

Voices of Freedom

Virginia Civil Rights Movement Video Initiative

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**Transcript - Thomas S. Hardy (2003-03-21)**

CARRINGTON: Okay. May I have your name, sir, and where you grew up.

HARDY: My name is Thomas Hardy. I grew up in Surry County, Virginia. I was born in 1930, and I grew up on the farm, and I am living next door to the home house that I was born in.

CARRINGTON: Oh, really. Right now you live next to the house that you were born in?

HARDY: Right.

CARRINGTON: Tell me about Surry County when you were growing up. What kind of conditions were you growing up in there?

HARDY: Well, to begin with, in -- I started elementary school in Surry. It was a two-room school house. And they had about 30 small schools throughout the county for Negroes, some one room and some two rooms. So, and we had to walk each day about, I'd say at least two miles to the

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elementary school, two-room school, and that's where I started my first education in the elementary school in Surry.

And during then the white children would pass by us on the bus going to Surry but we had to walk to school each day.

CARRINGTON: What was school like? What were books, condition of the schools?

HARDY: Well, I could tell you the -- the school building itself was in a sense liveable, and it was -- we had the two like classes and I'm trying to think now, it went to the seventh grade and classes -- half of the class was in one part of the school and half in the other. Like the fifth through the seventh grade was in one room, and the others were in the other room.

And we didn't have any water, and we had to go to a farm next door to get water for the school, and we had to get wood to build a fire in the heater in the mornings when we got there. And it was many times we were just as cold as could be until we get the fire started in the school.

CARRINGTON: How far did you have to walk?

HARDY: About two miles.

CARRINGTON: About two miles to school?

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HARDY: Right.

CARRINGTON: And the other white kids in the neighborhood, how did they get to school?

HARDY: They went to Surry on a bus. The bus used to pass by us, and we used to say, why are they on the bus and we got to walk?

CARRINGTON: Now, you said you went to the seventh grade.

HARDY: Right.

CARRINGTON: What happened after the seventh grade?

HARDY: After the seventh grade, we had a school in Surry, Surry High School -- Surry Training School. They didn't call our school high school. They called them training schools. And I went there one day, and I came back and told my mother, I said, I don't like this school, it is a three-room high school, and back then we didn't have nothing, gymnasiums anyway, even the school I went to in Isle of Wight, but to make a long story short I told my mother, I'm not going to that school. If I can't go to the school in Isle of Wight I just won't be going.

And she said, well, I can get you over there. You don't have to pay tuition because she was a land holder in Isle of Wight County, and if you owned land in that county you could go to school free of tuition.

So I walked across the county line and that was about a two-mile walk, and caught the school -- caught the bus to Isle of Wight County. The reason I didn't like Surry Training School was I didn't see anything they had to offer, not even a laboratory or anything. And when the classes changed that first day, when we had to ride many a mile to get to it in Dendron, Virginia, where the school was, the principal stuck -- had a little, small bell, he stuck the bell through a broken panel in the door and said it is time to change classes.

And I told my friend, I said, I'm not going to this school. I said, I've got to get something better. And Isle of Wight wasn't all that great, but Isle of Wight Training School was a lot better. And they had science, we had classes like geometry, biology and physics. They offered a lot more than Surry had to offer.

CARRINGTON: And how far could you go in the training school, to what grade?

HARDY: Well, the first year I started in -- the first year that I started they changed to the 12th grade. It was the 11th because when my brother finished, he finished in the 11th grade, but we had to go five years, so I finished the 12th grade in 1948 at the Isle of Wight Training School.

CARRINGTON: So what kind of courses did you take?

HARDY: Well, I had geometry, I had physics, and I had biology, and English and et cetera, but these are classes that you couldn't get over at Surry Training School.

CARRINGTON: What did you get at Surry Training School, what kind of courses?

HARDY: Surry Training School didn't offer physics and geometry. I know those two were not offered there at that particular time.

CARRINGTON: So what kind of things -- if you came out of Surry, Surry County Training School, what were you able to do once you finished?

HARDY: Well, I'm not saying that if I hadn't of finished -- if I had finished Surry Training School, I'm not saying there would have been that -- because I do know students that finished there and went on, you know, to higher education, but I just felt like I got a better schooling at Isle of Wight Training because I do know that some of the students at Surry -- well, it was Surry training school, but they couldn't pass the examination in certain phases for -- like we did at Isle of Wight.

