Civil Rights History Project
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Interviewee:	Willy Siegel Leventhal
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Interviewer:	David Cline
Videographer:	John Bishop
Length:	03:02:18

David Cline: Ready?

Willy Leventhal: I'm good.

David Cline: Okay.

Willy Leventhal: Yeah.

John Bishop: We're rolling.

David Cline: Okay. So, today is Saturday, April thirteenth. We are in Malibu, California, and this is David Cline on behalf of the Southern Oral History Program and the Smithsonian Institute's National Museum of African American History and Culture and the Library of Congress, and today I will be the interviewer. I'm with John Bishop, videographer, and Willy Leventhal. And, Willy, I want to thank you very much for being part of our project.

Willy Leventhal: I know it's—

John Bishop: You forgot to say it's the Pacific Ocean.

David Cline: Oh, and it's the Pacific Ocean is behind us, as well.

Willy Leventhal: It's a great honor. And I think that, you know, this was a key part of American history and world history, and there are so many lessons for the world to know about how you try and change things without violence. And so, I'm more than more than happy to be a part of this.

David Cline: Thank you so much. So, Willy, I wanted, if I could, ask you to start just by telling us about where you grew up, and how you grew up, and how you may have seen some of the lessons that you learned early on playing out in the work that you chose.

Willy Leventhal: Born in New York in '46, but my dad had just gotten back from World War II. He had had a very good chiropractic practice in Saginaw, Michigan, when he went into war. My mother, who was a teacher and later a college professor at USC, special ed, went back and lived with her family in Staten Island. And when my dad got out, he had to sort of start over again, you know, after a couple of years away for service. And, you know, that was when the migration was happening to California. And they apparently talked to some people in Michigan, and they said, "Yeah, there's a lot of opportunity out there." Still being in the service, he could fly free out to California. And Bernard, Dr. Bernard Leventhal is his name.

They were both—my parents were members of the NAACP at different times. I don't know at that time, but I know that Hubert Humphrey was his big hero from 1948. In fact, when I worked for George McGovern, it took years—in 1972, and we got the nomination over Hubert Humphrey—it took many decades for my father to forgive me for working against Hubert Humphrey, who was his hero of his generation, as many like Jackie Robinson and Martin Luther King and John Kennedy were for my generation.

But, so we moved to California when I was two. We didn't have much to start with out here, so we lived in Ramona Gardens, which was a federal housing project, probably about 1948. My mother worked in the campaign of the first Hispanic councilman and then later congressman. I'm blanking on his name, but the federal building is named for him downtown. I'll think of it later. Roybal! Ed Roybal. She worked—and I've since become friends with somebody at Cal State L.A., did a book about Ed Roybal. And my sister had talked to Ed Roybal before he died—his daughter, Lucille Roybal Allard is now, has his seat—he remembered my mother. My mother was an activist. And my grandfather had been the assistant superintendent of New York City Schools, Morris E. Siegel, and had handled all of the veterans retraining and all the vocational education after World War II. So, I come from a family of educators on my mom's side.

My dad's [parents] were also immigrants. His father and mother were immigrants, as my grandparents on both sides, and they had shoe stores. They fixed shoes and they had shoe stores. And then, typical, next generation became college-educated. My dad was the only one of his generation to be college-educated.

So, we lived in the projects for a couple of years. And I think that shaped me, in the sense I saw—I've got the pictures in that book you have, you know, of Hispanic kids, Asian kids, black kids, all living in—in fact, the picture from the L.A. Weekly, I went there. I could have had that picture taken anywhere when they chose me as a Person of the Year, after I went to the White House for the Civil Rights Concert. And I particularly went back to Murchison Elementary School, which is right up the street from the projects, where my brother and sister went, and I substitute taught when I worked in LASD for five years. And so, those are my roots, East L.A., East Los. So, I'm culturally, I think, mostly Jewish, but a good bit Hispanic and black, particularly the food for both of those cultures.

But anyway, so then we moved to North Hollywood. My dad first built, and some of his veteran buddies from the—Jewish war veterans—they built a little front to the house we bought, and that was his waiting room. And he used to do his adjustments in the living room. And then, he made a little more success, and him and one guy built about an eight-room office in front of our house.

My parents then divorced, and I moved with my mom. She was a special ed teacher in the public schools and liked the county special ed program better than the city. And so, we ended up, first in Westchester, and then in the South Bay Area. And I think Westchester was a very key event in my life, beyond my family's commitment to quote-unquote "liberal" of that day, which was a very close bond between Jews and blacks and the NAACP [0:05:00] Legal Defense Fund with Jack Greenberg and others, worked with Thurgood Marshall. And my grandfather, as I said in my article, had donated money to the defense of the Scottsboro Boys. My parents were part of the NAACP, you know, as far as membership. My father, as I said, loved Hubert Humphrey.

But when I was a Little League baseball player at age ten, most of the kids were Catholic. And they never directed the word "kyke" to me personally, but they used it as kind of a slang negative word, "you kyke," "you this," "I'm going to Jew you down." That was also very prevalent in South Bay, only three Jewish families in my high school, again never directed at me, and me really not knowing what to make of it, but very painful to a child. Because, of course, as a child, you want to fit in, you don't want people—and, of course, I didn't understand why they would even say that about my religion, because I liked my parents and the people I met at Temple. They hadn't done anything wrong that I knew of. And, you know, of course, at that time within the Catholic Church, there was the—which later has changed, and it's a whole different

day in the Catholic Church, in terms of relations with Israel and Judaism—but in those days, there was the Christ killer, that was [6:13] for a certain time, so came out.

And then, the next thing that happened, which is tremendously connected to the word "kyke," was the Jackie Robinson movie, The Jackie Robinson Story, which I saw at age five. And here on the screen were two things that I related to: baseball, which I loved, still love, and racial prejudice or, you know, prejudice toward somebody and mistreatment of somebody, more verbally with Robinson in that movie than otherwise. And in the Jackie Robinson movie, which came out this weekend, there's a great scene with Harrison Ford when he tells the Jackie Robinson actor, "I was just there, and there's a little white boy who's imitating you."

And I talked to Andy Young about the movie, and Andy said, "The movie was great, the best civil rights movie I ever saw!" And he said, "I thought of you when I saw the movie," thinking of me. And he may have thought—I've been trying to get Jackie's teammates involved with the Civil Rights Game. I was the one that got Andy Young involved, through my RBI involvement. Went with him to Cincinnati when he gave the address there at the Civil Rights Game in 2009 or 10.

And I didn't identify with Jackie as a ball player. First of all, he was such—he was probably the best athlete in the country for many years, maybe of all time, him and Jim Thorpe were close. But Jackie was an unbelievable athlete. Broad-jumped 25'6" 1940. Would have been in the Olympics like his brother Mack, but they had no Olympics that year. What I identified with Jackie Robinson, I try to describe it as, "Whoa," because by that time Willie Mays is around, blacks are playing, you don't hear of any—I didn't know anything about this. I was ten years old. I just knew that blacks were in the Big Leagues. They were my heroes. Some were on the Dodgers. That's all I knew.

And I remember—the way I describe it is, in my ten-year-old mind, it was, "The grownups didn't tell me about this. They didn't tell me about any of this, that blacks and whites couldn't play baseball. I want to find out more about this. I want to find out about this." It really piqued my curiosity, and I wanted to be like Jackie Robinson, not as a player, because I didn't think that much at that time—when I eventually learned about Jackie Robinson, I knew I wasn't going to be Jackie Robinson, and no one else was going to be Jackie Robinson, by the way, either. But I couldn't run fast, and Jackie could certainly run fast.

But he was a healer. What Jackie did, what impressed me in that film, was he challenged the people that were saying mean things and hurting people's feelings, and he made it better, and he helped people whose feelings were hurt. And his feelings were hurt, but he was tough enough, strong enough, courageous enough, dedicated enough, you know, an exceptional enough athlete to overcome. And that was what fascinated me about him and that's what he became a hero for, not that he could play baseball, but that he could heal this terrible hurt that I felt, not to the extent that he felt or that African Americans felt, but it was still a pain, it was still a confusion to me.

My mother was smart enough when I was fifteen—and I didn't get bar mitzvah, mainly because I wanted to play baseball on Saturday when the religious school was and all my friends were playing baseball. And I didn't want to take that much time out to go to religious school because I would miss too many games, which my mom let me get away with after the divorce. My dad didn't care. He was a secular Jew. He didn't go. After World War II, he said, you know, "I don't believe in God after all—" you know, he was a secular Jew. He identified with Israel. My mother wanted me to have a Jewish education. My grandfather Siegel really wanted me to have one. When I got fifteen, she said, "You must be confirmed." And I fought it, but she forced

me, one of the first things she ever forced me to do. And then, I embraced it. All the other Jewish kids were just getting done with it. They couldn't wait to get done, and I discovered it!

And one of my buddies in the confirmation class was a guy named Mike Vogel, turned out to be first-team all-city in football and baseball at Westchester High, where I would have gone had I not moved, [0:10:00] played—was second-team all-American at Northridge, football, fullback. He played baseball; I don't know if he was all-America, and then played some pro football, another one of the non-Woody Allen-esque Jews who were athletes and strong and macho. And I love Woody Allen for his talent, not for his representation of the Jewish male, because some of us are not nebbish little wimps, no disrespect to Woody Allen, but we like to think of ourselves as very good athletes who competed, whose role models were Hank Greenberg, Sandy Koufax, Al Rosen, who was a boxer. And I had a chance to meet Al Rosen and Sandy Koufax and interview Sandy Koufax and spend some time with Al Rosen when he was out with Ted Williams in Iowa.

You know, the Jewish community needs to recognize there's a stream that runs from Hank and Al and Sandy through Mike Vogel, who was much better than me, but I was good enough to be on one of the best teams in the state, and lots of Jews are that good—Mike Safer at UCLA and his three sons, who were professional athletes, without—just naming a few. And that's my challenge to my own culture. When SNCC said, "Go work in your own community," I've got a lot of work to do in the Jewish community still, then and now.

DC: [Laughs]

WL: In fact, more now. So, you asked, though, about my early years, and I—

DC: So, your early years—?

WL: But the early years were influenced by my family, by the divorce, you know, coming from a broken home, which Jackie Robinson also didn't have a father. I mean, there was a lot of things that I could identify with Jackie Robinson. And then, I went up to UCLA.

And the other big influence at that early part of my life was John Kennedy. He was so charismatic. He was good-looking. Saw PT 109. He was a World War II hero. I mean, you couldn't have been much more heroic for me at that age than towing somebody through the water and these things. He was also very funny. He gave such a great speech—we're coming up on the anniversary in June, the night before Medgar Evers was killed—about the issue being as old as the Scriptures and as current as our Constitution. And, you know, Eisenhower was a grandfather figure to my generation. Kennedy was the New Frontier. And also, of course, the "Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country." That resonated. I was—you know, had I not gone South, I would have been attracted towards the Peace Corps. But I went—Dr. King found me before the Peace Corps found me. But I was very—you know, that was a great thing for my generation, in terms of idealism.

So, those were really—and then, I was very primed. And then, of course, when I was twelve, the Dodgers came out. They had three Jews on the team. They had Sandy Koufax, Norm Sherry and Larry Sherry, and what a great deal! By '59, Sandy was just coming into his own, and Norm Sherry was the World Series MVP, won two games, saved two games. So, as a Jewish kid, that was thrilling. And I actually got to work out with the Dodgers three times when I was thirteen and fourteen at the Coliseum, on the floor. Pete Reiser kind of adopted me, and Gil Hodges, as well. I got to sit on the bench with them, so that was pretty neat. So, I had a lot of great things in my childhood.

And then, Dr. King came to UCLA when I was eighteen and asked for volunteers, announced the Summer Community Organization and Political Education Project, which was known as SCOPE, S-C-O-P-E, Project. And made the national announcement at UCLA, I'm quite sure, because of Ralph Bunch and Jackie Robinson, each of whom had been on the front lines with him every year from '60 through '65.

DC: Now, how aware of the Civil Rights Movement or of King were you before he came?

WL: Actually, my—

DC: This is what? This is '65?

WL: Yeah. I'm going to namedrop, because Harris Wofford and I are good friends, along with Andy Young, who are my two big-name friends of mine and wonderful men. And Harris and I—Harris was just in Birmingham with Alma Powell and Diane McWhirter. And he mentioned—I said, "Well, maybe I'll be back in D.C. the anniversary of the March on Washington." He said, "Were you there?" And I said, "No, I wasn't yet seventeen. I was getting ready for high school football and I had my own column in the Valley News and Greensheet. I was the only kid that had his own column and covered B football." And then, when I got to play varsity, they sent Herb Carlton, I remember the name, a photographer, over with the orders: Only take pictures of Willy Leventhal. And, of course, he took six pictures, all of me, and one was in the picture the next day. So, I was very happy. The little bit I got to play, at least I got in the paper!

DC: [Laughs]

WL: So, we went to the city finals, which was on TV, and I was coaching third base instead of playing, which was extremely disappointing. But we were in the city finals, and that

was, for those days, it was a big deal. There was no divisions. It was one tournament, out of all of the city of L.A., and two teams made it, and Birmingham beat us. We had beat them five times in a row, and they beat us. And my teammates never kind of forgave themselves for losing that game. But, so those influences were going on.

And I was—what I said about Harris. I was aware of the March on Washington but, [0:15:00] you know, I was in California. I was sixteen. I was trying to get some playing time in football. I was little and not very big. I was at a new school. I had just been there, you know, three-quarters of my junior year and going in my senior year. But I knew what was going on. And also, the three guys that were killed in Mississippi, two of them were Jewish, that same summer, or the summer before—the next summer, the next summer, when I was a senior, my senior summer. That had a big impact on me.

The first time I really remember—as I told Harris, and the March on Washington—Jackie Robinson was far more the influence on my life than Martin Luther King. Twenty months later, Dr. King came and wanted, you know, asked for volunteers. But I remember very clearly being aware enough—Dr. King went into Selma January first at the request of many of the educators. Some of the SNCC people will say that they did all the work, and Dr. King came and took the credit. There was a group of educators and town leaders, and the way Andy and Hosea tell about it, SNCC did great work in Selma, but they were beaten down. The repression was terrible. The violence was terrible. And unfortunately, the media didn't cover it enough, and the Justice Department didn't do enough, and they suffered a lot of losses, as they had in Mississippi.

But the fact was they were being beaten down, and we did need the media there. And those leaders in the town, and they're very easy to research and find—Amelia Boynton was

certainly one of them, and there were some others in the school system—requested Dr. King and SCLC came in. And I remember the article in the paper January second.

And the reason I remember so well I had a girlfriend up in Big Sur that I was trying to commute back and forth back and forth from UCLA, which was quite difficult. But her father was a Navy veteran. He was in the hospital; he had a drinking problem. And he was critical of Dr. King, and he was trying to tell me, "Well, in the service it didn't work, and the blacks—Negroes were this and that." And I said, "You know what? This is about voting." I said, "I don't care what you're talking about. This is a democracy. They're trying to register to vote. You're not going to persuade me that he's doing something wrong."

So, I had that conversation with my girlfriend's stepfather. And, I mean, I had noticed it in the paper anyway. And I think I was—again, the killings in '64, and Freedom Summer. But that was my first time I can personally now remember knowing what Martin Luther King was doing. You know, it was news when he went into Selma. And then, I followed that. Of course, it was big news. And the Selma March, you know, Bloody Sunday, was it? I think it was Bloody Sunday.

DC: Um-hmm, Bloody Sunday, yeah.

WL: There was Turn Around Tuesday, they called it, and Bloody Sunday. And, you know, little did I know that Hosea Williams would become one of my dearest, dearest, closest friends. I would have, at this point, the only book about him. He's got a manuscript that he flew me down for, to work on, and he would, "Willy, we're going to Savannah. We're going to go down to Attapulgus." Then, we'd be in the office, and a poor person would come, and he'd interrupt our work and go counsel the poor person, which is a wonderful thing about him, because he had the Poor People's Church of Love, Martin Luther King Poor People's Church of

Love at the time. He had a storefront on Peachtree. Andy Young had an office on the forty-fifth floor, almost across the street. But that manuscript is still sitting with his family, that we were going to do, so my book is the only one.

But he led that March on Bloody Sunday with John Lewis. And Dr. King came a month and a half later to UCLA. And had I not gone, I don't think I would have gone South. But Dr. King was so impressive that I was ready to go but still afraid. And it took actually a friend to confront me, a Jewish friend I played football with in high school. And he was going and he said, "Why don't you come?" And I had no excuse except, "I'm scared," which I was. I was waiting—I was trying to be a counselor in a prison, but I had gotten a thing saying, "You're too young. You can't be a counselor in a prison until you're twenty-one." I had been interested in being a social worker at that time in my life, [laughs] which is sort of what I did in my life anyway.

And so, Dr. King made an appeal at UCLA, made the national announcement. And they had—Joel Siegel was one of the key organizers. Rick Tuttle, another key organizer, even if he didn't want to talk about it in your interview, and he was actually our advisor. He was our—you know, he was an old man of twenty-five.

DC: [Laughs]

WL: We were all eighteen or nineteen or twenty, and Rick was kind of our on-campus advisor. In fact, when I was arrested in Americus with John Lewis, and others of the UCLA group were with us—the pictures are in that book, front page news, I have the video for CBS, NBC, and ABC, which Joel got me—Rick actually was connected enough politically at that time to get to Glenn Anderson, who was lieutenant governor for Pat Brown. Pat Brown was out of the state. And Glenn Anderson telegrammed Carl Sanders and said, "We have five UCLA students missing in Americus," because in those days, when you got arrested, like the guys in Mississippi,

you didn't know whether you were going to go out in the country. In fact, my first arrest in Americus, I was the happiest civil rights worker when they turned towards the jail and not towards the country! That was my—I wasn't so worried about getting arrested. [0:20:00] I was worried that I might not go to jail.

DC: Right.

WL: And so, Rick did that. There was, at one point, a telegram with my name and the others' names that Rick arranged. So, Rick was very involved with SCOPE.

DC: What were the charges in Americus?

WL: "Disturbing divine worship." I went two weeks. I went the first week, just me and John. There may have been some other people behind us, but me and John were in the front. And the fire chief—it was actually quite an interesting experience I've told many times. I went to Americus from Macon. Hosea wanted people to go down to see a hot movement.

And I think because of my athletic background and being little, I had to—you know, they talk about giving a hundred and ten percent. When you're 5'8" and a hundred and forty pounds, and most of the guys are six feet and bigger, if you look at my teams, I'm always one of the smaller ones, although in high school it was kind of a small team. I'd say half of us were small, comparatively, to the guys over six feet. You work harder. You have to work harder, or you can't compete.

And I wasn't as gifted. I was good enough to be with the most gifted in L.A., but at the bottom of the group. And the only reason I was with the most gifted, and when say the most gifted, this is Steve Sogge, who played quarterback at USC and then for the Dodgers; Tom Griffin, who was on my team, who played twelve years in the Big League; Jeff Pentland, who is in the Hall of Fame at Arizona State, was Sammy Sousa's hitting coach, was the hitting coach

for the Dodgers, now with Seattle. I mean, there's a difference. Those guys end up in the Big League, you know, and in the Hall of Fame.

Guys like me, if we work real hard, we can compete with them. And so, I wasn't that gifted. I was good enough—I mean, some guys don't make the team. I made the team. So, I was good enough to do that, but so I was at the bottom rung of the best in L.A., which is good, you know. So, I could play when I integrated the Macon Bombers in that league in Macon.

JB: Can we pause for a second?

[Recording stops and then resumes]

DC: We have to pause every now and then to save the digital files. Otherwise, they get too long.

WL: Okay. So—

JB: We're back.

DC: We're back.

WL: What we were talking about is the UCLA thing.

DC: Yeah.

WL: So, Dr. King came. Are we back on?

DC: Yeah.

WL: So, Dr. King came. Joel Siegel really was taking the lead, raised some money. Dr. King had had a lunch at URC, University Religious Conference.

DC: And for people who don't know, can you tell us who Joel Siegel is or went on to be?

WL: Joel Siegel at that time was the humor editor of the Daily Bruin and was in Celts, which was a spirit organization. And, as he said, "I later became Joel Siegel on Good Morning America entertainment editor." And he did one piece on Israel, as well. He did a little other

journalism, but mainly he's known for entertainment and movie reviews, which he was very successful at, very well-loved at.

He came over to Queens College when I published this book. We did a program there. UCLA has never done a program for my book. Joel would have flown out for one, but they refused. They weren't interested. They weren't interested for six years in doing even a plaque for Dr. King and only did it because they were ordered to. Queens College embraced us. That's where Andy Goodman went to school. He's one who was killed with James Chaney and Micky Schwerner.

So, Dr. King—I remember there were two things in his speech I'd be happy to tell you that really impressed me when I listened to it. I had, again, not yet decided I would volunteer, but wanted to and felt it was the right thing to do. Do you want to know the two things that impressed me?

DC: Umm.

