouse and --

McCOLLUM: Yeah, absolutely.

BENNETT: Would you describe how you happened to go on the first Freedom Ride, and what that was like?

McCOLLUM: Well, we were all in Nashville, students, and -- John had gone. John had gone to Washington. He was the only one from Nashville, I think, that had gone, and joined CORE. I'm pretty sure that's right.

When the bus was burned in Anniston, we all immediately gathered at the church and started to talk about how we couldn't -- just couldn't let this happen, because that felt like we'd been beaten. That the Ku Klux Klan had won, I guess, is the best way of saying it. So we talked and talked and talked and talked. Decided that some of us would go.

And as I drove in today, I was trying to remember. The first thing -- one of the funny, fun things about remembering back to that time was, we didn't have any money. And I've forgotten who was the treasurer. There was an adult group and a student group, and the

adults always had the money, and we were trying to get money to buy ten tickets, because we decided that ten was a good number, that we were going to pick up and go as far as we could go. But we didn't have any money, and whoever was the treasurer worked in a bakery and worked all night long. So we couldn't get any money until he was finished baking.

Anyway, I was trying to remember -- Leo Lillard drove me outside of Nashville and I got on the bus separate from everybody else. I was trying to remember on the way here whether or not I missed the bus, which doesn't sound too likely, because normally I'm not late -- or whether or not we planned that that way. My sense is we planned it, but I could be wrong.

Anyway, I rode on the bus and we spread all out so we didn't look like -- you know, we did not rent a special bus and go as Freedom Riders, we went as Freedom Riders on public transportation. I assume that it was deliberate that I went by myself, because my job was to report back to Nashville, and to Diane, what was happening.

When we got to -- I think when we first got over the state line, we started seeing all these guys standing up and down the roads with their shotguns. But when we got into the bus terminal, they started putting up paper on the windows, or covering the windows with something. Or maybe it wasn't paper, but I just remember the windows getting covered. And I don't know how this happened, whether or not, but --

Bill Barbee was being taken off the bus, or was asking -- was at the front of the bus. And they started to beat him. And he was totally out of view of anybody except the passengers in the bus.

And I just took my chances and started to scream, and started yelling, 'Oh, no, I can't stand it. Don't beat him! Oh, no!' -- acting like a hysterical white woman.

And I can remember them pushing him aside and he fell down on the floor behind the bus driver's seat and these men saying, 'Oh, no, honey, it's all right. It's all right. Nobody's going to hurt you. It's okay, it's okay.' And they never bothered him after that.

We all went into the bus station together and I can remember making the phone call, and sitting around for hours in the bus station trying to keep my eye on everybody and know what was going on, and to go back and make the phone calls. And finally, when they came to take everybody to jail, they left me in the bus station and I had to make (laughs) -- make them take me. To jail in Birmingham.

BENNETT: Is this the time, then -- so then you went to jail, and it was from that point that you called your folks, or someone else called your folks.

McCOLLUM: Actually, I called my folks' -- I called my parents' minister from the bus station, and told him what I was doing, and asked him to go and help them get through it.

BENNETT: By this time, too, you've got national news, television news.

McCOLLUM: Right.

BENNETT: With a chance of you dying.

McCOLLUM: Well -- there's always a chance of you dying. You don't ever see it that way. Or that was not my perspective.

BENNETT: Did you -- were you part of the group that wrote a little note before you left? I read that Diane Nash recommended that people write sort of the equivalent of a will or something like that?

McCOLLUM: No, I don't remember it. I don't think I did that.

BENNETT: Can you tell me a little bit more about William Barbee? I've heard his name mentioned before.

McCOLLUM: I don't know anything else to tell you. He was part of the Nashville group. I saw him about ten years ago, I guess, for the first time. He's in Atlanta.

BENNETT: I had heard that he was beaten badly. This was a different beating than the one you witnessed.

McCOLLUM: Oh, he was beaten in Jackson, I think, as well. If I remember it correctly. I think he was beaten with Jim.

BENNETT: I think that I was going to ask you a bit about the impact of witnessing this violence that you witnessed and actually, I'm sure, people that you cared a lot about were victims as well as yourself.

[END OF TAPE 1, SIDE B] [FIRST INTERVIEW]
[COUNTER: 429]

[START IF TAPE 2, SIDE A] [FIRST INTERVIEW]
[COUNTER: 000]

McCOLLUM: ...you may want to ask me, or you may want me to talk about actually the knifing itself, and what -- how -- what happened.

BENNETT: Yeah. Would you tell me a bit about the knifing itself, how that happened and how you were -- that affected you, or -- ?

McCOLLUM: Sure. Well, the interesting thing -- to me, the interesting piece was -- is -- the man lunged at me and cut the back of my leg, and actually fell down. And I reached down and picked him up.

And that kind of a gesture -- or intent, I guess, is the better word -- 'cause it's not just a

gesture but it's the intent of the gesture -- oftentimes turns the tide in a situation like that. And -- I mean, he was like -- so startled that he couldn't breathe, kind of thing. And everybody else stepped back. That happened sometimes.

BENNETT: So that was the real practice

McCOLLUM: Yes.

BENNETT: of this philosophy.

McCOLLUM: Yes. That was not the technique. And when you could get hold of the philosophy, it made things very different.

BENNETT: Were you able to carry this on throughout other times and parts of your life?

McCOLLUM: Yes, but it's harder -- well, it's harder because there's not much support for that kind of practice. Certainly, that's one of the ways I got involved with the American Friends Service Committee.

And I often wonder -- I wondered the other day -- I thought again about -- I mean, nonviolence, even as a technique, is politically very, very potent. I mean, if all of the women in Nashville, Tennessee, that needed child care, and needed affordable child care, would flush their toilets on the hour -- for one day, they could bring some real attention to their concerns.