CARRINGTON: So Surry County, what is the population make-up of Surry County?

HARDY: Well, today I think it is around 64 -- 6,400 It is close to that. It's about 6,400.

CARRINGTON: How about when you were a child?

HARDY: It was around no more than 6,000.

HARDY: And what was the population make-up? What percentage were black, what percentage was white?

HARDY: Well, back in the sixties, it was like 60 percent -- at least 60 percent black and 40 percent white. Today it has changed. It's about -- today it's about 60 -- it's about -- I would say 55 percent black and 45 percent white.

CARRINGTON: And back when you were younger, who ran the county?

HARDY: It was all white. The only black in the courthouse was a lady that cleaned the courthouse. She was the only black in there. So all whites. It was run by all whites.

CARRINGTON: So you didn't get equal treatment because you weren't represented in the county?

HARDY: Without a doubt.

CARRINGTON: How did you change that? How did you go about helping to change that disparity?

HARDY: It's a long story, but what really motivated me was the fact, as I told Mr. Ragsdale [Ben Ragsdale, head of the Video initiative project], that I served in Korea, and served in the Army in Korea, and when I got back from Korea I was stationed at Fort Meade, Maryland, Fort Meade, Maryland -- Virginia. At Fort Meade the captain told me that we were shipping out to Camp Pickett, Virginia, which is Fort Pickett today. And when we left Camp Pickett, I had made Sergeant First Class in Korea, so he said Sergeant Hardy, you are in charge of this convoy and said when you get into the outskirts of Richmond, I'm giving you a check, and you are to go into the first fast-food restaurant. [Discussion held off the record.] So we pulled in with the convoy, and the check was made out to Sergeant Hardy and 175 troops. And he said, let them eat what they want, you sign the check and the government is going to reimburse the establishment.

So when we pulled in, I got off the convoy, the first, lead bus, walked into the restaurant and I said, I got -- I told the manager, I said, I've got a lot of troops here to serve because we're on our way to Camp Pickett. So the first thing he asked me, by me being light, I think he thought I was white, but to make a long story short, he said, well, how many blacks on that bus? I said, I think it's about 19 blacks because we came from New Jersey.

And he said, well, I can serve the whites, but I can't serve the blacks. I said, Mister, you are making a grave mistake, because I am to sign the check, and if the 19 blacks can't eat, none of us eat -- will eat here today. So he said, wait just a minute. And he looked around and talked with, I guess it was his assistant manager. And he said, bring them all in.

So here we get the sandwiches and sodas, just a small meal that he told us to give them on the way to Camp Pickett. So I thought then, I said, wait a minute, I came back from Korea fighting. I said, what was I fighting for? And it gave me the initiative to go back to Surry with the help of my wife, and when I got married she was more into it than I was, so we just decided we had to do something.

And we looked around and said, look at our voter registration. We didn't have -- back then they had the poll tax, and you had to answer ten questions, and write it on a blank sheet of paper, and they didn't tell you anything. They said write the ten questions down - you are supposed to write date of birth, and age, and et cetera. So back then you had to pay a \$3.00. poll tax, so we got into voter -- so we registered to vote, my brother, my father, and we had to register on the white man's car in his yard. He wouldn't even let us in the house. So we registered to vote right on the hood of his car. And that's where we got started into saying we're going to get out here and get our people registered to vote because we are the majority, but we are in the minority when it comes to voting.



CARRINGTON: What did you do when you went out to get people to register to vote? What was your strategy? What did you go out and do? My apology. Okay. Now --

HARDY: Back in the early -- this was in the late fifties and early sixties, we had the Surry County Improvement Association that we had formed, and the late Mr. C. C. Pettaway was a driving force with that, and he was -- back then he was a driving force with the NAACP. So we met like on Saturday nights at a place in Surry, the Improvement Association, and we tried everything we could to get our people registered to vote, but it seemed like I think the \$3.00 was holding us back, too, because we paid \$3.00 for a lot of them, and that poll tax really held a lot of them back because they didn't want to pay the \$3.00. But we went out and we just combed the whole area, started working, but we had -- my wife and I kept civil rights workers that came from the colleges, back then in the days of Martin Luther King, we kept them, they worked out there -- we fill up a car every morning and let them comb the county while I was going to the Navy yard to work, the Norfolk Navy Shipyard, and all this work -- I mean they registered a lot of people but still we weren't getting to where we wanted to be.

