

An oral history from Bill Monnie of the VSCRC, 2015

Oral histories taken for the VSCRC 50th Reunion Oral History Project in Blackstone, VA. Professors Brian Daugherity and Ryan Smith interview former members of the VSCRC to obtain information about their work with the organization in the 1960s, in addition to their work with Civil Rights in general. Virginia Student Civil Rights Committee Oral History collection.  
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(Unedited)

[Smith] Okay. Well, we have a couple of just boilerplate preliminaries to get out of the way at the start here.

[Monnie] Got it.

[Smith] My name as we said, is Ryan Smith. I'm a faculty member at Virginia Commonwealth University. This is Brian Daugherity with me as well. Also a faculty member at VCU. And we are going to interview Bill Monnie here who's a former member of the Virginia Students Civil Rights Committee.

[Monnie] Correct.

[Smith] VSCRC. And today, we are talking on Saturday, June 20th, 2015, at the 50th anniversary of the VSCRC. So Bill, do you agree to be interviewed and recorded here today?

[Monnie] I agree to be interviewed and recorded today. [Smith] Excellent. Can you tell us your full name?

[Monnie] William Michael Monnie [Smith] Is Bill Monnie what they knew you...

[Monnie] It's my nickname but that's what they use commonly, not William.

[Smith] But back in the sixties. That's what you would...

[Monnie] Bill Yep. Yep. Okay.

[Smith] So the first part of our history here is just your personal background and then we get into the activist activities there and then we'll go into a little bit of what happened after that for you. So can you tell us when and where you were born?

[Monnie] I was born on 3/26/1943, March 26th, 1943 and in a town called Meadville, Pennsylvania. Lived there up until the time that I went to college in 1965... sorry, 1961, graduated from West Virginia Wesleyan College in 1965. Became involved with a movement. Civil rights was exposed to it when I went to a conference sponsored by the National Council of Churches in New York City, actually lived in Harlem for the week, met. Malcolm X as a part of this program, was exposed to the UN. I was 19 years old at the time, very naive, didn't know what was going on. Met Jessica Mitford who wrote The Death of the American City. And so it was a very good introduction. But during that time that I was in New York City, I was staying at a 125th Street YMCA that was a part of the program, were housed and they gave us a tour around New York City, saw various programs. I don't know how they did it, but they had us go into a Black Muslim restaurant and have dinner there. The woman who ran a program with Black. So I think that that help. As I said, we had an opportunity to spend three hours, the eight of us with Malcom X, who had just gotten back from Mecca, as I recall, and was really starting to

pull away from the Black Muslim group. But was not quite there yet, but felt comfortable talking to white students. Okay. And spent quite a bit of time with us, me being a naive person than I was. Having been first introduced to even civil right because I came from a very conservative background. Malcolm X still scared the shit out of me, you know, a very imposing figure. And I remember writing to my then fiancé, soon to be wife, saying this is a man we've got to fight against. Okay. Then I started doing my reading and stuff like that and realized that came to the conclusion within, oh, I'd say about a year. But he was probably one of the greatest Black leaders we had on the American scene ever. He did not have the polemic and the ability to speak like Dr. King did. But that man was one of the most powerful men that I've met in my life. Okay, so I have a lifelong positive impression of Malcolm X. The real exposure that week though, in terms of the civil rights issues, vis-a-vis me was we went to a Chinese restaurant. And this woman who ran a program with Bray in terms of exposing us or different people. There was a freedom rider that she had come to dinner with us. And he talked about his bus being burned and being beaten as a, as a member of the freedom riders. So it was a white guy and not a Black guy. So that that stuck with me.

[Daughterity] Do you remember who it was?

[Monnie] I have no memory of who was none whatsoever. Don't even remember if he was a clergymen are not. National Council of Churches. Might have been. But I was impressed. And also I, they, they had us go to a play. I'd never been to a Broadway play in my life. Purlie Victorious with Ozzy Davis and his wife. Ruby David, I think was her name. So we saw that that same week. I think that was the same week. I saw Westside Story, the movie with Richard Beamer and Natalie Wood. Now, there is a connection with this and that is at once I became involved in the civil rights movement. Richard Beamer ended up being my roommate in 19]64 in Mississippi for summer of 64, OK. Backing up then. So the following year in 1963, I'm, I'm a Methodist or was a Methodist. I was studying to... I had pre-seminary classes at my undergraduate school, West Virginia Wesleyan College. I graduated from West Virginia Wesleyan College in 1965. But in 1963, the Pittsburgh Methodist Council of Churches or board, whatever you want to call it was holding their annual meeting. And we had heard that there were some problems with integration within the Methodist church, that was in fact the truth in the south, in particular. So a group of us went to protest that. As a result of that, I was exposed to a member from SNCC who was organizing and trying to get volunteers for the summer of 19]64. So it was sort of a snowball type of progression in terms of my connection and involvement with the Civil Rights Movement at that point in time. I was then married. I left my wife behind the summer of 64. I was late going down to Mississippi because I had a summer course. So I drove down by myself. That was probably a mistake because I was scared to death the whole bit and almost didn't make the trip because I was so scared and spent the summer of 1964, not the summer, six weeks in Mississippi doing teaching political education classes, voter registration, which was nonexistent. I mean, you know, we tried I don't think I was responsible for one person being registered. Mississippi. Came back.