And I'm not sure why we don't use that approach. I understand that the -- I don't always understand why I'm not willing to do more at this point in, you know -- or haven't been, for the last twenty years, I'd say. But organizing is not that difficult. And probably, in relationship to -- well, you asked me the question in relationship to violence. Maybe that's not -- it's a very heady experience to be nineteen years old, or twenty years old, and realize that you're on the front page in the New York Times, and that you've turned a community around, and that you've made the kind of impact that we made. So that that probably was the effect for me, of my involvement. And always the sense of a certain kind of powerfulness, whether or not I used it.

BENNETT: That level of personal power?

McCOLLUM: Yes.

BENNETT: Through nonviolence.

McCOLLUM: Yes.

BENNETT: One fellow that came in is in one of the photos in the Civil Rights Room -- Curtis Murphy, who was a student at TSU, I think. And he mentioned that following his graduation that he really had several years of real slow time, that -- he said he kind of hit a wall. Did you

experience that after years -- he said, because you're on 24/7. He said you're just always doing or thinking about the next thing you were going to do.

McCOLLUM: Well, there was a kind of intensity that comes about from lots of things, I think, one of them being the potential life and death kind of thing that has to be -- you don't believe about -- that that's an issue, but that has to be present. And for those of us who took leadership roles, there was that sense of responsibility for everybody else. I mean, if you told people to walk, or stop walking, and it was the wrong choice, that was a heavy-duty deal.

You asked me another question that I don't --

BENNETT: I just said was there sort of a time when you just had to slow down in your own life because --

McCOLLUM: My slowdown probably didn't happen for about twenty years afterwards.

BENNETT: Okay.

McCOLLUM: And I'm not sure that that -- I would even qualify that as a slowdown. But I would think that -- I don't know. I would like to -- my sense is that I would really like to do a book that tries to examine how it impacts what you do with -- you know, how that kind of experience impacts your decision-making and your perception of yourself and your perception of the world.

BENNETT: How do you think it impacts your decision-making?

McCOLLUM: Well, I certainly think -- you know, I mentioned the power part. I think that you -- that I, at least, experienced the fact that I am more powerful in terms of my decision-making process, and more -- and have real choices, I guess. That some people don't see themselves in that kind of way. I certainly don't feel a victim, the role of being a victim in my life, or having decisions made for me.

BENNETT: Did you get involved at all in Tent City, Fayette County in West Tennessee?

McCOLLUM: No.

BENNETT: Okay. And while you were attending meetings here, and also up in Illinois, were you part of a church or --

McCOLLUM: No.

BENNETT: Okay. Because I know that prayer and faith and the -- almost -- I've heard that those routines were part of the meeting structures, too.

McCOLLUM: I had real -- I had exactly the opposite reaction to religion from that point of view. They seemed like real hypocrites. I had a church in -- someplace in Alabama, I don't

remember where any more -- actually -- some men were chasing me and I had them put me out of the church and lock the door. (laughs) Tell me that I certainly wasn't one of God's children and I was a disgrace, etc. I did not see Anglo religion stepping up to the plate at all in this. In fact, just the opposite.

If you look at the education system in Nashville, you know, the tremendous number -- disproportionate number of private elementary schools that came about because of desegregation. The churches opened schools to enable white people to have a place to send their children where they would not have to be integrated.

BENNETT: What do you think made this Nashville Movement unique?

McCOLLUM: Magic.

BENNETT: Really?

McCOLLUM: (laughs)

BENNETT: (laughs)

McCOLLUM: Well, how else would you explain having all the -- I mean, I think there's something very unique about students. Students don't pay -- for the most part, at least then -- didn't have mortgages. Didn't have babies. Were idealistic. Had the attributes that enabled them to give it all, and had all that energy and hormones and all those other kinds of things that made -- made it work.

BENNETT: Is there anything else that you'd like to wind up with, here?

McCOLLUM: I don't guess so. I don't know.

BENNETT: Okay. Didn't know if there was anything that you'd like to make sure that -- kind of a summing up, or --

I've got one more question. You said you moved around a bit, but how long have you been in Tennessee?

McCOLLUM: About four years now.

BENNETT: Okay. Where were you before this?

McCOLLUM: Santa Fe, New Mexico.

BENNETT: Okay. Did you do the same type of work?

McCOLLUM: I played a lot in Santa Fe, and then I went back to education. Early childhood.

BENNETT: Uh-huh. What form did your play take?

McCOLLUM: I trained dogs, I rode horses and I traveled. Did all that kind of fun stuff.

BENNETT: And how long were you there in Santa Fe?

McCOLLUM: About fifteen years.

BENNETT: So then, before that?

McCOLLUM: I was in New York.

BENNETT: Oh, back up in the upstate New York area?

McCOLLUM: No, I -- I lived and worked in the New York City area. South Bronx.

BENNETT: And what type of work did you do there?

McCOLLUM: I was a day care center director. Early childhood.

BENNETT: In South Bronx.

McCOLLUM: And Harlem.

BENNETT: So that would be a pretty challenging, tough neighborhood, I guess, at that time.

McCOLLUM: Yes, although it was before the time of AIDS and before the time of -- I mean, certainly not before the time of drugs, but before the massive use of drugs.

BENNETT: Mm-hm. How long were you in New York?

McCOLLUM: Twenty years, I guess. I actually -- I went -- first time I went to New York, I went with a woman -- Lucretia Collins, I think is her name, was living in Langston Hughes' house, and I went and stayed with her, trying to figure out whether or not I wanted to go to New York to live. And that was my first experience in New York.

BENNETT: He was still living then, wasn't he?

McCOLLUM: Yes. I guess I had a choice between living -- working for the American Friends Service Committee in New York or working for them in Des Moines, Iowa, and I went and looked at an apartment that they found that I could live in, and I looked out the window and all I could see was a brick wall, so I left.

BENNETT: Oh, in New York?

McCOLLUM: Yes. (chuckles)

BENNETT: Yeah. And then before that, we're talking maybe the American Friends work?

McCOLLUM: Yes. Well, that was when I -- the year I went to work for the American Friends, and that was -- I would either work in New York or I would have worked in Des Moines.