So in essence we said, what are we going to do? We got the NAACP, we got the Surry County Improvement Association, but we couldn't get our people indoctrinated into registering to vote. And I think back then the \$3.00 really was a hindrance to us, too, and a lot of them that worked on the white man's farm was really afraid to vote. They were afraid to vote. They would tell them, why register to vote? It ain't going to do you no good. And a lot of them took it for granted and said, if I go to register, they might fire me, then I won't have a job. And we had a lot of black

farm tenants, and all of this added up to the fact that we really weren't making progress like we wanted to.

CARRINGTON: What did you do to step up the activity?

HARDY: Well, we kept going on and on and we were gradually building up our voter registration rolls. And I know in the Bacon's Castle District when I went and got the list of how many blacks were registered to vote in Bacon's Castle, I don't think it was over 12 or 15. So we said this is ridiculous. So we just kept going on with the NAACP and the Surry County Improvement Association, but still it looked like we couldn't get what we wanted and still we had the population.

But to move right on up, in 1967, the latter part of '67 and '68, a fellow named Don Anderson came to Surry County, and he was working in Washington, D.C., for -- he helped draft the anti-poverty legislation. He was working under Congressman Adam Clayton Powell, and he came to Surry, he said, while I'm sitting here drawing up this anti-poverty legislation, he said, I need to get out into the south. So he went -- came to Surry because we were what they call one of the black-belt counties where, you know, you had a majority of black population, and I think they said black soil throughout the south.

And when Don came, Mr. Pettaway called me and said, I got a fellow that's coming into Surry, he wants to organize an organization in Surry, so he met -- they met at my house, it was about 12 of

us met, so while my brother and I, we were skeptical of Don, I said, Don, where did you come from all of a sudden? How can you help us when we worked so hard?

He said, I've got an organization that will work if you will just listen to me. And said, you are the first county I've tried from Washington -- coming down from Washington. So he said, you all -- you've got -- you've got the power in your hands. You have just got to get your people registered to vote.

So I said, well, you sound like a communist. I don't trust you. And he said, no, Mr. Hardy, I'm not a communist. Said, if you don't believe me, he said, you call -- I forget who was head of the Democratic Party, and he lived in Chicago, Illinois, so he gave me the phone number, said you call him right now, I am definitely sincere in what I'm doing. So I called, I made the call to Chicago, and I can't remember who was head of the Democratic Party, but he came on the phone and he said, no, Don Anderson is for real.

So I went back and told the fellows that met in my den, I said, I just talked to the fellow he told me to call in Chicago with the Democratic Party, and he says he's for real. So I told Mr. Pettaway, I says, okay, he's got my go, I said, and the other fellows in the room, and I think some ladies were there, too, they said -- so we said we're going with you, we're going to try it.

He said, okay, I'm -- he showed us a video how to structure or set up, and it was patterned after British Parliament, House of Parliament, the Parliament, and it was a situation whereby each

community would dissolve themselves into small wards and set out to solve problems. It was called a problem-solving organization. And the way the structure was, you would have a crew of 50 people, and the 50 people would have a representative, and that representative would come to each monthly meeting and bring the problems that was presented to him by his committeemen, and each committeeman in turn had six constituents which in turn made up -- and it was seven committeemen, and they would have six constituents and the seven and six and then the representative himself made -- it made a group of 50 people.

So when we started the organization, I think we ended up with about 27 or 30 -- 30 representatives, so that meant 30 times 50. So we would meet -- and we didn't have nowhere to meet at that time other than the churches, so we met in Lebanon Baptist Church in this room there, in the fellowship hall, and we started organizing, and it started coming together because each committeeman that went out with six of his constituents, he would -- the first question on that questionnaire was like -- the first question was, are you registered to vote? Well, you had name, address and et cetera. And he would compile all this up, and are you registered to vote? So when he come back, he would say, okay, I got so many people here that are not registered to vote. So we would go out then, the representative would go out and get these people registered to vote.

So we organized road captains, and the road captains would go on this particular road, and they wound up -- would get the list of names and say, listen, you got to register to vote. And we would furnish the transportation, and we would take them to the registrar's house, and the registrar was

white, and she was real cooperative, and she would open her doors at night after we came from work. And she said, bring them on in. Any time you want to come, she said, I'll open my doors, and my wife can attest to this, but she was very good. So we would take them in.