[Daughterity] And what county were you in?

[Monnie] I would think, you know, I can't remember the name of county, but was Canton, Mississippi was where the office was located and I was assigned to a house called Valley View outside of Canton and that's where Richard Beamer, myself and several others were

roommates. Came back north. let's see...it was 64, finished up, was finishing up my school year and I was working for SNCC when, what's the, what was called the Council of Federated Organizations an amalgam of groups, but SNCC one, it recruited me so I saw myself as a SNCC volunteer. But given where I was at, both theologically and religiously, I didn't identify with the group in some ways. I felt it was too radical, even though what they were doing was excellent work. Okay. So I just didn't feel like my fit was perfect. Selma came around and I did volunteer for that and went to Selma and that's where I became affiliated with the Southern Christian Leadership Conference group. I was at Selma for the week and spent the entire time because I've got a few volunteers that came down with a car, that they assigned me a transportation pool. And I hauled reporters and some marchers back and forth between the entire march So I was right there on top of the march. And that's why I brought this along, because this book I just published, okay. It's Selma and its Aftermath. And this has all the personal pictures that I took. And as it turns out, I think there are very few color pictures of the Selma march. A lot of black and white, but no color. And so I have some, I have some really rare photographs of the march. And what I did is because the in 1965, we had to Selma to Montgomery march. And when that march ended, there was a big push by Johnson and the Congress. Well, some of Congress a Voting Rights Act that Martin Luther King was sponsoring and SNCC was too, by the way. So I volunteered for pings summer program. It was called SCOPE, the Summer Community Organization and Political Education project for that summer Headed up by Hosea Williams, volunteered for that and went to Atlanta for the training session in June and then they sent us north. And I was very upset because sent me to Virginia. And I can remember saying that one of the leaders there at Atlanta, I think it was Bayard Rustin I complained to or Andrew Young and I forget whom. And I said, hey, I'm a Mississippi veteran. I, I'm experience you should send me to a more active place. Turned out historically, historically for me, Virginia was the most dangerous place that I was serving. So...

[Smith] Can we stop you there because this has opened up a bunch of avenues that we want to...

[Monnie] Yeah. I tend to talk a lot so you need to stop me when I'm talking too much.

[Smith] No, this is really good. But I'd like to go back to the more personal side of things about how you get into this. Can you tell us a little bit about your parents?

[Monnie] Yes, I was gonna back into that because that's very, very important. I come from western Pennsylvania, 90 miles north of Pittsburgh, 40 miles south of Erie, right on the Ohio border. Man, you can't separate, that much from a southern area in terms of attitude towards race. I have to admit that my father was very racist, my mother, a little more moderate, but yeah, it's hard to say that was my background.

[Smith] What was his occupation?

[Monnie] He was a printer and a writer. He was a newspaper man that ran the local newspaper. Hardscrabble, grew up into depression. Very solid work values. The whole bit.

[Smith] Did your mother work?

[Monnie] my mother's school teacher, full time school teacher, yep.

[Smith] And they were fairly conservative in their...

[Monnie] very conservatives, yes. And but what they taught me was adherence to religious values. And that as I grew up, it was partly my adolescent rebellion, I understand that. But as I

grew up, I saw the dichotomy between what they, their attitudes towards race and what they were teaching me religiously in terms of love thy neighbor, these types of issues and that created a conflict within me and, but also was yes. But let's be honest in terms of the psychological dynamics, this is my way of also separating from my parents and maybe adolescent rebellion, whatever, even though it was valid in terms of the feelings I had about dealing with the racial issues and civil rights. And so that was my background that I grew up in the stew, so to speak, and I moved away from it, particularly when I got to college. That was the breaking point.

[Smith] Where did you graduate high school?

[Monnie] the high school was called Conneaut like, Conneaut Lake is the name of the town, Conneaut Lake Area Regional High School.

[Smith] And then you went to college in West Virginia?

[Monnie] Went to college in West Virginia Wesleyan College in Buckhannon, West Virginia.

[Smith] What had brought you there?

[Monnie] Church school, pre-seminary training, that that sort of thing. A Methodist school. So yeah, that's why I went there.

[Smith] And you had been intending to be a minister?

[Monnie] Yes. In fact, I ended up being ordain after I left the South, I had a church in a town called East Douglas, Massachusetts. I was then attending the Boston University School of Theology. I never finished that program. But in a Methodist church you have to step of ordination Deacon and an elder, I was ordained a deacon, which meant that I was eligible to have a church by appointment of the bishop to one church. Had I gone on and finish school, I would've been ordained an elder and could have served in any church without permission throughout the entire Methodist kingdom so to speak, you know, hierarchy.