BENNETT: Well, I thank you very much for coming in on a Saturday, your day off.

McCOLLUM: Sure.

BENNETT: Thanks a bunch.

This concludes out interview and I'm going to turn off the machine.

[END OF FIRST INTERVIEW, TAPE 2, SIDE A] [COUNTER: 155]
[TAPE 1, SIDE A] [INTERVIEW OF 7/2/04] [COUNTER: 000]

BENNETT: ... 2004, continuation of an interview for the Civil Rights Oral History Project. This is Kathy Bennett interviewing Salynn McCollum. Initial interview was March 27, 2004. And we're going to continue on with questions about the Freedom Rides.

McCOLLUM: Was it May or March?

BENNETT: I've got down March 27. Was it ...

McCOLLUM: It seems like a long time ago.

BENNETT: It does. But I think it was March.

McCOLLUM: Okay, that's fine.

Were you going to ask...?

BENNETT: If you would cont -- we had talked before about the -- you'd talked about the number 10 being the deciding -- the group would be ten. That you'd boarded the bus in Nashville, that you had to wait for the funding, because the Treasurer of the group had a night job at a bakery.

McCOLLUM: Actually it was the NCLC Treasurer, the adult civil rights group, Nashville group. And they're the ones that had the money. And he's the one who was the baker. And we had to wait until they opened up the bakery, or until (chuckles) his shift was over, I guess, is the better way of saying it.

The original CORE [Congress of Racial Equality] Freedom Ride, and I don't know if we've talked about this before, was designed to test the interstate ruling, the federal ruling, that had

taken place at that point, where interstate travel was supposed to be desegregated. And the CORE group was publicized and announced, etc. -- their ride.

Those of us who were students here felt like we couldn't just let it -- let the burning of that bus in Anniston be the end of the story. So we decided that we would leave from here.

And we did not leave as a group -- as an announced Civil Rights group. I think they -- I'm not sure how it happened, because I -- what happened was that Leo Lillard took me out on the bus route and I actually boarded the bus not in the Downtown terminal but someplace on the outskirts of Nashville, to keep myself separate from the group and to try to provide a little protection that way. So I actually didn't get on with the group.

By the time we got to the Alabama border, it was apparent that they knew that we were Freedom Riders, because there were armed men all along the highway, going in to Birmingham.

BENNETT: Did you converse on the bus?

McCOLLUM: No, we sat spread out on the bus and tried not to be identified as Freedom Riders. And I was the only one, apparently, that was very successful at it.

BENNETT: Were you the only white student then, with this group?

McCOLLUM: No, Jim Zwerg was one of the ten.

BENNETT: And he was a student at Fisk?

McCOLLUM: He was an exchange student at Fisk.

BENNETT: So when you saw the -- were they Alabama Guard, or police?

McCOLLUM: No, no.

BENNETT: Highway -- do you know -- individuals?

McCOLLUM: Mm-hm. Klan.

BENNETT: Ohh. Were they dressed as Klansmen, or ...

McCOLLUM: I don't remember back then. I think some were and some were not.

BENNETT: What time of day was it?

McCOLLUM: It was early in the morning when we left. So it was actually during daylight hours that we were riding the bus.

BENNETT: So that was your greeting.

McCOLLUM: Right.

BENNETT: And were there other passengers on the bus besides the Freedom Riders?

McCOLLUM: Yes.

BENNETT: Do you recall any discussion among the people, or overhearing anything the bus driver might have said, or ... ?

McCOLLUM: Well, there was a lot of whispering but I don't remember anything in particular. People wanting to know what's happening, what's going on, who are those people?

BENNETT: When you entered the Birmingham bus station, then, would you tell me what happened as you drove in?

McCOLLUM: Well, the bus pulled into the station and then there were policemen around. And they didn't let anybody get off the bus, and they put some kind of paper up over the windows so that people outside the bus couldn't see what was going on inside the bus.

But even the regular passengers weren't allowed to get off the bus. And I'm not sure how it happened. It was William Wright that was the one that was being beaten. I'm not sure what provoked it. I think they called people up to the front and were asking then questions, if I remember right. And I was sitting a few seats back from the front of the bus, and my job was to get off the bus and to call Nashville and let them know what was happening, but I couldn't -- they wouldn't let anybody off the bus.

When William was being beaten, I played the role of the white indignant Southern lady and screamed and yelled, "No, don't do that to him! I can't stand that!" or whatever, and they stopped, and pitched him in the back of the bus and proceeded to treat me like I was a nice white Southern lady, and comforted me, said, "Oh, it's all right. It's all right."

BENNETT: So the paper was on the bus. I understood before that they covered up the windows of the bus station. But they covered up the windows of the bus.

McCOLLUM: No, the bus. The bus.

BENNETT: Paper on the outside?

McCOLLUM: Right. With paper. Yes.

BENNETT: And so after -- what happened after that point?

McCOLLUM: It was quite a while, I don't know how long, exactly, but I got off. They let the

regular passengers, and not the Freedom Riders, off first, and I went out with that group and called. And while I was standing -- I'm trying to remember. I think once they came into the -- and I was just standing as an observer, trying to keep track of what was going on and watching what was going on outside --

If I remember right, Catherine Burks and Lucretia came off and went into the bathroom, and I followed them into the bathroom, and we decided at that time that I would join the group. So when they left the bathroom, I left with them and then we all sat together.

BENNETT: Did you successfully make the phone call, then, to Nashville?

McCOLLUM: Oh, I had made the phone call before that.

BENNETT: And then just to give them an update on arriving, and --

McCOLLUM: Right.

BENNETT: And what happened after you joined the group, and where were you sitting, with the group?

McCOLLUM: We were sitting in the white section of the bus terminal. The police kept us cordoned off from everything and everybody, and tried to keep the news media away from us, and us away from them. Eventually arrested us and took us to jail.

BENNETT: When you were taken to jail, this would have been the afternoon, then?