And I think the poll tax had been abolished then, which made it easier, and so we worked the roads day and night to get people to register to vote. And we finally found ourselves coming on up. And then when the Justice Department said -- I think it was civil rights movement -- Civil Rights Act that we had to redistrict, what they call one man one vote, so Mr. Pettaway and I were on the redistricting committee. And when we went in to draw up the boundaries, we went from three districts to five. So we came out, and Mr. Pettyway say, you know what we're doing, he called me Thomas, said, Thomas, we got it. Said, we got three districts that's predominantly black. He said, I've looked at the figures and you have, too. He said, we have enough voters to take over this county.

So we went back to the assembly, and we said, we need three blacks to run for the board of supervisors position. And it was Claremont District, it was Carsley District and Bacon's Castle, the district I live in. So we started looking around. I said, hey, I can't, as much as I work just take off to go to board meetings, all white board meetings, be setting there, and they didn't hardly recognize us, but back in that day, in the seventies, through the sixties and the seventies, they would meet in a room downstairs, three blacks on the board of supervisors then, so we are headed now for five districts, so you are going to have five supervisors.

So we went back to the meeting at Lebanon Baptist Church. So Don was there at the meeting, said, we need three people to run. So Mr. Sherlock Holmes from the Carsley District, he said, I'll run, because his daddy had been in politics, and Mr. Pettaway had recommended him. And Mr. Edward Johns from the Claremont District, he said, I'll run. And he worked with us in the civil rights movement at the Surry Improvement Association. So when it came to Bacon's Castle District I said, well, I can't run, and I wanted to run, because it was under the Hatch Act at the Norfolk Naval Ship Yard which back then if you worked for the federal government you could not run for public office. You could work in voter registration, be poll watchers and et cetera, but you could not run for public office.

So I asked my brother. He said, well, I'll run. So in 1970, when we went to the polls in November of 1970, we won three districts, the three blacks won so we actually said, well, we've got control of Surry County, and that's where it started right then.

CARRINGTON: Tell me about the Surry Assembly.

HARDY: Well, the Surry Assembly, like I said, Don Anderson came in and organized it, and Mr. C. C. Pettaway was the first president. And the organization, like I told you, comprised of problem-solving organization. In other words, if you had a problem and you take it to your representative, and he would bring it to the meeting. The meetings were completely controlled. Any problem on the problem sheet which we'd make up a problem sheet and compile all the problems that are before us. Like I think the first problem we had was a lady said she needed a

washing machine, and we solved that in, I think, one week. One of my friends said, I've got a washing machine. We'll take it over to her house. Simple things like that, you know, that we got problems like that, but this problem solving -- if you started in the meeting with a problem, and you had a speaker of the house, and the speaker would control the meeting, and if you started -- you brought a problem up you could not take that problem off the order sheet until it was solved. And some of them we kept on at least two or three months, but we just kept going until we got it solved.

And one of the big problems was when we first started was voter registration, so as I told you, we solved that one. But the organization was very strict. And if we met at 8:00 o'clock, Don would tell us, Don Anderson would tell us anything past 10:00 o'clock, you leave this building because you are repeating yourself. And it was very strictly controlled. And you couldn't speak to -- if -- when the speaker of the house would call you to stand, speak, you address the speaker, and you had to speak particularly to the problem, what the problem was on the problem sheet. You couldn't talk about anything else other than that particular problem. You couldn't stray into some other thing like you do in certain meetings that get out of control.

And it was their way of controlling -- he said it was actually patterned after the House of Parliament in England because he went to school in England, and I think that's where he got the idea.

CARRINGTON: What kind of -- the people in the community saw the Surry Assembly solve those problems, what kind of support did they start giving you?

HARDY: Oh, with the representatives and all that that, we had good support, without a doubt. If you said -- if you went there and said I'm a representative from the Surry Assembly they -- they recognized the assembly. It really, it grew very fast. It went throughout the county and it was a very well recognized organization.

CARRINGTON: Now, you said you took control of the county with your three members of the board of supervisors. When they took office, what was the reaction by the white population of Surry County?