[Smith] When did you get married?

[Monnie] I first married on August eighth, 1963. We had no children. We were married for five years and then got divorce.

[Smith] What did your wife think of your increasing interest and...

[Monnie] my wife, a wonderful woman, very passive though, and really accepted everything that I wanted to do. She did worry about me a lot, that sort of thing. I was 19 years old, let's say 63. I was 20 when we got married. But it was a I was in the process of growing up, hadn't made it and didn't make it for quite a few years. And as a result of that, this marriage failed, not because of her trying to keep it together, because I wasn't mature enough to maintain a relationship.

[Smith] Going back to the excitement, the experience in the South, you had gone to Mississippi and witnessed Selma and some of the stuff there then you mentioned being I forget exactly how you phrase it transferred to Virginia. How did you first become aware of the Virginia group here, the VSCRC?

[Monnie] Well, I'll actually interacting because remember I'm working for Southern Christian Leadership Conference SCOPE program for that summer and was assigned to Virginia and there was a number of groups of SCOPE volunteers went up to Virginia. And we were we were are a group of five was assigned to Lunenburg County as it turned out, two people, Nan Grogan and Betty Cummings, were also assigned to Lunenburg County through the Virginia Students Civil Rights Committee. We agree to work cooperatively throughout the summer and that sort of

worked out. There was probably some friction because of the different group philosophies... that sort...not probably there were, in fact it came up in a meeting today, which I dealt with. But anyway, we worked together that summer and that's how I got exposed to VSCRC worked for SCOPE for the summer. Okay. Then that was, that was my graduate college graduation year 1965. So I was already enrolled into Boston University School of Theology. Had even considered at that point dropping out and just staying in Virginia because I really got really caught up in the community, I loved what I was doing the whole bit.

[Smith] Can you say a little bit about that? Like what exactly were you doing in Lunenburg as part of your duties there?

[Monnie] Yeah. Yeah, absolutely, absolutely. Again, the political education and community organization was a title for the project for that summer. Okay. So our job was, we taught classes to adults to teach them about Virginia government, for example. Okay. How to organize stuff like that and get really worked at trying to get a grass roots type of thing going. Clearly, we tried to do the voter registration piece, very unsuccessful at the beginning of the summer. But that's where Selma came in. And so, and this book I detail, Selma detail the history, the Voting Rights Act and in the middle of the book. And then in Virginia, when we were doing the organizing and stuff, Hosea Williams, who was a director of the project from Atlanta, contacted us and he said, oh, well, every SCOPE unit in a South is doing a major demonstration the week of August third or fourth, I forget when it was, and you have to do it too. When we had an agreement going into the county with the NAACP, there'd be no demonstration. So that create a major crisis, one for us, because we had to say to the NAACP, we brought in our marching orders here, okay, and NAACP. was saying, wait a minute, in good faith, we welcomed you into the county we set up housing for you. We've even contributed money to support you while you're doing important work in the county and now you're breaking agreement. So they had a big meeting. And it was very divisive because many of the members really liked the idea, but the leadership did not. And that's where we were feeling, the pull and tug in the community. And so an agreement was reached. The NAACP said, we don't support this march to the courthouse to support voter registration, but we have no problems with our members participating. But as a group, we're not sanctioning it. That's what happened. As it turned out, it was really fascinating because I think of all the political organization that had occurred throughout the summer. We had a very highly at the grassroots level mobilize community. And we had 300 people show up for the march, just under 300. And we marched from Victoria to the courthouse Victoria, Virginia to Lunenburg county courthouse. And I have all the pictures of that in there. Then up to that point, there had been no real voter registration, big resistance from the registrar, voter registrar's office. So we had the demonstration and one of the issues that had been pulling out our registration hours after it was only on Tuesdays running a week, twice a month. And we said, well, the farmers need a Saturday to register they said absolutely not. When they heard about the march taking place, they thought that was the main issue. They change the hours the day before the March officially change it. The march went ahead anyway, but we had a big sign that said we thank them for their board registrar for changing the poll hours but still went ahead with the March. After that. This is most of the registration did take place on Saturday, by the way, that it was like the floodgates open for voter registration in the county, that people really started registering and in significant - by the hundreds.

[Daughterity] Okay. And correct me if I'm wrong, was Nathaniel Lee Hawthorne, was he head of the NAACP in Lunenburg...

[Monnie] At that point, no. But he ended up being president of that. And he was my hero he was my man.

[Daughterity] Can you talk about how he came to become the head and was that part of the dynamic within the NAACP?