WL: One thing, he talked about the three versions of love in Greek, agape, philia, and eros. As a teenager with hormones, I was very familiar with the eros, but agape and philia were totally new concepts to me and very interesting topics that you could divide love into other things, because at that point eros is pretty overwhelming. When you're eighteen, the hormones are there.

DC: [Laughs] Yeah.

WL: And, of course, I loved my family and I had friends that were women that I didn't think of in a sexual way, but that was a pretty macho Playboy-time culture for young males in America. So, that was very interesting to me. And also it was a way of understanding and putting into a theoretical context why I was interested and upset that people were being mistreated,

because they weren't showing agape or philia, and that was what, supposedly, America was about, "land of the free, home of the brave," "out of many one." What could be more philia and agape than that?

So, and the other thing was he had a great sense of humor, because Dr. King, about halfway through his speech—he was talking about the history, many of the good things that had happened—and he said, "And I could stop here," he said, "but, first of all, Baptist preachers don't give short sermons."

DC: [Laughs]

WL: And then, everybody laughed, of course. And he said, "But I need to tell you the other part, too, that there's a lot more work to do." And he was just a likable guy. He wasn't giving the kind of oration that he gave in the march. I mean, I have the tape that I got before. I think it's now restricted. I don't think you can get it from Audio-Visual at UCLA. But before then, I did get a copy and, actually, I provided UCLA with a transcript that I paid for, without any thanks.

But he was [0:25:00]—he was a person—and, of course, Franklin Murphy introduced him, and he said, "This is, I think, when legend meets reality." And he said, "This is the moral leader of our country." Franklin Murphy was taking somewhat of a risk, because the FBI was going around to every place that invited Dr. King and trying to sabotage it.

And, I mean, because I wrote the report to President Reagan and the Congress on the first King holiday for Mrs. King, and I read all the congressional testimony and—since researching David Garrow's slimy, sleazy book, using Hoover's files, which Taylor Branch also does, in I think a very disreputable way—have researched much of this from the nineteen volumes that are at the UCLA library of the House Assassinations Commission Report, who they start out that

report by saying, “We hesitate to include many of these files,” so the reader has an understanding “we are including them but we are cautioning the reader that these represent a shameful chapter in American history and these are unverified attributions towards people’s lives and political affiliations,” which is never found in Taylor Branch’s book or David Garrow’s book after they heavily quote those same files.

They quote the same files that the Congress investigated with hundreds of thousands of dollars over many years, produced a report, nineteen volumes, but they—then they—and in my book, that that’s, some of, part of, is in that book, went to Cass Canfield at Harper and Row, and he wanted it, but he wanted me to put sex things in it, just as Holt, Rinehart and Winston did, just as many New York publishers want to sell books. I said no. Taylor Branch and David Garrow said yes. They won Pulitzer prizes. I didn’t.

I was on “Tony Brown’s Journal” just after David Garrow’s book, and he said, “Mr. Leventhal, you’re challenging the Pulitzer prize. And some people may say you’re jealous of David Garrow because he won it, and you didn’t.” And I was a little caught off-guard, because Tony Brown and I had actually arranged, which he didn’t want me to say on-camera, but he had worked with me a little bit on the background of our interview. But it was still a challenge to go on national TV and be talking about Dr. King’s personal life at all, because it’s not something that’s anybody’s business, in my opinion. But I said, “Well,” but I wasn’t expecting that question and I said, “Well, you know, I would be dishonest if I said I wouldn’t have loved, or wouldn’t love to win a Pulitzer prize for a book I did on Dr. King. But I would not want a Pulitzer prize for that book. I would not want anything to do with that book. A Pulitzer prize is not more important to me than telling the truth and not using these kinds of files.”

But anyway, that's a long answer to that visit by Dr. King. There was a committee set up. Joel, again, was very involved. Rick Tuttle, I'm sure—Rick may have mentioned Alex White to you. I don't know if he did, but Alex White, who's not in good health now, ran the service organization at UCLA to send people internships. Alex was involved at the time.

And I was just a freshman. And, of course, my excuse to myself was, when I was not going to do it because I was afraid, was that, "Oh, I'm just a freshman." I kept thinking of reasons: "Oh, they've got a lot of people. I'm sure—I'm just a freshman—they've got better people than me." When the real reason was, [laughs] "I know they're going to kill me, just like they did the guys last summer." But when my friend confronted me, I just had that decision. You know, that was my whole life up till then: hearing the kyke word, Jackie Robinson, you know, the March on Washington, some black friends I had.

What I did write—what I told Harris Wofford, I did write an editorial. I wrote only sports for my high school paper except two articles. One was about cigarette smoking, because my mom had already had an operation for lung cancer, and she died three years later from lung cancer. And the stress of me being in the Movement, I think, was not particularly good for her, so it's very personal experience for me in that sense, that I put stress on my family by making the decision to get involved and stay involved. My dad was very happy that I went. He wasn't so happy I stayed involved after I came back, after three arrests and so on, because he said, "You've done your part. You've served your tour. You don't have to keep doing this." And I said, "Well, they've asked me to be the college coordinator."

So, I—and I was very involved. I think it was a very religious thing for me, as well. I think I found a real religious connection to my Judaism, and the Judaism was a big connection to the explanation of how to respond to antiSemitism. So—

DC: Can I ask you to talk a little bit more about that for a second, because I often look at—I often feel that people's civil rights experiences are very much like a conversion experience, what they experience there and how they relate to it. I wonder if you could talk a little bit more about that.

WL: Yeah. I wanted to finish. There was one other. What was I—well, I'll eventually wander back to it later.

DC: Come back. [Laughs]

WL: But, well, not so much a conversion that—there's a letter in that book. It was a letter I wrote to my then-roommate, Charlie Goldberg, who he took it to the *Daily Bruin* and published it. And I've actually heard it from some of the other people [0:30:00] that were in the SCOPE project. I had not been around a lot of black people. Only two were in my high school. I played baseball and football against the kids from San Fernando [0:30:10], who were Mexican and black at that time. And so, I didn't have a lot of personal experience.

Oh, the editorial in the high school paper, I do want to talk about that first. That came about because Grant at that time was a very TV, Hollywood kind of place. Tom Selleck went there, was a good basketball player, track guy. James Keach, who's a good friend of mine, lives up the road here, married to Jane Seymour, "Dr. Quinn." James did a great movie about Johnny Cash and The Long Riders with his brother Stacy. Many other Hollywood people, one of whom was a guy named Kim Weiskopf, whose dad wrote *I Love Lucy*. Kim, being well-to-do, went to a Beverly Hills camp. One of the counselors was a black guy who went to Cal State L.A. He was an all-American football player at Cal State, when they still had a football team.

I went to a party that summer, my junior summer, with Kim. And this African American, in those days would have said Negro, guy was there, nicest guy in the world and great singer. He

sang at the party. I met him, nicest guy at the world. Then Proposition 14 was on the ballot in ’64, which was the anti-discrimination housing thing, which lost, by the way, and the Rumford Act got then declared, I believe, unconstitutional.

The other editorial besides smoking was about this African American young man, who I named at the time. I don’t remember his name anymore. It’s still in the Grant Odyssey files. And I said I was with my friend, Kim Weiskopf, who was the photographer for the paper, later went and wrote *Good Times* and created *Full House, Nine to Five, Married with Children*, died recently, not too long, with cancer, sadly, but had a great career in Hollywood, followed his father. Norman Lear got him his first job. Nice when your father is friends with Norman Lear. But Kim took me to the party, and I said I was at the party with Kim and I met this guy. He’s a great guy, he’s an all-American football player, he’s a great student, he sings great. I said, “But some people wouldn’t want him for a neighbor because he’s Negro.” And I was mature enough at seventeen to say—I think it was one of the better things I’ve ever written. And I told Harris, I said, “I think, you know, I was with the March on Washington in spirit, if not—” I was mature enough to write that article, based on my friendship with him.

But the conversion, to go back to your question, was when we then went to the South, there was an immersion into the black community. So, those of us who wanted to feel we looked at everybody the same, you can’t look at everybody the same if you’re only around white people, because black people look different, not better or worse. It’s the same thing I would say with gay people. It’s not better or worse; it’s different. I don’t know why we can’t just say people can be different, and that’s okay. That doesn’t mean we don’t like them. It doesn’t mean we’re homophobic. We just say, hey, a marriage between a man and a man, and a woman and a woman, is different. It doesn’t have to be the same.

I've always felt: pick a new word. Say it's "my loved one." "This is my loved one." I mean, I think we should change it all. Men and women should say, "This is my loved one." Take the word "marriage" away, because that offends older conservative people, who don't hate people, but hate that they're losing what they consider is very sacred for generations and history and blah-blah-blah, what they said at the Supreme Court. I thought the discussion was pretty good. I think we should get away from marriage and let everybody talk about their loved one. And some people's loved ones are their children, like Dr. King, agape, philia, eros. You can have eros with a man, eros with a woman. I don't care! But I don't want—I hate to see all this division and pain about the subject. As somebody with this background, and people have suggested that get the state out of it. But I think we should have a new word for it, not "marriage"— "my loved one, my loved one," and just say some things are different.

And, again, it's different when you're not around black people. The great story is, and other people that I've—Sherie Labedis, who's written a new book, and another woman who's writing a book, Maria Gitin, University of Alabama, about SCOPE, SCOPE workers, after my effort to organize our first—SNCC has a reunion every year, multiple ones, every ten years, fifty years! The attorney general comes to their reunion!

DC: Right.

WL: I had one reunion. We've only in SCOPE had one, ever. There was a professor from Albany, New York, who did his group in South Carolina. Andy Young came, because it was in Atlanta, and Andy's my friend, and he's so nice to have come, and that's why I got an article in the Atlanta Journal Constitution. Fox News was going to come, but we quit a little too early.

But a number of us have said it was so different when we immersed in the black community. And within a few weeks, black people just looked normal. They weren't different

anymore, because we saw them every day. And then, they didn't all look the same either, because they're all different shapes and shades, they have different lips, different noses, just like white people! We're all different, you know, but with the skin colors, different hues.

And, in fact, the great story there is that a young man, not anymore, [0:35:00] but at the time, who worked—from Carlyle, not Carlyle. Carlyle? Carlyle, Pennsylvania. I'm forgetting the college. I can't think of the name, but anyway, he had the same experience I did. And he said when he knew it was time to go—he stayed extra, like I did. He stayed till November, and he said his mother called him, and he thought, "Why is this white woman calling me?"

DC: [Laughs]

WL: And he said, "That's wrong!" He said, "I knew I needed a break at that time."

And I know, for me, the way I describe it is in the beginning the black people looked different. By the end of the summer, the white people looked different. You know, I didn't think I was black. But black people were my friends, black people were my baseball teammates. Some of the white people literally wanted to kill me and did try and kill me. So, the white people looked different to me, and just within three months. It shows how—my background is sociology—it shows how acculturation.

So, one of the conversions is that emotionally, and I said in that letter, I used to want and used to believe I wasn't prejudiced and saw everybody the same. But now I really feel that way because I know black people. I know more black people than I used to [36:06] Negro. And so, that's one part of the conversion is that when you have so many black friends and you're living with a black family, that becomes your life. And you have no more doubts that you're going to treat people different because they're black, because everybody's black that you knew. So, they

become—and then, the young beautiful black women become young beautiful women and the good athletes become good athletes, and the color fades to very little significance at that point.

DC: Um-hmm. So, let me just ask you where you went, if you could just tell us the experience of that, that summer.

WL: So, the way the SCOPE project was organized, the board of SCLC, at Hosea Williams' request—and he developed the project, which is in my book, The SCOPE of Freedom, the founding papers essentially—approved it in December, and they targeted a hundred and twenty counties. They didn't target—it was much like a battle plan. Hosea Williams was a World War II veteran, was in General George Patton's what they called the Negro Tank Brigade.

A great friend of mine, Jim Colaianni, who was a Catholic lay leader, who was at that time executive editor of *Ramparts* with Jann Wenner. In fact, Jann Wenner tried to convince him to go partners with this new magazine that he was going to start. I think it was called *Rolling Stone*. But Jann was only like twenty-one, and Jim said, "Yeah, Jann, that's really cool, but we grownups are doing other stuff." And so, he didn't found *Rolling Stone* with Jann Wenner. But Jann worked at *Ramparts* as a young kid.

But Jim started a business and did sermons, which I think his son is still doing. I think Jim is still alive in New Jersey. He must be in his eighties. He was also a World War II veteran. I dated his daughter very briefly, Karen Colaianni Johnson, who is in L.A., who I met through somebody in the McGovern campaign, yada, yada, yada, all these connections through politics and civil rights.

But, so, and the reason I bring up Jim is he did an issue of *Ramparts* about Selma, and he did it in a military way, where he had a joint chiefs of staff, almost—on the white side, Jim Clark, and on the black side, Dr. King. But he did it as a military battle, and that was very

apropos and very brilliant. That's the spring issue of *Ramparts* magazine somewhere in the library.

But Hosea really had kind of a battle plan. And they picked a hundred and twenty counties, which are listed in the book. These were not the worst hundred and twenty counties. These were the hundred and twenty counties where, if they got another thirty or forty percent Negro voters, they could knock out the racists and get in a moderate. Some of the counties, like Lowndes County, there were no blacks at all—I mean, you had a longer road. That's why the Black Panther Party was appropriate in many, many ways and a very good thing in Mississippi in many places, because you have to move outside the party. Dr. King and SCOPE and Andy Young, they wanted to move within the Democratic Party and overturn the worst racist counties.

And Andy Young has told me that those same hundred and twenty SCOPE counties all went for Barack Obama and may have made the difference in the election in 2008. You can talk to Andy about that, whether—I haven't seen those statistics. In his congressional, I mean, his governor's campaign in Georgia, the SCOPE counties in South Georgia also, again, were counties that came out heavily for him. And many of those were, also, where SCOPE and SNCC worked together.

DC: Interesting to do a longitudinal study about that.

WL: But so, but they wanted two thousand volunteers to man these hundred and twenty counties. They only got five hundred. So, when people tell you, "Well, it was all over, nothing going on," more people got killed in the year of '65, civil rights workers, than in '64. It was still quite dangerous. I'm sure Charles Sherrod will verify that and other people from Southwest Georgia.

And so, and also at that point, [0:40:00] whites were getting killed because blacks were starting to shoot back. That happened in Americus. Unfortunately, a bystander who was white, Andrew Whatley, who I consider a martyr of the Movement, had just joined the Marines, was a bystander when they were throwing rocks at the marchers. And there was a black car, a car came with two black guys. They weren't part of the Movement, and they were tired of people being abused, and they shot back.

You know, I got shot at twice in Americus. We didn't get to shoot back. That wasn't part of our thing. But there, you know, there were many SNCC people that were carrying guns by then. But not—in fact, I tell the story in my article, I think you saw, from B'nai Brith magazine, Judson Ford, a Korean War vet, stuck a .38 in his belt when we were going out to get [0:40:47]. We're not in a demonstration now. There was a transition period going through Deacons for Defense and Justice in Louisiana, who were already openly carrying guns. But within the Movement, within Dr. King, during demonstrations, etcetera, that was our philosophy and that was the philosophy of SCOPE. So—

DC: Did you go through specific training?

WL: Yeah. So, but you asked to where I was—absolutely, the orientation schedule, which is in there, was fascinating. But because we only could get five hundred, because of the danger—that's why people didn't volunteer. And it was almost all-white and not—you know, there were many blacks in the South, but not too many blacks were coming out of the North to go south. Stoney Cooks was one, and I hope you get a chance to talk to Stoney in Washington. But Stoney could tell you about that. But Jesse Jackson was another who came into Selma at that time. That was when he got involved with SCLC in Selma, not in a leadership role, by the way; that came later. But Stoney did have a leadership role very quickly. People with skills

immediately—there was a lady named Kit Clarke, who I just saw, with SCOPE, whose papers are now at the Schomburg, she had some skills. She went to a leadership role in SCOPE with Hosea. Hosea was good at picking people. He picked me. I don't know—hopefully that was a good pick, also.

DC: [Laughs]

WL: So, we couldn't man the whole hundred and twenty counties. We went essentially into ninety counties. They had black leaders in all the twenty counties that had requested people. They were working, and some of us were shifted around. I worked in two counties primarily, but went into four or five other counties for demonstrations. So, [coughs] that was—they sent out recruiting teams between Selma, between the first of the year, while Selma was going on, they had recruiting teams all around the country at colleges. And Dr. King himself was the recruiter at UCLA, so I always got to tell people Dr. King recruited me, not Hosea, not Andy. I said Dr. King recruited me, so I don't have to answer to you guys so much as you might want me to.

DC: [Laughs]

WL: And I think he also knew that I had been picked, because I had talked to him personally, got to thank him, when they called us in for a meeting. But, so we went to Atlanta. We were housed at Morris Brown College in the dorms. I had—I recently said I may have learned more in one week at Morris Brown than in six years with a BA and MA at UCLA, particularly now the way I feel about UCLA and what they've done with the SCOPE history and taking down Dr. King's photo and Franklin Murphy's photo from that wonderful day when Dr. King came—to honor, by the way, Jackie Robinson and Ralph Bunch, who the UCLA people loved to make money on and market, particularly Jackie Robinson.

And Rachel Robinson does not know this, but I hope to tell her before too long—I just missed her at the Civil Rights Game. Sat across from her with Andy, and went out to give her the little thing, and she left early. But I'll see Mrs. Robinson at some point. Andy knows. But, you know, there's only so many battles you fight, and this is my battle. I got the plaque up, anyway.

So, we had this wonderful orientation. If you'll hand me the book—well, I'll tell you who was there at the orientation. It's amazing, amazing. I consider it the best week of education in American history. That's a big statement! Let me tell you who was there. Dr. King spoke to us. Bayard Rustin organized and ran it. Hosea spoke to us and was one of the organizers. Norman Hill, who had been at CORE, was Bayard's assistant. Then we had people like C. Vann Woodward, John Hope Franklin from academia. Lillian Smith was there, didn't speak. We also had Septima Clark, who started the Citizenship Education Schools. We had Vernon Jordan. We had Charles Morgan from the legal organization, ACLU, national leader. We had Clarence Mitchell from the NAACP, the head of their office there. We had the field staff, who oriented us. We had Michael Harrington, who had just written *The Other America*, which was a key book about poverty. We had a number of government people. We had a Jewish man, who was head of the Meatpackers Union, whose picture is in there. Why am I forgetting his name? He was there.

John Doar came down. He was not on the schedule, but he came down and told us how to make reports to him—which Joel Siegel did when my life was threatened in Macon—which resulted in thirty-three gas stations getting desegregated in three states, because John Doar had trained us, and John Doar ordered J. Edgar Hoover [0:45:00] to investigate. And once that happened, the FBI did a very good investigation, which is recorded in my FBI file that's in the book.

So, it was an extraordinary week. I've forgotten a few people, but just the people I mentioned to you, it's a pretty all-star cast of people to speak to us in a week. And Dr. King addressed us. And the amazing thing about Dr. King's speech, when he closed with "Free at last, free at last," or he said, "Protestants and—" like he said in the March on Washington, he said, "Jews and Gentiles, Protestants and—black and white, Protestants and Catholics, Jews and Gentiles," when he spoke to us, knowing that there were young people, some of them might be atheist or agnostic, he said, "Muslims and Hindus and nonbelievers."

Now, here he is, because he had been to India, he knew about Pakistan and India, the Muslims and the Hindus fighting there, and he knew about Kashmir. And I've talked to—Andy Young has been to Kashmir. He was happy that I even knew about Kashmir, because I'm not a global person. But, to me, given our world now, with the things that are going on in the world, in the Islamic world and still with Pakistan and India, that Dr. King went out of his way to say that—and that recording is available, by the way. That was at Morris Brown College at Joe Louis Gymnasium. Such a far-reaching, visionary thing to talk about to a college group. And now, as we look at it, he was talking about we need to heal these divisions of race and religion, and not just among Jews and Gentiles—among Hindus and Muslims, although in those days we called—I don't know how, in those days, it was "Moslem." But, you know, we've changed it to "Muslim." But he said, "Moslem" and Hindu. And I know the reason he said it was because of Gandhi, and India and Pakistan.

So, it was an amazing week. We were all energized. Originally, as with a number of chapters, the gentleman Larry Scott Butler is the one who talked about his mom. And he had a lot of similar experiences. He went off to Bogalusa, and the man at the house where he stayed had a gun, same thing, and said, "My daughter's here!" Because Larry Scott Butler said the same

thing, "But we're nonviolent." He said, "Might be. But nobody is going to kill my daughter." You know?

And what Andy Young always said, he said, "Had it not been for nonviolence, the South would have been like Northern Ireland." He said, "Because everybody in the South, in rural areas, they all hunt. And then, most of the people had been in World War II, and everybody had guns."

DC: Or Korea, yeah, yeah.

WL: Yeah, from Korea and World War II. It was not that long after—fifteen years after World War II, or twenty years after World War II.

DC: Right, right.