HARDY: Well, we had comments like, oh, they are going to waste all our money. They don't know what they're doing. They said, they are going to waste all our money here so we -- Don Anderson said, listen, you are going in, you don't know anything, you are new in government, said, I want you to have a county attorney. Now, this was new. All of them never heard of a county attorney because back then the Commonwealth's Attorney actually served as a spokesman at board meetings. So he said, I'm going to bring you in a county attorney.

So we said, who are you going to get?



He said, we're going to get Gerald Poindexter, who is here working in Surry County. He's in a law firm in Richmond with -- and I think somebody else came down. I can't think of his name, but it was a black lawyer that was very prominent, but Gerald worked in Richmond I think close to him. And so Gerald came, Gerald Poindexter came down and the black board members appointed him as county attorney, and that was news in all the counties, surrounding counties, they had never heard of a county attorney. I think today all of them have got a county attorney, but that was something new.

And he came in and he guided those three blacks through on how to govern a county, so that was how we got started.

CARRINGTON: What were some of the improvements that happened with -- as the blacks started taking over the county in terms of --

HARDY: Well, we had -- when the three blacks took over they had three goals; it was education, job opportunities and recreation. We didn't have any -- like I told you, we met in the black churches, so we -- and Lebanon was actually the main church, but we didn't have any recreation facilities at all, so they set out first for education. And we had met this board of supervisors off and on, the white board -- the three white members of the board of supervisors and begged for them to purchase land so we could build a school, and we constantly went to school board meetings and so we waited and we waited. And so I went back to the county and asked their clerk of the courts in the county, he said -- he was secretary to the three black -- board members.

I said, what's happening about the school, purchase of the school land?

He said, well, Thomas, the money has been here for at least two years. And I said -- he said, the down payment. So we had already found a site where to put the school at, the high school, because back then it was the L.P. Jackson High School for blacks, and there was no gymnasium, so you don't know how many years we went without a gymnasium, I'll tell you anyway, but to make a long story short, before the blacks took over, the three white board members purchased that land. They wanted that to be something that they could put in, I guess, in the archives as something they had done. So they purchased the land.

So when the three black board members got on board, the first thing they done was to get the -- to finish paying for the land, and get an architect to design a new high school. And at first they -- on the plans of the new high school, the assembly stayed right on the plans. We sent them back to the drawing board at least three times and we wouldn't give up because the first set of plans did not -- they had a cafetorium. And we said, we don't want a cafetorium. We want an auditorium and a cafeteria. So they changed the plans on that. So we -- on the football field, which was completely new to us, we said, we want lights on the football field, and want lights on the baseball field, so they went back and changed that. And then on air conditioning, I don't know how they had it designed, they didn't have air conditioning. We said we want air conditioning in the schools. And we stood our ground. We even had meetings in the courthouse. We packed the courthouse. And so they changed the plans on that.

So eventually the Surry County High School which stands today was built. And that was the first time that our children had ever used a basketball court indoors and, you know, that was in 1970 I think it was 1973 when Surry County High School was the one -- my middle daughter, the one at Hampton right now, she graduated from that school. And my oldest daughter, she was at Surry County High School, and she wanted to be a doctor.

She said, I don't think I can get it there, Daddy. Say, I don't see but one Bunsen burner in the library -- I mean in the laboratory. Excuse me. So lo and behold Don Anderson came through -- I'm backing up now, but Don Anderson came to me and said, listen, I've got a scholarship to Chatham Hall, all girls school. Do you think your daughter would go?

So I went back and asked, her name was Debbie, and I said Debbie, and my wife was instrumental in this, I ain't going to take nothing from her, so Debbie said, I'll go, because I think this is going to prepare me for being a doctor. So she went to Chatham Hall. She graduated from Chatham Hall. And to make a long story short, she went to the University of Virginia and from there to Howard Medical School, and today she has two offices, one in Bowie, Maryland, she owns Women's Health Care Associates, and she has two offices, one in Annapolis, it's OB-GYN and one in Bowie, Maryland.

But backing up from her where I got there was the fact that the way we had worked so hard to get this school which my daughter attended and it was an up to date school and it stands today. And since then we have built in a triangle we have built a new elementary school, and we just,

about three or four years ago, maybe five years ago, we built a middle school, and we named that school L.P. Jackson after the black school, high school. So that's L.P. Jackson Middle School today.

And so like I say, I think we got an education system now second to none.

CARRINGTON: Now, when the new high school was built, what was the response from the white community?

