TTT

Interviewee: James Robinson Session #6

Interviewer: Sheila Michaels

Date: February 19, 1999

Q: This is February the 19th [1999], and it's a conversation with Jim Robinson. We were just talking off tape about Richard Wright.

Robinson: Well, last night we happened to watch a television picture or biography of Richard Wright, going back from the time he was in the South, and a relative of his with whom they lived was murdered, up through his going to Chicago and joining the Communist Party and being very active in the Communist Party for a while.

Then he wrote *Native Son*, which the party didn't like very well. The picture of the girl who got drunk and her Communist Party boyfriend was not very much to their liking, and then the violence that followed it. But he was still in the party up until the time that Randolph was trying to organize a March on Washington--back in the forties this is--and he had decided that the march should be all black. The party opposed the march because it was going to be all black.

Actually, the background of that is that earlier on, the National Negro Congress was something that Randolph was connected with and the Communists rather took over, and they were able to take it over because it was interracial and they had some of their trained

cadres within the National Negro Congress. So he was not risking that again. Randolph was not a racist by any means, but he wasn't going to have this outfit taken over.

On the other hand, he was not a great organizer. His own Sleeping Car Trainmen or Porters Union, the nuts and bolts of it were run by people like Ben McLaurin, but Randolph had gotten it together.

Randolph was the man who could draw a crowd and entrance a crowd, even though he spoke completely above their heads. I went to a rally in Chicago when they were talking about the March on Washington, and Randolph talked, I guess, for forty-five to fifty minutes and analyzed the historical this and the historical that, and it was very much like a talk from a Harvard professor, except there was a lot of emotion in what he was saying. But it was certainly going over the heads of nine out of ten of the people there, but they loved him.

So he had had that kind of charisma to pull people together for the union, but he did not do much with the nuts and bolts of it, and also wasn't doing a lot with the--really didn't have the March on Washington well organized. There were people who were working for it who were much better at organizing than he was. But it was a live thing, really, only in New York City and Chicago and a few other places. It was fortunate that [Franklin D.] Roosevelt agreed to issue an executive order which had something to do with fair employment--I'm vague on it now--if Randolph would call off the march, and Randolph did call off the march.

Now, Richard Wright had been in favor of that march, and the Communists were opposed to it, and that was one of the elements for his getting out of the party and disagreeing with the party. He was tarred with the brush of having been a Communist for the rest of his life and he really was a Communist for a fairly brief period of time. He never wrote material that the Communists would have considered politically correct. His picture of the white Communists in *Native Son* doesn't give any indication that this couple had any understanding of Bigger, who was the chauffeur who was driving them around, or any real connection. They may have talked a good line on brotherhood, but they didn't relate. So that was an interesting sideline.

It was also interesting to me that Wright, after he left the U.S.--and according to the television show last night, he left in part because he did not want to testify in the McCarthy hearings of the Communists about who did he know had belonged to the Communist Party. He also didn't want to go to jail for it. So he went to France, and thought that he could do a lot about race on a global basis. That's when he went to Ghana at the time of Ghana's independence, and he went to a Third World conference in Rangoon, etc.

Q: Didn't he write a book called *Black Power*, which was about the Pan-African Congress or something like that?

Robinson: It was *Black Power*. He wrote a book called *Black Pow*
when he went to Ghana that the Ghanaians regarded him as an *A*
regard him as an African in any way, shape, or manner, and he fo
relate to--you know, he related pretty well for an American, relate
French, but the Ghanaians were a different kettle of fish. I mean, they're very -- people at

the top he could talk to, but the ordinary people he couldn't really reach at all, which has been the experience, actually, during the push for independence in Africa of a great many. Well, "a great many." A large proportion of the black Americans who went to Africa experienced that kind of gap that they couldn't quite get over, and they were surprised that the color of their skin didn't make them Africans. They were still, from an African point of view, Americans.

Q: That's very sad, though. I mean, it's very sad and disappointing, I would think, for the people to find out that there's no place to be. I mean no place--there was no place to be somebody, but no place where you're just okay.

Robinson: Yes.

Q: You're normal.

Robinson: Well, I know later on when I worked at the American Committee on Africa, and we had various African leaders who came to the office, I found that I did not relate to most of them. I related to the people who came from South Africa, the people who had been fighting against apartheid and had been fighting against apartheid partly in contact with white people, and it was the same kind of struggle that was going on here in civil rights. But when you got to areas in Africa that were primarily tribal, and a lot of the conflict that was going on was as to which tribal leader was going to end up as head of this particular independent state, the mindset was just different.

There was a man in southern Rhodesia, he was president later on forever and now I've forgotten his name.

Q: That's Bimbi or somebody--go ahead.

Robinson: Anyway, I was impressed with him when he was here and he had been, as a number of them had been, trained in one of the mission schools.

Q: Is that Zambia?

Robinson: Yes.

Q: Kenneth Kaunda?

Robinson: Kenneth Kaunda. He was a very impressive man. They had, also, from the mission schools gotten an idea of sharing, which fitted in with a lot of the tribal background, I gather, although the sharing was strictly within the tribes. But as one of the Christian overlay on that was one of the reasons that they, by and large, tried to be Socialist states when they got their independence. Of course, in general, it didn't work. You tried to divide up what the--there wasn't enough to divide up in the first place, and then if you tried to divide it up evenly, you undermined the people who were at the top of the feed line and ultimately there was less and less produced. Also there was a tendency to push out white people who had been running things before there were other people who could run them in their place.

Anyway, I'm kind of getting ahead of my story. But after I was out of national CORE, I was really very lucky.

Q: You know we didn't -- if I'm following right, we talked about 1957 partially, and then we didn't really cover the time up until 1960, because we started talking about Darwin Bolden [phonetic] then we jumped to what's-his-name from--

Robinson: Fine [phonetic]? Clarence Fine?

Q: Yes, we talked about Clarence Fine and we talked about--that's it. I mean, we did this large jump, and also Lydon Jackson [phonetic] and so on, so that those years when -- we talked about the field secretaries and what they were doing, and the changes in the *Correlator* and things like that, but we didn't--

Robinson: And we talked at length, I think, about the Sharkey-Brown-Isaacs Fair Housing thing.

Q: Exactly.

Robinson: That was at the very beginning, when I was there in 1957, and about the Christmas card stuff. We bounced along and built the mailing list, the contributors' mailing list and the Christmas card mailing list, and we had interesting things happening in St. Louis and Baltimore that were getting featured in the *Correlator* sometimes. I think the most interesting thing in New York had happened earlier, of course; it was the Palisades Project.

A lot of it, particularly in New York, was not particularly exciting, and Jim Peck liked to emphasize what was exciting in the *Correlator*. And it was important from my point of view, too, that it was the *Correlator* kept people who contributed interested and informed, and eventually, if they were empathic, they began to feel about these issues the way we felt about these issues. It was an extraordinary period for communicating. You weren't just asking people who already agreed with you; you were really in the process of bringing people in to see what you were about and what nonviolent direct action was about, and so it was a very--generally a very, very interesting period.

Of course, there were all kinds of things that contributed to that movement outside of what we were doing: the '54 school desegregation decision and the '55 bus boycott. But in the intellectual and literary world, things were happening, too. *Native Son* was extraordinary. Nothing had been written like that before. And if it had been written ten years before, in my view, it would never have been a selection of the Book of the Month Club. It was a selection of the Book of the Month Club.

Q: Was it written in '57?

Robinson: No, no, it was written before then, but it was one of the things that helped to change people's minds. And of course, [Ralph] Ellison's *Invisible Man*, that had gotten across to people, too -- to many people. So that you were beginning--while it was perfectly true that the standard liberals were not very much a part of pushing for civil rights until the very late fifties or--well, after 1955, there was a growing movement all the time. There was at the top of the intellectual world, the reading public, things were happening that

hadn't happened before, things that may have started happening at the time of the Negro Renaissance in the twenties, and then they'd fallen out of sight with the thirties, because most of the thirties' socially-conscious writing had to do with labor and poverty and a lot less with race, as such. Zora Neale Hurston dropped out of sight.

Q: Became a maid.

Robinson: Yes. So you had all this ferment going on outside. And within the penumbra of CORE, the mailing list, the ~~*Correlator*~~ CORElator and the letters we did were important. The pamphlet that we did on school desegregation in Nashville, and the letter that King signed that went with it, and then we eventually featured other things, but it was all percolating along without bursting into anything very significant.

I was spending a lot of time in the office just answering correspondence from people, contributors, etc., which was important, too, but I constantly got behind on that. But one of the things I was conscious of -- I was always conscious that we needed to spend as little money as possible and produce as much action and publicity as possible, so that I never wanted to have a lot of salaries if we could possibly avoid it, because they go on. And the costing weeks when you're very busy, you need lots and lots of people, so you get lots and lots of people. On the slow weeks you're paying out money and then it's preventing you from doing other things that you should be doing.

So I wanted everything to be as efficient as possible, and that's the reason that I bought dictating machines, and quite early on we got IBM [International Business Machines] electric typewriters. I didn't want people to dictate to a secretary; I wanted them to use the

machine. Cynthia--I can't remember her last name. Anyhow, Cynthia, for a while, was the office manager. She was good at transcribing, but she also gave tapes to various people to transcribe. She was white. We had, I think, one or two other people there who were white.

We had trouble finding black secretaries who had enough English so they could operate from the dictating machine. I remember calling the woman who was office manager at the NAACP, she'd been there for a long time, and I think all her secretaries, or almost all of them, were black. I said, "What do you do?"

"Oh," she said, "what you do is you hire and you fire and you hire and you fire, and eventually you get one." She said, "Don't hesitate to let them go if they're not good." [Laughs] She said, "You know, a lot of these people have not had enough English and spelling, and they really can't do it. They know how to type. If all you're going to give them is copy typing, fine, but otherwise it doesn't work, and you just have to recognize that you're not discriminating. That's the way it is." So anyhow, we had all of this kind of work going on in the office.

I did mention the Frogmore Convention that we had down in South Carolina, and we had that in '58 or '59, probably in '59. No, I think it was '58. Anyway, Gordon Carey came to that from Los Angeles. He was making big progress with Los Angeles CORE and he was very articulate. It was shortly after that, I think, that we asked him to come and become a field secretary with James McCain. We had the meeting in Frogmore, anyway, in order to try to involve more of the people from South Carolina, which did not really work, as I mentioned before. But the exposure of delegates from elsewhere to Frogmore was not a bad thing either. Frogmore was not the South in any typical sense. It was predominantly a

black area, and the American Friends Service Committee had an office there. That's how we happened to get to use the place, so that we did not really experience any kind of discrimination.

It was not a very big meeting; I don't know, we probably had twenty people there altogether. We had people from St. Louis and Los Angeles, New York, and I don't know where else at that time, because the CORE groups tended to get bigger and then smaller and then maybe bigger again, and it was like this. The number of people in any CORE group who were interested in activity outside the local community was fairly small, so that groups that really did quite a lot were not necessarily well represented at the convention either. The convention didn't cost much, but some people really didn't have a lot of money for transportation.

Q: I was thinking, that was quite a trip from Los Angeles.

Robinson: But that was an important--having Carey join the staff was important, and it was important in part because his orientation was activist and northern and pacifist, and so he made a good foil for McCain, whose background was southern and black and not pacifist, but accommodationist, I would say. So that was a good thing altogether.

It was some time along in this period that Marvin Rich--it must have been half a year or more after Gordon joined the staff that Marvin joined the staff. We didn't have good press relations. We did occasionally send out a press release, but sometimes I had to write them. I wrote wonderful appeal letters, but I was not very good with press releases. Also, it was apt to be a long way from the top of my agenda, so that it might be a good idea, but I didn't

necessarily get to do it. I mean, I had the Christmas cards and the fundraising and setting up the conventions and the Action Committee meetings.

Q: What did the Action Committee meetings do?