[Monnie] It was just an ongoing, I mean, there was always a power struggle taking place within the NAACP. A lot of it revolved around the ministers controlling the project, controlling the NAACP. And it was more of a top-down type of thing. Hawthorne was very local, ground up type of person, very laid back when it came to those meetings. I mean, I was a hot-headed one and he was always And Bill, calm down, take it easy, we'll get through this type of thing. But eventually, I don't know whether we wore the leadership out or if there was just enough of a groundswell from the local people that Hawthorne was finally put into that position of a President of the NAACP. So and he did it full-time, I mean, he was a disabled Army veteran receiving some sort of payment to support his family so he could afford to well, he couldn't afford not to work, but I mean, he could do whatever he was doing almost full time because he had an outside income coming in, didn't have to worry about losing a job or anything like that as a result of his activities. He after I left, he started describing himself as a what was their militant. It'll come to me in a minute. But he saw himself as an advocate for, for social change and that's how you define it, militant And he was, we all were, he just had a different way of expressing it.

[Smith] Curious about your camera work, your photography. Did you do it as a hobby? Did you know these are going to be historic images down line?

[Monnie] I did not. I, I'm a lifelong photographer. I was a high school photographer for my school. Just did it. I mean, it was just something that was second nature to me I took pictures wherever I went and took pictures in Virginia, and I took pictures in Mississippi. And, of course, I took the Selma pictures lucked out there. But no, I didn't, I did not think that they would be of historical significance at all until I started writing my memoirs. That's a whole other story. You wanna hear that now or later? Okay. Yeah, I'll, I'll talk your head obviously.

cross talk]

[Daughterity] Your background is a little bit different from the people that we've talked to so far in that you came in with SCOPE and SCLC instead of...

[Monnie] For VSCRC, yes, that is correct.

[Daughterity] And so can you tell us a little bit about the the SCOPE project and how many SCOPE volunteers were in Virginia and where it was located in just....

[Monnie] No memory. What I can tell you is five of us came in from Georgia and there were a number of other chapters throughout the commonwealth that worked in the Southside counties. I think there might be four or five. I can't remember.

[Daughterity] Did you all have meetings? Do you ever remember getting together...

[Monnie] Yeah, Dr. Payne came to Petersburg and Herbert B. Colton was the head of SCLC at that point in time for statewide. And that's another story, but he He said, Well, all you guys, we need you to come over here and support Dr. King for his speech and that sort of thing. So that we're probably the meeting that summer that we had that was brought all the volunteer together. Honestly. You know... It's I hear from my other volunteers in the memory gets hazy around a lot

other after 50 years or around about a lot of those events. And had not my wife saved my ex-wife, saved my letters that I wrote to her, which were basically a diary of all of my activity through Mississippi and Virginia. The, the first book would not have been written.

[Daughterity] Tell, tell me a little bit about Herbert Colton in a brief manner. And also do you remember Reverend... Revered Reed, Milton Reed? Do you know that name from Petersburg?

[Monnie] No memory of him at all.

[Daughterity] You said there was a story....

[Monnie] Rev. Colton, a wonderful family man and he's still alive. The last I heard, but his memory, I guess from what I've heard is also not there. I was going to visit them, but I don't have time this trip, but anyway, I really got to know him best, when I came back into the project in January, February of 1966. Okay. And he had offered me a position. He was moving on or doing something. I can't remember why he was leaving his position in Petersburg. He wanted me to step into his role. Okay. And do and I'm not sure. I don't think it would have been at the level he was at, but to step into his job as more as a coordinator for the activities for SCLC at the ground level throughout the Commonwealth of Virginia. And I really wrestled with that because the reason I was coming back at that point in time was I wanted to be back in Lunenburg county. Had I accepted his offer, I would have been then pulled out of that and away from grassroots participation, which is where I was at, at that stage in my life. So after an agonizing several weeks, i I turned him down and and then got approved to be a staff member February sixth, I think it was with VSCRC

[Smith] Say a little bit more about that connection to Lunenburg, was it the fact that you felt like you were on the front lines in there kind of working with people at a grassroots level. Or was it the fact that something about Lunenburg had kind of touched a....

[Monnie] I don't think Lunenburg was any more special than any other county. Maybe it's people were, and they grab me in a way that I was not aware of. But it really was the people and the grassroots work. Absolutely. But I think that, that phenomenon might have occurred elsewhere, whether it's Virginia, Mississippi, or Georgia or something. So who knows

[Smith] where we staying? At that time.

[Monnie] The first in the summer of 65, it was a mixed bag. We've stayed with Mrs. Banks to start out. And in. They moved us out into the community to different home and move us around almost weekly, sometimes every two weeks. And that was the best approach because it got us into the community, goes into the farms, got us and got people exposed to us and us to them. I mean, here's a white boy from the North, who had never live with a black family before I, I didn't live with black families in Mississippi where we had to Freedom House and all that stuff so I didn't have that exposure. But man, we got that in Virginia. It was wonderful. And that's part of what what drew me into was just dealing with the families. Just wonderful, wonderful people. I think, like any normal community has so.