HARDY: Well, at that time, you know, in 1963, seven black children tried to enroll in the white school, and they pulled all the white children out, and they were having classes here and there and everywhere until they established the Tidewater Academy rather than go to school with blacks. But it wasn't like Prince Edward. I think Prince Edward shut down all the schools. But our black public schools still stood, and stood like -- we went on until way into the 70's, I guess 19-- I think two white students came in early, but we went on until we brought in Dr. Penn in 1977 without any integration, other than token integration, and when they saw this new high school, a lot of them said, well, our tax money is going into it, and so they gradually -- Dr. Penn got into -- when we got him in 1977, he started to contacting white parents. And he said, it doesn't make sense to send your children there. And so today, and during Dr. Penn's administration the integration really worked. The white students started coming back, because they saw we had more than they had to offer.

CARRINGTON: Massive Resistance was one of the big tools that was used in Virginia.

HARDY: Right.

CARRINGTON: Tell me about what happened in Surry County during Massive Resistance.

HARDY: Well, in Massive Resistance, and I guess that's what you are saying, when the whites took -- the white flight, away from the public schools, they were resisting going to school with black children, and during the Massive Resistance movement, I think this is when we really got into working with the assembly. And over a period of time the whites saw that we were gaining ground, and it -- and using county money, and I think this is where they realized that -- Massive Resistance stood for a long time but it begin to crumble because they saw that the blacks were not going to give up, so that's why they finally started trickling back into our system.

CARRINGTON: Now, you hear a lot of people who were working in the political system in Surry County, and -- but a lot of people work outside of Surry County. What was the impact of -- like you were working at the -- over in Newport News, why did that work for Surry County with people working outside the county but doing political action in the county? Why did that work for Surry?

HARDY: Well, we found out that a lot of them worked on the white man's farms, like we called them farm tenants, they were scared to speak out and we really had to educate them. And the one

that was carrying the load were like Mr. C. C. Pettaway that worked in Newport News Ship Building, and myself, Norfolk Naval Shipyard, and Mr. Edward Johns who ran for the board of supervisors worked for Allied Chemical in Hopewell, and Mr. Edward Sherlock Holmes worked for Brown and Williamson Tobacco Company. These are the people that led the movement, and we started trying to indoctrinate the people that worked in Surry County to say you are not going to lose your job if you speak out, but it was hard to convince them, but we convinced them to register to vote.

But most of the main leaders, like my brother worked at Gordon Meat Packing Plant in Smithfield, he was supervisor there, but the ones that really worked to overcome Massive Resistance were people that worked outside of the county. They were actually afraid. In fact I can attest to the fact that we went to one guy's house that lived on the farm, white man's farm, and we drove up there, and he knowed we were coming to get him to register to vote, he took off and ran down through the field. But we finally got him.

And one of the -- my cousin that's deceased now, David Hardy, he rode with me and he -- he would say -- when he drive up to the house, first thing he would do if they had a dog, he loved that, he said, has that dog got a tag? And they say, yeah, yeah, it has, Mr. Hardy, it's got a tag. We got a tag for the dog. He said, well, you are not registered to vote. Said the dog is more of a citizen than you are. And this really got over with them. And after -- then, backing up, David Hardy, he's dead and gone, but he was instrumental in helping us in voter registration.

And then -- back then we found that you could vote for the justice of the peace. So he rode with my wife back in the early sixties, he rode with her night and day, and we -- in Bacon's Castle District, and we slipped in a write-in vote, she became the first elected official since reconstruction days. And they couldn't believe this. They said, where did this come from? Because all the justice of peace was appointed by the court. And my wife was actually the first elected black official since reconstruction days. But he rode with her day and night to make sure she got enough write-in votes, and the write-in votes weren't easy. But he was really one of the driving forces along with Mr. C.C. Pettaway and Mr. Edward Johns, and I can go way back to some of the old pioneers that worked with us, but we really had a long struggle, but we kept fighting until we got where we are.

CARRINGTON: What was the connection between Surry County and the national civil rights movement?

HARDY: No more than the fact that -- like Martin Luther King, I met him one time at Virginia State College, but we -- Mr. Curtis Harris in Hopewell would come down, he was with the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. He would give us a lot of inspiration, but the national movement, the only thing I know is the fact they sent the civil rights workers in from the national movement that was organized throughout the -- actually, they brought them from the north, and almost all of them were white that came in, so that's where we had the affiliation with the national movement, they sent civil rights workers in. And we kept in our homes, and like I say

back then, they done as much as they could do but they never got us into the majority, when we had the majority population. But they done, they done a lot. They done the grass-roots work.