McCOLLUM: Yes.

BENNETT: And what was that experience like?

McCOLLUM: Well, it was really scary, because I was the only white woman. So I was segregated from everybody else and didn't know what was going on.

BENNETT: And how -- besides being -- did you talk to anybody else there in the jail with you, or --

McCOLLUM: Oh, they -- the jailer -- it wasn't individual cells, it was a big holding area, and then bunks in the holding area so that there were, I don't know, maybe twenty, twenty-five or thirty women in the jail that were all in one room.

I can only remember that when I entered into the cell, that the women had already heard about the Freedom Ride and knew who I was before I got there, and were most hostile and name-calling and that kind of thing. During the time that I was there, when everybody would go out to eat, for example, and we would come back and they'd spread all the newspapers with my picture and all of our pictures all over the floor so everyone had to walk over it to get there -- to get into the holding cell. So they were sure to keep up with (laughs) my devious

behavior.

BENNETT: Oh. So they could let your fellow --

McCOLLUM: Inmates, yeah.

BENNETT: Detainees, yeah.

McCOLLUM: Right.

BENNETT: Ohh. And what was the response to those photos and the articles?

McCOLLUM: I got beaten once, I think, and I had my stuff taken -- a lot of my stuff taken away from me. I had candy or cigarettes or something like that.

But the worst part of it all was that I had all the money for the group, so I was really worried that -- you know, I had the money, and even though this was taken away from me when we (laughs) -- I started to say "registered" -- but whatever it's called -- processed in, I knew that -- you know, that it severely limited the rest of the people if they didn't have any money, and I felt like we'd made a bad plan when we chose to do that.

BENNETT: Uh-huh. Did you -- did they give the money back to you when you left the jail?

McCOLLUM: Yes.

BENNETT: How long were you in the jail?

McCOLLUM: Gee, I don't remember. Three or four days.

BENNETT: Okay. And was this a different episode than the time that they released the young people at the state line?

McCOLLUM: No, this is the time.

BENNETT: Oh, okay.

McCOLLUM: What happened is that my father called, as a nice Southern gentleman -- called and chatted with Bull Connor and said he would come and get his child, just to hold me until he could get there. So I was not questioned, processed, charged or anything. I was just simply held for about four days. And everybody else was held in the same way.

And my father -- I was then released into his custody.

BENNETT: But the students were released that night, is that how it was?

McCOLLUM: Yes, as soon as I was taken away, and put on an airplane with my father back

to Nashville, they were then all loaded into one vehicle in the middle of the night and driven out to the state line, and dropped.

BENNETT: And it seems that Catherine Burks Brooks was part of that group.

McCOLLUM: Yes.

BENNETT: And so you flew back to Nashville with your father?

McCOLLUM: Yes.

BENNETT: And did you -- you were a student at the time, also?

McCOLLUM: Yes.

Actually, I tried to get away during the time I was in the Birmingham Airport. And I got into the Ladies -- I'm trying to remember what happened. I got into the Ladies' room -- couldn't find the -- I was going to at least call and tell people what was happening. But somehow or another, they sent a woman -- a prison guard or something after me into the bathroom. So I didn't have a choice but to go. I was really kept under --

BENNETT: You were then a junior in college, so probably about twenty, or maybe even --

McCOLLUM: I don't think I was twenty, yet.

BENNETT: So you might have started college a little young?

McCOLLUM: I could have been twenty.

BENNETT: So that must have been a tough situation with your father, though.

McCOLLUM: Well, it was very -- it's extremely distressing when you see a parent align themselves with the person who's, you know, causing you to be beaten.

BENNETT: Yeah.

Did you actually ever talk to Bull Connor during you stay there?

McCOLLUM: Oh, yeah. We rode in his police car to the airport. My father had gone to college and played football in Memphis, and they talked like they were old buddies.

BENNETT: So you became really the child. You were the child

McCOLLUM: Absolutely.

BENNETT: in this, whereas before, you had had a role really quite different. I mean --

McCOLLUM: Yeah, but I guess I was always -- I mean, I don't know that I viewed myself as grown up at that point, yet. And we were certainly students.

BENNETT: So what was your impression, then, of Bull Connor?

McCOLLUM: He was a redneck, and fairly unscrupulous. But it was -- you know, it creates real conflict when you recognize that -- socially, he was like an uncle. I mean, I could identify my own family in that way, and that's -- those are difficult things to reconcile in your mind.

BENNETT: And you father -- that was the game he knew, I guess, the Southern guy-talk.

McCOLLUM: Oh, yeah. Sure.

BENNETT: If he walked into it so comfortably.

McCOLLUM: Oh, yes. I mean, he was a Southerner. And I was an embarrassment.

BENNETT: So when you came back to Nashville, were you able to get in touch again, then, with the leadership here?

McCOLLUM: Yes. Did we talk about Peabody, and how I had an interview with the Dean?

BENNETT: Yes. Dean Robb, and the agreement that you wouldn't live on campus, or that -- yeah. And that was subsequent to the Freedom Rides?

McCOLLUM: First of all, I went back to school and lived in the dormitory for the rest of that semester, which was only a matter of a couple of weeks. But I was campused, meaning I couldn't leave my dorm room except during my actual hours of class, and I think I was given an hour for a meal, three times a day. The rest of the time, I had to stay in the dormitory. But I certainly talked to people by telephone.

I guess I did more than talk, because I -- I don't remember when the Freedom Ride Awards were.

BENNETT: It looks like September of the following year, yeah. Following school year.

McCOLLUM: It was for the next year that I wasn't -- they did not want to -- did we talk about this in relationship to Jim Lawson's --

BENNETT: Yes, you said that Peabody did not actually take that action, but in spirit, they did.

McCOLLUM: Right. They didn't want to create the kind of public scene that Vanderbilt had, by risking to actually toss me out. So they tried to make it impossible for me to come back. But I -- that was when I came back the next year anyway.