[Daughterity] And that's also different from what we've heard from the VSCRC folks. They seem to have stayed in one location for their summer as opposed to moving around on a regular basis?

[Monnie] Well, no. No. I mean Ann and Betty stayed in Lunenburg County When I say we moved around, it was within the confines of Lunenburg County. We never moved out of the County

[Daughterity] No, that's what I mean. But it seemed like they were in one housing location for most of their time and...

[Monnie] I think you're right. Yeah. At that point in time,

[Daughterity] Was there and this is just a hypothetical... Was there any more of an acceptance of SCOPE because of its association with King and with SCLC than there was of VSCRC or do you know if they were handled any differently?

[Monnie] I personally don't think so. I think they do, but I don't feel that way at all. In fact, I think they felt that we look down on them that came up in a meeting today with Nan. We didn't. I brought the issue. I brought the issue. She brought the issue up and I said, Well, we weren't picking on you, Nan And I mean, I was just trying to make light of it, but she was very serious about that. And it wasn't just Nan and I'm not picking on her either. I think there was a feeling that but I think it was a cultural difference too. And that's, that's the other dynamic. I think that was at work with northern white students coming into Virginia, coming head on head. With the white southern students in a cultural sense that's not a negative, But there was tension. Now I think as a result of that, we were all in the throes of adolescence and people I think kinda forget that, that we are all growing up. We had a lot of growing up to do. I certainly did and I think everybody else did. That created even more sparks. Okay. And then there's just your basic personalities okay, that come into play. And so it was an interesting dynamic. And also then the two cultures of SNCC culture coming into contact with an SCLC culture, that dynamic played itself out throughout the South, at least this is my theory, okay? When you look at what happened to Selma, there was SNCC in Selma in 1963 and working with the Dallas County Voting Rights League, okay. SCLC wasn't around. Okay. SNCC was doing that ground level work in Selma, was it Lowndes County? I can't remember the name... Dallas County, but I think it was nearby Lowndes County

[Daughterity] Yes, Lowndes is just to the east

[Monnie] Right. And they did the groundwork, uh, well, the Dallas County Voters League from the 1930s did the groundwork but SNCC really picked up on it, ran with it. Then King comes in with this top-down approach. And I loved Dr. King and the group. That's why I joined them. But man, that's those two groups and SNCC didn't participate, in the March. Now Lewis did. But as I am an individual but not as a SNCC member. I think that same dynamic played out up here in Virginia because SNCC was very much a part of VSCRC's organization and beginning. Okay? And so you have those three dynamics. This SNCC dynamic, sociologically or movement wise, the adolescent issue and then North meets South White students. That's my theory anyway, but who knows?

[Smith] Can you talk a little bit about the Black community and Lunenburg County. Were they divided amongst themselves in terms...

[Monnie] Yes

[Smith]...as much to participate there? You mentioned the NAACP's kind of concerns about the change in direction there, but was it a generational thing? Or was it just a personality thing...

[Monnie] Oh, well, yeah. I mean, you can't separate separate out any of those issues. I think what was happening is at the... And again, this gets back to SNCC versus SCLC. Ironically, SNCC, SCLC contacted the NAACP chapter in Lunenburg County, which I think they did with all the counties in Virginia for the SCOPE project. Okay. So it was a top-down decision to a



top-down group. Okay. A group already in power in Lunenburg County NAACP, SCLC contact him and said, will you accept this this group in? And of course they said yes, under certain conditions. And that we came in with the attitude that we were to do local community organizing. Well, that ran counter to what the NAACP was the power structure reside there and the minute you start community organizing with local people, you're going to set up a dynamic, an opposing dynamic and it happen and as an exact, exactly how the change started taking place and in the county in terms of the power structure, that's eventually how Hawthorne was able to move into the leadership role that he had. I'm convinced of that. So that's what I think that's so it's just like any normal community, whether it's a white or black, me, it doesn't matter. You always have people wanting to be in power to begin with, want to stay in power, don't want to lose it and are not going to share it. And another group that feels a need to be a part of the process and are going to fight for that, so that sort of thing. And then of course you had all the white people threatening to kill you. Yeah.

[Daughterity] Well, let's talk a little bit about that. Of course, this is part of the Klan resurgence and we've heard a little bit about the Klan, but if you could tell us any stories or memories that you have

[Monnie] Oh, Jesus... Yes. Actually, and that's where this book comes in. For the interview. I want to make sure that this book is on camera as a part of the oral history because this this this chronicles everything about what happened with the Klan while I was in in Virginia. And as I said to you in the beginning, this was the most dangerous time in my career. And I will start with the the incident in the spring of around March of 1966, this was when I was on the VSCRC staff. Okay. And the Klan had put out a hit, according to the FBI, put out a hit on myself, Nan Grogan, and, Nan Grogan Orrock, and Nathaniel Hawthorne. And I can remember Carl Reasonover I think that is it, Reasoner or Reasonover, I'd have to look in the book. He come to me and said. There's a hit out on a three of you. You all need to get out of the county. Now he was a local boy, Carl was and he had a lot of I take interest in maintaining the status quo. And, you know, keep in mind I was an adolescent still and I said essentially said fuck you, we're not going any place. We have a right to be here.