Robinson: The National Action Committee, they went through various stages, but we tried at various times to have council meetings between the conventions, and it became difficult when things began to move to wait for a decision from--if you're only having three meetings a year. So we did authorize a National Action Committee, which was to be made up of people living in and around New York, who could come to meetings quite frequently and could make many policy decisions ~~they~~ the National Council couldn't make. So we were able then to add--I think when we added Marvin Rich we didn't do it in a council meeting. We probably had at the Frogmore meeting authorized adding someone to the field staff, but the actual addition to the field staff was done between meetings.

Q: Was that resented in the Midwest and West, that the people making the policy would be in New York?

Robinson: In general not, because--

[END TAPE SIX, SIDE ONE: BEGIN TAPE SIX, SIDE TWO]

Q: The 19th of February. I had asked if the Middle Western people were saying that New York thinks it's so hot or not.

Robinson: Actually, that wasn't true. That was true later, but that wasn't true very much from '57 to at least '58 or '59. Charlie Oldham was the national chairman. The coordinator position had been in St. Louis and moved to New York only after the people in St. Louis weren't able to do it.

Q: The coordinator's position?

Robinson: Yes, the coordinator position, which Billie Ames had had, and then when she left, there was someone else there who did it temporarily, and then it came to New York because Lula Farmer did it. Lula was a volunteer or semi-volunteer when she was doing it. I think she still had a regular job.

And then it came to me, and that was the first time we had a staff that was paid by CORE in an office that was rented by CORE and was not part of the Fellowship of Reconciliation. And a lot of day-to-day decisions then were left to the staff, and the staff had frequent meetings with the National Action Committee right here in New York. George Houser was on the National Action Committee, and James Farmer was on the committee, and Tom Roberts [~~phonetic~~], who was or had been chairman of New York CORE was on it, and Roy Carter, who had been a field secretary for national CORE, was on it.

But the fact was that very often the National Action Committee was a meeting of Lula Farmer and Marvin Rich and Gordon Carey and me with one or two of the others. Eventually, Roy Carter didn't come at all, he was out. Roberts came fairly often, but he wasn't always available. George came fairly often, too, but was not always available. So that it was not as democratic as it should have been, but it permitted the national office to

move forward when it had an opportunity, quite quickly, without having to go through a lot of business.

Now, I'm not a great advocate of democracy, but I was a big advocate of democracy in CORE, not because I think the majority is always right, but because I felt the more people who were in on a decision, the more action you'd get as a result of it. So that's why I always tried desperately to get people to come to the national meetings. It wasn't that I thought that their decisions were necessarily better, but the decisions, if something was going to happen, you wanted a number of people to help make it happen. And that was true in the local groups, too, that you wanted to involve people.

One of the reasons that we had not only membership meetings, but in most of them action units--one on restaurants, one on housing, and so on--was that within each unit you had a smaller number of people involved and then that way you could involve more and more people in decisions and carrying out action. If a unit developed a project and then went to a meeting, you had a number of people who could explain what the project was about and pull in other people that they knew who were in different units. So that was the objective of it. I have no doubt that benevolent dictatorship is probably the best kind of government there is.

Q: I really wanted to ask you about that. You saw you caught me off guard there. [Laughs]

Robinson: But, you know, the trouble is that after Maria Teresa dies in Austria, then where's the succession going to be? It's that problem. But I do think that--

Q: According to Carrolly Erickson, it sounds like she worked herself to death, Maria Teresa, between the children and the work that she did running Austria.

Robinson: Running Austria-Hungary.

So, things went along fairly calmly, and some of the units did quite remarkable things and we publicized those. We had meetings and discussions and we put out literature, and gradually built a staff. You know, it just McCain and me at the beginning and no secretarial help at all. Then it was Gordon Carey and we had one or two secretaries, and then we got the dictating machines in the office and the typewriters.

Q: How did you do without secretaries at first? I mean, you did all your own typing?

Robinson: Yes. Actually, I had a Smith-Corona portable typewriter that I took to the office, and I used that typewriter the whole time I was in the office. Actually, I pretty well wore it out. So that when the IBM machines were out in the--they were for the secretaries to use with the dictating machines and the material that went out looked a good deal better if it was done that way. Now, I've noticed when I looked over copies of my letters on the microfilm that I didn't read the letters too carefully sometimes, because every once in a while there's a word that's left out or something that's not quite right. But my signature is there.

Q: Under duress. [Laughs]

Robinson: Unless there were very serious errors, I would just correct it by hand and let it go out. Then we did have--sometimes we'd have a lot of appeal letters going to the higher-dollar donors going from the office, and those were--there were no automatic typewriters, so that they were typed one after another after another.

Q: Oh, you didn't run them off. Oh, of course not, because it would look terrible.

Robinson: See, most of our mailings, the big mailings that went to the whole list were printed or multigraphed letters and sometimes with a fill-in at the top, "Dear Mr. So-and-so," and so on. But we had several hundred people who gave--a hundred dollars was a lot in those days, and occasionally they would get letters that were actually typed.

Then I remember once we got a mailing list of people with high potential, and I can't remember quite whether we did those in the office, and whether by that time there was Hoovinized [phonetic] typing.

Q: Hoovinized?

Hoovenized

Robinson: Hoovinized. They typed material and it went onto a paper tape and then the paper tape would run through these machines and the machines would type. They could stop the machine at the top so they could fill something in. But everything was individually typed, and if you turned over the paper you could feel that it was actually typed.

But this big donor list, I can remember I deliberately left the word "not" out in a very important sentence and it was going out over my signature, so as I signed them I put a

caret with "not." So everyone who got it knew that they had an individually typed letter. [Laughs] So there were things like that. Anyway, as I say, I got backed up on the correspondence.

In the meantime, I was going with Barbara.

Q: Can I ask how you met?

Robinson: What?

Q: How did you meet?

Robinson: Oh, yes, I must tell you that. One of my good friends is Simon [Si] Perchik. I've talked about him before, from 200 Mott Street. He was a bombardier in England and then he came back and went to NYU [New York University] Law School. He may have had to finish college first; I'm not sure. Anyhow, he said he thought the G.I. Bill was a good thing and was a nice way to be able to live on a subsidy like that. He didn't know what he wanted to do when he decided he'd go to law school, and so he eventually became a lawyer. And while he was at NYU, that's where he met Harper LeComte who'd been a conscientious objector with me. So he and Harper moved to 200 Mott Street, and eventually he became a very close friend of mine.

When Dorothy was very ill, the last time she went to the hospital, I called them one night, I talked to ~~Nikki [phonetic]~~ Mickey (Si's wife) and then to Si, and Si said, "Well, tomorrow on the way to the office, I'll come by the hospital." I was spending all day there anyway, so he came and he

was dressed for his office. He was not working for anybody else at that time, but he had a small practice of some sort, and he had his briefcase and everything else.

Dorothy was in a coma. I don't think she talked at all. Anyway, he spent the whole day Mickey there and then we were always in touch afterwards. He and ~~Nikki~~ had gotten married just months before Dorothy and I were married, and Harper and his wife, Marion. So we were always in touch.

Barbara had come here to be with her sister and brother-in-law. She was going to stay a little while and then she thought she was going to go across the country and take a boat, or a ship, from the West Coast to New Zealand. She had two sisters in New Zealand. She says now she doesn't quite know how she thought she was going to finance it, but that was her general idea. However, she stayed with John and Monica out on Long Island -- East Rockaway, Long Island -- and decided she was going to stay until Monica had her child. It wasn't due for quite a while.

Q: Nine months anyway.

Robinson: But she said she was living at their expense out there and she thought that was not quite right, and she said she wanted to go to work. John found her--she was a trained baby nurse anyhow, so he found her job with one of the people that worked in his office. His wife was having a child and they wanted help for a little while after she came home with the child. So Barbara took that job, and somewhere along the line realized that she really should have a Green Card, if she was going to be working here, and she went down to

Immigration. Of course, the British at that time had no problem and she got her Green Card right away.

Q: They had the quotas.

Robinson: But it was the Bessos [phonetic] she worked for first. Besso was vaguely Jewish, and so they were very pleased with her, and the result was that she got on to a new baby Jewish circuit on Long Island, and eventually ended up at the ~~Najaris~~ [phonetic] and ~~Najari~~ had been at NYU Law School with Si, and they were very good friends, and ~~Najari~~ called up Si one day and said, "We have this wonderful woman here helping with the baby and she really ought to be married. She's in her mid-thirties and she ought to be married, but she's a Roman Catholic. Do you know any?" [Laughs] And Simon, of course, knew me.

So, Simon went out there to visit the Najaris and see their new baby and I think probably to look over Barbara, too. Anyway, Barbara said he rang the bell and came inside the front door and took off his shoes. She said she'd never seen anybody before pad around in stocking feet, which Simon was always doing that.

Q: Had he been in Japan?

Robinson: No, he hadn't. He'd been in Britain, but he was very easy going and informal.

Anyhow, she said he wasn't there very long when he suddenly turned to her and said, "Would you like to meet somebody?" [Laughs]

And she said, "Well, yes." She said she'd never met anybody quite so direct before, but she'd been here long enough to absorb some of the way people talk.

So he arranged it. This was along about 1957 sometime, I think, well along in 1957. He arranged for her to come in and go to Minetta Tavern, but he came, too. So that's where I met her, in Minetta Tavern in Greenwich Village. We talked about things in general. I think we talked a little bit about CORE, because by that time I was working for CORE.

Then afterward I said, "Well, why don't you walk up to the apartment and meet the Kalingers [phonetic]." The Kalingers were the people I'd met in Austria. They wanted to come to this country and they couldn't find anyone else to sponsor them, and I had said, "I don't think it will work, but--."

Q: When were you in Austria, to digress?

Robinson: I was in Austria with my mother in 1956. I didn't tell you any of that. Okay. After Dorothy died in September of '55, in May of '56 Mother and I went to Europe and I was gone for five weeks or so, I guess. I met Joseph Kalinger through Marie Klein [~~phonetic~~], who'd been in Chicago CORE. When I said I was going and we were going to stop in Austria, she wrote and said, "Well, you must look up Joseph Kalinger." He was here at the University of Chicago briefly on some sort of exchange after the war. She wrote him and I wrote him.

Anyway, when we got to Vienna, they came to the hotel and we went to *Tristan and Isolde*, Mother, the Kalingers and me, at the Staatsoper. Then I went out to Grinzing [~~phonetic~~]

with them on Saturday night. That's the little place outside Vienna where there are lots of beer gardens and where Beethoven used to go in the summer. He was such a difficult tenant that apparently he had to go to a different house every year he went there.

But anyhow, that's how I knew the Kalingers, and I had signed ~~with~~ them when they came in July. I had this two-bedroom apartment at Stuyvesant Town. So they lived with me until they got jobs and then moved out to Queens. So they were living with me when I met Barbara.

Q: Oh, okay. I thought they were living on Mott Street.

Robinson: No, they were living at--Dorothy and I had moved to-- so I'd been there in Stuyvesant from the time that we moved there, about 1950. When Dorothy died in '55, I was still there.

So Barbara came up and saw the apartment, but she also saw the Kalingers. Of course, he'd been in the Luftwaffe, and Barbara had been in ~~[unclear]~~. [Laughs] And she met this funny little man who was a conscientious objector ~~of~~ the war, and was running around and picketing things, and she didn't think that she was going to--she wasn't very impressed. [Laughs] If anything, she was a little negatively impressed.

But she did come. I met her in town again, and she did, and so we gradually got to see quite a bit of each other. As far as theology was concerned, we weren't different. We were different in the way we perceived how that reflected into ethics, because I'd been influenced by Dorothy Day and the Catholic Worker people and the Protestants and the Fellowship of

Reconciliation and all that. And her family were Tories and they were conservative. It's interesting, her sister married somebody from Wales and he was Labor. [Laughs]

Q: The ice had been broken. [Laughs]

Robinson: But anyway, we saw more and more of each other, and Christmas of 1959 I invited her to go up with me to my mother's, and she went. I had mentioned getting married and she'd put it aside.