BENNETT: You mentioned a job at the newspaper in your town there, with the black newspaper, writing stories. That would have been, then, a summer job?

McCOLLUM: No, it wasn't a job. I just wrote some articles.

BENNETT: Okay. And do you recall the name of the paper?

McCOLLUM: Empire Star, maybe.

BENNETT: Out of Buffalo?

McCOLLUM: Yeah. Empire Banner -- something.

BENNETT: So when you returned, I recall you saying that you made some connections that got you to a couple in Nashville -- and you lived with them.

McCOLLUM: Right.

BENNETT: And I had a question about where you actually got your degree.

McCOLLUM: Peabody.

BENNETT: Okay, so Peabody accepted transfer credits late in your career as a student.

McCOLLUM: Well, yes, but it was a hassle. (laughs) It was a couple of years that we negotiated about it. But they didn't want me to come back, so they were anxious to accommodate me on one level, but they also made it clear that they didn't want their name attached to mine.

But -- I don't know if I told you, but I remembered the other day when I was talking to Sam -- was, years later, that Peabody found me and offered me a teaching job. Which I thought was a very peculiar kind of thing.

BENNETT: Where -- well, how did -- what did they want you to teach?

McCOLLUM: I think kindergarten, or elementary ed or something. Some -- I don't remember the details. I just remember being shocked and thinking, you know, "Wonder what has happened here, that made the difference."

BENNETT: So you -- when you went back up to -- did you ever get back to Peabody for course work at all, after you went to SIU, Southern Illinois?

McCOLLUM: No. No.

BENNETT: But through Southern Illinois, you completed your student teaching.

McCOLLUM: My second set of student teaching. I student taught in the campus school at Peabody that first semester I came back, while I was living with my so-called guardians, I student taught at the -- actually, it was the kindergarten program.

BENNETT: So -- and you said you had another major in Special Ed. Did you student teach Special Ed in Carbondale?

McCOLLUM: Yes.

BENNETT: And did you -- and then you mentioned taking a speech class and meeting Esther -- or Ethel? Esther?

McCOLLUM: Yes.

BENNETT: But I wanted to ask then, that this coincides with other people being in Cairo, too, and -- not necessarily? This was prior?

McCOLLUM: No, there wasn't anybody there. There was a very small local -- I guess maybe it was a CORE group, or -- It was primarily adults and there were a few high school students involved. And the high school students were really kind of chomping at the bit to do something, at the time I visited them. But nobody else from SNCC was there.

BENNETT: Did you visit them as somebody who -- to share your experience with them?

McCOLLUM: Yes, the friend from -- actually, I think Ethel -- Ethel had relatives in Cairo. She did not live in Cairo, she lived in St. Louis. That's the other student. But it was through her -- I'm sure she took me down there. Why, how exactly that transpired, how she knew about it -- but I think she had relatives that were living there and she knew about the student group that was trying to get organized and formed.

So when I went down, I did some nonviolent workshops and talked to them about techniques and stuff. And then before I knew it, it was happening again. Things have a way of taking a life of their own, I guess. The kids really wanted to demonstrate.

BENNETT: And would this be at the bowling alley?

McCOLLUM: No, our first demonstration was a restaurant.

BENNETT: And was it a sit-in or -- ?

McCOLLUM: No, I don't think we were succ -- we were not successful in getting in. We just stood in front of. And that's were I got quite badly cut.

BENNETT: I recall you mentioned, then, the difficulty in getting treatment, too.

McCOLLUM: Right.

BENNETT: And then reaching out your arm to the attacker.

McCOLLUM: Yeah.

BENNETT: What kind of a -- did the kids give you any feedback on how that -- what kind of an impression that made on them?

McCOLLUM: You mean the nonviolent part?

BENNETT: Yes.

McCOLLUM: I think for most -- first of all, those were much younger folks that in Nashville. It's a little different when you kind of have left home and are in college, and viewing things philosophically and having those kind of discussions. There was not the opportunity at that point. We -- the waves sort of got the best of us, and things started happening more quickly than probably would have been ideal. So for them, I'm not sure that it had a lot of philosophical meaning. But certainly I think they saw it as a useful technique.

BENNETT: Is there any more to the Cairo story? Before, you very kindly planted questions with me -- 'Be sure to ask about such and such.'

McCOLLUM: I'm trying to remember.
Well, I guess one of the interesting things is how, in fact, often, I think, we think of political movements, and the people who were involved in them have a tendency to think of people in relationship to not having much at stake in life at that point. In other words, it's really easy for students -- you know, I didn't have any car payments or mortgage, no commitments and no babies and no obligations, so to speak.
But the truth of the matter is that, every step along the way, there were adults -- and many times, older adults. Not thirty-year-olds, but fifty- and sixty-year-olds, who stepped up and took us into their houses, and risked a lot. And certainly that was true in Cairo. John Lewis and I stayed with a great family, a woman and her husband who lived just a few doors from the church. I can't remember -- Fowler, I think, is their name. But certainly they risked a great deal to do that.

BENNETT: How did John Lewis end up getting to Cairo?

McCOLLUM: I think I just asked him to come. It was a big job.

BENNETT: Yeah. And did you -- I'm guessing that you were out of school, you'd finished your commitment to student teaching and completed your course work?

McCOLLUM: I squeaked by a little bit, there.

BENNETT: But your focus was then on Cairo. You were pretty much out of Carbondale.

McCOLLUM: Yeah, I moved to Cairo.

BENNETT: And you stayed with this family?

McCOLLUM: Mm-hm.

BENNETT: And did you -- how did you meet up with them?

McCOLLUM: Oh, the way things always happen. They just sort of evolve, they happen, you're standing around someplace and you need someplace to go sleep, and somebody says, "Well, you can come home with me."

BENNETT: When you trained the kids, was that at the church nearby?

McCOLLUM: Mm-hm.

BENNETT: So -- and your introduction then was through Ethel to the community and the problems they wanted to do. So you presented as somebody with some experience.