[Smith] Did you tell your wife about it?

[Monnie] Hmm?

[Smith] Tell your wife about it?

[Monnie] Oh, yeah. Yeah. You know, after it was over I told my wife about it. But up until that point in time, I had been pretty nonviolent. But there's a pre-history to that too. I come from a culture that is very comfortable with guns. We had a deer rifle, at our front door in Pennsylvania, there was always venison on the table, farmers always shot their own meat. So we always had firearms I was very proficient at firearms the whole bit. But I took up the mantle when I was with SCLC of the non-violent approach to political action. When I got this threat that ended. And from that point on, I was armed with a 12 gauge shotgun and a semi-automatic pistol. But that weekend, I was staying with a farmer whose name was Wayne Gee and Wayne. It's hard to describe Wayne. Probably one of the most amazing human beings I've ever met in my life other than Hawthorne in that community because the man I think probably saved my life. I had, Waynes' house was down a long driveway, as I remember overhanging trees. I doubt that there was any Spanish moss, But that's a memory. Okay. But I can remember coming home at dusk

and have having had this theat, scared, no question about it. I was very scared probably as almost as much as I was when I was in Mississippi. And I'm alone driving down the driveway, shadows the whole bit. And out behind the house come 11 armed men, but I couldn't see what color they were, carrying rifles, long guns And I said I'm dead. it turns out it was the local farmers. And there was a group in, I don't know if anybody from VSCRC have talked about this, but I worked closely with this group they were called the Lunenburg Brothers. Oh, they have not talked about this?

Unintelligible. It's in the book. I'll be leaving you a copy of the book by the way, to put in the archives. But they were a group of farmers, many of whom were Army veterans, who basically said, I think they even were influenced by the Black Panthers in California, but I don't know about that. They just said, hey, you push, we are going to push back and we're going to protect what's ours and particularly we are going to protect our families. This group met on a weekly basis and included me and Hawthorn in on the meetings. And they basically would strategize about what to do for the community. And we never talked about guns. All we talked about was how could the Brothers make sure people are protected, okay. And what were some of the strategies and stuff like that. I never asked them to surround the house. I didn't know they were going to be there. So that whole weekend they put an armed guard on the house. Okay. So Wayne was a bachelor, Wayne Gee was a bachelor The guy I was living with.

[Daughterity] How do you spell his last name?

[Monnie] G E E And he...I had the bedroom downstairs. He had the bedroom upstairs. And in the middle of my bedroom was a pot bellied stove because I was there in the winter. Okay. And prior to this whole plan incident and we'd stoke up that fire in the winter time, I sometimes had a roommate and it would get - that stove would get so hot. You see the flame flickering in the background. That's how hot that thing got. Anyway, so I'm on a lower level. And he said he looks at me and he would not call me by Bill. He's always with Mr. Bill and people were criticizing me and I said I can't get him to call me anything but Mr. Bill, so he called me Mr. Bill. And he said Mr. Bill, he says, I need to tell you something. Tell me what, Wayne? I said we got the guards out here that are protecting us. He said them guys, they've been coming around all winter I I said Wayne, What do you mean? He said Yeah, he says every Saturday night they would be there from midnight till two or three am. I said Wayne, why didn't you tell me? He said well, he said Mr. Bill, he says it's this way. He says, you're doing good work here in this county and you need your sleep. I said well, yes, but I was in danger. He said, well, yes, you were. He said but he says I cracked my bedroom window just this much and I stuffed my shot gun out the window the whole time they were here. He said if they've gotten out of the truck I would have killed them. So that's my, that's my story of Wayne and living with Wayne. I've got a lot more stories, him cutting ham off in the smoke house for breakfast in the morning, stuff like that. But just a stand-up guy, bulking guy with the old bib overalls of your, your your tobacco farmer. Although I think yet, I can't remember. I think yet another job too, besides doing tobacco farming. He is since dead. I just wish he'd been alive for me to tell his story and him to be able to read it, you know, that type of thing. So I feel that he might have been responsible for saving, he certainly protected my life, whether or not he saved it. That's, that's up for debate. But he was one of my heroes along with Hawthorne So the Klan stuff, let's back up to the summer of 65. Stop me if I'm...

[Smith] No, this is okay.