WL: So, if you look at it that way, both SNCC and SCLC, through nonviolence, you could say they saved the country. Because if we had been like Northern Ireland at that point in our history, with Africa becoming independent—I always tell people this was about America, what one of the Swedish guys who was at the co-op—I ran in the all-U cross-country championship team for intramurals, and it was me and a guy who was a very good runner and a guy from Sweden, and, you know, he told me, he said, "You know, when my mother talked about, when in Europe, when they saw headlines about Alabama, it wasn't about Alabama, It was about America." And when Russia was saying, "Follow us, independent countries. We're the great country. We're socialism. Everybody is taken care of." And we said, "No, follow us. We're about freedom." And yet, we weren't about freedom to a significant number. You know, it was the double [48:25].

We have—you know, it's a great—and that's why when I'm in Montgomery, I try to tell the whites and blacks—and many of the whites, they just overwhelmingly in the Senate and the

House passed resolutions in Alabama to pardon the Scottsboro Boys, without one dissenting vote, not one. The governor is going to sign it.

And they've now recognized and embraced, "This was for everybody, this Movement," and many of the whites say it. The whites say, "It freed us from our guilt and it freed us from the terrorism of the Klan." You know? And there were many whites who stood up, Virginia Durr, who I write about in here, Aubrey Williams, wonderful people, you know. They really had some courage, [laughs] because they lived there the whole time. We left, you know, because we weren't living there, or some of us stayed a little longer, or whatever. I'm one of the few that moved there. And I like Alabama, and Alabama had changed a great deal, a great deal.

DC: Um-hmm.

JB: [Let's pause].

WL: If I could stretch here for one second.

DC: Yeah, a quick—

[Recording stops and then resumes]

JB: Okay, we're going.

WL: And I'll try and be shorter to respond to your questions.

DC: [Laughs] Oh, don't—

WL: Well, I mentioned one other [0:49:38] in Alabama is Millard Fuller, from Lanett, and his wife, Linda, from Montgomery, who started Habitat, who I met. I wrote the first article about Millard and housing, because that started at Koinonia Farm, Sunshine Acres. That's where it started. And I actually did my R&R out of Americus over at Koinonia for a couple of days.

DC: Yeah.

WL: When we got out of jail, they took us out there. I met Clarence Jordan, who was, you know, the founder of that place, [0:50:00] and I became very close friends with Florence—by the way, the uncle of Hamilton. Five Jordan brothers, one integrationist—that was Clarence—and who knew Hamilton Jordan quite well, and Hamilton knew his Uncle Clarence quite well.

DC: Yeah, Koinonia was really, as you say, an R&R place for the Movement.

WL: Well, it was its own place, too. I mean, they had their own history.

DC: Oh, yeah.

WL: But, from—did they do that in Albany, too? They went up to Koinonia?

DC: Yep, yep.

WL: I got to swim in a "waterhole."

DC: [Laughs]

WL: Something that a boy from California—two big country things I had in the South: One was the waterhole at Koinonia. The other was my first baseball game with the Macon Bombers in Round Oak, George, which was in the middle of a cow pasture that had been—trees had been cut down, and there were [whispers loudly] cow paddies on the baseball field.

DC: [Laughs]

WL: This was not something that a boy from L.A., who played on pretty good baseball fields, was used to, because my mind said, "Well, what if the ball hits the cow paddy?" Country boys don't care about that stuff!

DC: Yeah. Play on! [Laughs]

WL: Yeah, and fortunately, the ball didn't hit the cow paddy.

DC: Well, that's a good segue to—so, you know, take us past the orientation into your assignment.

WL: Yes. We had the orientation. It was an incredible orientation. And like—the same thing with Larry Butler, the reason I was saying—originally, they got assigned one place. We got assigned to Macon County, which was small, but we had one of the biggest groups. We had twenty. Brandeis had a big group, which they don't seem to be interested in. My Jewish brethren don't seem to be interested that a small college had as big as Columbia, UCLA, Berkeley. I'm working on that, and they will get interested, I guarantee you, in the next couple of years, or they will be very embarrassed. Maybe this may embarrass them.

But Jonathan Sarna, who is the guy who spoke at the B'nai Brith convention, who is the advisor to the National Jewish Museum, is there. I gave him the book. He hasn't called me back yet. I will deal with Dr. Sarna, who is very important, distinguished, and, of course, Willy Leventhal is not, he dropped out before he got his Ph.D. at UCLA. But this is mission, and you're giving me a little forum it, so I appreciate that.

DC: So, they assigned all the UCLA people together as a group?

WL: Yeah. That was the reason. And they also wanted to assign us where they could get some numbers, which was Macon, Georgia, where they had a great local leader, a number of great local leaders. Bill Randall, William P. Randall, was one. They had a man named Tom Jackson, who became the first black judge, who was the only black lawyer in town. There weren't many in Georgia at that time. And he went South. He returned South, and he became a—he was also a former semipro baseball player. And, of course, his family and his wife's family thought they were completely crazy to go South. But he knew Mr. Randall and he went back and—courageous guy. And there was also a guy named Louis [52:27], many others. There was the NAACP Youth Council.

But Mr. Randall was the town leader. He was a great leader. Joel Siegel talked about him on *Good Morning America*. He was somewhat of a mentor to Joel, although Joel never went back, either. A lot of people, once they left, they didn't want to go back, for whatever reasons. I did, because I became friends with Hosea and Andy and Mr. Randall. And Joel went back and did a great piece for *Good Morning America* that I was kind of a field producer of.

But so, you know, my position was the SCLC—we're on assignment from them. That's where they want us, that's where we went. It wasn't a great discussion. But there was some romanticism, and also maybe we're needed more in the rural areas. But that soon ended when Hosea said, "You are ordered to go to Americus. [Laughing] I am the general. You are the troops. You go where I tell you. That's the way it works here." And that's what we did. There was no discussion as they had at SNCC that whites were taking control. Hosea made it very clear who was in charge.

Willie Bolden, who was an ex-Marine and a very tough guy—there was no cognitive dissonance about who was going to be running anything. SCLC ran it. Hosea ran it, and his troops ran it. And we learned, and if we did well, we got asked to join the staff, and then we had a little more stature on the staff. But there was no confusion in our group. Hosea ran it. We didn't have that problem. And Mr. Randall ran it.

And there was some—anyway, so that was one thing. Larry Scott Butler's group was a great story. It was that—I've got to tell this story. Larry Scott is down in Florida. They got assigned to some county. And then, SCLC said no. Hosea said, "We need you," or the guy that was Hosea's guy there—I think Minister Harrell, I think his name, Reverend Harrell—said, "No, we need you to go to Clayton, Alabama, Barbour County, Alabama." They said, "But we already talked to these people here. We need—you know, they were expecting us." They said, "Barbour

County is the home of George Wallace. We need you to go raise hell in George Wallace—." And they said they immediately said, "When do we leave?"

DC: [Laughs]

WL: And they had big demonstrations. They tore that town up. And apparently George Wallace came down one time. And his comment was—he sat at the auto repair place, watched them march to the courthouse, and he said, "That's the best-looking, best-dressed group of civil rights workers I've ever seen!" Because we were told that one of the reasons SNCC didn't like us—because we were told not to have beards, told to look more preppy, and to be careful about holding—interracial couples in public because—it's not a criticism of SNCC.

They were courageous, wonderful people, but they made the white people even angrier [0:55:00] because they flaunted it sometimes. Not that it didn't need to be flaunted, in some sense, but it also could get people hurt and killed and so on. And not that that wasn't of value. That was one of our roles. If we got killed, that brought the media, and that changed things. That's a sad thing to say, but black people's lives weren't too important in those days.

So, but, and so, we were told to dress well. And George Wallace noticed: "That's the best-dressed group of civil rights workers I ever saw!" [Laughs] Apparently—I mean, that's what Larry Scott Butler told me. That was his only comment, which I think is hilarious.

DC: [Laughs]

WL: But they registered a lot of people. That was one of the—second-most active movements in SCOPE. Americus was probably the first. And they're all in the incidence reports in that book. There's about twenty pages of incidence reports. Not everything made the incidence reports.

JB: Why don't you hold up the book?

WL: Okay.

JB: Hold up the book and explain what it is.

WL: Be happy to. *The SCOPE of Freedom: The Leadership of Hosea Williams with Dr. King's Summer '65 Student Volunteers*. There's Hosea and Andy in St. Augustine, where Jackie Robinson, by the way, was. Jackie Robinson was in Birmingham. Jackie Robinson was in "Al-benny," as they call it. Did Charles Sherrod, because I know you talked to him, did he talk about Jackie Robinson? Jackie went there, at Dr. King's request, after the churches were burned. And they couldn't get the media.

I have an interview with Andy Young, in the book you have, about that. But I have this great photo of Jackie Robinson with Wyatt Tee Walker in Albany near a burned-out church. And Andy said in the interview, he said, "If you want to talk about being in harm's way, being in rural Southwest Georgia after the church has been burned out by the Klan, that's as much in harm's way as you can be in those days," because you're not in a demonstration. The demonstrations, they had the media there.

But there's Jackie. Didn't have to be there. He's from Cairo, not too far from there. But he was on the front lines over and over again. That's one of the reasons he's even more my hero now, I think, that I know more about him than when I was young. But he was a healer, and God bless him. God bless him. I'm glad he's getting the recognition.

God bless Bud Selig. I got to meet Bud through Andy. That's the only reason Bud would want to meet me really.

DC: [Laughs]

WL: Not that he—just because he has too many other things to do. He's a nice man. He's done a great job retiring Jackie's number. Harrison Ford did a great job with this movie. And

young people of all races need to know here's a celebrity, he wasn't worried about the bling, he was worried about Tweeting, he didn't have his own reality show, although he did play himself in a wonderful movie, *The Jackie Robinson Story*, typical of that era of Hollywood, well-meaning but a little hokey at places, but still a good movie, and you get to see Jackie himself and Ruby Dee, who's—Rachel Robinson is a wonderfully attractive woman, as is Ruby Dee, playing Jackie Robinson's wife.

But such a special guy, such a lesson for—and these young ball players are now learning him. I just read the MLB blog, and Bryce Harper saw the movie at the White House. Barack Obama showed *42*, and Bryce Harper was enthused, and Matt Kemp. You know, baseball has a special role in all this, because of Jackie and Branch Rickey. As Jackie said in his book, *I Never Had It Made*, "This was Branch Rickey's deal. I was just an actor in Branch Rickey's deal." I mean, Branch Rickey conceived it all.

DC: So, can you tell us about the role that baseball played for you that summer?

WL: Oh, sure! I—talking about baseball, I love. It's actually an interesting story, which hopefully it'll be on the big screen or the small screen at some point. But it's ironic. That was going to be my first summer not playing baseball since I was ten years old. I had been discouraged. My high school team went to the city finals. And I had played American Legion as a fifteen-year-old in South Bay, where I had been the all-area shortstop. I played—you had to get asked to be on that team after high school. And my teammates and their two dads, both who played professional baseball—the kids, Jeff Pentland and [59:02], who was a buddy of Mark McGwire, golfs with Mark McGwire and Tiger Woods, very successful bunch of guys and great athletes—you know, their dads, and they called my parents, [59:11] want Willy to play on the

American Legion team. And, you know, it was a very fast group. They had come in third in the state in Little League. You know, they were very good.

But that summer I didn't play with them. They asked me to play, but I was getting ready for school and I was kind of burned out because I got hurt both years. I didn't get much playing time. Now, I really—they went to the state finals in the American Legion and, you know, went on to great things in baseball, seven—five pros on the high school team and two more that turned down contracts, which is very rare. That's like a Division 1 team—eleven Division 1 athletes on my high school baseball team, two in the big leagues.

So, I had played with good guys. I had been around good baseball players, not realizing at the time how good they were, because I was more discouraged because I wasn't playing. In fact, my high school coach told me—I said, "I'm going to UCLA. Do you think I can play there?" He said, "Oh, yeah. You couldn't play at USC, but you can play at UCLA."

DC: [Laughs]

WL: I'm thinking, [1:00:00] "What the hell are you talking about? I'm not playing here!" But, as a matter of fact, our high school team was better than UCLA. By the time my friends were in college, they were in the Hall of Fames at Santa Barbara, Arizona State. They beat UCLA every time they played them, the pitchers. The pitchers were our strong suit. Our fourth pitcher pitched AA baseball. So, I played good baseball. I wasn't going to play that summer. When I came back, I got asked, actually, to go out at UCLA by a guy named Ray Arrington, who's in the Hall of Fame, because he heard about that I played in the South, because it was in my letter.

But there was a guy named Willie Bowens, who still works at the VA. He came back with us. He was the one that was not invited to the opening of the Martin Luther King Memorial

along with everybody else. And I tried to tell them, you know, they had the names. Rick Tuttle and I developed the list. He was an African American who worked three miles away. He didn't get invited.

I wouldn't go. They finally invited me, but I said, "If you don't invite everybody, I'm not going." I didn't. I didn't care that much about having my little day of glory among the UCLA that had been opposed to having a plaque for Dr. King for six years and only did it because they were forced to by the NAACP and the president of the university, Mark Yudof, who hasn't forced them to put the picture back up yet.

So, Willie Bowens was one of our young recruits. Some had worked with the NAACP Youth Council. Others came into the Movement that summer because William P. Randall took us around to a different church every night the first week. We had a mass meeting. You know what mass meetings are.

DC: Um-hmm.

WL: And he introduced us. He says, "These white people have come down here, these students! These white students are here from UCLA! Dr. King did this! Hosea Williams did this!" And he—William P. Randall was a special, special, wonderful man. He later became—there's a building named for him, as Joel Siegel said on Good Morning America. He later became Bibb County commissioner. His son was the first state representative. His granddaughter is now the state representative, and his son is a judge. So, things do change and have changed. But Bill was the leader in the town, a wonderful, just a [1:01:57] man.

And so, we started recruiting the young people from all the different parts of town. And Willie Bowens came out of East Macon, which is where I ended up living with the Simmons family. Terrell Simmons was on the Macon Bombers, as well, but I didn't know that at the time.

He was gone. There was no father at home. And that was a little bit of a scandal, I later found, because Mrs. Simmons took in two white boys and she had two daughters still at home. One was at Tuskegee already, he's now in Mali. Things are not going well in Mali—Lucille. I'm in touch with her by email occasionally, not recently. I should find out what's going on with her, but she usually lets me know if there's a problem. But anyway, so Terrell was on the team.

But Willie Bowens and I became good buddies. Also, William C. Randall, who was Mr. Randall's nephew, who later had a terrible car accident. But William C., and Willie, and I—and, of course, I used to say one thing I really liked was there were lots of Willies. I remember there was one time I was in the front yard, and it was me and Willie Bowens, and the guy we were trying to get to register, his name was Willie, and the cousin's name was Willie. And I wrote in the thing, I said, "Lots of Willies." I said, "One thing us Willies feel is that all people are created equal, except Willies—we're created more equal!"

DC: [Laughs]

WL: Because I was thinking of Willie Mays, because he was such a great athlete. But anyway, so Willie and I got to be buddies. Willie was on the Macon—Willie Bowens was on the Macon Bombers, and he said, "Hey, maybe I can get you a tryout." I used to wear my football jersey. It's in the picture here from the SCOPE book. I was stupid enough to actually wear it in the marches!

DC: [Laughs]

WL: And there I am, which I think now, there was a great target for the Klan. I was like one of the only white guys, and I'm wearing a bullseye! But also I was doing it to relate to the guys through athletics, which was my strong suit. And they used to call me "Number Ten" a

little bit later on in Macon because I wore my football jersey and I was proud I had been on the football team.

DC: And who were the Bombers?

WL: The Bombers were in Macon. They sometimes were called the Bibb Bombers, as well. There's an article in, I think, that book I showed you with Terrell's picture and me.

DC: Um-hmm.

WL: Terrell and I did this program at the Georgia Sports Hall of Fame on the Macon Bombers, because they had a traveling exhibit on "Baseball in Black and White," about the Negro leagues. And they also had, of course, they had the Negro League and then they had a lot of local Negro leagues, because there was no [laughs]—you know, they couldn't have black-white leagues, so they had their own leagues. So, Willie got me a tryout. And so, we went out. Terrell had the team bus. Terrell always worked two or three jobs. Terrell sadly had a heart attack about five years ago now, passed away. But I would always stay with Terrell. Two people I would always see in Atlanta first were Terrell and Hosea. I would usually stay on Terrell's couch. When I wrote the report to the President and the Congress, I stayed on Terrell's couch for three months, working for Mrs. King.

And I gave some money, I gave four hundred dollars back to the Holiday Commission, which didn't have public funding, partly because Terrell gave me free rent, so I had a little extra, and they didn't have much money. Lloyd Davis, who was my supervisor there, who was a federal bureaucrat, wonderful man, worked for Sargent Shriver, worked for the Republican side when they passed the King holiday and Reagan signed it. And his eyes got very big: "You're giving me money back?" It's like, "Nobody gives money back. This is the federal government." But we didn't have federal money yet. [1:05:00] We did later get it. And had it been federal

money, I wouldn't have given it back. But we didn't have much money, and it was private money. And I just never wanted people to think that I was doing it for the money. I may have overdone that, because I ended up quite impoverished many times. That's one of the reasons I was on Terrell's couch.

DC: [Laughs]

WL: But anyway, so Terrell had a bread truck. He had a full-time job and a bread route. So, his bread truck was the team bus on the weekends. So, they came by 795 Center Street in East Macon, where the Simmons family lived. Emma Mae Simmons was a professional cook, so I got real good food that summer. We got in the truck. And I think they may have told me we were playing in Round Oak. I didn't know where Round Oak was, go off about forty miles away and go through this little town, which was—it's still there. It's like a post office with some boxes and a general store, and that's Round Oak, Georgia. That's it, and then you've got country. And so, we get to this [laughs] place, and it's a cow pasture with the trees cut down and a diamond cut in there. [Laughs] That's the field. And then, you know, the first thing I'm noticing is the cow paddies and I'm going, "Okay."

And so, because of what I was doing, unlike Jackie Robinson, as I've said a couple of times in articles, everybody was very nice to me. They didn't know if I could play or not, but they were going to give me a chance. One guy that wasn't too happy was the guy that was shortstop before I got there, because he got bumped through no fault of his own. But I had just come out of this experience moving to this place where I got bumped, and I didn't want to give up any playing time. I look back now and I don't think—I think I played every inning. I don't know, maybe he did get to play a little, but I think I played every inning once I got there. But he

knew I was only going to be there for a while. But everybody else was real friendly. He would sit in the dugout. He would look at me. He didn't say anything.

DC: [Laughs]

WL: But he wasn't happy, and I got it. I knew it, you know, and I felt bad for him but not that bad that I was going to, "Coach, let him play." No. I loved playing baseball. And I loved practicing, but I loved playing in the game. I loved the competition. So, this was my chance to play. I barely got to play in my—I got injured both years of high school.

I played a lot in American Legion my junior year, but I kept getting hurt and I kept running into Tommy Griffin, who got drafted number four in the country and was rookie pitcher of the year when he was twenty years old, struck out two hundred for Houston, who was also a good-enough hitter that he pinch hit. He was six foot four. I wasn't going to beat Tommy Griffin out. That just wasn't going to happen. And, I mean, I had forgotten he was drafted first round, number four, in the country. That's who I had to beat out.

So, I got to play. And it's in the article—the first ball hit to me, I think it was maybe first or second inning, [claps] bopped out of my glove, but I made a quick recovery, I had a quick release, threw it and I'm pretty sure it was a tie. A tie goes to the runner. The umpire called him out. He gave me the call. And I think they sensed, you know, here's this new kid, he's out here by himself, he's working with Dr. King. We're going to—and, as the guy that wrote the nice article for the L.A. Weekly said, "That was sort of a welcome."

DC: Huh.

WL: But I got the call. That should have been E-Leventhal. It should have been E-6. But it was close. But it was a tie. Tie goes to the runner. I got the call. And, of course, that boosted my confidence. Instead of having an error your first play, you made the play, even if—because

that happens in baseball sometimes. I mean, I don't know if the umpire did it on purpose. I think he did it on purpose, because I was the white kid, and they were being nice to me, because they knew I was there.

At bat, it was very interesting, because we didn't have any batting practice, and I had not played in a year. And I was an okay hitter, although I've since—Jeff Pentland, who later was Sammy Sousa's coach and the Dodgers' coach and then he, about six teams, he's since showed me how to hit. But in those days, "Swing level. Keep your eye on the ball. Don't step in the bucket." So, you know, it was whatever natural ability you had, and I had some. But I told Jeff, I said, "Jeff, why didn't you tell me this when we were in high school?" He said, "I didn't know it when we were in high school!" I said, "You knew. You were doing it," because he was so good, he was such a great hitter. But he learned the mechanics of it, and that's what in major league baseball the hitting coaches—it's a science. It's a science. That's why they have videotapes, and they correct a little hitch, and this and that.