McCOLLUM: Right.

BENNETT: How long were you there?

McCOLLUM: I don't know. Four or five months. John and I went back and forth and did some fundraising in Chicago at the time. We certainly were there over the summer, and I want to say into the fall, but I don't remember. Things kind of shook loose and moved fairly well after a bit. So then we just -- John and I moved on.

BENNETT: Were you -- was the group affiliation with SNCC?

McCOLLUM: Ours was.

BENNETT: And was John at the time a leader of SNCC?

McCOLLUM: I don't know for sure. I don't remember John's sequence at that point. I don't think -- he was not Chair of SNCC at that point. I think John was still in school, actually.

BENNETT: Okay. You had mentioned, too, at the last interview, that it was a very heady thing to be nineteen or twenty and have your picture in the New York Times.

McCOLLUM: (laughs)

BENNETT: Did you have your picture in the New York Times?

McCOLLUM: Yes. Somebody -- a reporter, I don't know the name. I think his name was

Ralph McGill, called me regularly, and it was really a nice thing, because it was a kind of sane connection to the outside world, and he would always accept my (laughs) collect calls.

BENNETT: I think there was a Ralph McGill with the Atlanta paper.

McCOLLUM: Maybe it's somebody else, then.

Ralph Emerson McGill, 1898-1969. Studied at Vanderbilt University 1917-22, serving in the Marines 1918-19. A proponent of civil rights, he was expelled from Vanderbilt for expressing his beliefs. He worked at the Nashville Banner, then the Atlanta Constitution, for 10 years as sports editor, 4 years as executive editor, and was editor 1942-60. For the decade of the 1960s, he was its publisher.

BENNETT: But was this through the New York Times?

McCOLLUM: Yeah, somebody from the New York Times. I don't know why -- maybe I just associated news reporters' names...

[Was it Claude Sitton or Donald Janson, who wrote on civil rights events for the NY Times?]

BENNETT: Well, it could have been that he was doing stringer type -- who knows, yeah.

McCOLLUM: I don't know.

BENNETT: So then how did they get your picture?

McCOLLUM: They would send folks around, and -- I'm sure it also went out on the wire, in one way or another.

BENNETT: And was this at the height of the Cairo events?

McCOLLUM: Yes, I think so. There were certainly some other occasions, too.

BENNETT: I wanted to ask you, too -- this is -- well, I think we got the part of the interview, the last time, too, where you moved to Des Moines for a short while, this following your time in Cairo.

McCOLLUM: Yeah, but I did a lot of other stuff before I actually ended up in Des Moines, because I did voter registration and I was in Georgia, and we did another -- I'm trying to think who that was, that went with me. We did another test ride. It wasn't really a Freedom Ride, but we did another long bus ride, test ride, of the integration of bus terminals. Somebody went with me. I don't remember who that was.

BENNETT: Where did this ride begin?

McCOLLUM: Atlanta.

BENNETT: And where did you go?

McCOLLUM: All over. I mean, I think we rode for like a week and a half, or something like that, just doing the kind of -- checking on -- and not to demonstrate but to just verify whether or not we could use the facilities or we couldn't.

BENNETT: And this was something that Lawson's group practiced also, in terms of confirming yes or no. It's sort of a fact checking -- are they following the law or not -- prior to a demonstration. Is that what you're talking about?

McCOLLUM: Um -- this was in relationship with putting pressure on the Feds. To enforce the law that had been passed, for interstate travel.

Jim Lawson left, kind of, at that point, and left Nashville, and I think he went to Boston.

BENNETT: So I'm trying to get years, now. I'm thinking this might be about '62.

McCOLLUM: I'm really terrible with years.

BENNETT: Okay. The Freedom Rides were '61, and if you did -- maybe summer of '62.

McCOLLUM: We're talking about -- the Freedom Rides were '61, then I went back to Nashville like in December, or January of '62, and it was at the end of that that I went to Atlanta and worked for SNCC.

[END OF SECOND INTERVIEW TAPE 1, SIDE A]
[COUNTER: 425]

[START OF SECOND INTERVIEW TAPE 1, SIDE B]
[COUNTER: 000]

BENNETT: We're talking about after you finished your time in Cairo and then you -- would you give me the chronology, then?

McCOLLUM: I went to Chicago some, and Detroit, to do fundraising, and then I spent time in Albany -- "All-banny" -- Georgia. And I spent some time in Mississippi and Alabama.

BENNETT: How was the fundraising experience? What did you do to get the fundraising going?

McCOLLUM: I'd speak. Do public speaking.

BENNETT: And where were these -- where did you do your public speaking?

McCOLLUM: Churches.

BENNETT: Was this part of the service, or was this a featured event?

McCOLLUM: Sometimes it -- one or the other. I mean, it could be both.

BENNETT: Were they black churches?

McCOLLUM: Yes.

BENNETT: and white churches?

McCOLLUM: No.

BENNETT: No white churches.

McCOLLUM: Well, I shouldn't say 'no white churches.' I don't remember doing any fundraising in any white churches. I think I spoke in a couple.

BENNETT: And was there a lot of curiosity and -- was this a completely foreign story to them?

McCOLLUM: Well, certainly they were reading it in the newspaper, so it wasn't foreign from that point of view. It was always kind of strange, though, because it -- people sort of viewed you as -- or viewed me, or those of us involved -- as somehow very different, and special or -- you know, brave. But none of that's really true. You just -- it just is what it is. I mean, it just happens to happen.

BENNETT: When you were in Albany, were you there for the things that went on, at Albany, the riots?

McCOLLUM: Uh-huh, some of them.

BENNETT: And did you do any work there?

McCOLLUM: Yeah, again I was representing SNCC, and we did workshops and strategizing and that sort of thing.

BENNETT: Was Albany a voter registration project?