Anyway, my family was a help, I think. We went to my Uncle ~~Vinton's~~ Denton's for Christmas dinner, and my Grandmother Robinson was still living and she was there. Uncle ~~Vinton's~~ sister who had been a teacher, was there, and the two sons were there, and their wives. It was a very--she had a good time, and they weren't all starry-eyed radicals who were running around with picket signs either.

So at some point we decided, well, we should get married. I don't know if it was when we first got back or what, but anyhow, New Year's Eve we told people we were going to get married.

We didn't set a date or anything, but I happened to notice that there was going to be a cruise on February 6th. Who was it that ran those tours? Simmons Tours ~~[phonetic]~~ O.K. Simmons Tours were the first people to get transatlantic ships to take ordinary people on cruises in the off-season.

Q: Oh, I thought that was something that had always been. Okay.

"C" the letter "C" for Costa

Robinson: There had been cruising on people's yachts and things. They had Costa Lines, which was a very small line then. It's a big line now. They had a boat; they had boats that were called various things, and everything ended with "Sea." Ours was the Bianca Sea. It was women's names but with "Sea" after it. The ship had been built to take Italian immigrants to South America, and it was to go this way, but Simmons had gotten into it, and Simmons ran the cruise staff to do this trip in February, February 6th, from New York to Curacao and Haiti.

So I called Barbara in her office and told her about the cruise. I said, "It's February 6th, so why don't we get married on Friday, February 5th."

She said, "Yes," and then she said--afterwards she realized that was about three weeks away.

Q: "My dress, my veil." [Laughs]

Robinson: So we went to the church there on Fourteenth Street, Immaculate Conception Church, and I had to ask people on one of the other floors, I knew I wanted the young red-headed priest, but I didn't know what his name was, and they told me what his name was. So we went and saw him, and he needed her baptismal record and so on. So we weren't quite sure it would come through on time, but it did.

Barbara Robinson: I heard you. [Laughs]

Q: Yes. Yes, this is from his point of view.

Barbara Robinson: Yes, and it's very interesting to hear it. Oh, dear. [Laughs]

Robinson: So anyway, we did get married in the evening on February 5th. I'd asked ~~your~~ about getting married in the evening. It wasn't usual. We weren't going to get married at Mass. We just wanted the marriage ceremony by itself. He said, "Yes, we can do that. We'll have to do it at seven, because we have a service at eight on Friday evening."

So that's what we did, and we just sent out little announcements and asked people to come for a brief reception afterward at the apartment. I wore a business suit and Barbara got a beautiful gray dress with polka dots on it, and a hat and shoes and things, at Saks Fifth Avenue. When she said she was going to get married, the lady really took a lot of trouble.

Q: I hope so. [Laughs]

Robinson: Simon was our best man. These people that I checked with to find out about the priest, the woman said to me, "My husband said Friday night, they're getting married Friday night at seven o'clock. Something about it sounds Jewish to him." [Laughs]

Q: And a Jewish best man.

Robinson: I said, "Well, Simon Perchik is."

"Oh," she said, "I didn't even know you could do that."

The other witness was Barbara's sister, and her brother-in-law brought her down the aisle. My mother came. My Uncle ~~Vinton~~ Denton and Aunt Carrie did not come; it was at his house we'd had Christmas. He was busy doing taxes, etc. It was unfortunate they didn't come, because he died a month later. He wasn't all that old. But my mother's sister and her husband, Uncle Ray ~~Haines [phonetic]~~ Hammes, and my Uncle Ed and his wife, Aunt ~~May [phonetic]~~ Mae came down.

So I had ordered a lot of champagne and Barbara's sister was baking a fruitcake, which was traditional in England. Anyhow, Mother decided we really didn't have enough stuff, so somebody brought snacks and she went up to the bakery and ordered a big chocolate cake, all chocolate. So we had a groom's cake and a bride's cake and lots of champagne, and we had records. Almost everybody who was invited came. We had fifty-five or sixty people in that apartment. We had a wonderful, wonderful time. No dinner, nothing. It was just a reception, so it was all over about nine-thirty or so.

We went to her apartment in Brooklyn. My mother and her relatives stayed in our apartment. Then the next day we went over to the boat that went to Curacao and Haiti.

So this was February 5, 1960, and we were at sea when we first got in the ship's bulletin words about the beginnings of the sit-ins.

Barbara Robinson: Yes, lotsa fun. You can imagine him, "Oh, I'm not there." [Laughs]

Q: I was in Turkey when I read about the picketing of the Miss America pageant, and I thought, "They've started the revolution without me." [Laughs] [unclear].

Robinson: The sit-ins, of course, had started spontaneously in Greensboro. Dr. Simpkins ~~[phonetic]~~, who was a dentist, was on the CORE list and he was in Greensboro. He was also connected with the NAACP. But he'd gotten CORE's pamphlet on sit-ins based on what we had done in Chicago and how we'd put it together, etc. And a couple of these students who started the sit-ins were in touch with him, and they went over and they said, "We went and we sat at the counter, and we just sat. We don't quite know what we're doing." And he had that pamphlet, so there was a CORE connection right at the very beginning.

Then I think Simpkins called the office, and Gordon Carey went down. James McCain was probably already in the South, but Gordon--

Barbara Robinson: And we're on our honeymoon. [Laughs]

Robinson: Anyway, we were a day late getting back. We were a day late getting back. We went to Curacao, and the people on the cruise, the Simmons people, had arranged with the Shell Oil Company's Employees Club for us all to be able to use that club, which was kind of amusing because there was one black couple with a son on the cruise and they went out to the club. Now, I'm sure at that point in Curacao, the people who lived in Curacao who were black never went to that club, but these people went. We had such a good time there, didn't we?

Barbara Robinson: Oh, indeed, it was lovely.

Robinson: It was a hot day and we had Planter's Punch when we got there, then we went swimming, and we had those little things like Jamaican patties that are hot, hot, the meat, hot, spicy meat in the middle, out on the beach. Anyway, we had a good time in Haiti, too.

But we got into a storm coming back off Cape Hatteras, and this was not a very big ship and it was not really built for the North Atlantic, anyway, so it did this and this [gestures]. I have been seasick a number of times when it hasn't been very rough, but this time I didn't get seasick. We decided that we'd better not be in the cabin and we'd probably better not be inside, and the constant warnings not to move anywhere without holding on to a rope or something, but we did manage, with the railings and the ropes, to get up to the back of the ship near the top and there was a bar there, and they had closed the bar with wooden slats. So you could sit flat on the planking of the deck and lean against this place. Two or three other people came.

Barbara Robinson: Oh, there were a number of people up there. There was about a dozen or so of us up there.

Robinson: Finally some of the stewards discovered that we were up there, and they bought apples and blankets. [Laughs]

Barbara Robinson. As long as we sat there and watched [unclear].

Robinson: The wind was blowing like crazy, but it was that fresh wind that helps a lot, and you'd sit there and you'd see the sea, and then you'd see just the sky, then you see on this side, because it was rolling and pitching at the same time. But it was not very cold. The blankets were useful, but it was not very cold. But it continued all day long, and by the time we went to have a drink at night, I was tired. I wasn't queasy or anything. Anyhow, we decided we would pass up the martini; we only had sherry.

Barbara Robinson: We had sherry. [Laughs]

Robinson: Then we went in the dining room. Well, the dining room, we go down the hall and there was a door, and then you go again and there's a nice wide spot and then a beautiful staircase going down into the dining room. Well, they had waiters at the top, so as soon as you opened that door, somebody grabbed you and you had the railing and they helped you down the stairs.

Barbara Robinson: With somebody in the middle and somebody at the bottom.

Robinson: To get you down. Once they got you down to--it was a table, they said, "The edges of the table"--

Q: "No soup."

Robinson: -- to hold on to the edge of the table, because it wasn't built for the North Atlantic, and the chairs are not anchored and just don't worry about the dishes or the food

or anything. If it goes off the table, we'll get you something else." But there weren't that many people in the dining room, so--

Q: I can understand. [Laughs]

Barbara Robinson: Only a few brave souls. I think then there were about two dozen people down there and that's about it.

Robinson: They had soaked all the tablecloths so that the dishes wouldn't slide off the tops, and the cups came without saucers. Anyhow, the dinner worked all right. We did all right.

Then we slept in spite of the storm. The cabins, incidentally, were the smallest I have ever seen. They were built for immigrants. We had a cabin with a shower. It meant that you went into the cabin and it was about this wide [gestures], I guess, and there were the bunks, one above the other.

Barbara Robinson: That's all right, we fit two in one.

Robinson: Right at the back there was the shower and toilet. I can't remember where the drawers were, whether--

Barbara Robinson: Oh, there were drawers.

Robinson: Yes, there were drawers. Anyhow, it was very small, but it worked. We were very happy with it and we had a--

Barbara Robinson: That steward, do you remember that one?

Robinson: Oh, yes.

Barbara Robinson: He was white-haired when we got on. When we got to Curacao, he went and got his hair dyed a beautiful brown. We looked at him, and he said, "The ladies, you know." [Laughs] We insisted on calling ~~him~~ *il professore*. He thought ~~he~~ was a professor.

Robinson: The woman from Simmons Tours, ~~which~~ I think she had been a university dean or something, she ran things so beautifully. We had a costume party, which, fortunately, was the night before the storm.

Barbara Robinson: We won a prize.

Robinson: Yes, she bought a Chinese gown in Curacao and she wore that. Late at night on the back deck -- it was not like modern ships, you know, it had a big front and the main part and there was a long part in back -- and they had built a late-night bar out on the back and the bartender was the entertainment. He used to sing, and his favorite thing was "I don't want her, you can have her, she's too fat for me." [Laughs]

Barbara Robinson: He'd ~~lean~~ over the bar and he'd ~~lean~~ back again when he'd finish it.

Robinson: Anyhow, it was a lot of fun. But with the storm, we were a day late getting back and she said that was the end of the honeymoon. [Laughs]

Barbara Robinson: I said to myself, "Why on earth did I get married?" [Laughs]

Robinson: By the time we got back, Peck and somebody else, and I'm not quite sure who, had already been over to talk to people at Woolworth's. I can't remember whether picket lines were already decided upon. They weren't taking place, but I think they may have already been decided on before I got back. There was all this business going on in the South with Gordon Carey running around from place to place in North Carolina and helping spread the idea, and giving at least a little bit of training to people who were beginning to do it.

Q: How did the guys get the idea to have a sit-in? I mean, I'm sure they've talked about it at length somewhere.

Robinson: Well, I'm not quite sure. I know that in Nashville that they had had discussions with Lawson [~~phonetic~~ OK] about what they were going to do, and the people were particularly annoyed with the department store counters, because when people went to the department stores to shop, they spent a considerable amount of time, and then there was no place for them to eat.

Q: Right. Or sit down.

Robinson: Right. What?

Q: Or sit down at all.

Robinson: Yes. So that was all decided before they did it. Of course, they didn't get started until after the North Carolina stuff started. As far as I could gather, the first time they sat down at a dime-store counter, it was almost spontaneous. They'd been there and bought something and they felt like having something to drink, and they decided, "Well, why can't we?" And they just sat down. When they didn't get served, they continued to sit for a while, and nobody knew what to do about it. The management didn't know what to do about it either. Then they were in touch with Simpkins and the thing began to be better organized.

Initially, and most of those places in North Carolina in the beginning there wasn't very much hooliganism the first few days either. That got worse as time went on.

Q: Wasn't Orangeburg the first one in South Carolina?

Robinson: No, Greensboro.

Q: Greensboro. Sorry.

Robinson: Greensboro, then Raleigh, and then place after place after places. Then, of course, the Nashville people began right after that. I mean, as soon as they heard of it, they thought, "Oh, they've stolen our thunder." And there, there had been a lot of

preparation and training under Lawson. So all of this was going on, and Darwin Bolden was added to the staff to work here in New York.