But, so I was just winging it and, you know, I was competitive. And I have a bunch, out of my stats, which are in there, I was on-base eleven out of fifteen times, which is very, very good on-base average. But there were eleven—ten walks, once in the head, but with a curveball. I wasn't dusted off like Jackie Robinson. It was a curveball and it just hit my helmet. We wore helmets by then; back in the old days, they didn't. And then, a sacrifice fly, and I drove in a run to tie a game. And they were very happy that I had made that contact. But the walks, which are very odd—how can somebody get a—and then, I struck out three times.

But I beat the pitcher in a sense eleven out of fourteen times, versus walks, versus strikeouts, and most of those at bats, if you know what a nine or ten-pitch at-bat is in baseball. Three-two it's five pitches. And then, if you keep fouling off pitches—I mean, Matt Kemp just

did this against a good pitcher. He had eleven-pitch at-bat opening day, and then the Giant pitcher had to go out, Lincecum, I think, and he wore him out. My timing was off, [1:10:00] and I just—and I had never done that in my life, but I kept hitting foul ball after foul ball after foul ball after foul ball. And then, I got a walk. And that happened, I'd say of those eleven walks, about nine were probably more than eight or nine pitches, were eight or nine, eleven, somewhere—I mean, I think one at-bat I must have had ten foul balls. But I wanted to [1:10:21]. My coordination wasn't good enough, my timing wasn't, because I hadn't had any batting practice. I never got any batting practice, because they practiced during the week. I couldn't. I had to do voter registration during the week. They didn't have batting practice on Sunday before the game, so I just had to go out and play. But I didn't want to strike out, so I just—I could get enough of the ball.

And then, finally, my last game in Milledgeville, which is now famous for the quarterback for the—had that terrible incident there in Milledgeville in the bar, very ugly incident, which I'm no longer a fan of Big whatever-his-name-is. But that's where we played a double-hitter there my last time. And Brenner was on third, and [1:11:01] down the middle, and I hit it far enough in center field—one of my friends said, "Oh, you hit it for the wall." I said, "No, I didn't hit it for the wall, but he didn't have to slide. I hit it far enough where he came in standing up," which tied the game, which is always a good feeling. And when I went back to the bench, I got some nods of approval.

So, you know, and I think I made—and I made one other error. I made an error playing in Warner Robins playing at the Air Force base, which was very, to me, very ironic that I go south, because I'm trying to do what President Kennedy said and what Martin Luther King asked, to help my country. Most of the white people don't like what I'm doing, but the military bases are

integrated, because they have to be, by law, since ’48, two years after Jackie Robinson, because he integrated in ’46 in baseball and ’47 in the majors, and Harry Truman integrated in ’48 in the military. But Warner Robins, we could play on the field there. And we were playing a team from Warner Robins. Somebody reserved it. We went in through the gates, you know, and they knew we were coming. And no white people came to the game. But it was under the lights, and they were good lights. The guy hit a—just hit a monster one-hop line drive at me at short, and then it exploded and went by me. And it was an error. I mean, it was a hard play, but it was an error and it cost us a run, and I felt real bad.

And then, we had—I mentioned a couple of my players, one whose name I didn’t know, and I’m not sure—he came to the reunion that I organized in 2002, which the article—that’s how the—I met a guy who got me involved with the Georgia Sports Hall of Fame, because he was a former player that lived there, a major leaguer. But one of the guys for the Jackie Robinson All-Stars, so I have that connection with Jackie Robinson. One of my teammates on my team—I don’t know if he was playing on the team when I was there, but he was on the Macon Bombers—also toured with Jackie Robinson. He may have been there when I was there. I don’t know that. But he came to the reunion. He did come to the reunion. I don’t know if he played the summer I played.

But the other guy that was quite amazing was a guy named Ralph Eason. He was built like, not Ken Norton Junior, but Ken Norton Senior, the football player. He was tall and just built like a tree trunk. And he had never played pro ball, but he was really good. And Ralph hit one in Warner Robins—I haven’t been back there, but they didn’t have fences, but they had lights that were out, like, three hundred and something in left field, three seventy-five in center, whatever—

hit it out of the lights! I mean, he—and turned us around. We won the game, so my error didn't cost us the game. So, Ralph saved me that game.

So, the umpire saved me with the first error, and Ralph saved me in the second. So, that was two errors in five games, so I wasn't playing great in the field. But, again, I was not practicing too much. But, yeah, Ralph—I remember Ralph hit the ball, and I don't know if they ever found it. I mean, he probably hit it five hundred feet. But he hit it—I mean, he was a big guy, about six foot four, and he was just ripped, muscles, I mean, he was a big strong guy, and he hit it perfect. [Laughs] It just went out of the lights and disappeared. And we won the game in Warner Robins. So, we won four out of five. The five games I played, we won four out of five.

DC: Um-hmm. And when you mentioned reunions, you're talking about reunion of the baseball teams?

WL: Yeah. We did a—and the Macon Braves, at that time was a—Mike Dunn, who's now the general manager of the Braves team up north of Atlanta. I'm blanking on the name. They built them a twenty-five million dollar stadium, and they moved from Macon. In Macon, they didn't have—the irrigation to—when it rained, like underneath all the major league stadiums.

JB: The drainage.

DC: The drainage.

WL: The drainage, yeah, the drainage. And Macon wouldn't put the money in. They should have, because they lost their team. It's an independent team. But the Macon Braves were in their last year there, Mike Dunn was great, and minor league teams, they always like promotions. So, we had a Macon Bombers night.

And it was very interesting, because later on, I did some clinics there, and the police were there, and the military was there. And there was a policeman about my age who knew when my friend Jim Gaudet, who played for Kansas City, [1:15:00] who is a convert to Judaism, his wife Jaime is on radio there, and a chiropractor like my dad. And so, they had the police. And so, we had a ceremony before a clinic, which Jim ran for twenty-five years. The police were there. And so, he said that I had played there for the Macon Bombers; I was the only white Macon Bomber. I could tell the policeman had been there for a long time, so he knew that if I was the only white there, I was probably a civil rights worker. He may have been the guy that arrested me! [Laughs]

DC: [Laughs]

WL: But, you know, they were all very respectful, but we had a moment of contact where we both knew that we had some history. So, that was interesting. And actually, that field in Macon, Luther Williams Field, which was 1919 (1929), was one of the—third-oldest field—that was used for the Jackie Robinson film that just came out. Most of the dugout scenes, which have blue screens behind them, because they recreated Ebbets Field when they created this film. But they filmed the train station there and they filmed a number of the, I think, the runway shots and maybe even the shower shot, not the dugout shot, because that's a recreation of Ebbets Field. But they used that field.

And Jackie actually played on that field, because the Dodgers would barnstorm. Roy Campanella—I have an interview in my book. What the Dodgers would do, as a team, is when they would come north out of Vero Beach, they would play in Birmingham, Montgomery, Jacksonville, and they would insist it must be—after the first year when Jackie was there and they didn't let an integrated audience—they said, "We'll come to your town and do an exhibition. Everybody gets to come." And so, it was still segregation. It was before *Brown vs.*

Board of Education and things like that. When the Dodgers played, black people sat in the stands. And Jackie and Roy—I have a picture in my book of them from Macon that I got from the library. But that same field where the actor played, Jackie played. It's kind of neat.

DC: Yeah.

WL: And that's maybe one of the reasons they went back there. I don't know. The same with Birmingham.

DC: We need to stop?

[Recording stops and then resumes]

JB: Okay, we're back.

DC: And you were arrested both in Macon and in Americus?

WL: I was.

DC: Yeah.

WL: Do you want to hear those?

DC: Yeah, what were those like? [Laughs]

WL: Two kind of interesting, and one typical of my experience. The first one, and I was the only one arrested in Macon. Eric Schiller, the minister, was the only one beaten up, and that was mainly because Bill Randall had told the town, "You want Selma, you want Birmingham, or you want some business going on in your town? These white people are coming here. The change is coming." And he had already integrated the buses, the Randall family. He had an understanding with the white business establishment in Macon, and they were smart enough, and they already had thirty percent black vote of the Negro—voters were registered, so they had some. That's why they sent us there, because they knew we could get some.

Now, we were also being photographed by the White Citizens Council, had an office across from where we were working at the courthouse. So, it wasn't as though they—and the Klan had a rally at the same park where we had the first integrated July 4th—so, it wasn't as though nothing was going on. But, in terms of the town leadership, the police chief and the mayor, they had a choice between Birmingham and terrible publicity, and Selma and terrible publicity, or trying to keep the lid on and keeping the business community going, which the Montgomery business community had done in the mid-fifties.

So, there were people who were smart enough and, you know, obviously, most Southerners—I would say even most—well, I don't know most. There were certainly many, many, many Southerners who were not happy with the White Citizens Council and the Klan, but to stand up was to be ostracized by terrorists. The Klan were terrorists; that's just what it was. And the Citizens Council had a lot of prominent business people, besides people that weren't so prominent. So, you know, and the politicians were beholden to them for votes and so on. So, but Bill Randall had done a lot of things, and he had an agreement with the police chief not to bother us, but apparently it didn't get down to all the officers on the street.

So, I did a number of things that were sort of key. And I'm saying that; Joel Siegel says it. Stanford University has sent a team down called Project South. It's all in Green Library, all the transcripts and the audio, which I've examined. Joel Siegel, who was our administrative leader, when they had his interview, singled me out as the hardest worker. So, it's in his interview. So, I was an athlete. I was in better shape probably than anybody, and I was extremely dedicated. The humidity really got to us from California. People were getting tired at three in the afternoon. And I said, "Hey, we've only got ten weeks! We can't get tired at three in the afternoon. We've got to keep going." And I was the pain in the ass.

I was also the youngest, except for one other, somebody who was also a freshman. What was her name? Elaine—Diane Hurst was the radical of our group. She would have rather been with SNCC, but they didn't have a project. Diane was very cool. But anyway, she became a nurse, married a Hispanic guy, [1:20:00] and worked for the same union I did but just after I did. And I've been chasing Diane around. If you ever hear of Diane Hurst, she now has a Hispanic last name, I'd love to touch base with her. She lived with Gloria Wise's family in Americus. Gloria Wise was one of the four women arrested in the movement that pushed the voting rights through, the Voting Rights Bill out of Congress.

They had been trying to stall it during SCOPE, which is why—Selma happened in March, Lyndon Johnson gave his speech about the bill in March, but there were five more months 'til August, the reason being because of SCOPE. The Southern legislators wanted to stall it until we left, and then, there was no pressure for a strong enforcement clause. Because we were there, and after Americus, and then the bill was stalled, and the incidence reports show we had, of the ninety projects, we had people in the street in seventy-five. And the white community said, "Okay, enough!" And the white Southerners who were blocking it said, "Okay, sign the fucking bill—" oops, I shouldn't have said that. But the bill got signed.

But we had registered people, but in some places they couldn't register anybody. In many of the counties, they were blocked. And one of the reasons they sent us to Macon is because we could register people. In Americus, it was almost impossible, and they were still arresting black women for standing in a white women's voting line, which of course was illegal, a year after the Civil Rights Act.

DC: Right, or Terrell, yeah.

WL: Yeah. Well, you couldn't even get into Terrell.

DC: Yeah.

WL: Terrell was so bad, I mean, literally, I heard stories—we tried to move out from Sumter to other places, and they were already, of course, in Albany. There was a car that went into Terrell, and it was shot, so many bullets at it, they came around and came back. Terrell was one of the most—Terrible Terrell—one of the most notorious. I don't know what Charles Sherrod in Albany thought of Terrell in '65, but the story I heard was, "We tried to go there. We got shot at. There were so many bullets. At the county line, they were waiting. We turned around."

DC: Right. He got turned out of there in '61. So, [laughs] you know, they had a long history of trying and not being able to.

WL: So, anyway, I had started. We first tried to go in the communities. The people would say yes and not be there. And we were wasting a lot of money. We were missing—three out of four would tell us, because we were white, what we wanted to hear, like they did with most white people, and then they wouldn't be there because they were afraid to go downtown. Even in Americus, even as good—I mean in Macon, even as good as it was in Macon, the fear level was still very high, because people could get fired. They might be able to register, but then they'd lose their job.

So, I then, on a Saturday, had a church bus—or on one day. It wasn't Saturday, because we couldn't have registered on a Saturday. But maybe on a Friday, I had a church bus and I brought down twelve people. While they were in registering, people were walking by the courthouse, and I just said, "Hey, would you like—I'm working with Dr. King. You can come register right now." And I got seven more in twenty minutes. I went back and told Joel Siegel, "Hey! We can get them downtown if we—." "Well, it might be too dangerous." I said, "We

don't have much choice. We just spent two hundred dollars in gas the last couple of weeks, and we've only got forty-four. We've got to start making some numbers." So, we decided to give it a try. So, and then, once we did that, that's when the Klan started—the White Citizens Council started photographing us. But the city also gave us two parking spaces.

But we also moved down to the bars on Broadway, which is now Martin Luther King Drive, which is where the Georgia Sports Hall of Fame is, right near where I got arrested. So, we went down to Broadway to get people out of the bars and the pool halls. And Ken Long, who was my roommate, who was from northern California, parked his old Oldsmobile there, I think—no, Joe Goldberg had an Oldsmobile. Ken Long had a Ford, I think—and he was in a waiting zone. But he was in a waiting zone for about a half-hour, I think, because we were soliciting the bars. Well, the police came, and they didn't give him a chance to move. They started to kind of, saying stuff, and they wrote him a ticket, and they weren't very nice.

I then went in the barbershop. We were then trained by John Doar and Bill Randall: If you're having trouble with the police, call and let us know what's going on, in case you get taken away or whatever. Apparently, and I—this is the honest truth—somebody said something, I don't know who it was, made a smart aleck comment of some kind. That's what they said. It was not me. I'm looking you in the eye, looking at the camera. It wasn't me! I just went in the barbershop and got on the phone. Apparently, the police officer thought it was me, that I had said something. I don't know why he thought that, but at least, that was his story. I think he really did think it was me.

So, I'm in the barbershop and I've got Bill Randall on the phone, and I said, "Bill," or maybe it was Joel. I think it was Bill. Actually, I'm not sure. It was somebody at the office. I don't know if it was Bill Randall or Joel Siegel. Joel mostly stayed in the office. And I said, you

know, "We're getting harassed here. We're down on Broadway." And I said, "Uh-oh, the policeman is coming in the barbershop. I think they're going to be arresting me, and I have to hang up." And, in fact, they did.

So, they took me in the car, arrested me, and they put me in the backseat, started driving. And, again, [1:25:00] we then had to go down to whatever the street is, turning right towards the jail, turning left out to the country. And I had just read these reports of they arrest people, take them out in the country, and they beat the crap out of them. So, I was—that's when I was nervous. Which way are they going to turn? I didn't mind going to jail. Our office was right across the street from the jail. Bill Randall was close to the jail. Bill Randall knew I was going to the jail. I had no doubt Bill Randall was going to take care of me. But I did not want to go the other way, so I was nervous.

And then, the two policemen were in the front, and I said, "What am I being arrested for? I was on the phone in the barbershop." And the police officer said—I'm quoting because I don't like to use the n-word—he said, "You're a nigger-lover and you're a smart aleck!" And I said under my breath, "I didn't know that was against the law." And he said, "What?!" And I said, "No," but at that point, he turned right, so I was—and that was the only conversation I really remember. And that was—I don't know what the charge was, but that was the only charge I heard, you know, was a quote-lover and a smart aleck. That's why I think he really thought that I had said something.

So, I got in the jail. And, you know, I wasn't in the jail more than—I got booked. I was in—you know, they put me behind bars. I wasn't behind bars more than ten minutes, and I was out. Bill Randall got me out. Not only that, and then actually Fred Hoffman, who did the film, which I can give you a DVD of, it's called *Be Somebody*. But he threw away all the stuff he

didn't use, why I don't know, 16mm. He had hours and hours of footage, which we could have done a full-length movie of. But he actually photographed me coming out of the jail across to Bill Randall's office.

Incidentally, our office later became taken over by Capricorn Records, which was the Allman Brothers Band—the Allman brothers are from Macon, and Little Richard is from nearby, and Otis Redding is from Macon. So, Phil Walden started Capricorn Records. And our office was above a liquor store, and eventually the entire block became Capricorn Records, which is now abandoned and should be a museum, really. But it was also the SCOPE office. So, and the famous little diner called H&H Diner was where the Allman Brothers went, where all the integrated band members, Otis Redding went there, that's still down the street. That was between Bill Randall's *Macon Weekly* newspaper office and our office, which then became Capricorn Records, so big historic blocks in Macon, Georgia, in the music industry, which is a big thing in Macon. They had the Music Hall of Fame, but they moved it. It was a great Music Hall of Fame. They lost funding in the budget stuff.

But anyway, so then, they get me out, and I go into Bill's office. And Bill calls up the sheriff, or the police chief. And Bill, when he got excited, kind of talked like, he said, "Chief! Chief, what are you officers doing arresting this young man from UCLA?! I thought you understood we weren't going to put up with any of this stuff, that your officers knew that!" So, then he didn't say anything, and he barked at the sheriff a couple, the police chief a couple of more times. Because Bill had had a confrontation over the buses about two years earlier.

DC: And what was Bill's position?

WL: Bill Randall was Dr. King's friend, Hosea's friend. He ran a newspaper called the *Macon Weekly*. He had a construction company. He worked with Hosea on something called the Georgia Voters League. Have you ever heard of the Georgia Voters League?

DC: Um-um.

WL: That was a network they had all around Georgia, probably other states. He was also involved with the NAACP. He was the local leader.

DC: Okay.

WL: There was a more left-leaning local leader who also had a newspaper. But Bill was the one who worked with Hosea and Dr. King. There was a little rivalry between Bill and this other guy, but Fred, who was more leftist than the rest—he was older and an Air Force veteran—he kind of liked the more radical guy. But Bill was the guy. And Bill was the mainstream guy, and that's why he went into politics and his son is in politics—and a wonderful guy.

And so, then he turned to me and he said, "Well, Willy, the police chief would like to drop the charges if it's alright with you." And I said, "Well, I don't know, Bill. What do you think?" He said, "I think—the police chief has told that all of his officers are going to understand that they can't harass you all anymore, so I think you should let him drop the charges." I'm still not sure what the charges were! [Laughs]

DC: [Laughs]

WL: At that point, I don't think I knew, actually, what the official charge was. I don't really—I don't think, to this day, I don't know. I should probably go back there and see if those records are available. It may have been disturbing the peace. I don't really know, while I heard that it was smart aleck and—that's the only thing I was told. So, I said okay. So, then Bill barked

at the police chief a few more times, which made a big impression on me, by the way, that he was telling the police chief off, and the police chief wanted to apologize.

And I, of course, spread that around, and I think the police chief spread it around with his officers. I don't think we had any more problems. Nobody else got arrested. I was kind of the test case. It didn't work out good for the police officer. I don't know what happened to that guy. But, like I say, he may have been the guy I met at Luther Williams Field many years later. I don't know. I think they all knew about it, though. I think they all knew about it. I'm sure they all knew about it, because the police chief knew—the police chief, I think, made sure they knew about it, and no one else got arrested. And we worked downtown from then on.

And one of the things that happened was there was a guy named Denny [1:30:00], [1:30:00] whose niece later had an official position with Habitat in America. Denny ended up in the Peace Corps for a long time and working out of country for a long time. And I've been in touch with him just briefly. I liked him. He was from a Mennonite school in the Midwest. And some other people. They had—a guy came up in bib overalls with a gun, a .38 or some gun, I don't know what caliber, not to me, but on the corner where we were trying to get voters, and he took the gun out and stuck it in his face and he said, "If you're on this corner in an hour, I'll come back and kill you." Well, that didn't work. We stayed on the corner, and the guy didn't come back and kill us.

But, I mean, those kinds of things were going on in Macon, which was better than Americus, where they didn't come up to you. They just shot at you. They didn't give you any warning. Later, there's a story, was when I went back to Macon, that there was a warning that if you're in town in twenty-four hours, you're dead. And it sounded serious enough that it made me uncomfortable, but of course at eighteen I wasn't going to leave then. But Bill said, "No, you're

going to leave. Time for you to go." And I was planning to leave anyway. But that's—I wrote that in something I sent you.

DC: Uh-huh. Right.

WL: So, that was my arrest there. But then, the other time, William C. Randall, who I told you about, Mr. Randall's nephew, very involved, was almost sixteen, had his learner's permit—or was sixteen, had a learner's permit, but no license. His uncle had been too busy, and his dad—I'm not sure, I don't know what his dad's situation was. But, of course, when you're sixteen, you like to drive and impress the girls, which I knew, because I was only eighteen. I had been sixteen two years earlier and wanted to drive to impress the girls.