McCOLLUM: Yeah, I'm trying to remember. I don't remember Albany. Albany was not my -- I did not initiate Albany. I mean, I just sort of worked with people who were working in Albany already. I don't know that there were -- I'm trying to think who was assigned from SNCC there. A lot of people came out of Albany, that had significant roles in the Movement itself.

BENNETT: A lot of leadership came from Albany.

McCOLLUM: Bernice Reagon, Bertha Goldberg, some folks. The Freedom Singers.

BENNETT: That'd be Rutha Harris, would be one.

That brings to mind the question about music and the Movement. Did you -- do you remember a lot of music?

McCOLLUM: Oh, yeah. Yeah. They used to tease me because I never could carry a tune very well, but I'd just sing anyway. It wasn't about carrying a tune.

BENNETT: After Albany, then, you said you didn't head up that project. Where did you head up projects?

McCOLLUM: Just Cairo. Everyplace else I just worked.

BENNETT: And you mentioned voter registration. Would that be -- where did you work with that?

McCOLLUM: I'm trying to -- not for really extended periods of time. Atlanta and Cairo and Nashville, of course, were the areas where I spent most of my time, a greater share of my time. At that time, though, you might get called. Somebody might call the office and say, 'I need such and such and such and such' or whatever. A lot of times we did it in code. We would call collect for -- need a ride, or -- and so then you just helped supply what was needed. Or somebody needed help with workshops, or they were planning a big event and they needed somebody to canvass a neighborhood or whatever. And you'd just go do it.

BENNETT: Was the SNCC office located near the SCLC?

McCOLLUM: It wasn't very far.

BENNETT: Okay. Did you work with Dorothy Cotton? I guess she was at SCLC. Or Septima Clark?

McCOLLUM: I knew her. But we really -- did we talk about this in the previous tape? We were really very different from SCLC. King was the leader for SCLC and was identified and sought after and treated like, you know, the figurehead. And my sense -- and it wasn't just my sense, but some of us who were looking and trying to figure out why we worked as well as we did, and have, since then, looked often at it. There wasn't any single person. There wasn't anybody who -- I mean, Diane Nash probably was the best-known name at the time, but even she was not a figurehead in the same sense of the word. I mean, she wasn't the only spokesperson. She wasn't the person who was doing the major leading. It was, in fact, a really collective effort, that made us different.

It cost us money, though, because the money was raised by SCLC -- more donations were

given to SCLC. When Martin Luther King would go to jail, he would have a television and catered meals. But that would have really crippled us, if that had happened to one person, one individual or two individuals out of the group. And it creates a lot of infighting and a lot of bad feelings and -- all of those issues, if you will. And that was one of the things that, I think, kept SNCC alive, in the sense that it was, and effective in the way that it was.

BENNETT: So then, you didn't have a lot of back and forth, but did you get to know Septima Clark at all, or just --

McCOLLUM: Yes, and I'm trying to think about -- when you said her name, there was something -- a book or something she was doing that we -- I don't remember. We helped her, or we -- it was a project she was doing that she enlisted some help for.

BENNETT: She did write a memoir that's a pretty good little read, [Echo in My Soul] and then, I guess, really associated with voter registration, or voter education.

McCOLLUM: It may have been the materials that she was preparing for that, or something, for voter registration.

BENNETT: And so it sounds like almost management-level, at the SNCC office in Atlanta, or troubleshooting, or whatever you want to --

McCOLLUM: Yes, that was the central spot, so to speak, and that was the dispenser of bus tickets and meal tickets and (chuckles) all the folks got to have an assignment.

BENNETT: And where did you live in Atlanta?

McCOLLUM: Two or three different places. One of the places that I lived was with a fairly well-to-do African-American family, and if I remember correctly, he was a dentist. But they lived in a really hotsy-totsy nice neighborhood and I spent about two or three nights in their guest quarters, or whatever. It was very nicely done, very high class. A lot of times we slept in SNCC offices. And there was a doctor's office, or chiropractor, anyway, somebody who had tables, and we slept on the tables in their office.

But the rest -- much of the rest of the time I spent there, and I don't remember this family's name. It was an African-American family said that they weren't afraid to have me there, of course because I called attention to myself more (chuckles) than other SNCC members. And he was blind, and they were elderly people, but they were really just wonderful to stay with, and delighted to have me, and brave about it.

BENNETT: Were there many other white students in SNCC?

McCOLLUM: There were people who kind of came and went for projects, who would show up to do voter registration and hang out for a while.

BENNETT: So you were really there from just about its inception through --

McCOLLUM: Yeah, I was in Nashville, actually, I think, when SNCC first took flight was with -- I want to say Chuck McDew, but I may be wrong.

BENNETT: Right, at Shaw University?

McCOLLUM: I think that's really how it was born, and I want to say that Highlander had something -- that we were there at Highlander, from a collection of folks from other areas. One of the times we were at Highlander -- I could be wrong, but it seems to me like that's really how it happened. And it happened primarily as an exchange of -- a source for information exchange. It was thought of that way originally.

BENNETT: Did you meet Ella Baker then, during that time?

McCOLLUM: Mm-hm.

BENNETT: And would you describe her at all?

McCOLLUM: I don't remember that much about her, to be able to describe her. It was too long ago. (laughs)

BENNETT: After Atlanta, then you mentioned Alabama and Georgia, working with voter registration. Would you describe that a little bit?

McCOLLUM: Well, like I said, none of the projects were really mine, so depending on the area -- I'll tell you one funny story that I think of, offhand, when I think of -- this may have been Mississippi.

Bernard Lafayette met me someplace and we got -- somehow or another got into trouble with people following us. And if I remember correctly, we were doing voter registration, and Bernard walked me in one door of a house and deposited me, and walked out the front door of the house. (laughs)

And he said, "If you'll just stay here, they'll follow me. Just stay here."

He kept on going and they kept on following him somehow or another.

BENNETT: Was this on foot?

McCOLLUM: Yes.

BENNETT: Did you know the people where you were --

McCOLLUM: No. No.

BENNETT: (laughs) Okay.