[END TAPE SIX, SIDE TWO; BEGIN TAPE SEVEN, SIDE ONE]

Q: ... of February and we're talking with Jim Robinson. We were talking about the first sit-ins in North Carolina just while he was still on his honeymoon. So he came back to the revolution having started.

Robinson: Right. As I said, Darwin Bolden was soon hired to work with the Woolworth boycott, which was really not just Woolworth but Grant's and Newberry's and all the places where anything was going on in the South, to try to pressure these places in the North.

Q: [unclear].

Robinson: Pressure them to change their policy in the South and to work on the ~~corporate~~ corporation - corporate headquarters was right across the park from us in the Woolworth Building.

Q: As I remember, one of the problems was that some of the places were only Southern chains and we couldn't put that kind of pressure on them.

Robinson: Right. But it was known as the Woolworth boycott, but it did go--we had Grant's and other places that we approached, and the boycott became very big in cities like New York and Chicago. The book on CORE talks about the number of picket lines on Saturdays

machine. Cynthia--I can't remember her last name. Anyhow, Cynthia, for a while, was the office manager. She was good at transcribing, but she also gave tapes to various people to transcribe. She was white. We had, I think, one or two other people there who were white.

We had trouble finding black secretaries who had enough English so they could operate from the dictating machine. I remember calling the woman who was office manager at the NAACP, she'd been there for a long time, and I think all her secretaries, or almost all of them, were black. I said, "What do you do?"

"Oh," she said, "what you do is you hire and you fire and you hire and you fire, and eventually you get one." She said, "Don't hesitate to let them go if they're not good." [Laughs] She said, "You know, a lot of these people have not had enough English and spelling, and they really can't do it. They know how to type. If all you're going to give them is copy typing, fine, but otherwise it doesn't work, and you just have to recognize that you're not discriminating. That's the way it is." So anyhow, we had all of this kind of work going on in the office.

I did mention the Frogmore Convention that we had down in South Carolina, and we had that in '58 or '59, probably in '59. No, I think it was '58. Anyway, Gordon Carey came to that from Los Angeles. He was making big progress with Los Angeles CORE and he was very articulate. It was shortly after that, I think, that we asked him to come and become a field secretary with James McCain. We had the meeting in Frogmore, anyway, in order to try to involve more of the people from South Carolina, which did not really work, as I mentioned before. But the exposure of delegates from elsewhere to Frogmore was not a bad thing either. Frogmore was not the South in any typical sense. It was predominantly a

black area, and the American Friends Service Committee had an office there. That's how we happened to get to use the place, so that we did not really experience any kind of discrimination.

It was not a very big meeting; I don't know, we probably had twenty people there altogether. We had people from St. Louis and Los Angeles, New York, and I don't know where else at that time, because the CORE groups tended to get bigger and then smaller and then maybe bigger again, and it was like this. The number of people in any CORE group who were interested in activity outside the local community was fairly small, so that groups that really did quite a lot were not necessarily well represented at the convention either. The convention didn't cost much, but some people really didn't have a lot of money for transportation.

Q: I was thinking, that was quite a trip from Los Angeles.

Robinson: But that was an important--having Carey join the staff was important, and it was important in part because his orientation was activist and northern and pacifist, and so he made a good foil for McCain, whose background was southern and black and not pacifist, but accommodationist, I would say. So that was a good thing altogether.

It was some time along in this period that Marvin Rich--it must have been half a year or more after Gordon joined the staff that Marvin joined the staff. We didn't have good press relations. We did occasionally send out a press release, but sometimes I had to write them. I wrote wonderful appeal letters, but I was not very good with press releases. Also, it was apt to be a long way from the top of my agenda, so that it might be a good idea, but I didn't

necessarily get to do it. I mean, I had the Christmas cards and the fundraising and setting up the conventions and the Action Committee meetings.

Q: What did the Action Committee meetings do?

Robinson: The National Action Committee, they went through various stages, but we tried at various times to have council meetings between the conventions, and it became difficult when things began to move to wait for a decision from--if you're only having three meetings a year. So we did authorize a National Action Committee, which was to be made up of people living in and around New York, who could come to meetings quite frequently and could make many policy decisions ~~they~~ the National Council couldn't make. So we were able then to add--I think when we added Marvin Rich we didn't do it in a council meeting. We probably had at the Frogmore meeting authorized adding someone to the field staff, but the actual addition to the field staff was done between meetings.

Q: Was that resented in the Midwest and West, that the people making the policy would be in New York?

Robinson: In general not, because--

[END TAPE SIX, SIDE ONE: BEGIN TAPE SIX, SIDE TWO]

Q: The 19th of February. I had asked if the Middle Western people were saying that New York thinks it's so hot or not.

Robinson: Actually, that wasn't true. That was true later, but that wasn't true very much from '57 to at least '58 or '59. Charlie Oldham was the national chairman. The coordinator position had been in St. Louis and moved to New York only after the people in St. Louis weren't able to do it.

Q: The coordinator's position?

Robinson: Yes, the coordinator position, which Billie Ames had had, and then when she left, there was someone else there who did it temporarily, and then it came to New York because Lula Farmer did it. Lula was a volunteer or semi-volunteer when she was doing it. I think she still had a regular job.

And then it came to me, and that was the first time we had a staff that was paid by CORE in an office that was rented by CORE and was not part of the Fellowship of Reconciliation. And a lot of day-to-day decisions then were left to the staff, and the staff had frequent meetings with the National Action Committee right here in New York. George Houser was on the National Action Committee, and James Farmer was on the committee, and Tom Roberts [~~phonetic~~], who was or had been chairman of New York CORE was on it, and Roy Carter, who had been a field secretary for national CORE, was on it.

But the fact was that very often the National Action Committee was a meeting of Lula Farmer and Marvin Rich and Gordon Carey and me with one or two of the others. Eventually, Roy Carter didn't come at all, he was out. Roberts came fairly often, but he wasn't always available. George came fairly often, too, but was not always available. So that it was not as democratic as it should have been, but it permitted the national office to

move forward when it had an opportunity, quite quickly, without having to go through a lot of business.

Now, I'm not a great advocate of democracy, but I was a big advocate of democracy in CORE, not because I think the majority is always right, but because I felt the more people who were in on a decision, the more action you'd get as a result of it. So that's why I always tried desperately to get people to come to the national meetings. It wasn't that I thought that their decisions were necessarily better, but the decisions, if something was going to happen, you wanted a number of people to help make it happen. And that was true in the local groups, too, that you wanted to involve people.

One of the reasons that we had not only membership meetings, but in most of them action units--one on restaurants, one on housing, and so on--was that within each unit you had a smaller number of people involved and then that way you could involve more and more people in decisions and carrying out action. If a unit developed a project and then went to a meeting, you had a number of people who could explain what the project was about and pull in other people that they knew who were in different units. So that was the objective of it. I have no doubt that benevolent dictatorship is probably the best kind of government there is.

Q: I really wanted to ask you about that. You saw you caught me off guard there. [Laughs]

Robinson: But, you know, the trouble is that after Maria Teresa dies in Austria, then where's the succession going to be? It's that problem. But I do think that--

Q: According to Carrolly Erickson, it sounds like she worked herself to death, Maria Teresa, between the children and the work that she did running Austria.

Robinson: Running Austria-Hungary.

So, things went along fairly calmly, and some of the units did quite remarkable things and we publicized those. We had meetings and discussions and we put out literature, and gradually built a staff. You know, it just McCain and me at the beginning and no secretarial help at all. Then it was Gordon Carey and we had one or two secretaries, and then we got the dictating machines in the office and the typewriters.

Q: How did you do without secretaries at first? I mean, you did all your own typing?

Robinson: Yes. Actually, I had a Smith-Corona portable typewriter that I took to the office, and I used that typewriter the whole time I was in the office. Actually, I pretty well wore it out. So that when the IBM machines were out in the--they were for the secretaries to use with the dictating machines and the material that went out looked a good deal better if it was done that way. Now, I've noticed when I looked over copies of my letters on the microfilm that I didn't read the letters too carefully sometimes, because every once in a while there's a word that's left out or something that's not quite right. But my signature is there.

Q: Under duress. [Laughs]

Robinson: Unless there were very serious errors, I would just correct it by hand and let it go out. Then we did have--sometimes we'd have a lot of appeal letters going to the higher-dollar donors going from the office, and those were--there were no automatic typewriters, so that they were typed one after another after another.

Q: Oh, you didn't run them off. Oh, of course not, because it would look terrible.

Robinson: See, most of our mailings, the big mailings that went to the whole list were printed or multigraphed letters and sometimes with a fill-in at the top, "Dear Mr. So-and-so," and so on. But we had several hundred people who gave--a hundred dollars was a lot in those days, and occasionally they would get letters that were actually typed.

Then I remember once we got a mailing list of people with high potential, and I can't remember quite whether we did those in the office, and whether by that time there was Hoovinized [phonetic] typing.

Q: Hoovinized?

Hoovenized

Robinson: Hoovinized. They typed material and it went onto a paper tape and then the paper tape would run through these machines and the machines would type. They could stop the machine at the top so they could fill something in. But everything was individually typed, and if you turned over the paper you could feel that it was actually typed.

But this big donor list, I can remember I deliberately left the word "not" out in a very important sentence and it was going out over my signature, so as I signed them I put a

caret with "not." So everyone who got it knew that they had an individually typed letter. [Laughs] So there were things like that. Anyway, as I say, I got backed up on the correspondence.

In the meantime, I was going with Barbara.

Q: Can I ask how you met?

Robinson: What?

Q: How did you meet?

Robinson: Oh, yes, I must tell you that. One of my good friends is Simon [Si] Perchik. I've talked about him before, from 200 Mott Street. He was a bombardier in England and then he came back and went to NYU [New York University] Law School. He may have had to finish college first; I'm not sure. Anyhow, he said he thought the G.I. Bill was a good thing and was a nice way to be able to live on a subsidy like that. He didn't know what he wanted to do when he decided he'd go to law school, and so he eventually became a lawyer. And while he was at NYU, that's where he met Harper LeComte who'd been a conscientious objector with me. So he and Harper moved to 200 Mott Street, and eventually he became a very close friend of mine.

When Dorothy was very ill, the last time she went to the hospital, I called them one night, I talked to ~~Nikki [phonetic]~~ Mickey (Si's wife) and then to Si, and Si said, "Well, tomorrow on the way to the office, I'll come by the hospital." I was spending all day there anyway, so he came and he

was dressed for his office. He was not working for anybody else at that time, but he had a small practice of some sort, and he had his briefcase and everything else.

Dorothy was in a coma. I don't think she talked at all. Anyway, he spent the whole day Mickey there and then we were always in touch afterwards. He and ~~Nikki~~ had gotten married just months before Dorothy and I were married, and Harper and his wife, Marion. So we were always in touch.

Barbara had come here to be with her sister and brother-in-law. She was going to stay a little while and then she thought she was going to go across the country and take a boat, or a ship, from the West Coast to New Zealand. She had two sisters in New Zealand. She says now she doesn't quite know how she thought she was going to finance it, but that was her general idea. However, she stayed with John and Monica out on Long Island -- East Rockaway, Long Island -- and decided she was going to stay until Monica had her child. It wasn't due for quite a while.

Q: Nine months anyway.

Robinson: But she said she was living at their expense out there and she thought that was not quite right, and she said she wanted to go to work. John found her--she was a trained baby nurse anyhow, so he found her job with one of the people that worked in his office. His wife was having a child and they wanted help for a little while after she came home with the child. So Barbara took that job, and somewhere along the line realized that she really should have a Green Card, if she was going to be working here, and she went down to

Immigration. Of course, the British at that time had no problem and she got her Green Card right away.

Q: They had the quotas.