[Monnie] Back up to the summer of 65. I've completed a summer. My wife is up in Boston and working in the library at the school of theology and I gotta go back to school. I don't want to go back to school, but I go. And my heart was just not in it. I mean, I was an A, B student I was doing average work. I could tell that I was not happy with what I'm doing. And a guy who lived across from our freedom house, with the Stokes family that lived across the street from the Freedom House and Alphonse Stokes was always hanging out at the office and helping out with us and stuff like that. And one night he and Hawthorne and I think Robert Beverly was there at that point. I'm not sure. The Klan drove by or somebody we identified, thought was the Klan and fired two shot gun shots into the building. Caught Alphonse on the forehead. Luckily, it didn't go any lower. It just basically ripped his scalp open But it was a serious gunshot wound. Hawthorne maintained that they were trying to hit his car. Who knows? We don't know. Hawthorne probably was a target. As far as I know, no. Nobody was ever arrested, convicted of shooting. Okay. But I'm in Boston and this is happening. And I'm saying, I can't be up here when the people I care about and love are facing what they're facing. So I said to my wife, I gotta go back and I dropped out of school. Left in December or made my way back. Yeah, that's right. I think I arrive in January, was put on staff in February, with VSCRC So that's how I made it back.

[Smith] And you had known them from the previous year? So you'd make connections with the VSCRC group?

[Monnie] Well, it was the only group there I mean, to to make connections with I would've I would've gone down without without them, but I need I need I wasn't rich or anything, so I needed that \$5 a week to survive. And so yeah I was put on staff. Had hey not put me on staff. I don't know. Maybe I'd gone back to SCLC and work for Colton.

[Daughterity] And what sort of work... what was your primary work in Lunenburg? Was it voting rights, was it, did it spillover into school desegregation, War on Poverty? I mean, what were the issues that you all were...

[Monnie] Yeah. Well, that's a that's a good point. We covered a lot of the territory, because remember, we were boycotting Stanley Hornstein's store for not hiring Black people. Okay. In fact, I got, I think I got smacked a couple of times during one of the passing out boycott leaflets for his store That might have been November of 66. I can't remember for sure. But so there was a boycott that was going on, their voter registration that was ongoing, that never was off the table. That was for my point of view, primary focus. When I started working though for VSCRC, there was a lot of issues that took us in different directions. So I became essentially the office manager. And what that meant is I could type 50 words a minute. So they, they assign me that that duty. But also the getting out into the community and doing the organisation and voter registration, that was a primary goal, from my perspective. The tension with VSCRC staff for me came with again, there was a lot of office work to be done and it was all put on my shoulders. And then another guy that came in, we were both sharing it and at that point, but it created staff tension for me. The tension was you're keeping me from doing the work that should be done out in the community. But his work that needs to be done too, okay. So okay. So I crabbed. Okay. And kicked up a fuss and had we had staff conflicts and stuff like that. But that's I see that as a normal part of any organization anyway. So. It was also part of my growing process,

[Smith] Where was the office that you were working in?

[Monnie] What about it?

[Smith] Where was it?

[Monnie] Victoria.

[Smith] Was at Victoria?

[Monnie] Yeah, it was right here. Let me show you a picture of it. Hope I can show you a picture of it.

[Daughterity] While you are looking...

[Monnie] Yes

[Daughterity] What else can you tell us about the Klan in Lunenburg? In Southside at that point in time. They had the rallies. There was a rally in the spring of 66, I believe, they had over 1000 people attend I think that was in Nottaway County, I'm not sure where that was but they were very, very active at that point. I can remember a Klan I, we, we get some stupid things and again this is adolescent bullshit, but a carload of us went and pull up outside of Klan rally. That's cra-, I mean, that's asking for it. I mean, you have a right to be there. That's not the point. But you, you pull up outside Klan rally, you gotta expect some reaction. And it was as real cool guy in a suit. And you can see several of the Klan members came over, with clubs to the car, they were starting to come over and this suave looking guy comes up, he says, Boys, you all go back there. I'm going to talk to these people. He came over, he was the head... it's in the book, I can't remember the guy's name but he was the head of the Klan from Pennsylvania, head of the Ku Klux Klan He was down giving a speech, Okay, and... Anyway, he came over to the car and said I know about Nan, and I know about Hawthorne And I said what are you talking about and he said yeah. He said I followed them around when they were doing fundraising up in the northern campuses. I recorded everything they said and I guess caught them with some statements that probably shouldn't have been on tape But very swift, cool guy in terms of strategy and stuff like that.

[Daughterity] And somebody else had mentioned the fact that the FBI was involved in the counties at the time. Were they monitoring the Klan where they monitoring you all?

[Monnie] Well, they gave oh, of course. I mean, all of us have a file. In fact, that's one of my next projects is get my file if it still exist, but therein may lie another book. The FBI monitored us, but they did have their informants. They did not want another killing They really didn't. Not because they care about what we were doing. In fact, they were against what we were doing. But it would have been bad news for another killing like Mississippi to take place. And so that was their job to keep that from happening. I think that's my theory anyway. They dealt with us in other different ways in terms of subtle stuff. But the Klan told us about the hit and I'm assuming it was a real, real threat at that point. So... Not the Klan, the FBI told us about the Klan hit. Yeah.

[Daughterity] Okay. Yeah, interesting.

[Smith] What happened at the end of the summer of 1966 for you. Did you stay?