So, we were on our way home one day from downtown, and William wanted me to let him drive. And he had the learner's permit, but it had expired. He didn't have a license. So, he got three blocks, and the girls, some pretty girls were in the car, black girls, and I knew why he wanted—I was sympathetic. It was a male bonding thing, and I let him drive. Well, I was driving Ken's car that didn't have power steering. He knew how to drive. He had driven his Uncle Bill's car that had power steering that he could just swing around. Well, we got to this corner, and he tried to do the swing-around like he did with one finger, and we started into somebody's yard. Then, because he was an inexperienced driver, he got panicky and he tried to hit the brake. But he hit the gas instead and ran into [claps] a parked car in a black man's yard, who wasn't too happy when he came out. He wasn't too confused about me, because most people knew that white people were there, but he wasn't happy about somebody who just slammed into his car. Of course, I don't think that made a real good impression. It wasn't the impression that William C. wanted to make on the two black girls.

DC: [Laughs] No.

WL: I had done something similar, almost crashing my mom's car, so I sympathized with the whole thing. The black man was unhappy enough he called the cops. And then, William C. had a knife in his pocket, which I didn't know. So, they arrested him for the knife and, I think, the driving. And they arrested me—now, they probably could have given us a ticket but they didn't. But they weren't mean about it. I mean, we were obviously guilty. I was obviously guilty of letting a minor without a license drive. And so, they took us in, and we paid a sixty-five dollar fine. We went to court. My dad sent the money. He wasn't thrilled about that, but of all the things that were happening, that was the least of his worries. I think I had to work it off when I got back. I had to do some painting for him. And so, that was my second arrest in Macon. I don't know how I get in these situations. I just—

DC: [Laughs]

WL: Americus is a little more dramatic. Americus—I started telling the story about John Lewis. We got called down there, actually quite interesting introduction to Americus. We went down at night. It was the night after Andrew Whatley had been killed. Four women were in jail. Dick Gregory was in town, leading marches. Hosea had started night marches. Vivid memory of the first night in a church, there was two young African American guys with rifles at each door. We slept in the pews, about forty of us.

What Hosea wanted to do was bring in SCOPE workers from all the projects around Georgia and Alabama—South Carolina was a little too far—and show us what a hot movement was like. Also, we needed more troops for the marches. Because once the women were arrested and then the white guy was killed, particularly when the white kid, young man, Andrew, was killed, all the state patrol came. A hundred state patrolmen were there. The Klan had a rally. There were a lot of shootings going on, I mean, at people, no one else got hit. And so, Hosea

wanted troops. This was going to be the Selma of the summer, and that's actually what he said in the *New York Times* and the L.A. *Times*. The articles are in my book. And so, we were the reinforcements. And so, that night, there was a burned out car across the street that had been firebombed. So, it was a lot different than Macon. And it was kind of in the battle, essentially, in the battle from the back lines to the frontline.

DC: Can you define what this term "hot movement" means?

WL: Huh?

DC: You've used the term "hot movement."

WL: I don't know what Hosea called it. The way Hosea described it, [1:35:00] I think he said, "I want you to see what a real movement is like."

DC: Okay.

WL: I think those were the—but a movement where the media was there, where there was mass demonstrations, where the opposition was making it life-or-death, to some degree, which meant then that the media would portray it. The whole thing of nonviolence is to dramatize in a creative way—that's what Dr. King said in the *Letter from the [a] Birmingham Jail*, do a creative tension nonviolently that will dramatize the injustice that will expose the racism and the injustice, which was what the whole Movement was about, from the Montgomery bus boycott on, where you had the media come because of violence.

But compared—the entire number of people that were killed in the Movement from the beginning of the Montgomery bus boycott until 1968, the end of your period, which I think is a good period, is less than one day in Syria or in Egypt, where they've had the Arab Spring, and Barack Obama went and said, "Model the Civil Rights Movement," but apparently they don't have the foundation, unfortunately. And we did have the Judeo-Christian foundation here. And

I'm not a scholar enough about Islam. I know there are many peaceful things in Islam. But that part of Barack Obama's speech—which by the way, some of the Jewish community, because I know people on the Republican Jewish Committee, thought that Barack Obama was being anti-Israel by saying that in Cairo when he talked to the Egyptians at the beginning of his trip—what he was telling them is, "Use nonviolence," which they tried and have done somewhat successfully, but the governmental structure has not supported it.

We, at least, had a governmental structure in the United States that was based enough on law, even with the flaws in the federal government that SNCC's talked about and the corrupt federal judges, of which there were some, which the Kennedy administration acknowledges they made a mistake. They were lied to. I've talked to Burke Marshall. Those judges came up from Georgia and Mississippi and said, "We promise you—" Robert Kennedy called them in, and he said, "If you're going to do this, you've got to follow federal law," and those judges looked him in the eye and lied to them. And they made mistakes; there was the guy in south Georgia. They shouldn't keep getting beat up over it. It was a tough situation. I wish SNCC would forgive that and understand that better and not feel so hurt about it.

The same with this quote—I know I'm getting off-topic, but I want to say this—that David Garrow used and said that John F. Kennedy called SNCC "sons of bitches" when the two guys from Birmingham, three guys, came up. The transcripts are in that book. What happened in that meeting was they tried to tell Kennedy, these three businessmen, "Get King out of there! Get King out of there! He's causing trouble!" Kennedy told them many times, and it's on tape. It's the civil rights tape at the Kennedy Library. There's a whole series. It's identified in my book, [1:37:56]. Garrow misrepresented it, and Frank Smith, who runs the African American Civil War Museum, knew the quote. SNCC is still angry about the quote: "President Kennedy is a

hypocrite. He called us 'sons of bitches.'" He was complimenting them. He said, "You're tough sons of bitches."

What happened was seven times the white men from Birmingham said, "Get King out!" And he told them, "We didn't put King in there. We can't get him out. And by the way, King ain't the problem. Men from Birmingham—" he didn't say that, but I'm quoting him. "You're the problem! Your laws are the problem. Change your laws! Hire some black people in your stores." And then, the guys from Birmingham said, "Oh, we can't have black people waiting on white people." Kennedy said, "Come on!" He said, "The military, that was difficult in 1948. People had to live in barracks together and shower together." He said, "Hiring people in stores," and you can listen on tape—he was magnificent—he said, "That's nothing! That's the problem! King isn't the problem! You're the problem!" And, of course, they negotiated that problem out, and they did hire black people.

And then, finally, after they said seven times, "Get King out," he said, "Look it, you ought to be happy it's King and not SNCC." He said, "They're tough, that John Lewis. They're sons of bitches. They're tough. You don't want them. You better take King," which is exactly, by the way, what Malcolm X said, "You better take Dr. King and not me." John Kennedy described it the same way Malcolm X described it, but David Garrow took it out context and it was circulated through academia. SNCC knows that quote. They're hurt by it.

And I want Andy to talk about it. Andy said, "Dr. King talked about healing the sick. I want to heal SNCC's pain and tell them John Kennedy, who loved toughness—" this is a tough guy who talked about macho, fifty-mile hike, he said, and I told Frank Smith, "He said you were tougher than Dr. King." Frank Smith [1:39:44] and then he said, "Yes, we were tougher than Dr. King!" Excuse me, Frank, I hope you see this: You weren't tougher than Dr. King. Nobody was

tougher than Dr. King. But you were tough, and that's what President Kennedy said. He was complimenting you.

So, to get back to my next arrest. So, we were down there. They needed volunteers. Every time there was a mass meeting, [1:40:00] they asked for volunteers. I kept raising my hand. Pretty soon Hosea Williams knew who I was. Instead of one of sixty or eighty new white people, I was the kid that kept raising his hand and kept taking assignments.

Well, as it happened, Andrew Whatley had just been killed before we got there. His funeral was that Saturday at the Methodist church, or maybe it was the Baptist. There were two prominent churches. There were the mayor and the fire chief and the police station right across from each other in the same block. And they needed two whites to go to tell the media that were there covering it that there was a press conference coming up. So, Eric Schiller, who was from UCLA, the minister, Reverend Eric Schiller, and I, we went. Now, if they would have known who we were, the white people, they would have been very unhappy we were there. But there were other people, and we were in suits, my one suit my dad bought me at Sears for twenty-five dollars for my high school prom.

And, by the way, my dad said he was proud of me when I called my dad and told him I was going. It was the first time in my life. He said, "No, I told you more!" I said, "Well." He wasn't happy. He wanted me to be a musician, not a baseball player. But when I called him after I decided—I was very mature enough to say, "I'm not going to ask my parents, because if I get killed, they'll feel guilty, more guilty than if I tell them I've already decided." And I was eighteen; people were going to Vietnam. And I told them, "This is what I'm going to do." The line went silent, and he said, "I'm proud of you." Those were the first words out of his mouth. Because of his feeling about Hubert Humphrey and all those things.

So, anyway, so they needed somebody to go to the church. Eric and I went. We took that assignment. Then, they needed somebody to go with John Lewis the next day to try and integrate the Baptist church. Hand went up. "Okay, you! You're going with John Lewis," the private, me, with one of the generals. You know, I always think of it as Dr. King was the Joint Chiefs of Staff general, Hosea was a general, John Lewis was a general, Abernathy was a general, Andy was a general, Dr. King was the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff in the Movement. That's kind of how Jim Colaianni set it out in his thing.

So, the interesting thing was—John and I go up there. And John, of course, this is one of many, many, many, many, many, and a few more manys, exponentially, that John Lewis had been involved with—my first time on camera as a Movement person, other than the Citizens Council. They had me on camera. So, we go up there. I'm essentially an extra. John was the star, and I'm the extra with John. And he goes up there. And Fire Chief Henderson comes out, I think it was the Baptist church, and he has a tape recorder, because he wants to record so nobody is misquoting him, which is fine with us.

So, he says, "We don't want you here! We don't want you here!" And we got, actually, footage of that on CBS News. And John Lewis says, "Well, but I'm a Baptist, and this is a Baptist church. We'd like to worship here. I'd like to worship here." "No, we don't want you!" He said, "Well, what about him," pointing to me. "We don't want him either. He's with you. We don't want him." He said, he said, and then he said, "But doesn't Jesus say that, you know, 'In Christ, all men are equal?'" He starts quoting the Scriptures. He starts quoting Jesus Christ, because John's been to seminary. John was not a minister, because he dropped out of seminary just before he graduated, but he had been to seminary, so he knew Scripture.

So, he started quoting Scripture to Fire Chief Henderson, and Fire Chief Henderson got very flustered. "That doesn't matter here! That doesn't matter here! Sheriff Chappell, arrest these people! Arrest these people!" So, Fire Chief Henderson was quite unable to answer John Lewis when he started quoting Scripture. He couldn't figure out a good answer as to why Jesus wouldn't want us in the church. So, Fire Chief Henderson came, and we left. We didn't get arrested. But I think—I don't know if we said we'll be back, but we came back.

So, that was one of the big deals, and that was on national news, and some of my baseball friends saw me. When I got back, they said, "Well, yeah, I saw you on national news." And that was on all the national, all the three networks, at night. It was a big story. That's where all the media was, once Andrew Whatley had been killed. There were media there anyway, but once there was a killing, of course, the media wanted to see if there were going to be more killings, whatever. But, I mean, they were doing a great job. Tom Brokaw was there, did a great job. I mean, the media was doing great work in those days. I shouldn't have said it in that way. But obviously that brings—you know, it's not the planes that land that bring the media. It's the ones that don't land.

So, we were then working. I got shot at that week at close range twice. And then, we went back to the church the next week. That week, John took his group to the Baptist church, and Willie Bolden took a group to the Methodist church. I don't think anybody, I don't know, somebody may have gone to the Methodist church that first week, too. I don't know. I was at the Baptist church with John. And that photo actually ended up in *Ebony* magazine. Eight months later, they did a special article about the Movement and Christianity, and they talked about the Americus churches. And that was part of Hosea's plan. Hosea said, "The media is here. We're going to dramatize the churches."

And nobody from the white community could have said that was unfair, or today could say it, because Lena Turner, who had been a SNCC worker who later worked with SCOPE—because at that point, a number of people in SNCC also worked and were paid by SCLC. Lena Turner was one of them. She was also one of the women arrested. She went, after the '64 Civil Rights Act, to every white church in town. [1:45:00] Every church in Americus let her in, except the First Baptist and the First Methodist, where the big important people were. So, we knew who those—you know, they knew, and the local people told Hosea that. So, that was part of the plan: We're going to expose this unChristian-like behavior. The difference at the Methodist church is their national body had passed a law, an edict saying no one could be refused. I'm not sure that Lena knew that at the time and let them know. But the next week—

DC: What's her name? Sorry. Lena?

WL: Turner.

DC: Turner.

WL: I believe Lena is still alive in Detroit, last I heard. I tried to contact her, and she did not come down for the Americus-Sumter County Movement Remembered [Committee, Inc.]. They have an organization that's very active. Sam Mahone is the co-chair. Gloria Wise, who was one of the other women arrested, is deceased. But her sister Jewell, who unfortunately had a stroke and is a dear friend, is involved in that. Mamie P. Campbell is one of the other women arrested there and listed in my book, in the articles, she's still alive. But that's why I think it would be great if you talk to Sam Mahone. That's a very active organization that is not embittered and are teaching their history. I think Sumter County, more than any county, more than Albany, more than Selma, Lowndes County, because of Koinonia and because of being the founding place of Habitat. And also, Andersonville is there, the Civil War cemetery. So, it's an

amazing history from the Civil War up through the Movement, and the legacy is also Habitat, which is part of Koinonia, which is very positive. And unfortunately, some of the other legacies are not so positive. Americus is a glorious story, I mean, Sumter County.

So, anyway, so as we're going up to the Methodist church, Willie Bolden is leading the group, because he's one of Dr. King's lieutenants, one of Hosea's lieutenants, now Reverend Willie Bolden, not at the time, it wasn't Reverend Willie Bolden. And he said, "Willy," he said to me, "I can't get arrested today. I'm leading the movement here. You lead the group." Why he picked me? I mean, I had only been around for ten days. Of the people there, I guess I had been volunteering more.

So, I then lead that group to the Methodist church. And we were told, "You can't come in." They met us in the line, and [laughs] some of them had blackjacks. And they said, "You can't worship here." And I said, "Could we—" and I think either he told me or I knew that—I don't know how it was, but I think we knew we wanted to say a prayer if we couldn't go. So, I said, "Can we say a prayer?" And they said, "Yes," before we were arrested.

DC: And this was a group of blacks and whites together?

WL: Yes.

DC: Yeah.

WL: And UCLA, mostly UCLA students: Chuck Hammonds, Elaine [1:47:45] all of us that were on this telegram that Rick Tuttle had sent, and are in the picture that was on every front page in—L.A. *Times*, *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, *New York Times*. They shot the picture from across the street, and so, I'm in the front, so I'm barely seen. You can barely see me. I do have the news footage of it, though, which is kind of interesting to watch. It's also interesting to listen to the Stanford interview, where I'm less, much less hyper than—I think I came back with post-

traumatic stress and have been more hyper ever since than I ever was before, not that I wasn't hyper before.

But, anyway, so I—we knelt and said the prayer, and then they arrested us and took us to jail. And then, John Lewis—had another interesting moment. We get in the jail with Sheriff Chappell, and he says, "Okay, whites over here, and n—" they would—the polite term in those days was "Nigras" and, of course, the joke in the Movement was for the white people to say, "Well, that's our Southern accent. We can't say 'Negro' because we don't say 'gro.' We say 'gra,' so we say 'Nigra.' We're not being rude." And so, the black people would say, "Those white people can say 'knee' and they can say 'grow,' so they can say 'Negro.'"

DC: [Laughs]

WL: And so, but Sheriff Chappell said "Nigra," and that was probably better than he said most of the time, frankly. This was who Jimmy Carter had said was "my dear friend," because Jimmy Carter had a lot of dear friends down there, because he was from Plains. The man that beat Bill Rowe, next to David Bell, whose family I stayed with, was the former state Rep who served with Jimmy Carter.

Jimmy, by the way, stayed neutral, which is not the worst thing in the world. He ordered both the Klan and the Movement and the reporters, which is written about by the AJC guy in his book that won a Pulitzer prize, off his property. What [1:49:26] told me was that Jimmy knew that he couldn't stay in business if he took sides. I mean, if he showed any sympathy, he wasn't going to have a peanut business, and he had kids and everything else. So, he did his missionary work, which he did do at the time, [laughs] outside of Plains.

DC: Right.

WL: But he did tell—the Klan came and wanted him to join, and he said, "Get off my property! I'm not joining." But he was a Navy veteran. And the *New York Times* came, and he said, "Get off my property! I'm not talking to you." And, anyway, but the guy that served with him was the one who beat Bill Rowe, would have been to death, [1:50:00] but David fell on top of him.

But, anyway, so what happened in the jail, so Sheriff Chappell said, "Nigras over here, white people over here!" And John said, "Well, that's a violation of the Civil Rights Act of '64. You can't segregate us in the jail. You can't do that." And Sheriff Chappell said, "Well, you may run the streets, but you don't run this jail." And John said, "Well, I don't understand." He said, "Yes, you do! But you don't run this jail. Get over there!"

And so, they segregated us in the jail, which, of course, gave John a chance to talk to the two guys that had been arrested for shooting Andrew Whatley, who he claimed were innocent. They eventually went to prison. I don't know what the details were, as far as what actually happened. But the shooting was in retaliation for a lot of violence directed towards the marchers. And that night that those guys said, "Enough! We're not going to have our people—" they were throwing broken glass at kids, and it was not a—and they were shooting at people.

One of the other nice things that was happening in Americus was, as they released people, not from the county jail, but the city jail, which was downtown—I was in the county jail—the fire station was across the street, and the firemen had hunting slingshots and ball bearings, and they were shooting the slingshots, [makes explosive sound] which could have killed somebody or put their eye out. They may have been good enough shots that they weren't hitting people, but they were ricocheting off. So, they knew when they were being released and they were shooting.

The other story in there that's amazing is Warren Fortson, who was Jimmy Carter's lawyer, who came out for a biracial council, which the whites wouldn't agree to in the beginning, was actually run out of town. He was a white guy. And his brother was Ben Fortson, the sitting secretary of state. And, to me, that really showed how bad the repression was. If the brother of the sitting secretary of state in Atlanta, a hundred and fifty miles away, could not be protected—I mean, this is the brother of the secretary of state, who knows the governor, who was a liberal, Carl Sanders, and can't mobilize the state patrol—that he doesn't, he feels he has to leave for his own safety, it's pretty dangerous. And that article is in my book. And he left. Warren Fortson left.

But they did create a biracial council within about two weeks. About two weeks after those demonstrations, there was a biracial council, because the white leaders were getting terrible publicity, and they knew that they couldn't, you know, that they were going to lose.

So, the other guy I'd like to mention is a guy named Red Heffner. Have you ever hear of Red Heffner?

DC: Yes, I have.

WL: Red Heffner was then working for the Community Relations Service. I also met Jack Nelson of the L.A.*Times* down there. But Americus was where I got to meet, kind of where I proved myself in battle, you could say, and where I met a lot of really substantial, interesting people because of what was happening there. Red Heffner was run out. He wrote—Hodding Carter wrote, the third, the one that worked for Jimmy Carter, wrote a book called *So The Heffners Left Mississippi*.

The interesting story was Red Heffner's eldest daughter was Miss Mississippi in the Miss USA pageant, Miss America pageant, the main pageant. And she was what Virginia Durr

called—Virginia Durr's autobiography is called *Outside the Magic Circle*. If you don't know much about Virginia Durr, you should read her. I got to meet her when she was quite elderly. But the Magic Circle—you know what the Magic Circle was?

DC: Um-um.

WL: The Magic Circle for a white woman was—what Virginia Durr said, "As long as white women in the South stayed inside the Magic Circle, they were catered to. They were taken care of. They were on a pedestal." And, of course, they couldn't be defiled by any black men. Of course, one of the excuses was, "You want them to marry your sister?"

DC: Right, right.

WL: So, they were put on a pedestal. A great story from Selma: There was actually an interracial couple in Selma. The daughter was from a prominent family, so prominent that the whites couldn't retaliate against the black guy, who was still there by '65. You know how they handled that problem? The family just decided she was no longer white. That solved the problem! She was no longer white, so there was no longer a problem. And in the town, all the white people were, you know. You know? That's how you—because she was too prominent to kill, and the black guy was too prominent to kill. You couldn't do it, because they were too—they were one of the town leaders.

DC: Right. And the whole system was all part—

WL: So, how do you solve that problem in Selma, Alabama?

DC: Right.

WL: She ceases to be white. And this is absolutely true.

DC: Yeah.

WL: I forget the guy's name, but that's a great story from Selma.

DC: Yeah.

WL: So, the South was so conflicted with all this. Another story that's so interesting is that—so anyway, so—and Janet Merritt was a woman who was a state Rep after the guy who was beating people up. She stepped outside the Magic Circle. She later got defeated, but she was in for three terms, another one of—was a great artist. I got one of her—I got to meet all these wonderful people.

But anyway, so Red Heffner was down there. And he had to leave McComb, Mississippi, because all he did is have some blacks and whites at his house to discuss the problem. He was an insurance man. They poisoned his dog. They threatened his family. [1:55:00] And he left and he got taken in by the Community Relations Service run by LeRoy Collins, former governor of Florida who Andy Young was friends with. And he was down there, and I got to know him, and very, you know, impressive guy. And he was now working for the Department of Justice.