Robinson: But it was the Bessos [phonetic] she worked for first. Besso was vaguely Jewish, and so they were very pleased with her, and the result was that she got on to a new baby Jewish circuit on Long Island, and eventually ended up at the ~~Najaris~~ [phonetic] and ~~Najari~~ had been at NYU Law School with Si, and they were very good friends, and ~~Najari~~ called up Si one day and said, "We have this wonderful woman here helping with the baby and she really ought to be married. She's in her mid-thirties and she ought to be married, but she's a Roman Catholic. Do you know any?" [Laughs] And Simon, of course, knew me.

So, Simon went out there to visit the Najaris and see their new baby and I think probably to look over Barbara, too. Anyway, Barbara said he rang the bell and came inside the front door and took off his shoes. She said she'd never seen anybody before pad around in stocking feet, which Simon was always doing that.

Q: Had he been in Japan?

Robinson: No, he hadn't. He'd been in Britain, but he was very easy going and informal.

Anyhow, she said he wasn't there very long when he suddenly turned to her and said, "Would you like to meet somebody?" [Laughs]

And she said, "Well, yes." She said she'd never met anybody quite so direct before, but she'd been here long enough to absorb some of the way people talk.

So he arranged it. This was along about 1957 sometime, I think, well along in 1957. He arranged for her to come in and go to Minetta Tavern, but he came, too. So that's where I met her, in Minetta Tavern in Greenwich Village. We talked about things in general. I think we talked a little bit about CORE, because by that time I was working for CORE.

Then afterward I said, "Well, why don't you walk up to the apartment and meet the Kalingers [phonetic]." The Kalingers were the people I'd met in Austria. They wanted to come to this country and they couldn't find anyone else to sponsor them, and I had said, "I don't think it will work, but--."

Q: When were you in Austria, to digress?

Robinson: I was in Austria with my mother in 1956. I didn't tell you any of that. Okay. After Dorothy died in September of '55, in May of '56 Mother and I went to Europe and I was gone for five weeks or so, I guess. I met Joseph Kalinger through Marie Klein [~~phonetic~~], who'd been in Chicago CORE. When I said I was going and we were going to stop in Austria, she wrote and said, "Well, you must look up Joseph Kalinger." He was here at the University of Chicago briefly on some sort of exchange after the war. She wrote him and I wrote him.

Anyway, when we got to Vienna, they came to the hotel and we went to *Tristan and Isolde*, Mother, the Kalingers and me, at the Staatsoper. Then I went out to Grinzing [~~phonetic~~]

with them on Saturday night. That's the little place outside Vienna where there are lots of beer gardens and where Beethoven used to go in the summer. He was such a difficult tenant that apparently he had to go to a different house every year he went there.

But anyhow, that's how I knew the Kalingers, and I had signed ~~with~~ them when they came in July. I had this two-bedroom apartment at Stuyvesant Town. So they lived with me until they got jobs and then moved out to Queens. So they were living with me when I met Barbara.

Q: Oh, okay. I thought they were living on Mott Street.

Robinson: No, they were living at--Dorothy and I had moved to-- so I'd been there in Stuyvesant from the time that we moved there, about 1950. When Dorothy died in '55, I was still there.

So Barbara came up and saw the apartment, but she also saw the Kalingers. Of course, he'd been in the Luftwaffe, and Barbara had been in ~~[unclear]~~. [Laughs] And she met this funny little man who was a conscientious objector ~~of~~ the war, and was running around and picketing things, and she didn't think that she was going to--she wasn't very impressed. [Laughs] If anything, she was a little negatively impressed.

But she did come. I met her in town again, and she did, and so we gradually got to see quite a bit of each other. As far as theology was concerned, we weren't different. We were different in the way we perceived how that reflected into ethics, because I'd been influenced by Dorothy Day and the Catholic Worker people and the Protestants and the Fellowship of

Reconciliation and all that. And her family were Tories and they were conservative. It's interesting, her sister married somebody from Wales and he was Labor. [Laughs]

Q: The ice had been broken. [Laughs]

Robinson: But anyway, we saw more and more of each other, and Christmas of 1959 I invited her to go up with me to my mother's, and she went. I had mentioned getting married and she'd put it aside.

Anyway, my family was a help, I think. We went to my Uncle ~~Vinton's~~ Denton's for Christmas dinner, and my Grandmother Robinson was still living and she was there. Uncle ~~Vinton's~~ sister who had been a teacher, was there, and the two sons were there, and their wives. It was a very--she had a good time, and they weren't all starry-eyed radicals who were running around with picket signs either.

So at some point we decided, well, we should get married. I don't know if it was when we first got back or what, but anyhow, New Year's Eve we told people we were going to get married.

We didn't set a date or anything, but I happened to notice that there was going to be a cruise on February 6th. Who was it that ran those tours? Simmons Tours ~~[phonetic]~~ O.K. Simmons Tours were the first people to get transatlantic ships to take ordinary people on cruises in the off-season.

Q: Oh, I thought that was something that had always been. Okay.

"C" the letter "C" for Costa

Robinson: There had been cruising on people's yachts and things. They had Costa Lines, which was a very small line then. It's a big line now. They had a boat; they had boats that were called various things, and everything ended with "Sea." Ours was the Bianca Sea. It was women's names but with "Sea" after it. The ship had been built to take Italian immigrants to South America, and it was to go this way, but Simmons had gotten into it, and Simmons ran the cruise staff to do this trip in February, February 6th, from New York to Curacao and Haiti.

So I called Barbara in her office and told her about the cruise. I said, "It's February 6th, so why don't we get married on Friday, February 5th."

She said, "Yes," and then she said--afterwards she realized that was about three weeks away.

Q: "My dress, my veil." [Laughs]

Robinson: So we went to the church there on Fourteenth Street, Immaculate Conception Church, and I had to ask people on one of the other floors, I knew I wanted the young red-headed priest, but I didn't know what his name was, and they told me what his name was. So we went and saw him, and he needed her baptismal record and so on. So we weren't quite sure it would come through on time, but it did.

Barbara Robinson: I heard you. [Laughs]

Q: Yes. Yes, this is from his point of view.

Barbara Robinson: Yes, and it's very interesting to hear it. Oh, dear. [Laughs]

Robinson: So anyway, we did get married in the evening on February 5th. I'd asked ~~you~~ about getting married in the evening. It wasn't usual. We weren't going to get married at Mass. We just wanted the marriage ceremony by itself. He said, "Yes, we can do that. We'll have to do it at seven, because we have a service at eight on Friday evening."

So that's what we did, and we just sent out little announcements and asked people to come for a brief reception afterward at the apartment. I wore a business suit and Barbara got a beautiful gray dress with polka dots on it, and a hat and shoes and things, at Saks Fifth Avenue. When she said she was going to get married, the lady really took a lot of trouble.

Q: I hope so. [Laughs]

Robinson: Simon was our best man. These people that I checked with to find out about the priest, the woman said to me, "My husband said Friday night, they're getting married Friday night at seven o'clock. Something about it sounds Jewish to him." [Laughs]

Q: And a Jewish best man.

Robinson: I said, "Well, Simon Perchik is."

"Oh," she said, "I didn't even know you could do that."

The other witness was Barbara's sister, and her brother-in-law brought her down the aisle. My mother came. My Uncle ~~Vinton~~ Denton and Aunt Carrie did not come; it was at his house we'd had Christmas. He was busy doing taxes, etc. It was unfortunate they didn't come, because he died a month later. He wasn't all that old. But my mother's sister and her husband, Uncle Ray ~~Haines [phonetic]~~ Hammes, and my Uncle Ed and his wife, Aunt ~~May [phonetic]~~ Mae came down.

So I had ordered a lot of champagne and Barbara's sister was baking a fruitcake, which was traditional in England. Anyhow, Mother decided we really didn't have enough stuff, so somebody brought snacks and she went up to the bakery and ordered a big chocolate cake, all chocolate. So we had a groom's cake and a bride's cake and lots of champagne, and we had records. Almost everybody who was invited came. We had fifty-five or sixty people in that apartment. We had a wonderful, wonderful time. No dinner, nothing. It was just a reception, so it was all over about nine-thirty or so.

We went to her apartment in Brooklyn. My mother and her relatives stayed in our apartment. Then the next day we went over to the boat that went to Curacao and Haiti.

So this was February 5, 1960, and we were at sea when we first got in the ship's bulletin words about the beginnings of the sit-ins.

Barbara Robinson: Yes, lotsa fun. You can imagine him, "Oh, I'm not there." [Laughs]

Q: I was in Turkey when I read about the picketing of the Miss America pageant, and I thought, "They've started the revolution without me." [Laughs] [unclear].

Robinson: The sit-ins, of course, had started spontaneously in Greensboro. Dr. Simpkins ~~[phonetic]~~, who was a dentist, was on the CORE list and he was in Greensboro. He was also connected with the NAACP. But he'd gotten CORE's pamphlet on sit-ins based on what we had done in Chicago and how we'd put it together, etc. And a couple of these students who started the sit-ins were in touch with him, and they went over and they said, "We went and we sat at the counter, and we just sat. We don't quite know what we're doing." And he had that pamphlet, so there was a CORE connection right at the very beginning.

Then I think Simpkins called the office, and Gordon Carey went down. James McCain was probably already in the South, but Gordon--

Barbara Robinson: And we're on our honeymoon. [Laughs]

Robinson: Anyway, we were a day late getting back. We were a day late getting back. We went to Curacao, and the people on the cruise, the Simmons people, had arranged with the Shell Oil Company's Employees Club for us all to be able to use that club, which was kind of amusing because there was one black couple with a son on the cruise and they went out to the club. Now, I'm sure at that point in Curacao, the people who lived in Curacao who were black never went to that club, but these people went. We had such a good time there, didn't we?

Barbara Robinson: Oh, indeed, it was lovely.

Robinson: It was a hot day and we had Planter's Punch when we got there, then we went swimming, and we had those little things like Jamaican patties that are hot, hot, the meat, hot, spicy meat in the middle, out on the beach. Anyway, we had a good time in Haiti, too.

But we got into a storm coming back off Cape Hatteras, and this was not a very big ship and it was not really built for the North Atlantic, anyway, so it did this and this [gestures]. I have been seasick a number of times when it hasn't been very rough, but this time I didn't get seasick. We decided that we'd better not be in the cabin and we'd probably better not be inside, and the constant warnings not to move anywhere without holding on to a rope or something, but we did manage, with the railings and the ropes, to get up to the back of the ship near the top and there was a bar there, and they had closed the bar with wooden slats. So you could sit flat on the planking of the deck and lean against this place. Two or three other people came.

Barbara Robinson: Oh, there were a number of people up there. There was about a dozen or so of us up there.

Robinson: Finally some of the stewards discovered that we were up there, and they bought apples and blankets. [Laughs]

Barbara Robinson. As long as we sat there and watched [unclear].

Robinson: The wind was blowing like crazy, but it was that fresh wind that helps a lot, and you'd sit there and you'd see the sea, and then you'd see just the sky, then you see on this side, because it was rolling and pitching at the same time. But it was not very cold. The blankets were useful, but it was not very cold. But it continued all day long, and by the time we went to have a drink at night, I was tired. I wasn't queasy or anything. Anyhow, we decided we would pass up the martini; we only had sherry.

Barbara Robinson: We had sherry. [Laughs]

Robinson: Then we went in the dining room. Well, the dining room, we go down the hall and there was a door, and then you go again and there's a nice wide spot and then a beautiful staircase going down into the dining room. Well, they had waiters at the top, so as soon as you opened that door, somebody grabbed you and you had the railing and they helped you down the stairs.

Barbara Robinson: With somebody in the middle and somebody at the bottom.

Robinson: To get you down. Once they got you down to--it was a table, they said, "The edges of the table"--

Q: "No soup."

Robinson: -- to hold on to the edge of the table, because it wasn't built for the North Atlantic, and the chairs are not anchored and just don't worry about the dishes or the food

or anything. If it goes off the table, we'll get you something else." But there weren't that many people in the dining room, so--

Q: I can understand. [Laughs]

Barbara Robinson: Only a few brave souls. I think then there were about two dozen people down there and that's about it.