[Monnie] I did not stay I stayed through from January through June of 66. Did the organization for the volunteers to come down that summer. And then I went back to seminary. And that summer, was that the summer I got a job at a gas station, waiting for school to start? I can't remember. But I went back to seminary. And then yes, that was the summer I had a job in the gas station. Then...

[Smith] How did you feel about leaving then because you're...

[Monnie] terrible, terrible.

[Smith] You get pull once...

[Monnie] did not want to leave, but felt that I'd made a commitment to my education and that it was time to, to finish that. It never happen, but because of the wheels went off my personal train several years later. And but I went back to school and then I was assigned, I was ordained that summer also, let's see, that was no, that was somewhere in 66. I was ordained the summer of 67. And then was assigned to church. And I had a church from 67 until 69, beginning of 69, and a church outside of Boston. But then dropped out of school permanently and left my my wife and took up with this other beautiful woman who eventually became my wife of 38 years. And we had one son together. And she died of metastatic cancer 2008. So that's that's a part of my life story. And then basically didn't date for five years. Became engaged once then after five years, this woman really helped me get through that that phase of mourning and whatever you want, call it for my wife. And but she dumped me. And I'd known this woman for five years who was a bridesmaid at my son's wedding. And she called me up one day and just to say Happy New Year. And I said You wanna go out? And the rest is history. We've been married a year now and we have a three month old son. And that's sort of where my life story is up to this point. But let me back up where I left my first wife. I then went to, back in 69, 70, I went to social work school and got my master's degree in psychiatric social work, and essentially spent my entire career in public education providing therapy to special needs students K through 12.

[Smith] In Massachusetts?

[Monnie] In Massachusetts, Yeah. And that's my history. Did I give you enough information?

[Daughter] Yes. Absolutely. I'm going to ask you kind of a big picture big picture questions. A couple of them here at the end. What do you think that you accomplished as part of VSCRC and or SCOPE in Virginia in the mid sixties?

[Monnie] I think I took part in one of the most significant areas of social change that this nation has ever seen. And I look back to Shakespeare and say that I was a bit player on a big stage. Ok. And I was, but I was able to, without getting killed, translate my personal values into contributing to, what I consider to be significant change that occurred in this country. I was a part of a very small minority of people who did what I did. I had no leadership role, doesn't matter. I knew that what I contributed would have a lasting impact upon our society. Add just as I know that what my career did in terms of working with children has a lasting impact on what happens at a certain level to society. That's, that's, that's based on a lot of my theological beliefs. I've, even though I'm no longer clergyman, I'm very, how shall I say it? Value and religiously based in terms of my lifestyle,

[Smith] Is that sense of being small, bit player on a big stage and that feeling of gratification that you have and putting faith into action. Has that feeling changed over time? Do you remember feeling like that in 1966, 1967, 1968 as much as you feel like that now, how's your memory...

[Monnie] My commitment to racial justice has always been dead spot on. Okay. My assessment of some of the people who were involved in the civil rights movement and where they took it. I am not in agreement with I'm much more conservative now in terms of my value system, I won't say that I am as conservative as my parents were. But politically I'm, I'm really very much to the right in terms of where the society is right now. And I really feel unfortunately, that the Civil Rights Movement itself was co-opted by, on a lot of the, what I call Saul Alinsky, progressive

radicals to the detriment of the Black community to be honest with you. And I won't go into in more detail on that, but that's where I'm at. So, but I don't say it with bitterness or rancor. I, I made my contribution and I have no regrets. And I have no, my my commitment to what I believe in and what I fought for and by the way, what I fought for throughout my entire career dealing with minority populations within a school system. Because that was my primary focus, even though it was special needs students. I just feel that my value system translated into action. Throughout my life. I have no, absolutely no, regrets in that area my entire life. I think I'm pretty lucky that way to be able to feel that way. But do I like the way things are now in this culture? No, I'm a little disappointed.

[Smith] Is there anything that you'd like to add just at the end, this is a nice sum up that you've already given us.

[Monnie] Yeah, but, this, well, this book here essentially is my life story. Along with my brother, he, he made a contribution to it, but we are both raised, Conneaut Lake. That's the lake effect and that's where we got our values, that sort of thing. And it's, it really, it, it shows where I'm grounded both theologically, but in terms of family values which I've never left me. I've always been a family man. It's been important. Did I make mistakes along the way with my first wife, Of course I did. You know. Could I have stayed married to her? No, no I just was not not mature enough to do it at that point in time. So there was too much water under the bridge there. But in terms of what's happened since in terms of the relationship that I've had and no regrets. None. I'm in a good place. I hope I can stay there till I stop.

[Daughterity] Thank you Bill, for what you did here in Virginia in the sixties. And thanks again for sharing your time with us.

[Monnie] Yeah, happy to.

Interviewer

[RS] Thank you. Tremendously helpful. Thank you so much.

[Monnie] And keep this.