And he did -- well, he's still here with us, so --

McCOLLUM: He's still here. I mean, somehow or another, we evaded the problem that particular day.

BENNETT: Were they any other times where -- you mentioned some violence earlier that you experienced, in the jail and then in Cairo, but any other experiences of violence for yourself?

McCOLLUM: Hmm... I think it was actually the first time I went to Albany that -- I'm trying to remember. I had to -- I got out -- I had to get out of the bus station. I was supposed to be met at the bus station but the police were there. So I -- I got out of the bus station. All I can remember -- I can't remember too much about it. I just remember that I ended up in a cemetery, cutting through a cemetery, and it was -- I don't know if it was just getting dark or it was just getting light. And I found an African-American person and said, "Take me to the community -- or the neighborhood."

BENNETT: Were you being chased?

McCOLLUM: Yes.

BENNETT: By --

McCOLLUM: Policemen.

BENNETT: Oh.

McCOLLUM: And it seems like I was there to do something, or bringing something, or talking, or conducting -- I needed to do something or another and I didn't have time to fool with being questioned and harassed.

BENNETT: Any other memories about the voter registration and some of the southern states.

McCOLLUM: No, I never stayed long enough that I really -- it wasn't the same kind of intense experience. I knew a lot of students and knew a lot of people, for example, in Albany, and certainly in Cairo, was that kind of an experience. A lot of times I'd be moving around a lot.

BENNETT: Would this be prior to what is called Freedom Summer?

McCOLLUM: No, this is after. Yes, this is after, because that was that first summer, I remember. And I was in New York at that point.

Also, it's -- if you've been in a lot of demonstrations and you've had enough experience with

that kind of thing, you're very sensitive to crowds. I was, at least. And you want to be with people that you know, know what they're doing. Because otherwise, you'd get hurt. So it was very hard for me to participate in mass marches or do any of those kinds of things. That was really scary.

BENNETT: Did you experience any link between the Civil Rights Movement and the Women's Movement?

McCOLLUM: No, I would say that probably the Civil Rights Movement was probably the most equal in relationship to women that I'd had an experience with. Our opinions were validated and our thoughts were validated in a way that didn't happen in a lot of other places. And that's not to say we were not treated like sexual objects some of the time, and certainly there was a lot of that kind of thing that went on in the Movement.

But there was also this other piece, that really gave validity to your thinking about stuff. And when you were having a meeting, there was no difference, and there was no fooling around, and there was no -- I mean, we were really serious. And it was just a kind of agreed-upon thing. It wasn't anything anybody talked about.

Other times, people certainly dated and interacted and did that kind of thing, so -- does that make sense?

BENNETT: Yeah. I had heard from another member of SOC who really talked about that kind of an awakening time for her, being part of the Civil Rights Movement, and then she became -- but she describes a different situation than what you're describing, where there was equality in the meetings, but then she had to go home and iron her husband's shirts.

You mentioned your father a bit. Was your mother -- was she -- did she have the same opinions as your father?

McCOLLUM: Oh, she -- even more so. She thought she was going to have a nervous breakdown because she was so ashamed.

BENNETT: Hm.

McCOLLUM: I think it created for her much more pain.

BENNETT: In what, trying to deal with her family and

McCOLLUM: And everybody. But she's also -- she also said to me, after my freshman year in college, I guess it was, and I was -- I was a good student, academically a good student, and I had gone home and I said, "Oh, I really love this. I really think it's great, I'm really having a wonderful time. In fact, I'm going to have two majors. I'm not going to just have one major, and I'm going to do this, and I'm going to do graduate school,"

She said, "No, no, don't do that, dear. You're going to get so smart you won't be able to find a

husband."

BENNETT: Is your sister older or younger?

McCOLLUM: Younger.

BENNETT: And so how did this -- did she ever tell you later about any repercussions or anything like that?

McCOLLUM: Oh, yes.

BENNETT: Fill you in on the behind-the-scenes?

McCOLLUM: Yes, but she's four -- almost five years younger than I am, so that there was a lot of difference, age-wise.

BENNETT: I think I'm -- did you do any graduate work after you finished?

McCOLLUM: Mm-hm.

BENNETT: Where did you do that?

McCOLLUM: City College.

BENNETT: And what did -- what -- what were you -- did you get another couple of degrees, or a degree?

McCOLLUM: Masters in Early Childhood.

BENNETT: Okay, and would this be around the time you were in the South Bronx?

McCOLLUM: Mm-hm.

BENNETT: I think that -- is there anything else that you would like to add here, or that I'm missing here?

McCOLLUM: I think that I -- I guess the main thing I would somehow or another like to include is that I think there are a lot of lessons to be learned that have not yet been learned. It seems to me like we're politically not very savvy at this point in our existence, and that there's some very powerful things that don't include violence, that can make a big difference. And it doesn't take a genius and it doesn't take a holy person. It doesn't take -- I mean, it's just your average person can make huge differences in things.

BENNETT: Is that how you saw the early days of the Civil Rights Movement?

McCOLLUM: I don't know that I thought a lot about it, you know, when I was twenty. I

don't know that I thought a lot about it when I was thirty. But in looking at it now, it seems to me that we still have a long ways to go even in terms of civil rights, but in terms of -- poverty and all those kinds of things. If you take a city and everybody flushes their toilet at the same time, and there's a whole lot of civil disobedience type of things that are very powerful. What would happen, you know, if five hundred airplanes full of women went to Iraq? What happens? And why not do that, instead of seeing the solution in a more traditional orientation of war and peace.

BENNETT: Well, I really thank you much for your interview. Thanks. I'm going to turn this off.

[END OF SECOND INTERVIEW, TAPE 1, SIDE B]
[COUNTER: 288]

Is it possible to remember or look up somehow?

Name of black minister's family who were your guardians in Nashville, and name of church 'Jim and Nan Woodard -- Woodland -- Wood something. Maybe Woods.'

Name of African-American newspaper in Buffalo, NY you wrote for.