So, he—and, you know, of course, the younger daughter who wasn't Miss Mississippi kind of got it that the family had to leave. The one that was Miss Mississippi, "Why do I have to leave my friends? I'm Miss Mississippi! I don't want to leave my—." You know, I mean, she was on the pedestal. Virginia Durr got outside the Magic Circle when she worked with Eleanor Roosevelt on the New Deal, a wonderful lady. And the same with Florence Jordan and Clarence Jordan, out at Koinonia.

So, we got put in there with about three of the white guys that had been throwing broken glass at black kids and one civil rights worker. And they were having a card game. When they finished the card game, they were going to beat him up. And six of us came in, so that part was over; they didn't—they weren't going to beat him up. But they really were—one of their—there were a number of times where I had to question nonviolence. One was when Judson Ford put his

gun in his belt when we were going out to get the people out in the county areas of Sumter County, which I was actually happy about, because I had already been shot at. But it was still a conflict, because this was not what Dr. King would really approve of. [Laughs] But it doesn't matter. We're not in a demonstration.

The other time was listening to these white guys, and it was ugly. It was similar, sort of, to the Ben Chapman character that was a true character in the Jackie Robinson movie, the manager of the Phillies, who was the worst antagonist and the worst of the language. And I, literally, I think I had to put my hands over my ears, and it was making me sick, where I wanted to beat the crap out of these guys, which was against the rules.

DC: And they were deliberately trying to provoke you?

WL: No, no! They were just—that's just who they were!

DC: Okay.

WL: They were just talking about us and they were talking about black people, and that's just how they talked. They were not nice people. They were not of the higher class, as they say. And so, but I—you know, had they started a fight, I could have defended, but I couldn't go attack them. That would have been against what I had pledged myself, to nonviolence. But it made me very, very angry. I mean, I wanted—and it probably connected emotionally to hearing "kyke" when I was a—I didn't think of it at the time, but it was a very deep connection, and I just wanted to—shut up! You know?

I think—but nonviolence was you ignore them, you turn the other cheek. By the time I left, that was—I was pretty much—said, you know, many of us could practice it; we could not be it. Dr. King could live it. Hosea Williams was not a nonviolent guy. That's one of the reasons SNCC doesn't like him so much, because he got in their face. You know, he got very angry with

people. He had a temper. He didn't put up with stuff. But he practiced nonviolence during the Movement and in demonstrations. He walked across the bridge and into the battle. I found out by the end of the summer I could not practice—I could not be spiritually a nonviolent person. Maybe too much football, maybe "kyke" when I was young, maybe too angry. In my core, I had enough abuse. I didn't want to take it any more.

And I also had post-traumatic stress at that point from the shootings and the stress of being scared every day. I mean, if you're scared, you know, if you have the fight-or-flight syndrome, and you can't do either, you internalize, and that's not very good for you. And plus, getting—I got shot at from six feet away. I got, you know, from the next car, which totally, totally, totally scared me.

DC: That's while you were—was that while you were trying to register voters?

WL: No, that was when we were trying to organize a maids union, which was going to be a great opening scene in my movie, after the movie Help.

But ironically, amazingly, really, I'm in Americus. Who do I run into? A guy from Grant High School named Rich Adler, who was—I was the sports editor. He was in the Hall of Fame as a gymnast. He was a ring guy and like most gymnasts, small and very muscular, because they have to—low weight, you know, on their bottom, so a lot of little guys with big arms. Rich was about 5'7", dark hair, Jewish, and he had joined SNCC somewhere or another. I don't know if—I don't know where he went to college, but somehow, he'd gotten involved with SNCC. He's down there.

And in between the week going to churches, I run into Rich, "Hey, Rich! How you doing? Da-da-da-da." You know, I hadn't seen him in a year, because I'd been in college, maybe two. I'm trying to think if he was—I think he was a year ahead of me. Maybe not. He was either

in my class or ahead of me, but I knew him. And he was a good athlete, and a lot of athletes knew each other. We didn't run in the same group, but I knew he was in the Hall of Fame, because I wrote about him, and I don't know if it was my junior year or my senior year. But he was a real good gymnast. He was an all-league gymnast.

And he had been beaten. He's in the news accounts in my book. He had been surrounded by a group of whites and beaten up and broken through. You know, he was a strong guy, but he—and he was also, in theory, pledged nonviolence, but he wasn't going to be, you know, ten guys were going to beat him up, so he broke through the crowd and got away. But they did beat him. And it was in the paper; he got [1:59:58] injured, whatever.

But he came to me and he said, "Hey, [2:00:00] I'm organizing a maids union! These maids are working eighty hours for twenty dollars a week. Let's organize a maids union." Well, that didn't come from Hosea. You know, Hosea was doing the churches and the marches. But I thought, "Yeah, that sounds like a good idea," little did I know. Well, the other unfortunate thing was, Fred Hoffman, the guy who made the movie Be Somebody, who was an Air Force veteran who was twenty-nine, his car was there. He had a Citroen, probably like a 1963 Citroen.

Let me tell you, I don't think there were any more Citroens in the state of Georgia! There certainly were no other Citroens—I think it may have had Georgia plates on by that time, but it didn't matter. There were no Citroens in Americus, and all the white people knew that if there was a Citroen, it must be an outsider. And that was the car I had! I had Fred's car! Not good thinking on my eighteen—I think I was probably wearing my Number Ten jersey and driving a Citroen!

DC: [Laughs]

WL: Going to try and organize a maids union! That was a third strike. That was not good. So, but Rich convinced me. So, I just—you know, I didn't think about it very clearly. There was so much going on. "Hey, you want to [2:01:10]? Good!" "Alright, what are we—what are we doing?" He said, "Well, we've got to go around and pick up the maids and take them to a meeting at the Freedom Center."

The Freedom Center is—there's the Freedom Center. That was a little building owned by Barnum, the family that owned Barnum's Funeral Home, which was one of the other centers of the Movement there, whose family had gone to jail, a wealthy family. You know, the barbers had independent clients—they were independent, the funeral people, and the ministers. Everybody else was beholden to the white community, including the teachers, in those segregated days.

So, we went around to a couple of places. They said no. The women were—they seemed fearful. That was one of the few times I really saw people fearful. And this was, again, this was the week that Andrew Whatley had been killed. The state patrol had been sent there. The Klan had had a rally. Lester Maddox was in town. It was a pretty busy week in Americus, Georgia, and I've got some of the news footage from that.

But the maids wouldn't get in the car with two white boys. I think the other thing was that, [laughs] "We're not going to get in the car with you, two white boys, because that ain't going to go over big with the white community. And they may not—they may hate you more than us, but they may miss you and hit us when they shoot at you." So, they wouldn't come in the car.

So, I remember very vividly—and in those days, in most of the black communities, there was not a ghetto. There wasn't even so much the other side of the tracks, at least in the communities where I was. The black neighborhoods were scattered throughout the white—the

downtown here, fancy white neighborhood, could be a little black poor neighborhood here, a little black poor neighborhood here. You know, there were pockets, two or three maybe. So, we had to drive through the white—from a black neighborhood through white downtown, or to another black neighborhood.

And as we came out from the last group that we were talking to—we couldn't get anybody to come, at least, we gave up at that point—I noticed there was a pickup. I think I may have noticed the pickup truck on the way in, but I definitely noticed it on the way out. And as we left, it followed. And I noticed because things were going on. I mean, you know, that was the first time I got shot at, but, you know, it was a dangerous time. So, I noticed.

And there had been bricks—the guy I was living with, David Bell's family—Bill Rowe had thirteen stitches in his chin. They had driven by and thrown a brick at him, hit him with a brick, then chased him and beat him with sticks, and he had also broken some fingers. And then David threw—David was seventeen, later went in the military. He's in Albany. He's a social worker now, David Bell. You might try and find David. I stayed in touch with his mom for years. I think David may be divorced now, with three kids, but he was stationed at Fort Benning for many years. And he was, you know, in the military for twenty years.

Ironically, Bill Rowe's brother was a chaplain in the military at Fort Benning when Bill went missing. My only contact with the FBI that summer—I have a file now from the thread in Macon at the gas station—was I called the Albany office. We were always told to keep tabs. If somebody—if you're going out, tell people when you're coming back. And if you're not back, then try and find out what happened. So, Bill was gone. You know, he had been beaten up. And I didn't—he was missing, essentially, six hours late.

So, I called the FBI field office in Albany. And I got one of the ones that Dr. King criticized for being a Southerner who wasn't sympathetic with the Movement. And it was, "Ah, yeah?" Said, "You call us back if you find the body." Click. That was how much they were interested in helping.

That was not the case of the FBI agents sent after John Doar got the complaint that I made to Joel Siegel, that Joel Siegel sent to him, that's in that book. You can read their interviews of the people they chased all over Georgia, who had made the threats, and their communication with Power Service Stations, which convinced Power Service Station it's not a good enough excuse to say [2:05:00] that you're hiring people that aren't taking down the "white only" signs. You better take down the "white only" signs at your gas stations, or you're going to be in trouble. There's not going to be anybody else but your corporate office. And the "white only" sign came down.

But anyway, so the car followed us, and because I knew of the brick being thrown, as the car came up beside of us—I can't remember, I'm trying to write it for the screenplay now, and I don't really remember if I said anything like, "Look out, Rich!" or whatever. But I started rolling down the window—not that Fred had air conditioning, the windows were probably half-down anyway—because I didn't want a brick to hit the window and shatter it. Not that—it may have been shatterproof glass, but because I was bunking and sharing a bedroom with Bill, and he had been hit by a brick, I was thinking more brick than gun.

Instead, what happened is the car came up, it was a pickup truck, the gun came out [laughs] about this far away. I mean, here I'm the driver. The passenger—the car pulls up. The passenger sticks the gun out. Bang, bang, bang! As soon as I saw the gun, I ducked. Rich ducked. Heard the shots, hit the brake, and started looking for the bullet holes. And they took off. The

guys, the shooters, left. And there were no bullet holes, which was very confusing to me, because I wasn't far away. To this day, I don't know whether the bullets went through the windows or whether they were blanks.

Now, I talked to somebody in the military. They, for whatever reason, they said, "I think it was bullets. I don't think they would have gone to all that trouble with blanks." On the other hand, it was a good way to scare me and not kill me. And it scared me. It scared both of us. Rich, I think, did leave. I've only talked to him once since then. I've tried to find him, actually. I haven't been able to find him. And he said, "I thought I was driving." I said, "No, Rich. I was driving." [Laughs] But he had already been—and they may have been going after him. He may have been—but I had already been to the church.

So, he had been already beaten up. I had been to the church. We were both ID'ed at that point. See, when we first came down, one of the reasons I got sent to the church for the funeral was they didn't know who we were. But it didn't take long. And, you know, by that time, both Rich and I were known. So, I don't know who they were following. Or, they were certainly following the car. And to this day, again, I don't know.

The next day, I got shot at again and I heard the bullet hit the bushes, so I know that was a real bullet. And that was, I was just walking with about four black guys. A truck came by—I don't know whether it was the same truck or not, because I didn't look close enough at the truck the first day. That was all pretty quick, the first day. But the second day, I was scared. [Laughs] I was terrified. I dove in the bushes. The black guys knew, instinctively, they would be shooting at me.

The whites—I don't know if you've heard this before. The whites hated the white civil rights workers more than they hated the blacks. They understood the blacks; they wanted their

freedom. Why the hell were the white people helping them? We were race traitors. We were white niggers. We were called white niggers sometimes. So, the black guys knew that if they were shooting at somebody, and a lot of black people will tell you this—Freedom Riders Bob and, um, Bob, who was a UCLA Freedom Rider, his wife Helen Singleton, Bob and Helen Singleton. Helen is on what's his name's book, the Freedom Rider book, on the cover. I was at Rick Tuttle's house at a dinner with Helen with somebody with a journalist. She told them, "No, when we were Freedom Riders, they hated the whites more." Among Movement people that are honest with you, they'll tell you that.

It makes sense. They understood the black people. They didn't like them. They hated them. But they knew why they were doing it. Whites? Why were we doing it? We were traitors! And they wanted to make us the devil. Without us, the black people, they could kill them without trouble. And so, they weren't thinking very clearly, because once they killed us, that was even worse.

But the black guys, [laughs] the black guys kind of laughed at me when I dove in the bushes that second day. They didn't dive in the bushes. I dove in. I was afraid they were going to come back. I was scared. I was very scared by this. Now, I told people, and I think it's really true. The first day really scared me. But it went away. I mean, I was shook up, and I told people. It's in the incident report. And I think the group from Macon didn't want me to stay, because they were afraid I was going to get killed.

But the second one had a far more lasting effect. If it happens once, you say, "Well, it happened once. It's never going to happen again." When it happens a second time, you don't know when the third time is. And particularly, even to this day, I don't like cars to follow me.

When I drove between Macon and Americus the rest of that summer, no one ever passed me. I knew I had post-traumatic stress when I got back.

I stayed two weeks extra, almost three weeks extra, for the election in Macon. That was my thing for the people in Macon, "Oh, you can't leave! We need you here. Everybody knows Number Ten!" I said, "No. Hosea wants to put me on the staff. He wants me to be in Americus. I'll come back." They said, "You're deserting the people in Macon." "No, I'll come back. I'll work in the election." Because we were—our [2:09:46] project was ten weeks, June fourteenth to August twenty-eighth. The election was September fifteenth in Macon. I said, "Well, gosh, you know, school doesn't start till the nineteenth," you know. We've registered all these voters. We've registered over three thousand voters in Macon. [2:10:00] Now, our job is to get them to vote! That's the whole point!

But everybody else decided they wanted to leave. They did their time. They did their tour. Everybody left. Except Merle. Merle was going to come back, but he left, too. He eventually did come back, Merle [2:10:13]. So, I stayed and, you know—but anyway, when I got back— and that was when I got the threat from the Klan the night before I left. But when I got back, when I was driving down to see Ken Long, I was on the Long Beach Freeway—see, other people, also, they drove back. They had time to decompress. From the night twenty-four hours earlier, they said, "If you're still in town in twenty-four hours, you're dead," twenty-four hours later, I landed in L.A. I had no decompression time.

DC: Where did this threat come from? Was it a phone call?

WL: The night of the election—oh, you didn't read that in my article I sent you? That was in the B'nai Brith article.

DC: Well, [2:10:44]

WL: Oh. When I stayed for the election in Macon, it was the first black who had run since Reconstruction. It was for water commissioner. They said in the article—they changed it for commissioner. It was commissioner, but it was water. It was Reverend Marcus Moon. He was a barber and minister, because, if he didn't have a full-time church, he needed to support himself. But he stood up. He said, "Okay." Bill Randall needed a candidate. He decided to be the candidate.

The morning of the election, they changed every voting, polling place in Macon. At least we knew we had an impact! And they put the directions in [2:11:17] print. Now, many of the black people had not had good educations. The tiny print was very hard to read, plus I think some of them may have been in white neighborhoods. I don't know. But all of our plans for getting people to the polls were thrown—and, of course, the white people that did this knew they were doing that.

That's why the Voting Rights Act needs to be kept active and approved, so that will never happen again. And I am sympathetic to Alabama and other places that we haven't had this discrimination in years. The problem is this is politics. This has nothing to do with race. This could happen—this probably happens in places that aren't under the Voting Rights Act if they can get away with it, because—excuse the language for lawyers—if lawyers run things, they figure a way to get around and manipulate laws. That's what the adversary system, which I don't like involved with civil rights law, sets up. If we can get away with it, we do it! It doesn't matter whether you're innocent or guilty doing whatever. You know, you do what you can get away with, and that's part of the adversary system. I understand there's a value to that, as well.

But that's why the Voting Rights—and that's why SCOPE—and Rick Tuttle is the one that said this in my book. Here's what Rick Tuttle's said, how important SCOPE was, which is

ironic, because he's quoted in my book, and I give him credit for it: "Selma happened in March. The Voting Rights Act was stalled until the sixth of August. Watts blew up on the eleventh. If the Voting Rights Act—and all the moral support of the churches, the white community, the labor unions, was powerful supporting the Voting Rights Act—if we hadn't got it done by the sixth, and the Watts riots, the Watts rebellion, had happened, some of that white support through the churches and the unions would have been weakened."

And it was—there was always going to be a Voting Rights Act. The key question was exactly what's still being debated: the enforcement clause. And that's what the Southerners were stalling for and negotiating for: no enforcement clause. Because, of course, without an enforcement clause, the law would have been meaningless, just like the one in '57. That's why SCOPE was very, very critical to the Voting Rights Act, both pushing it out of committee and as history, as Rick Tuttle, who is a Ph.D. in history, explained to me, apparently not to you, why SCOPE was important, was because it kept the pressure on and got that vote signed before the first explosion in the North, the worst of the first explosion.

JB: [2:13:44]

WL: But when I was driving on the Long Beach Freeway, talking about post-traumatic stress, the same lights that bothered me in the South still bothered me, and I didn't want them to follow me. And I thought, "Wait a second. That's not right." Just like the guy said, "That's not right," when the white woman called him, and it was his mother. I said, "That's not right. I'm not in Georgia anymore. Those people aren't following me." But emotionally, I thought I don't want—I don't like—I wanted to get away from them. I didn't want them to pass me. Once that car passed me, I never let another car pass me the rest of the summer, and I still don't like cars to pass me. Because I, I mean, you and I know intellectually, and I pretty much know emotionally,

that next car isn't going to shoot at me again. I'm not a hundred percent sure. That's what post-traumatic stress is. Just like these guys who come back from IEDs. I don't know what they go through, because they've had far more—although when you've had a gun stuck in your face and bullets shot, that's pretty scary. But I have to watch myself now that, when cars are behind me, I have to calm myself down and say, "That's what's going. This is your—it's kicking in. Just relax. It's not 1965."

But when I first got back, that was just one of many things. I got depressed after that, and no one really knew what it was back then, you know. They called it "battle fatigue." And, actually, I did see [2:15:00] the campus psychologist at UCLA, and they said, "Well, people from the Peace Corps—" they didn't associate it with the danger. I don't know if I verbalized it. I don't know if I understood that part. But they said, "People coming back from the Peace Corps, from such an intense emotional experience, being bonded so closely every day with people in very intense work, sometimes had had readjustment things." And that's what they told me at UCLA when I made one attempt to figure out what was going on.

DC: Um-hmm. You want to stop one second?

[Recording stops and then resumes]

JB: We're on.

WL: Solitary confinement.

DC: Oh, wow. Alright.

JB: We're on.

DC: Okay. [Laughs]

WL: But that's the second movie. The movie in the South is called *The Summer in the South*, and if that ever gets made, the one in L.A. will be called *The Fall in L.A.*

DC: Okay.

WL: A hundred and twelve days. And I'll tell you, a hundred and twelve days is not a long, long time in jail, but it's a pretty long time in jail.

DC: Well, I want to ask about that quickly, but I just want to follow up on, because I think the PTSD in Movement—this is a very important thing to talk about.

WL: Very important for SNCC. I don't think they understand it. I don't think the SNCC people have ever come to grips. And it's no shame. I mean, it is what it is. It's just your emotional system can only take so much. And I think their hostility towards Dr. King, some of the same stuff—they feel they haven't gotten enough credit. They're operating out of that same, those same feelings that they had at the time, of all the sacrifices they and their colleagues made, some of whom were shot down right in front of them, and nobody was ever, you know, penalized for it. It's like Jonathan Daniel, the guy who was in jail for eight hours.

And that was very important to me, too, because that was while I was there, and that was not that far away from where I was. I actually had post-traumatic stress to go to Hayneville. I had a real struggle going there to publicize my books for Challenge Press. And I talked to [2:16:50]. That was one of the times he helped me. He said, "I understand what you're going through, but it'll be good for you to go there." I said, "I know they're not going to shoot me there, but they shot somebody and killed somebody there. I don't want to go there. I don't want to go there, because I—it makes me afraid, because I got shot at." And you know what happened? I went there. The first person I saw was the black sheriff. I wasn't afraid anymore. [Laughs]

DC: [Laughs]

WL: See, black people were the good people, the good men. They weren't the ones who were going to shoot me anymore. It was white people. Except, when I was in jail, I had a few—I

had some Nation of Islam people that didn't care that I worked for Dr. King. I got some stitches in my eye from a fight in the L.A. county jail. That's a different story, though.

DC: Was that Civil Rights Movement related, too, your—?

WL: It was.

DC: Yeah, yeah.

WL: It was when I was Dr. King's college coordinator, yeah. It was over—fair housing thing. Some black kids from Santa Monica had come and heard my music and wanted to hang out. I talked to their mom. I don't think they even have a dad. And I was working around my place in Santa Monica, on a little court. And then, I got a call from—I had just moved in, and I got a call from the landlord, who said, "My wife's father just died in Italy. She's upset. Somebody called and said they were going to bomb my place, because you had black people there." This was the fall of '66.