Robinson: They had soaked all the tablecloths so that the dishes wouldn't slide off the tops, and the cups came without saucers. Anyhow, the dinner worked all right. We did all right.

Then we slept in spite of the storm. The cabins, incidentally, were the smallest I have ever seen. They were built for immigrants. We had a cabin with a shower. It meant that you went into the cabin and it was about this wide [gestures], I guess, and there were the bunks, one above the other.

Barbara Robinson: That's all right, we fit two in one.

Robinson: Right at the back there was the shower and toilet. I can't remember where the drawers were, whether--

Barbara Robinson: Oh, there were drawers.

Robinson: Yes, there were drawers. Anyhow, it was very small, but it worked. We were very happy with it and we had a--

Barbara Robinson: That steward, do you remember that one?

Robinson: Oh, yes.

Barbara Robinson: He was white-haired when we got on. When we got to Curacao, he went and got his hair dyed a beautiful brown. We looked at him, and he said, "The ladies, you know." [Laughs] We insisted on calling ~~him~~ *il professore*. He thought ~~he~~ was a professor.

Robinson: The woman from Simmons Tours, ~~which~~ I think she had been a university dean or something, she ran things so beautifully. We had a costume party, which, fortunately, was the night before the storm.

Barbara Robinson: We won a prize.

Robinson: Yes, she bought a Chinese gown in Curacao and she wore that. Late at night on the back deck -- it was not like modern ships, you know, it had a big front and the main part and there was a long part in back -- and they had built a late-night bar out on the back and the bartender was the entertainment. He used to sing, and his favorite thing was "I don't want her, you can have her, she's too fat for me." [Laughs]

Barbara Robinson: He'd ~~lean~~ over the bar and he'd ~~lean~~ back again when he'd finish it.

Robinson: Anyhow, it was a lot of fun. But with the storm, we were a day late getting back and she said that was the end of the honeymoon. [Laughs]

Barbara Robinson: I said to myself, "Why on earth did I get married?" [Laughs]

Robinson: By the time we got back, Peck and somebody else, and I'm not quite sure who, had already been over to talk to people at Woolworth's. I can't remember whether picket lines were already decided upon. They weren't taking place, but I think they may have already been decided on before I got back. There was all this business going on in the South with Gordon Carey running around from place to place in North Carolina and helping spread the idea, and giving at least a little bit of training to people who were beginning to do it.

Q: How did the guys get the idea to have a sit-in? I mean, I'm sure they've talked about it at length somewhere.

Robinson: Well, I'm not quite sure. I know that in Nashville that they had had discussions with Lawson [~~phonetic~~ OK] about what they were going to do, and the people were particularly annoyed with the department store counters, because when people went to the department stores to shop, they spent a considerable amount of time, and then there was no place for them to eat.

Q: Right. Or sit down.

Robinson: Right. What?

Q: Or sit down at all.

Robinson: Yes. So that was all decided before they did it. Of course, they didn't get started until after the North Carolina stuff started. As far as I could gather, the first time they sat down at a dime-store counter, it was almost spontaneous. They'd been there and bought something and they felt like having something to drink, and they decided, "Well, why can't we?" And they just sat down. When they didn't get served, they continued to sit for a while, and nobody knew what to do about it. The management didn't know what to do about it either. Then they were in touch with Simpkins and the thing began to be better organized.

Initially, and most of those places in North Carolina in the beginning there wasn't very much hooliganism the first few days either. That got worse as time went on.

Q: Wasn't Orangeburg the first one in South Carolina?

Robinson: No, Greensboro.

Q: Greensboro. Sorry.

Robinson: Greensboro, then Raleigh, and then place after place after places. Then, of course, the Nashville people began right after that. I mean, as soon as they heard of it, they thought, "Oh, they've stolen our thunder." And there, there had been a lot of

preparation and training under Lawson. So all of this was going on, and Darwin Bolden was added to the staff to work here in New York.

[END TAPE SIX, SIDE TWO; BEGIN TAPE SEVEN, SIDE ONE]

Q: ... of February and we're talking with Jim Robinson. We were talking about the first sit-ins in North Carolina just while he was still on his honeymoon. So he came back to the revolution having started.

Robinson: Right. As I said, Darwin Bolden was soon hired to work with the Woolworth boycott, which was really not just Woolworth but Grant's and Newberry's and all the places where anything was going on in the South, to try to pressure these places in the North.

Q: [unclear].

Robinson: Pressure them to change their policy in the South and to work on the ~~corporate~~ corporation - corporate headquarters was right across the park from us in the Woolworth Building.

Q: As I remember, one of the problems was that some of the places were only Southern chains and we couldn't put that kind of pressure on them.

Robinson: Right. But it was known as the Woolworth boycott, but it did go--we had Grant's and other places that we approached, and the boycott became very big in cities like New York and Chicago. The book on CORE talks about the number of picket lines on Saturdays

within two or three weeks after the sit-ins started, and there were thirty-five, forty picket lines in New York, but Woolworth's was all over town.

The office was very busy with coordinating that. We asked other groups to sponsor picket lines, etc., but they could pick up picket signs from the office and leaflets to hand out and so on and so forth, and it was Genevieve Hughes took over the coordination of it for New York CORE and worked with Darwin Bolden and so on.

Q: So each group, say, NYU Students, or I was in YPSL [Young People's Socialist League] at the time, I remember that Lucy Komisar[phonetic] was the person who was always trying to get us out to picket lines, which was actually how I got into CORE. When I thought all we're doing, you know, all this group is doing, actually, is supporting CORE, I should join CORE, so I did.

So each group was responsible for a different Woolworth's? Is that the way it went?

Robinson: It was usually that way, right, so there wasn't--it was certainly easier for a group to take responsibility for a particular one. It was easier than trying to get several groups to coordinate.

And then there were some picket lines during the week. There was one at 34th Street that I used to go to from the office, that I think--I don't know whether New York CORE was sponsoring it. Anyhow, I thought that I ought to be on the picket line at least once a week, and I used to go to that one.

I can remember something in the *New York Times* about that picket line. The reporter must have come along on that particular day, and I don't think there were more than six or seven people, or eight in there, anyhow, it was relatively small, and it was a way of showing up, but I didn't think it was at all important. But at that particular one got in--had a little strip in the *New York Times* and I was so amused because sometimes we done big things and they didn't get it at all.

These negotiations were going on with Woolworth's, etc., and CORE groups across the North and West were particularly important, because they organized these Northern protests in support of the Southern sit-ins, and because the CORE groups were inter-racial--actually, they were predominantly white when this started. New York CORE may have been even and St. Louis CORE, but a lot of them were more white than black. So it gave an inter-racial character to the whole national sit-in movement, even though most of the sit-ins in the South were almost exclusively black. There were whites in Nashville and eventually there were whites elsewhere, but there weren't very many whites, because they started with black college students.

Q: They started [unclear] in places, yes.

Robinson: And for the first time we were getting a lot of national publicity which was related to CORE, but then a lot of national publicity -- they had had [unclear] people on school desegregation. And, of course, there was a lot of national publicity about Martin Luther King's bus boycott. But this was the first time that CORE got a lot of national exposure.

So then in order to provide the picket signs and the leaflets, and keep the fundraising going and all the rest of it, we needed more people on staff and we needed more money, so it was a constant struggle. A number of people from Tallahassee who'd been in the demonstrations there, came to New York to help us raise money. We did have a CORE group that Patricia Stevens ~~[phonetic]~~ and her sister, Priscilla, and some other black students from Tallahassee, and Richard Haley, who was on the staff there and got fired for it.

Q: Was on the staff of what?

Robinson: Of Florida A&M [Agricultural and Mechanical University].

Q: Oh, that's how he came. Okay.

Robinson: So anyhow, he was not up here then, but the Stevens girls came up and a white fellow from Florida U. [State University], I guess, the other school that's in Tallahassee, the white school, and he and someone from Florida A&M, they'd had a big march. He and the black fellow were the two people in the lead and they got their pictures in the paper. The white fellow said, "My mother called me up and she said, 'It's all very well to get on these things and get your picture in the paper, but I noticed that the black fellow had his tie on and you didn't.'" [Laughs]

Q: It was always the curse of the movement.

Robinson: So anyway, these people came up to help us raise funds, and several of them stayed in our apartment.

Barbara Robinson: Hundreds of them [Laughs].

Robinson: Well, more people came there to eat than actually slept there, but a number of them slept there.

Barbara Robinson: There was an awful lot sleeping there. A lot of bodies to step over in the morning. I remember cooking eggs until they came out of my ears.

Robinson: Anyhow, they went to the Local 1199 and several other unions. The union connections were sometimes--were usually done by Marvin Rich. Bayard Rustin had a Martin Luther King Defense Committee. Bayard was *persona non grata* with the local people at the SCLC [Southern Christian Leadership Conference], but he kept his oar in by doing these fundraising things in New York. He had one of the students to come up to--the singer's apartment.

Barbara Robinson: Harry Belafonte.

Robinson: Harry Belafonte's apartment. So I remember we all went up there on a Sunday. I'm not even sure; I think Randolph was there that time, too. Anyhow, they circulated a lot and got a lot of exposure, and it did help to raise some money. The money we got from unions at that point was not very much. It wasn't terribly significant. And we were not getting any money from foundations at all at that point.

Q: Were you getting help in kind, like printing?

Robinson: Not much, but we had--Bedinbowl [phonetic] was the printer that we used for--we didn't use them for fundraising things, but we used it for the ~~*Correlator*~~ and for a lot of black-and-white printing. He did all the Woolworth stuff and he didn't charge very much. He was a leftist of some sort, probably a Socialist. But most of the stuff we were paying for.

Q: There was some discussion online about why the black-and-white handclasp button, whether it had actually come from a union or not, from the meatpackers or something like that.

Robinson: It may have. At any rate, they ran around town and it helped our credentials considerably, because it put a face on what we'd been doing, so that money that came in from things like Local 1199 thereafter, it really had gotten started then, even though it wasn't significant money. But it certainly did keep Barbara busy, and when we weren't at the apartment with these students, I was off somewhere all the time. It was just -- when I was not at the office we got calls at night.

Barbara Robinson: I didn't like that.

Robinson: It was terrible. So eventually--

Q: From people in jail?

Robinson: From our people--there were so many things going on.

Q: Couldn't get through to you, lines were busy.

Robinson: They'd call at night. So eventually we decided we'd get away for a weekend and we went to Chalfonte-Hadden Hall.

Barbara Robinson: In Atlantic City. I'd never been there.

Robinson: Atlantic City. It was in the spring. I said, "We're going to be away and I'm just going to lay in bed [unclear]." So we went Friday night and stayed through Sunday and got away from it for a little while.

But then we came back and there was in June--I think it was in June that we had a fundraising meeting at the Plaza Hotel. That was a meeting that the invitations went out over Eleanor Roosevelt's signature, and she was the hostess for the meeting, and Jackie Robinson came. We didn't have a lot of people. It wasn't a very -- we only invited people on our list who had given substantially. A woman came down from Rochester, a very nice lady, and so we seated her next to Jackie Robinson, and I can remember she asked him whether he'd been a boxer. [Laughs] She didn't know. Some of our civil rights supporters didn't keep up with sports.

Q: Put him in his place.

But the Stevens girls re-enacted what a sit-in was like, and someone from the United Artists--I can't remember his name now--pledged five hundred dollars, I think. Anyhow, we had somebody primed for it. They paid five hundred or a thousand dollars. Anyhow, it made a nice sound. It took a few months to collect it. [Laughs] We wrote letters and wrote letters, and I don't think he ever gave any money again. It was pointed out to me that for some people they buy their publicity with their gifts. But it was a big success in any case.