But as I said before, the Assembly was the organization that really put us on the road because they was completely organized. In fact, it organized the whole county.

CARRINGTON: When you get a chance to talk to young kids now, today, you know, the civil rights movement started over 40 years ago --

HARDY: Right.

CARRINGTON: And there are still things to do today. What would you tell them, what advice would you give them to enlighten them to keep the movement going?

HARDY: Well, this is the problem we got in Surry now. It really bothers us because they look around now and say, well, we've got a nice recreation center which we got through the black -- when's the blacks first came in there. Like I told you, recreation was one of our main goals, too. And we have meetings there now, and we have a nice recreation center. And they look around and they got three modern schools. And I think now they are complacent, and we're having a hard time now to get the younger people to say, look, you got to look where you came from. And we want them to follow in our foot steps to keep Surry, because we used to call it Sorry County, but we want it to remain Surry County, but I think a lot of them are getting complacent, they say



we got what we want, so it's no need of fighting anymore. But I always tell them that history repeats itself. If you don't watch out, they will take back over, which I wouldn't have no big problem with right now because we have done the things we wanted to do, and I don't think no one can overturn the things that we have accomplished.

But like you said, I am concerned about the younger people, and we are -- in fact, in the last week -- we had a couple weeks ago, that was one of the things that we stressed, we got to reach to the younger people to have them involved in government.

CARRINGTON: Let me go back for the moment on that thought. You were working in voter registration, and as you know, Medgar Evers in Mississippi was killed. Did you ever have any of those type of fears that people in Surry County, the opposition in Surry County would do any harm to you or your family?

HARDY: Oh, yes. Yes. My mother kept telling me, said, you all will get hurt out there. Said, I am praying every day when you leave and every night when you leave. But one night I was in Norfolk Naval Shipyard, and my wife called and said they are burning crosses right up from the house and throughout Surry. So it really didn't scare me, but one of them was right at the crossroads from my house, and many mornings I would get up and Klu Klux Klan literature was all over my yard, you know, scattered like they throw it out of the car, but it really didn't scare me.

And then we had one fellow the next morning, and went around and gathered every cross that they burnt. I think it was four burned in Surry, different places, like Dendron, Virginia, right on down. He got all the crosses that they burned, and he went on the courthouse grounds in his truck, and he stood there, and I think he had a shotgun, he said, now, please come forward if you built this cross. Don't be a coward. If you know anybody who built it, please come forward. And nobody came forward. So we didn't have any more trouble. That was the end of that.

CARRINGTON: Do you have any other memorable moments that you want kids to know about in the struggle in Surry County that brought you guys to where you are today?

HARDY: Well, one was the one like I told you when I came back from the service. You know, if you go somewhere and fight for your country and be humiliated like that and said we don't serve blacks, and it is hard to remember -- hard for me to think that when I went to the Norfolk Naval Shipyard they had colored and white drinking fountains, colored and white restrooms, colored and white cafeterias. And I never forget, I think when -- the Eisenhower administration when all that was wiped out, declared unconstitutional, and all the guys in the Naval Yard would say, well, today we're going to drink some of the white water, see if it tastes any different, and the fountains changed.

But I think our children today should be instilled in the fact how far that we have come. And a lot of them don't realize what we had to go through because they wouldn't think back in the fifties when I went to Norfolk Naval Shipyard that you had black and white restroom facilities,

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drinking water and cafeteria. They was completely separated. But all that changed over a period of time, but our younger people need to realize that these things really happened, and I don't think they would even think today it ever happened, because today they can go anywhere.

But still, right now, we have got pockets of racial overtures with people that have still got a racial bias in Surry County, but it's not as many as it used to be, but Surry has come a long ways.

But right now, we're in a fight raising the courthouse now because we want to -- the old courthouse, we want to renovate that, and they are fighting us day and night they, they had a meeting last night, and I decided I wasn't even going, but it's a white group that formed an organization, and we got some blacks along with them that they want to throw away all the plans. And the -- really, the courthouse has to be renovated because it has to meet the handicap, you know, regulations that are set down by the federal government, and we wanted to move the sheriff's department there, but it look like they are going to win that battle and stop us there. But - - so we still got, you know, an up-hill battle, I guess some of the die-hard whites, because I told them not along ago at the board of supervisors meeting, I say, if you -- because going back, in 1981, Ray Peace ran for the 4th District in the county, which was a black voting district. So now, today, he is resigned from the board of supervisors, he's not going to seek re-election, but today we have four blacks on the board of supervisors, so we got four districts.