And I had met a lot of white people in the South, some very good. Betty Adams was a woman from the Methodist church. We had the first integrated church meeting in Macon because of Betty Adams at a youth—he said, "You're working with them," when I was there for those extra few weeks. A number of interesting things happened. And you asked me about the threat I'll finish that. But Betty came. One of the good things that happened was Betty said, "Listen." She found me and she said—she was the first white woman in the postal department, so she was her own—she was a feminist before feminism became feminism. And a lot of the men didn't like her working in the post office, because that was a man's job. And she now raises dachshunds in—north of Macon. I've since seen her. And her husband kind of put up with all of her integrationist stuff.

But she said, "I'm working with the white Methodist youth, and you're working with the black Methodist youth. Why don't we have a meeting at my house?" And we did, and that was the first integrated meeting. And her husband, B. H., Chief Adams, good old Southern boy, he let his wife do it, you know, because the wife, of course, runs [2:18:57] anyway. But that was the first integrated—that was a local white woman.

There was a guy named Bob Brenner, who I believe is now a lay minister, who was going to William and Mary, he reached out to me. And I later saw him. He had a religious house there. You know, that summer, I met him through the church, through the Methodist church. I think he was at that meeting, actually.

And what happened with the threat, I was carrying the people down to vote for Marcus Moon. That night after the election, I'm at Bill Randall's office with his son, Harry, who worked for the state. Harry gets a call, and he said, "It's for you." You know, who was calling me at Bill Randall's office? Actually, it was our office. It was at our SCOPE office. Yeah, I think it was, or maybe it was Bill's office in Macon. I don't know. I'm not sure. I think it was—maybe it was our SCOPE office.

I got on the phone, and it was—I could tell it was a white voice. It sounded like a nice white man, and he said, "Are you the white man?" And I really liked it, because I was eighteen, and he called me a man, and I thought this was a compliment and he was going to say something nice to me. "Are you the white man that was carrying the Nigras down to vote today?" And I said, "Yes." And then, the voice changed, and it wasn't nice anymore. And it said, "If you're still here in twenty-four hours, you're dead." [2:20:00] And it was a very serious—it wasn't saying "you're gonna be" or "you better be careful." It was saying, "You're here in twenty-four hours, and you're dead." Click.

And I said, "Bill," I told Bill, I said, "I'm not leaving!" And Bill said, "Oh, yes, you're leaving. You're leaving tomorrow morning," because I had already been scheduled to go by Dr. King's office, get my—everybody else drove back. Because I stayed and I was on the SCLC field staff, I had met with Dr. King—I can tell you about that if you want—and became a member of the staff, and I got a plane ticket. I got a check with Dr. King's signature, which, of course, I wish I had saved, and took it to the airport and got my ticket. And so, Bill Randall was already scheduled—because I had to get back to school. You know, I had stayed three weeks extra. But I was—you know, the election was over, and it was time for me to go home, so I was already scheduled to go.

And Bill said—but I said, "No! They're not going to run me out of town!" He said, "It's time for you to go. I'm taking you tomorrow morning. I'll be at your house. We're going. We're not discussing this," which probably had I sobered up for a half-second, I would have—I mean, I wasn't, you know, but I was—kind of what the Movement was, is you're making your point, whatever, and I had been threatened a lot and I was getting tired—anyway, whatever. So, I got on the plane, I fell asleep, I woke up, I'm back in L.A. And two nights later, I'm scared driving to Long Beach.

DC: Hmm, um-hmm.

WL: So. [Laughs] You want to hear the Dr. King story real quick? Or you wanted to hear—do you want me to finish the—I can tell you the real quick story of the Santa Monica and Dr. King's—

DC: I want to hear just a little bit about being the coordinator on the West Coast, because I think it's important to know that SCLC was—

WL: I got to thank Dr. King. I like to tell people about thanking Dr. King, because that was very special.

DC: Okay, great, great.

WL: At the end of the summer, they just called about forty of us. I think they probably asked probably sixty or seventy of the people they felt did well enough on their work to join the field staff and commit a year to your life. That was when Hosea came to me and said, "You've done a good job here. We need—we've got a lot more work to do. I want to keep SCOPE going. I want you to commit a year to your life. Stay down with us." And I said, "You know—." "And I want to come on staff now."

So, I went on staff in Americus. And I said, "You know—." I knew my dad didn't like it too much if I, you know, I didn't—[laughs] because I hadn't had parental permission. I was also getting a little worn out. But I also knew that I would be classified 1-A. I'd lose my student deferment, so I wasn't going to be—I don't how Hosea was going to figure that out. And I don't know, maybe some—the women didn't have that problem, and some did stay. The guys that did, I don't know how they worked that out. Maybe they had a deferment, you know, a pacifist deferment, whatever. But I didn't have a deferment. So, I said, "But I'll stay two weeks. I'll stay for the election in Macon." So, that was fine.

So, the day that the project officially ended, which was August twenty-eighth, which was actually the anniversary of the "I Have a Dream" speech, that was the official date of the conclusion, we got called to—in those days it was West Hunter Street Baptist Church, which was Reverend Abernathy's church. Now, West Hunter Street is Martin Luther King Drive in Atlanta.

DC: Right.

WL So, we were in the basement, and Dr. King came, and Gwen Green, who ran the WCLC, was there, and she was given flowers. Ben Clark was there, Hosea was there, and Dr. King was there. And we were told that because we were now on staff, Dr. King wanted to talk to us. So, he came out and he gave this wonderful speech. And Hosea had all the data of how many registered voters, 49,302, I think it was, kept records of everything, which is in my book. And went over all of our accomplishments, and yada, yada, yada. And then, he said, "I've come out against the war. I want you to understand. It's very controversial. You're now representing our organization, representing me. I want you to be able to explain to people who may ask you why I've done what I've done."

Now, Dr. King came out twice against the war. He came out in '65, and he actually had to retrench, because there was so much criticism, and his own board was against it. He then kind of kept quiet, and Mrs. King went around to antiwar marches and did antiwar concerts, and she was the spokesperson against the Vietnam War. He then, two years later, actually the anniversary of his death, April fourth, 1967, at the Riverside Church in New York, made his statement against the war. So, but he didn't know that he was going to have to retract at that point. At that point, he was out front. He was also up in Chicago much of that summer.

So, he thanked us. He explained it. And then, he said, "Are there any questions?" And then, people have often said—you know, he also spoke to us, you know, I had heard him at UCLA, I heard him at the orientation, but this was in a small group. And there were some people that were in Atlanta, and they got to spend a lot of time with him. I did not get to spend time with him—a lot of time with Hosea, some time with Andy, although not that summer, really, when Andy came out to L.A., and Hosea would come out to L.A. Now, I never saw Dr. King in L.A.,

but I saw Andy and Hosea. So, sometimes I was not in town, whatever. I was organizing in Northern Cal, whatever.

But, so he said, "Are there any questions?" And, you know, you've got twenty teenagers or a little older, kind of awestruck—Martin Luther King has been thanking them—and me, you know, I worked out with the Dodgers, I was with my heroes many times. [2:25:00] And he was one of my heroes, but I was not awestruck enough that—and I've often said he wasn't the Martin Luther King, orator; he was like Martin Luther King, the youth minister, the YMCA coordinator, just very soft-spoken, knowing—I felt very strongly and I feel this now—he knew we were in awe of him. He went out of his way and knew how to make people feel comfortable. And he knew he was famous; it wasn't a big thing to him, I mean, that was just part of his job, and he made you feel comfortable.

And he just seemed like this nice guy, just like he had seemed at UCLA, which I said in a program with Hosea. Everybody else—because Hosea was worrying—what am I going to say? We were all supposed to give memories of Dr. King on this show, "The Voice of the Crusader," and he knew I didn't know Dr. King. Everybody else did. And I just said—I didn't try and wing it. I mean, I don't do that. I didn't try, "Well, Dr. King, I got to know him—." I said, "He just was a nice guy. I only heard him that one time closeup, [2:25:53], and he seemed like he was a nice guy." Everybody goes, "Yeah! Dr. King was really a nice guy!"

DC: [Laughs]

WL: Because you don't—you know, you think of Dr. King as this famous person. But he was a person! And it took him three hours to walk from Ebenezer home, because he would walk home and talk to everybody along the way, because he was a nice guy, too. Sometimes he just wanted to be a nice guy. So—and Mrs. King was an extraordinarily nice person. I am very

fortunate to—did get to know her and work with her. Wrote a letter to my father when he was ill, which was very meaningful to my father after all I had been through in jail and stress. And I'm sure the stress of my being in jail when I was nineteen and twenty was not good for my mom. She died a little more than a year later.

That's why when Taylor Branch uses the FBI documents and—I was in jail. The police chief was Peter Pitchess, who had been an FBI agent, and the FBI knew who I was, and Marcus Crahan, who said Sirhan Sirhan was sane after he killed Robert Kennedy and said I needed to be locked up in a mental hospital because I worked for Martin Luther King—it's extremely personal that Taylor Branch has exploited that FBI terrible period, which the FBI has acknowledged was a terrible period, and the Congress acknowledges. He has made money out of the pain that was caused by the FBI. It's very personal to Taylor, and Taylor knows that. Taylor is a coward. I've tried to talk to Taylor about it. I tried to help Taylor. And he trashed SCOPE. And then, he put—he had the nerve to put my name in his notes, saying that I helped him with his book! I helped him when he was in Selma, not knowing how to find Martin Luther King, III, because he wanted to march in the reenactment in 2005, which he had the nerve to say was "risking something," which was a joke. It was protecting—he said, "Oh, it was dangerous to march," or insinuated—Taylor is great at insinuating.

But I had an argument with Harris Wofford. He says, "You should get off of Taylor Branch." He doesn't like Taylor. He let me quote him, saying Taylor Branch used too much of the FBI, far too much, without explaining the thing. I told Harris just recently—we had an argument about it, because Taylor didn't put Harris's—Harris has criticized Taylor Branch publicly, and he didn't put Harris's name in his new book, although he mentioned the phone call from Kennedy to Mrs. King, which Harris set up. It's called *America in the King Years*, and you

leave out Dr. King's friend, who set up the phone call, and he said he did it for brevity. He says in a part this is an original part that he wrote for this new book, and he cut Harris's name out. [Laughs] And Harris thought I was being too critical. I don't think so. I think it was done intentionally, because Harris—Taylor Branch thinks that he is so important, and he's so egotistical that he gets to decide who's in the Movement. And if he doesn't put you in, you're not in.

SCOPE's not in there either, just like SCOPE wasn't in *Eyes on the Prize*, just like some of the SNCC people don't want to mention SCOPE anymore, despite the fact that many SNCC people worked with SCOPE, whose names are in my book in our record because they were arrested with us. And the families that hosted us, of course, were African American, so it's—and that's why Sammy Mahone has been such so great to have brought Willie Bolden and me and John Lewis and Willie Ricks, who said the Black Power thing, who told me to leave Americus. Willie was there. He said, "White boy, we don't want you here. Your only value is to raise money in the North."

That was after Stokely had said two months earlier, "We're going to sabotage SCOPE." And some of those people are still following Stokely's admonition from a meeting in Holly Springs, Mississippi, in May of 1965, which is in their minutes, which then Ralph Featherstone, who I got to know in Berkeley at a teach-in in '67, who got blown up in a car in Maryland—I'm sure he didn't blow himself up. I think those explosives were planted by the government. Ralph said, "Let's go off-record." These files are in the King Center, in the SNCC papers. He says, "What do you mean 'sabotage Dr. King and SCOPE'?" And they went off-record, and Ralph was against it. Stokely said it. That's Taylor Branch's marching orders?

And Stokely himself, or Kwame Ture himself, when he had cancer, [2:30:00] late in his life, with Louis Farrakhan, Minister Farrakhan, in Washington—it's on video. I have not seen it, but I've heard of it. Minister Farrakhan started making negative comments about Dr. King. And when Kwame Ture was in his last months of life, he said, "Do not say anything bad about Dr. King." He said, "We attacked Dr. King many, many times." This is on a video. I don't know where it is. It was filmed when they had a fundraiser for Stokely, for Kwame Ture, in Washington, and Louis Farrakhan was there. That's what I've been told. And he said, "Doctor—we attacked Dr. King all those times. He never attacked us back." Finally, Kwame Ture got the message.

Willie Ricks saw me in 2007. I was late to a thing at the little tiny armory they have there, a dance. I had been many times. I was the only white person there for the last couple of hours. Willie knows me. And I was—one black woman and I were dancing, different ones, and I was having a good time, because I was late getting there. I was outside with Willie. I had seen Willie over the years. Willie spoke at Hosea's memorial service. And he said—and Terry Randolph, who was really close with Hosea.

And Willie came up to me and he said, "You know, I'm Willie Ricks, who—I'm friends with Terry Randolph and I was friends with—you know, we worked with Hosea." And I said, "I know, Willie." And he said, "You know, we were down here together in '65." I said, "I know, Willie. I know who you are. I know. I know you." And I was thinking, "Jeez, Willie, it only took forty years for you to want to be friends, forty-five years. Gosh, I'm glad we can be friends now."

DC: [Laughs]

WL: Because he told me in ’65, he said, “I hate all white people.” He said, “A black state trooper in Alabama beat me up, and I hate all white people.” And I said, “You know, I’m really sorry that happened with the black state trooper. It has nothing to do with me. That community here has asked us here. Dr. King asked us here. Hosea asked us here.”

And then, I went in with another guy, a young guy, on Dr. King’s staff, and we were working off stress doing fifty sit-ups at a time. And Willie watched us doing the fifty sit-ups, and then, he didn’t say anything else to me. But he tried to intimidate me and, you know, I mean, “Hey, Willie, these white people have been shooting at me. You really are going to have kind of a hard time intimidating me.”

And there was another black guy at a meeting who told me to shut up, that I didn’t have a right to speak. And I said, “No, I have a right to speak. I’m out in the frontline.” And it was usually the guys that weren’t in the frontline that told white people they shouldn’t be there. Willie was the guy in the flatbed truck with Hosea. Willie was yelling, “Black Power” in the Meredith March, and Hosea was yelling, “Freedom now!” And I don’t dislike Willie. I’m glad Willie and I can be friends.

And I’m glad that, just like when Malcolm X made the pilgrimage to Mecca, and he saw that there were all different shades of Islam, that he came back and was a changed man and was moving towards Dr. King, which Jackie Robinson writes about in his autobiography, because he knew Malcolm X, and Malcolm had criticized him and was reconciling with him. And I just think that—I give all the credit in the world for the SNCC people for their valor and their courage, and they’re in my book. Their pictures are in my book, equally to SCLC from the King Center, the young SNCC group, the young SCLC group. Kwame Ture is in there. Eldridge Cleaver is in there. That’s the true history.

But you know what? The true history includes the five hundred of us who went south, lived with black families, as SNCC wanted us to do. As SNCC said, "Live in the community. Don't come in and out." That was their criticism of Dr. King. So, we did just what they wanted, but they—we made roots. And some of those SNCC or SCOPE organizations in a number of communities are still in existence as multimillion dollar community organizations that started during SCOPE. And that, you know, that process was something that—we registered 49,203 voters, many before the Voting Rights Act.

And we stood on their shoulders. They were the foundation that we followed. And instead of resenting us, we're the same. We're together. We're part of them. And some of them are now, within these books that are coming out, they—partly from the reunion I organized—they're now embracing us, Maria Gitin's book in particular about Camden, Alabama, and that county. She interviewed twenty-six families, many of whom were SNCC, because many of the people that had been with SNCC hosted the SCOPE families and the SCOPE volunteers. And that's what I always said, "When you cut us out, you cut the families out that we lived with and the people that we marched with."

DC: Right.

WL: And it was done out of the feeling that Dr. King got all the publicity, and they didn't get their fair share. They got plenty of publicity, but I think it was more based on post-traumatic stress, though. Post-traumatic stress and depression is experienced in many, many, many different variations. I experienced it in my way. Believe me, anybody who went through what many of the people in SNCC went through [2:35:00] and the Freedom Riders went through—another criticism was that Dr. King didn't get on the bus in Montgomery and go the rest of the way on the Freedom Ride. Dr. King had three children, or two children at that time, and a wife.

These were single people. I was single. Easier for us to put our lives on the line. We don't have children. We don't have wives. And they criticized him for that.

You know what? Time to get over it. It's history. I make no criticism for anything that was done at that time, because when people have their lives on the line under years of stress. People used to go to Atlanta for R&R, and they self-medicated. They would go out and drink. That's what soldiers do! That's what soldiers do because of the fear, of the stress. It's okay.

That's what I wanted to tell Frank Smith in Washington when he told me, "We were—the first words out of his mouth—we were tougher than Dr. King," when I told him about the son-of-a-bitch thing. No, you were as tough. You didn't have a bull's eye on you every day, that Dr. King had every day until one day they got him. He knew that—he knew that. Harris Wofford talks about that, that his wife Coretta talked about that in '56. And he went out every day, without any protection! That's pretty good. That's pretty amazing. That's, you know—he deserves—he was the leader.

That doesn't mean that Frank Smith wasn't a leader, that Kwame Ture wasn't a leader. They were leaders, too. They were great leaders. He was the main leader. He had it all. He had the education, he had the oratory, he had the courage, he had the humanity. You know? And he was an African American. Feel proud of him. Embrace him. He was part of you; you were part of him. And the same with SCOPE. So.

And so—but the people I don't like are the David Garrows and the Taylor Branches. And Taylor was not involved and claimed he sat in a jail, so he was arrested. He never went behind bars, because he was in a—he wanted to be like—he said—I heard him on a radio show: "I wanted to be like Stokely Carmichael, so I got in a black card game." And he got picked up by the sheriff, who didn't him to get in trouble. And then, he sat in the jail, and then he showed his

Yale ID, and he went off to his motel. 1969, not part of the era, but—and he was trying to build his resume. That's what the guy's about. I mean, I'm telling you this because I know the guy. I've dealt with him enough so I can—I don't talk about—and I've said this to his face. I said it in Birmingham at a meeting when he was at the Civil Rights Institute. I don't talk about people that—and some people didn't like it I said it there, but—. Harris has also said it, but much nicer than me, about using the FBI stuff.

But anyway, I'm sorry, you wanted to ask a question about the—about being the college coordinator.

DC: Yeah, I kind of—

WL: I can give you that real quick. I would like to talk about the 2401 Southwestern.

DC: Well, that's—do that, and then let's wrap up.

WL: Yeah.

DC: We could go for hours, but let's not. [Laughs]

WL: Yeah, I know. You've already gone for hours.

DC: [Laughs] I know.

WL: I appreciate you letting me run on.

DC: I appreciate—

JB: [2:37:48]

[Recording stops and then resumes]

WL: Because, unfortunately, this history of SCOPE has been left out—

JB: We're on.

WL: And the reasons why. I think it's, you know, it's worth talking about. And Sammy Mahone is the model. He was a SNCC leader in Americus. And he's a leader. He's had us both

there. He did it before I said it. So, I'm following Sammy's lead. He's embracing everybody and being inclusive, and I think it's time we do that. That's the true story. And that involves far more black people than white people. Taylor is right about that: it was a tiny number of Jews, a tiny number of others. Percentage-wise, we are a tiny group, you know, the whites. And even in the black community, although it's—a pretty significant part of the black community was involved, one way or another. Not everybody. Not everybody. Because, even then, you were taking big risks.

So, you wanted to ask some questions about being the college coordinator.

DC: Well, I was just going to say maybe just one last thing that you want to say, and then we'll wrap up.

WL: Yeah, well, the college coordinator was—I got back, I walked into the meeting, and Gwen Green, who was the leader, said, you know—so, I came back late, because I had been in the South. And I went to the first meeting and I got there late. She said, "Oh, our leader is here," or "Our coordinator is here." And I literally looked behind me to see who she was talking about. So, I think what happened was, when I raised my hand and talked to Dr. King, he and Hosea had talked it over, and they decided that I would be the college coordinator. So, I protested that I was the youngest one. And Gwen said, "No, you've been selected." I later asked for many years why did I get selected. She said, "Because we knew you would do a good job. We saw you did good work."

So, I organized a conference. Hosea came out. And the real thing was SCOPE was kind of ending, Black Power was starting, the Antiwar Movement was starting. It was very hard to recruit. But Dr. King only had one regional—two regional offices. One in D.C. was a lobbying office that Walter Fauntroy ran. One was the Western Christian Leadership

Conference/slash/Southern Christian Leadership Conference. The Reverend Thomas Kilgore, who had been in New York, was now out here. He was the president. And it was these ministers around the country that Dr. King had organized back in '57 as the SCLC. And some, at least Kilgore had come from—Reverend Kilgore had come from New York out here. I don't know where he was in '57, but he had been a longterm guy.

So, we did the conference. We did Operation Breadbasket, [2:40:00] where we went—when Jesse Jackson was starting in Chicago, we started there. Apparently, I was not quite as charismatic as Jesse, and also he had more SCLC troops there. But we did evaluations and we got jobs. We did exactly the same thing. Went around to the stores in the black areas: "How many employees do you have?" Worked with the churches. That was a WCLC/SCOPE/SCLC kind of thing out here.