That was in June, and then in July, sometime in July we had the Miami Action Institute, and we made a particular effort to get people who'd been involved in the student sit-ins. I think we had five people from New Orleans. Gordon Carey and James McCain went down, oh, ten days earlier, I guess. There was a CORE group in Miami and it was not a typical CORE group. It was inter-racial, but unlike most of them, it wasn't the really young people; there were people forty-ish. Shirley Zoloth, her husband was a businessman, she was what I would consider a middle-aged person. I was middle-aged, too, but I didn't know that. There was a Dr. Brown, who was a black doctor.

But they were people who had some connections with Miami and they were uneasy about the CORE workshop being in Miami, because anything they did they were careful with it, slow. When you're trying to train people and you only have three weeks to do it in, they've got to get some exposure to everything in a hurry. So there was a kind of a feeling of friction. There had been some with previous--

Barbara Robinson: Excuse me, do you think you should close that window? It's a little noisy, for one thing.

Robinson: And it's probably getting cold.

Barbara Robinson: Yes.

[Tape recorder turned off.]

Q: You had children within my memory. I mean, you came complete with children when I met you.

Robinson: Yes.

Q: So all this was going on while you were starting a family.

Robinson: Right. So we had written Martin King, been in touch with him about coming down to help with the training sessions at the Institute, and he came. He came, but we were not to publicize it at all that he was there, so we didn't. It got out from the national office a little later on, but it shouldn't have.

We had the housing at the Sir John Motel, which was a good-quality motel in the black area of Miami, with a nice outdoor swimming pool and a nightclub which didn't function in the summer. So we had our training sessions in the nightclub, and Martin King, I can remember, said, "I've never before tried to teach non-violence in a nightclub." [Laughs]

Q: We had exactly the same setup in Houston a few years later.

Robinson: Anyway, it was Joseph Perkins ~~[phonetic]~~ and I, I can remember, we always used the swimming pool. Most of the people didn't even bother to go swimming, but we did. Carey and McCain had found a restaurant within a couple blocks of the Sir John and had negotiated getting everybody fed there. The food was pretty good. The one thing I did object to, they always used powdered stuff for mashed potatoes, and we got mashed potatoes quite often. But the food, for the money, was good. The cost of everything was kept way down. It was not expensive, and it wasn't fleabaggy either.

But anyway, we did decide to have a one-hour sit-in at this twenty-four-hour supermarket that had a big lunch counter, and we went out to that, and about ten minutes before it was to come to an end, the cops arrived and arrested a number of us. They didn't arrest everybody, but they did--I was one of the people arrested. There were three whites, I think, arrested, and four or five blacks. The observer that we had at the lunch counter--we always wanted an observer to write everything down.

Q: I was going to ask you to talk about that.

Robinson: So we wanted a white person to do it, and we didn't have somebody white who didn't want to sit-in, and finally one of the girls from New Orleans said, "Well, I can be the white observer." She says, "In New Orleans I'm white when I'm with whites, and I'm black when I'm with blacks, and nobody's going to know the difference." So she sat at the counter and got served and she was the white observer. [Laughs]

Anyway, we got arrested and we had a great time singing "We Shall ~~Not Be~~ Overcome" in the paddy wagon.

Barbara Robinson: "We Shall Overcome," dear.

Robinson: "We Shall Overcome" in the paddy wagon. We got carted down to the Dade County jail in downtown Miami.

Q: Which was segregated?

Robinson: It was segregated. The courthouse, a lot of things were in that building, including the courthouses, and the jail was way up high where there was no shade, and it was segregated, and the guards made sure when they put us in that they let everybody know what we were in for. [Laughs]

Q: Oh, yes.

Robinson: So, nothing happened right away, but I think the second night a white fellow from New Orleans got beaten up; not badly, but beaten up. He was frightened anyway. So we got word out and we got him bailed out.

Perkins, who was one of the people arrested, a black, he didn't believe in being bailed out, you know. The jail/no bail was the idea that the Tallahassee people had had. Pat Stevens had pushed that in some of the training sessions. It was not something that I had in mind as part of the agenda for the Institute, but it appealed to me, too. So anyway, with one exception, everybody decided they weren't going to pay any bail.

There was a television set in the dayroom. There was a big room with glass, some glass windows, and then there were cells which had a bunk, and I think there were two levels of bunks, but there was this television there. So the second day, the local television station came in, and I was taken out of the cellblock and interviewed, and I just talked about "we weren't going to pay bail, etc., and it was absurd to have segregation, etc." It was all fine, except that, of course, it was played on the television set when I was there, when they broadcast it. I thought, oh well, but nothing happened to me.

Q: Oh, oh, I see. I see.

Robinson: Several times I seemed to lead a charmed life, because I was not the one who got beaten up at all.

Q: It may have been the luck, but it also--okay. There are people that are picked on and people who aren't.

Robinson: Yes. Well, you could count on Jim Peck getting beaten up if there were any beating up to be done. There was something about his attitude that contributed to it.

[Tape recorder turned off.]

Q: Okay. We're back on.

Robinson: So anyway, we were in jail ten days, and neither McCain nor Gordon Carey were arrested, and Rudy Lombard from New Orleans was not arrested. So there were people

around, enough people so that the training and various projects went on. This business of getting arrested came after we'd been there four or five days, and we had tested the beaches.

Q: That they kept on doing for many years, because I remember in '64 or '65 they were testing beaches in Tallahassee.

Robinson: Right.

Q: But this was Miami.

Robinson: This was Miami. The first beach that we went to was a white beach, and we had no problem, actually, but if we'd stayed long enough, we might have gone to another beach, too. We were in an area where it seemed to be accepted, and I think some of the people that we met on the beach were ex-New Yorkers who had retired there. But we thought, well, if we do it at the white beach, we ought to do it at the black beach, too. So Miami CORE had never done it at the black beach.

We had an absolutely hilarious time at the black beach, because there were lots of youngsters from about four or five up to about fifteen or sixteen, and they were in the water with this mixed group. A couple of people decided they would do chicken-fighting, on shoulders, you know, one person in the water and somebody else up here. So these kids thought that was great, too. "A white man is on your shoulders." [Laughs] And it was a riotous good time and it was a nice demonstration in a way. It wasn't challenging. It was

One kid called to me "White man, white man, let me get on your shoulder" He did and both of us got ducked.

illegal, of course, really, because the beaches were supposed to be segregated. But there was no problem with it at all.

So that came before, but then we had the ten days in jail and things worked all right outside, and the lawyers from the ACLU, we didn't have to pay fines. I think we were--they decided that we would be on probation for a year. Something happened like that. Anyway, they weren't giving us fines, because they were afraid we wouldn't pay them and we'd go back into jail.

So we were out of that, and there were, I guess, a few days left in the Institute, and we had a rally and Jackie Robinson came down and talked at the rally. We had King and we had Robinson. We had terribly good cooperation on a lot of these things.

Q: I'm impressed, because I didn't realize that Jackie Robinson had been so active at any point, really.

Robinson: Yes. Well, he really was. He came down to--

Q: Because you mentioned him in the picket line in New York.

Robinson: Yes. He flew down for that meeting and he was very good, and we had a good attendance. I don't remember what he said, but I do remember the turnout was very good.

Then the last night we were there, we had a dance and there was a new thing out called the Twist, which I had never done before. But I think there must have been--we must have had liquor there, too, because I did the Twist. I had a wonderful time.

McCain was older than I was, and he was the only person who was older than I was, and most of these people who were at the Institute were college students or people in their early twenties, so that they were half my age. It's strange, when I look back at it, that I wasn't very conscious of age differences at all. Anyway, we had a very, very good time.

At the end of it, we were coming back on a non-sched plane, and Gordon and I were on that same plane. I think McCain was just going back to Sumter, South Carolina. But I had gone down on a non-sched and we went back on this non-sched, and it was a military plane that had been purchased by one of these non-sched airlines and they had sort of cut the windows into the walls and piled in the seats.

We took off at night, early evening, I guess, and ran into a thunderstorm and most of the people were asleep. It bounced around quite a little bit. All of a sudden there was a terrific clatter and it woke everybody up. I wasn't asleep. Anyhow, I wondered what that was, and then we kept hearing "flap, flap, flap" on the outside of the plane, but we had no explanation for it for a long time. About an hour after it was over, the stewardess came on the public address system and said, "Don't worry about that flapping on the outside of the plane. When the plane was struck by lightning, it cut off the antenna." [Laughs]

So we flew on, landed in Philadelphia, and I thought, "Well, they'll fix that." We took off from Philadelphia and it was still flapping. Anyhow, we got back to New York, but I'll tell

you, I was all in favor of saving money and all of us were flying on non-scheds and all that, but it was a little risky I gather.

Q: Did you charter non-scheds? Was that how it worked?

Robinson: No. These non-scheds actually were flying like scheduled airlines. They flew at about the same time most days, etc., but they were not part of [unclear] or anything. They could be a little like catch-as-catch-can.

I saw somebody off at Newark once on a non-sched. I think it was Farmer, and I can't remember why I was seeing him off either. But he was going to Chicago and the plane company had two planes there. Anyway, they almost put him on the flight that was going to Los Angeles instead of the one that was going to Chicago. [Laughs] So it was that kind of thing.

Anyway, we got back and that was August, and Barbara and I had not had--I had had almost no breaks from '57 to '60, and then we had that honeymoon, which was eight days.

Q: Eight whole days.

Robinson: Yes. We decided that it was time for a vacation, and the Woolworth boycott was winding down. Some people were very discouraged because we had thirty-five picket lines on a Saturday and then it gradually got down to fewer and fewer.

Q: And Woolworth's wasn't giving in.

Robinson: And Woolworth's didn't give in. There were a number of places did open in the Upper South, in North Carolina and so on, a number of places did open, but the corporation didn't change its policy. The corporation wasn't really opposed to being open; they were opposed to being asked to break the law. [Laughs] See, it was a confusing kind of issue from a corporate point of view.

But anyhow, things were slowing down. And Barbara, we hadn't seen her father--I had never met him. So we took the North German Lloyd ship. What was it? The *Bremen*. Took it to England and met her friend Jean and her husband, and then went down and stayed.

Q: Had your little boy been born yet?

Barbara

Robinson: No. ~~She~~ was still pregnant. We went near where her father lived and we stayed at a hotel. My mother went with us, so there were three of us. Then it rained. Or it was late September, I guess. It was September and it rained every blessed day. We were in England for almost two weeks.

Q: Very unusual weather.

Robinson: It didn't rain steadily, but it rained and we had gray weather. So we met her sisters. There were two of them that weren't there, but her older sister and the next to the oldest and her brother, who was the second oldest child, they were all in the Coventry area, and we met all of them. We didn't meet the two that were down in New Zealand. ~~We later~~

Something wrong — never went to Australia

~~went to Australia~~. We didn't meet John and Monica, who had left New York; they left New York and they were in Tokyo at that time.

But we wanted, in addition to going to England, we wanted to go on down to Paris and then to Rome and Sicily. So we did that, we took the boat train and the boat and then the train at the other end to Paris. We got to Paris late afternoon and the sun came out. Barbara said, "Isn't that the limit?" No sun for two weeks in England. We just get to Paris and the sun comes out.

Q: Well, it would have been a shame if you hadn't been able to see the kind of life they have in Paris.

Robinson: So we were in Paris a couple of days and then we took an overnight couchette train, which went via --what's the city? Not Milano. The other city in northern Italy.

Q: Venice?

Robinson: No.

Q: You have to take a boat to Venice.

Robinson: There's another industrial--anyhow, we via that--

Q: Turin?

Robinson: Turin. Torino, that's it. We had to check baggage, so when we got to the border, I got up to go back to check the baggage through, and I couldn't check it through. Everybody said, "Oh, no, Torino. a Roma. a Roma." Well, that was a very great idea, except when we got to Rome, the baggage was up at the border. It had been held because we hadn't checked it through. [Laughs] And we spent two days in Rome with American Express getting the stuff down to Rome. Well, we got it down to Rome eventually. It was just about time for us to leave. Anyhow, it was nice to get clean clothes.