But like I was saying, they are still fighting us up hill to take back the government, and if you don't watch, history will repeat itself if we don't, you know keep fighting. But as far as the racial harmony in the county it has improved at least 75 percent since we took over in 1971.

CARRINGTON: Thank you, sir. Anything else?

[BEN RAGSDALE ASKED MR. CARRINGTON TO HAVE MR. HARDY DISCUSS THE HIGH PERCENTAGE OF VOTER REGISTRATION AND VOTING IN SURRY COUNTY]

CARRINGTON: Let me ask one question about something. In 1965, right after the Voting Rights Bills, what percentage of blacks in Surry County were registered and then how many were registered in 1971 when you'll took office? How much did it increase?

HARDY: Well, it increased, I would say, like the the blacks -- it increased about 75 percent, because in 1980 -- 1980, we were pointed out by the State of Virginia that we in 1980 during the presidential election we out -- we over excelled any county in the State of Virginia with eligible registered voters, over 87 percent of the people in Surry County voted, and that was tops for the state. When you got 87 percent, when the average presidential election is about 55 percent of the people, eligible to vote that go to the polls, we had 87 percent, we were tops. And they outlined, I think Richmond Times-Dispatch even printed this, we were tops in the state. And even today we average 65 to 70 percent of our people going to the polls because we are -- back then, we had -- we used to keep a list people, and people said, why do you have a list of registered

voters? But being a small county, like my district, Bacon's Castle, we would have a list of every black voter in Bacon's Castle, and as they came to the polls, we would check them off. We had poll watchers that stayed all day, and we would check them off. They would say, why do you have this list? We said, because 6:00 o'clock -- polls close at 7:00 o'clock. We said 6:00 o'clock, we are going to start sending cars to get those people that haven't showed up, and that's what made us successful.

And we would do that, and like I said, I would think right now that we got probably 80 percent of the blacks in Surry County registered to vote because, you know, we started out with voter registration, but then you had to have voter education. You had to actually teach them we had paper ballots you had to actually teach them how to mark those ballots. And we had sample ballots, and we would tell people to take these ballots into the polls with you, we would mark it, because they come us to, say, who are you all supporting? They would look right to us, and so whoever we supported they supported.

Then when they got the voting machines, we had the ballot which showed how to pull the lever, and we would tell them, pull the lever for this one, and so you take this ballot in there and we had the levers turned over to who we supported.

So all this worked really because, like I said, voter registration without voter education, you are right back where you started from. They would go in there and vote for the wrong person.

CARRINGTON: I need you to restate what Mr. Ragsdale said about voter registration, that when the law came down and said [inaudible.] How big was the increase...?

HARDY: We went from, like I said, we started this movement from Surry County Improvement Association to the Assembly, we went from at least 20 percent of blacks registered to vote, which a poll tax was -- we went from at least 20 percent to about 70 percent of the eligible blacks that were registered -- that were eligible to vote, we went to about 70 percent, and I would say today we're probably 80 percent of the blacks in Surry County are registered to vote, which I think is a good percentage.

CARRINGTON: Oh, yes.

RAGSDALE : I had one follow-up question. Mr. Hardy, the black majority has run Surry County for 32 years now, and your experiences has been very unique. What do you think you can say to your neighbors, your fellow Virginians and to your fellow Americans about the lessons which you have learned from your experiences?

HARDY: Well, it has -- I can say it has been a learning experience, and I'd say that we as blacks, we should exercise our voting rights at the polls, come what will what may if we have the majority, we put our people in office, but we shall always remember that all factions have to work together, both races have to work together to make the county more a place of harmony to live and work together as people, and I can say that we've always put God first, because prayer

answers everything, like my mother used to say, and I think that's what brought us where we are today. And I still say, racial harmony is the bottom line. We should not look upon each other because of race, creed or color. We should work together as a common government, and that's what we strive to do in Surry County. And I think it is working at least 95 percent in Surry County.

CARRINGTON: All right. Thank you. You can stop tape, sir.

END.