But when Andy and Hosea would come out periodically, Gwen would call me down there at 2401 Southwestern Avenue, I think, Suite Two, I think it is. It's in the book. Might as well get that address right. [Pause] Well, 2400. 2400 Southwestern Avenue, Suite 102, Los Angeles, California, 90018. It was Thomas Kilgore was the Director, Western Bureau, SCLC, which was essentially W—oh, and then, we had Marvin T.—I remember Marvin T. Robinson, all ministers, the Reverend Marvin T. Robinson, President of WCLC; Reverend Stovall, Chairman of the Board, WCLC. So, they had their own board. It was Western Christian Leadership Conference, Martin Luther King, Jr., Founder. So, it was sort of a separate board. And then, it was Washington, Oregon, California, Nevada, Arizona, Colorado, New Mexico, Utah, Alaska, and Hawaii.

Gwen Green was the Executive Director. [Laughing] And she's since told me that all the male ministers didn't make it that. She had to fight as a woman. But she was the executive

director. She was a woman in the leadership. She was on the payroll. I think she was probably the only one on the payroll. She had a labor background. She later worked for Councilman Bob Farrell, still alive, still in L.A.

And so, that's a great history for that neighborhood. I hope someday we're going to get a marker there, let those schools in that area know and let the ministers in that area know that they're part of the Martin Luther King legacy directly. And Dr. King went to that when he spoke at the Sports Arena not long before he died, I'm sure he was at WCLC.

And, you know, and then, so I did a number of things. I organized a little bit up in Berkeley. I had James Bevel come out. Had this incident where the kids in my neighborhood, these three black kids, came over. They were like ten, eight, and six. I talked to their mom, "Was it okay if they visit?" The landlord said, you know, "I want you to move." I said, "It's against the law to make a threat."

But I had told all these white people I talked about, Betty Adams—the main thing the white people that didn't want to shoot me came up and—particularly in Macon, not in Americus, because they didn't talk to you in Americus. They shot at you. But in Macon, they would talk to me. They'd say, "You're a hypocrite! What have you done—isn't there any problems back in L.A.?" And, of course, once the Watts situation happened, when I was out at Koinonia at the time, I thought, "These white people here might have a point. We might have some problems in California." And that was another reason I told Hosea, "I can't stay. I've got work to do where I live." So, I ended up doing work here.

And so, you know, so that stuff was going on. And I organized a little bit up in northern California. You know, the organization was a big organization. I didn't do anything. I was essentially the western states' college coordinator, but I was only doing things in northern and

southern California. And then, but because—so I would know Andy and Hosea. That was a key thing.

The other thing was, because of being on the staff, when Dr. King made his appeal about Resurrection City three years later, he did an appeal that he wrote for Look magazine before he died that came out after he died, April fourth, that said, "We need volunteers to go to demonstrate. We've had all these summers of violence in the black sections around the country. We need to channel this into a nonviolent way in Washington at the Poor Peoples Campaign." And I felt that was worth me going.

My dad was very against it. I had been in jail. I had dropped out of school. I had just gotten back in school, and he didn't want me to go. In fact, he told me, "If you go this time, I'm cutting you off!" Well, he hadn't given me any money since, when I was out of school, and he hadn't given me any—he had given me a hundred dollars for the—my dad thought it was like when the tuition was in the fifties. So, I—you know, and he was pretty serious, and I understood why. My mom at that point was ill. They were divorced, but she was—you know, she died that fall. It was a lot of stress for my family.

That's another reason why I resent people who weren't there, like Taylor Branch or David Garrow, cutting out those of us—it wasn't just me. It was my family shared that experience. It was hard on them. My family never—many of my cousins don't understand—haven't understood it. The post-traumatic stress I have they haven't understood. They never even asked me what happened. The Jewish community has never asked me until B'nai Brith last year. You know? This was a big deal in my life and a big deal in my family's life.

I never worried about it not being written about. But when Taylor Branch and David Garrow went out of their way to trash us [2:45:00] and disrespect our work and falsify our work

with fake documents, that was a little too much for me. For somebody like Taylor Branch, who's my age, who was having a comfortable summer in Atlanta when I was down getting shot at. Walk the walk if you want to talk about that. Willie Ricks walked the walk. The SNCC people walked the walk. I'll discuss that with them without a problem. I don't hold it against them. I think we need to bond and be a team together, as we were in many places anyway.

But anyway, with these kids that were there, it turned out the landlord was an ex-Santa Monica policeman, which I didn't know at the time. When I went down there, they said, "We're not going to do anything." I said, "I need somebody to come and take a report." They said, "We're not going to take a report," because the landlord told them I wasn't telling the truth, and he was an ex-cop. I was really worried, because I had told you, when I came out, I said, "I'm not putting up with this anymore. I can't." And I really didn't know.

I went and saw my rabbi, who had paid my way for me and four other Jewish students from UCLA. And he said, "Guns are okay." I mean, he knew about Israel's independence or whatever. He said, "You know, if you need protection at your house, you need protection at your house. The first thing you need to do is find out whether there was really a threat. You better call the landlord and see if he's telling the truth."

Well, that was the discussion after Friday night services. By the time I called the landlord, it was maybe nine-thirty, ten at night on a Friday night, and I had bought a gun. The police told me, "If you want any protection, buy a gun." That's when I asked the rabbi, and I bought a gun. I bought a—I said, "Can I have a gun?" They said, "You can have a shotgun if you're over eighteen." I went down and bought a shotgun. I mean, I had been through—this was the real deal to me. I mean, I had been through it. I wasn't about to have that happen again. Not that Dr. King would have been happy about it. I'm not sure Hosea would have cared.

So, I had the shotgun. I didn't want anything to happen. I talked to the rabbi. I called the landlord and I said, "Look it, the police told me to buy it." I didn't know he was an ex-cop at the time. I found that out later. I said I didn't know—I said, "I don't know. I want to know if this is true. I've talked to my rabbi. The police told me to buy a gun. I'm worried somebody might bomb my place. That's what you told me. Is that true? Were you making that up, or was it true?" He hung up on me, called the police, told them that I was threatening people with a shotgun. That's not a good thing. They came down with a city attorney named Herbert Lapine. I'd love to get his name in, because he told my dad he was going to put me in jail for life, put me in jail for life.

And I had a gun. I had the gun with me. I didn't have a phone yet. I went down to the corner at Santa Monica and 26th Street, called from a phone booth, was walking back. I had taken self-defense from a guy named [2:47:40], who was the wrestling coach and an Olympic wrestling coach, and a drill instructor from World War II. Once I knew I was going to go, I took self-defense and I paid attention when they taught about guns. I had the gun open, I knew it was loaded, and I was walking back.

I came in my alley, and there were two policemen from Santa Monica with their guns up. They said, "Drop the gun!" I said, "It's broken open. It can't be fired." Herbert Lapine, the city attorney, was there. And they said, "You have three. Drop the gun!" And I said, "It can't be—." He said, "Two." And I dropped the gun, or they would have killed me. Just like you read about all the Black Panthers that got killed?

DC: Right.

WL: I essentially had become almost a sympathetic Black Panther, in the sense that I wasn't going to take it anymore, Deacon Defense. That's where I was. Not a good place to be,

but that's where I was. Dropped the gun. They took it. I said, "Okay, you're here now. Will you take the report about the bomb threat?" "No. We don't think you're stable enough for the gun. We're taking the gun." I, at that point, wasn't experiencing post-traumatic stress, but I had had a depression. By that point, I was feeling fine. I was in really good shape. I had built fences for my uncle all summer and body surfed. I was in great shape. And so, they took the gun. They wouldn't take a report.

I went back down there, followed them down on my motorcycle, not again a good idea. I was nineteen. I said, "I want you to take the report." They said, "Get the hell out of here! We're going to beat the shit out of you and put you in jail! Get out of here!" This was before Tom Hayden and Jane Fonda kind of socialized Santa Monica. It was a different town back then. So, this was the fall of '66.

Went back home, two days later, and then three days, I called from a phone booth. I said, "Look, it's three days. I'm calmed down. But I'd like my property back." I had told them, I said, "Well, if you take the gun, I want a property receipt." They wouldn't even give me a property receipt. Essentially, they stole my gun. So, I couldn't be a very good Black Panther without my gun!

DC: [Laughs]

WL: I'm joking about Black—I didn't use that terminology.

DC: Right.

WL: But, essentially, I was doing what later people did when they got frustrated with injustice and brutality. So, I was at the same phone booth. And they said, "Okay, we'll bring—where are you?" I told them at the phone booth. "We'll bring it down to you." The cop car comes

down. The guy jumps out [2:49:38]. I said, "Oh, you brought me my gun?" He said, "No, you're under arrest!" Again, in the phone booth, like in the [2:49:43].

DC: Right.

WL: It's what Bob Zellner calls "Up North." I said, "What am I under arrest for?" He said, "You're disturbing the peace." I said, "You're not going to make that stick. I'm [2:49:49]. I'm in a phone booth." He said, "I'll make it stick," and the guy grabbed me and twisted my arm and started pulling me to the car. I said, "Take your fucking hands off me." I said, "You can arrest me, but don't touch me."

And he—and so, then he came at me, and [2:50:00] I—oh, no, I went in the car. And that's when I told him, I said, when we were going to the station, I said, "When we get out of this car," I said, "don't touch me." I said, "You can put me in jail, but you're not touching me." He said—or, no, he said, "I'm using," said, "I'm gonna," said, "If I have to use my billy," no, he said, "I'm gonna," he said, "I'm gonna do what I have to do." He says, "If I have to hit you, I'll hit you." I said, "You're gonna have to use your billy club on me, you motherfucker." Excuse language, but this was what was going on in my mind.

And we got out. I got out of the car right behind the booking room at Santa Monica station, still—I think it's still there, right off the freeway. And he came at me, and I, like I said, was in very good shape. I did self-defense. I knocked him down and jumped on him. I did learn, and the jail psychiatrist later told me, "That is not a good thing to do, if you hit a policeman outside a booking room at a police station."

DC: [Laughs]

WL: Because I was on top of him, and then, four policemen—they came out of the station pretty quickly when they hear that's going on, one of their officers is down. And four

officers each grabbed, each one grabbed legs and arms, and pulled me off, threw me over and banged my head on the ground until I passed out. I had told them, once they had me spread-eagled, I was stopping. I said, "Okay," and they kept smashing my head in the ground until I passed out.

Woke up. They brought me in and they punched me around. Then, they said—I said, "Okay, you've got me here, got me for disturbing the peace. I'm gonna sue you!" Another not-good [2:51:22] later. And they said, "Well, you know what? You promise to move out of town, and we'll let you go." That's when I should have said, "Yes!" Again, nineteen years old, you know, so I said, "No, I'm gonna sue you!" I said, "I'm a civil rights worker. I'm gonna sue you."

Put me in jail, and they charged me—instead of disturbing the peace, they charged me with a 653m(a)PC of the penal code. I'm not sure that it exists anymore. It's a threatening or obscene phone call. They said that I threatened them over the phone, that I threatened the police department over the phone, which was not true. But nobody can prove what anybody says, unless they have it on tape.

DC: Right.

WL: So, but then, they never thought I was ever going to have to go to trial, and they dropped charges from that. They put what they called a Department 95, which is a psychiatric hold, which is then a pathway to institutionalization, commitment, and that's what they tried to do. So, what happened was, they sent me to a guy named Ronald Markman, who is still alive and became a very famous jail psychiatrist, and has written a book. He's at UCLA. He's in Westwood. And he saw me. And he was a cool guy. He was in his thirties at the time.

And he said, "What are you doing here? You're a UCLA student." I said, "Well, this is what happened." He said, "Okay." He said, "You're not crazy. I'm gonna give you a clearance

so you can—" my parents couldn't bail me out. When you've got a Department 95, you can't even get bail. My parents were going to bail me out, and they couldn't get me out. And so, he said, "I'm gonna—you can get bailed out." He said, "But I'm telling you two things. Number one, you're probably wanting—I understand you're probably going to want to protest the Vietnam War. I'm gonna tell you never hit a cop and, particularly, never at a booking room."

DC: [Laughs]

WL: He says, "Okay, you're okay. Go." So, I got bailed out, and I couldn't live in the place. I went to stay with my girlfriend. And something happened with her, and my ex-roommate, the guy from the Co-Op UCLA, came by. Got in an argument with him. He called the police. He told them that I was out on bail on the other. They rearrested me for battery, which was bogus, but the two city attorneys got together. They then held me in jail a hundred and twelve days.

And I called Hosea. Actually, I tried to get to Atlanta and I got kicked off a Delta Airline plane. Hosea said, "Come down here. We can't do anything for you there." I said, "The media won't take the story." "Come down here." [Laughing] And I actually got kicked off the plane, and they sent me back, because I told them I worked for Martin Luther King. Not the same Delta Airlines, either!

DC: [Laughs] Yeah.

WL: I told the stewardess I worked for Martin Luther King, and they kicked me off the plane. Just like in the Jackie Robinson movie, they kicked him off the plane—the same thing happened to me. I have a wonderful intersection with Jackie Robinson, it seems.

So, anyway, to make a long story short, they immediately, when they found out my mother was a professor at USC and my father was a prominent chiropractor—he was the national

public relations chair for the National Chiropractic Association, had been on the Today show, was very prominent at that time. So, they offered me a deal: "We'll drop charges. You sign a stipulation of probable cause, so you can't sue us, and we'll drop the threatening phone call charge." I wouldn't do it, which pissed my dad off.

And then, they would not let me—so, then they brought me to trial to the other one. And the city attorney came down and lied to me and said witnesses were going to be there that weren't there. I got convicted by a judge, a guy named Woodmansee, who was a liberal judge, of misdemeanor battery and disturbing the peace. And they then put me up for another Department 95.

So, in the jail at that time, they had one chief jail psychiatrist. That was Marcus Crahan. He was a colleague of Peter Pitchess, who was a colleague of J. Edgar Hoover. Marcus Crahan wrote a terrible report, they told me, about me, the same guy that two years later said Sirhan Sirhan was not sick for killing—was completely sane when he killed Bobby Kennedy. So, I thought that was interesting. I was sick for having attacked a policeman who had attacked—or defended myself against a policeman. But Sirhan was sane. [2:55:00]

DC: Right.

WL: So, finally, I went back to Markman. He said, "What are you doing here again?" I said, "I got arrested again. They're messing with me." "Okay, I'm going to certify you again. But," he said, "you've got to start being careful here. You're getting arrested too much."

And so, then they took me to court and they said, "We want to send him back again." They wouldn't try me on the second charge, or the first charge. They sent me to all the jail psychiatrists. They had ten of them. When I got to the eighth one, he told me—and they have to

have two. They have to have Crahan, the head guy, and one other one. Then they they could put me up for commitment. They would never have to try me for the criminal charge.

DC: Right, right.

WL: So, they started telling me, the last couple of psychiatrists, they told me, they said, "We know Dr. Markman. We've seen his report." When they talked to me, they said, "You're not crazy." They said, "But you better be careful. They are trying to put you away and throw away the key. You are in trouble now. You've got to start being more careful and take this more seriously and not get arrested again when you get out."

So, finally—so, they could never get the second guy. So, they could never—so they finally had—and they kept taking continuances on the threatening phone call. And when I went to court about after the third continuance, Herbert Lapine said to my dad, "I'm going to put him away for life." And that's when my dad said, "Over my dead body." But, you know, he was just—he was trying to [laughs] be a chiropractor and leader in his field, and it had been a long struggle after World War II out of the projects, he was just remarried and doing well, and here's his son in all this stuff.

DC: Right, right.

WL: So, finally, I go back to court on the sentencing for the battery. And they say, "We're going to let you out, but you have to be committed." And I said, "I'm not going to be committed. I just went to your psychiatrists, and eight out of nine, or nine out of ten—you sent me to ten! Nine out of ten said I don't need to be committed! Why would I want to commit myself?" So, then, Judge Woodmansee said, "Okay, six months in jail." And I had already been in two months. Back to jail.

But at that time, I didn't cause any trouble in jail. Before, I flooded the jail. I had stopped a Black Muslim Nation of Islam guy beating up a Hispanic guy, which he then later—they put him in the same cellblock, and he hit me with a bar of soap with a razor blade in it and cut open my eye, actually was trying to kill me. He kicked me in the head with his boots. The funny part of that was there was quite a bit of blood, and when they took me in to sew me up, some of the deputies came in, who then kind of liked me, because they thought I was kind of tough and I wasn't causing too many more problems because I had decided I would go back to jail instead of going to a mental hospital.

So, they said, "Leventhal, we knew somebody was going to get you," and I think he was put up to it by them. And I said, "Well." They said, "We knew somebody was going to get you." I said, "Well." They said, "Yeah, he busted open your eye. You're getting stitched up." I said, "Well, I know I got a few on him." And they said, "Um." This guy was—his name was Hugo Maxi. He was on parole from Soledad, and he was a tough guy. When I got down, he kicked me. I threw him over me, which I learned from [2:57:54]. He got up and kicked me in the head with big boots. And that's when I realized, "This is not a regular fight. This guy is trying to kill me."

So, I got up and I defended myself. I was on my feet when it ended, but—so, they said—I said, "Well, I know I got a few in with him. Didn't he have some injuries?" And they said, "The only thing we noticed with Hugo Maxi, some of his knuckles were bruised. That seemed to be the only—"

DC: [Laughs]

WL: "The only damage you did with him." But anyway, so what happened was, to finish it out, I go back to court. So, then they hear that—so, I finally got to go back to court on the original charge of disturbing the peace.

DC: Right.

WL: This is now three and a half months later, a hundred and twelve days later.

DC: Right.

WL: And they have no more psychiatrists to send me to. They've run out.

DC: Right.

WL: They can't do the Department 95. So, they make a deal with Judge Woodmansee. And the day before I'm supposed to go back to Santa Monica, or that week, they bring me back to West L.A., and they say, "We're going to commute your six months to time served, but we just want you to have outpatient counseling." And my parents are—my dad tells me, "Take this." And at that point, I realized I wasn't going to have publicity and I wasn't going to change things.

DC: Right.

WL: I wasn't going to clean up the LAPD, which we know has had a few problems since then.

DC: Yeah, yeah.

WL: And needed to get cleaned up. And the corruption within the DA's—so, I took that deal. They let me out of jail. Then, I went back, and they were still offering me the stipulation of probable cause and drop the charges on the Santa Monica one. And my dad told me, "Sign the document. I want to be done with this." And I signed it, which made me very depressed.

And I've never forgotten that experience in our justice system. And that's why I have great sympathy for those, for example, in SNCC or the Black Panthers, who felt that the system—and I'm a middle class white guy, upper middle class, apparently. Dad's a doctor; Mom's a USC professor at this point. If they can do that to me, think what they can do to a poor black person, and what they still do.

We have in our country—this is a final thing I'll say. We have something called "stipulation"—they've changed from "stipulation of probable cause," which you have to sign, to something you have no choice to sign, which is called "arguable [3:00:00] probable cause and qualified immunity." And that is why the Innocence Project is having to free, and it's overloaded with so many people incarcerated, because of the same prosecutors, like Herbert Lapine, who wanted me to sign something. They later became judges and they put in a thing about twenty years ago, which Alan Dershowitz has written about and others, that is called "arguable probable cause and qualified immunity," which means a government can put you in jail, and you can't sue them, because they don't have complete immunity, but they call it qualified immunity. But all they need to trigger qualified immunity is arguable probable cause, and anything is arguable.

I had a civil rights case in Iowa, which I'm not going to go into the details of, where a judge found, on a disturbing the peace charge, or disorderly conduct, similar to the one that the guy at Harvard, the scholar. He didn't sue. I did sue. They dropped the charges, but I sued them, because I'm a civil rights—I'm not a civil rights educator or Harvard professor. I'm a real civil rights worker, unlike—I forget his name. He never was a civil rights worker, but he's a famous civil rights scholar. That's the difference between the scholars and the workers: We follow through. He never sued them, the Cambridge police. I sued the state patrol in Iowa.

The judge found my Fourth Amendment right was violated. There was no probable cause. He found the state trooper, who is six foot six, two hundred and forty pounds, and I believe antiSemitic—it was out at the Des Moines Register bike ride, which I had done twenty times, and I was trying to stop some drunks from harassing me and other people, and he believed the drunks, who weren't Jewish, but targeted me, and I was. And I did mention that I was a civil rights worker to him. And he also found the guy's story incredible but arguable.

JB: We only have about one minute left.

WL: But arguable. And so, he let him off. He let him off. And that's the next civil rights thing. And I appealed to the Supreme Court. They wouldn't hear the case. That's why so many innocent people are going to court, and that "qualified immunity" needs to be changed. I will end with that. And that's my current civil—and that's what the Innocence Project is about. And they were supporting me, informally, on what I do.

DC: Um-hmm, great.

WL: My little story.

DC: Alright. We literally got to the end of the tape, so—

[Recording ends at 3:02:18]

END OF INTERVIEW

Transcribed by Sally C. Council