Then we took the train from Rome down to Sicily. It was a beautiful train trip. The other train trip had been kind of interminable once we got into Italy. We seemed to be on a train that just didn't move. I think we were three hours just--

Q: They were waiting for your luggage to catch up.

Robinson: So it was three hours late getting to Rome. Anyway, the train to Sicily was wonderful and we had lunch on it, and it was a beautiful, beautiful lunch. Then the train went ~~under~~ onto a ferry, as I remember it, and over to Sicily and we went to a hotel on the beach in Taormina, a second-class hotel, which was the only hotel on the beach that was open at that time of year because it was already late September. I remember most of the people in the hotel were Germans, and they were so interested in swimming. They went swimming every day, even on the gray days. If it was a chilly day, it didn't bother them at all. They swam out a long way and swam back in. Most of the Italians thought it was too late in the year to swim. [Laughs] But I went swimming.

We had these wonderful bus trips up to Taormina on top, you know, the bus goes like this [gestures] and there's no guardrail. But they were careful drivers, I must say.

Q: In Sicily?

Robinson: It was pretty careful, the bus.

Q: Oh, good.

Robinson: Not the ordinary drivers. It was nothing like it was in Venezuela. If you ever go to Venezuela, don't take the beautiful old road up to Caracas from the port, because there are no guardrails and you can see all sorts of stuff rusting at the bottom. [Laughs] It is beautiful, but it's very chancy. But this bus driver, the bus drivers we had were good, and the town was very picturesque. It's a tourist town anyway. There are nice hotels up there.

We were going to go to the volcano. What is that? Etna, isn't it? In Sicily. Is it Vesuvius?

Q: Yes, I think Vesuvius. I'm not sure. I've never been there.

Robinson: Anyhow, we were going to go to that.

Q: Stromboli? Etna

Robinson: I don't know.

Q: Okay. I was just thinking it was the title of that Ingrid Bergman movie.

Robinson: Right, but that's on another island, I think. I think this is Etna. Anyway, we were going to go the next day, and Barbara ate fish and there was something wrong with the fish, I guess, and she was very sick. The doctor who came had some English, which was fortunate since we didn't have any Italian. The maids were so solicitous because Barbara was pregnant and he would say, "Oh, no, you mustn't eat fish. You must eat the green salads for the little baby," etc. Barbara said she'd never a little baby who ate green salads. Anyhow, she did recover, but we missed the--

seen

Q: The trip to Etna.

Robinson: Right.

Q: Vesuvius is by Pompeii.

Robinson: Right. And then when we were ready to go, we had shipped Barbara's trunk from Coventry down to Sicily because we didn't want to carry that with us, and we were going to put it on the ship. We took the bus into Palermo. That's where the *Olympia*, the Greek ship, the *Olympia* was there to take us from there, and we went to Customs to get this suitcase, the trunk. Well, Customs that day was apparently open nine to eleven or something, and this was twelve or one. Anyhow, we spent most of the day dashing around with Customs officials in their buses and this and that and the other thing, and we had all this palaver and argumentation everywhere you went, and we didn't understand what was going on. But eventually we got the thing--

[Begin Tape 7, Side B]

Robinson: I said, "I don't understand why Italian Customs is interested in this trunk, although we're perfectly willing to open it, etc." But it was shipped from England to Palermo, and going on this ship in Palermo we had never been in touch with the thing at all. As I remember, we tipped people.

Anyhow, it got onto the dock for the ship, and then the ship was late and we were awfully hungry and it was too early, it was six o'clock and the ship was supposed to be there at six or seven, but it was too early for any of the restaurants. But there was a pizza place that was open, so we had some pizza and it tasted awfully good. Then it began to rain, and we got down and stood in line for the ship, which I think was two hours late or something.

Anyway, it finally got there and we got dinner on the ship, but it was terribly late. It was a funny transatlantic because the Greek immigrants who had been counting on coming on the *Queen Anna Maria* were on the *Olympia* because the *Queen Anna Maria* needed some repairs. And the Italian immigrants got on in Palermo. I don't think we made another stop in Italy. And it was fall, so it was Greek immigrants and Italian immigrants and we went to get a dining room assignment and the maître d' said, "Well, I want to put you in the small dining room, because that's where the English-speaking people are." So it ended up with putting Mother at one table and the two of us at another table. And to get to that, that small dining room, in fact, was the dining room that had been used for first-class, I think.

Anyway, it was a funny trip because there were so many nervous people. The Italian immigrants, almost to a person, it seemed to me, got seasick as soon as we went through the Straits of Gibraltar. And there were little old ladies in black dresses from places like Sicily who didn't speak anything but Italian and were traveling alone, I suppose, to meet their families in Canada and the U.S., and they looked so depressed. It really wasn't a very good trip. The *Olympia* was a nice ship.

Anyway, we got back, and by that time there had been friction between Marvin Rich and me anyway, and so they decided while I was away to replace me. [Laughs] So I was not replaced until the end of the year and it was--

Q: How was this broken to you?

Robinson: I can't quite remember how it was broken to me. But anyway, they wanted me to do the fundraising, see, so I stayed on as membership secretary. There was no way I was going to quit without having something else to do, because at this point I had a wife who was pregnant, who was not going to go back to work. I don't remember, maybe she went back to work for a little while, but anyhow, she wasn't going to be able to work very long. So we had to have some income, so I did stay on as membership secretary.

At the beginning of 1961, Farmer came. Farmer would have been a good person to go around the country and talk, and his idea of the Freedom Ride was obviously a very important idea. It was derived from the Journey of Reconciliation and it was something that Billie Ames had tried to get set up again in '56 or '57, but it hadn't happened. But building on the student sit-ins, this was a good time for it to be proposed, and I think there was inadequate warning to people about what might happen. The earlier Journey of

(proposed to him by Gordon Carey and Thomas Gaither)

Reconciliation had been warned very thoroughly that if they went beyond the Upper South, that there would be extreme violence.

If the Freedom Ride had taken place when Billie was trying to do it, and she was trying to use much the same route down through Birmingham, it might have gotten further with less violence, because it would have been not so anticipated. But after the student sit-ins, the people, the thoroughgoing segregationists, were bound and determined to stop these people who were trying to use the Supreme Court decisions to force integration on the South. The Supreme Court said, you know, segregation of interstate transportation is illegal.

Q: But they hadn't said that corporations that operated in many states were illegal, so that they couldn't--Woolworth couldn't--

Robinson: That hadn't gotten to the Supreme Court.

Q: But interstate commerce had.

Robinson: But interstate travel had gotten to the--. So it was clearly illegal, but it was also something that the federal government did not want to have to enforce. The Kennedy administration had gotten--they had won the election with the support of most of the solid South. Without a solid South, they would not have been there, and they owed them a lot and they realized they were sitting on a coalition that was Northern liberal and Southern racist, and they had to sort of bounce both ways.

Also, until the campaign, the Kennedys weren't conscious of race to any large extent. Bobby [Robert F. Kennedy] became very conscious of it and very pro-integrationist, but it was new, as far as they were concerned. The Invisible Man was still invisible from the patrician Kennedy background.

So anyway, I think that letters were written to--I know that letters were written to the Justice Department, and probably another couple places in the government about the Freedom Ride. But I also gather they were sent quite late, and Robert Kennedy said he never saw them.

Q: Were they sent late on purpose?

Robinson: I don't know. I have no idea. You see, I think there may have been some feeling that if they were sent too early, there would be a big attempt to get them to call it off. So there may have been something like that. But at any rate, there should have been a far greater attempt to make sure that the Justice Department was prepared to know what was going on. Kennedy later said--well, he said it once the violence erupted, that he had never heard about the Freedom Ride, and the chances are that a letter got buried somewhere in the Justice Department and never did get to him.

But at the same time, they obviously didn't want to do anything about it. ~~They~~ had training sessions in Washington, D.C., before they ~~went on to there~~. Farmer's father died, and Farmer left for his father's funeral when the Freedom Ride was going on to Birmingham, ~~so~~ he wasn't on that leg of the thing.

And one of the buses was stopped in Anniston. The [Ku Klux] Klan was very active in Alabama, and the Klan and the police were in cahoots in Birmingham. On the bus going through Anniston there was someone from the Alabama State Police who was on that bus when it was stopped and burned. He was important, and I think a lot more people would have been hurt or killed without him. He did his best to reduce the violence, get the doors open so everybody wasn't suffocated inside the burning bus, and some of the attackers ran away after. But it was a terrible thing, and it was a terrible thing for a professor from the Middle West, who was not young, he and his wife, two white people, were on that bus. And he was beaten senseless and he had suffered brain damage and was never normal after that. But there were other people who were beaten or hurt, but he and his wife really gave up the rest of their lives for what they were doing. In the book by the man who is now in Congress in Atlanta--

Q: John Lewis.

Robinson: John Lewis, right. In his book there's quite a bit about this couple, because he was impressed with what a great couple they were when they were having their final dinner in Washington, D.C. He talks about them. But it was a terrible thing.

And we had from the office a man named Jimmy McDonald ~~[phonetic]~~. He was quite an amusing character.

Mc or Mac
I'm not sure

Q: Oh, I remember him.

Robinson: Right. He was on that bus.

Q: Young Jimmy McDonald?

Robinson: He wasn't very old.

Q: Young, black?

Robinson: Right.

Q: Yes. Maybe I did meet him.

Robinson: But he was fairly young. He was not 100 percent stable, or at least I didn't think he was, and I thought he really shouldn't be taken on this trip.

Q: I'm just kind of remembering him as a bit of a cut-up.

Robinson: Yes, he was a cut-up.

Q: He didn't eventually go to SNCC, did he?

Robinson: He may have; I'm not sure. But anyway, as I heard the story, he was on that bus in Anniston and he was so frightened, he ran away, which was a dangerous thing to do. Anyhow, he got back to New York all right.

Haberman is a columnist in 2005!!

In the meantime, of course, the other bus went into Birmingham with Jim Peck on it and he got beaten within an inch of his life in the station. The police, who were sitting in cars two blocks away from the station, were giving the Klan plenty of time to beat up people before they would come and put a stop to it.

wrong name, I think ?

Q: Wasn't there a newsman harmed at the time, Clyde Haberman or something like that?

Robinson: He may have been, but the one who was particularly important was Seigenthaler [John Seigenthaler] or something, from the Justice Department, who was--the Justice Department by this time had sent somebody down to observe and that's what he was supposed to do. But he had his car there and there were two of the white girls from--or maybe one was white and one was black, from that Freedom Ride, were being threatened and he stopped his car to rescue them and he was hauled out of his car. He was thoroughly beaten up. And that was a great plus with Robert Kennedy, because Robert Kennedy liked this man very much, and, you know, he was furious that the Alabama cops had deliberately let this go on.

Q: Surprise, surprise, yes.

Robinson: The burning bus on television and the beating on Jim Peck in Birmingham and the other people who were beaten to some extent, too, all of that made front-page news in a way that it had never been before, really. People who didn't pay much attention to civil rights were still shocked at this, because it was so--

Q: Yes, it was an incredible visual.

Robinson: Yes.

Q: The burning bus.

Robinson: So it really put things on the front burner. Then CORE decided to give it up, dropped the Freedom Ride at that point.

Q: Couldn't tell anybody else to go on it.

Robinson: Yes, right.

Q: Was that it?

Robinson: I think that they thought there ought to be a cooling-off period. The big difficulty, actually, in getting the people out of Birmingham to the airport and on a plane for New Orleans, because they were going to have a rally in New Orleans in any case, but they got them out finally. I gather they were penned in for--I think they were penned in the bus station for hours and then out at the airport. This plane was going to take off and that plane was going to take off. It must have been horrendous for the people who were waiting. You wouldn't expect those people to want to go right back into it. I think it was just assumed that we were going to let it go.

Q: Did Kennedy have anything to do with stopping it?

Robinson: I don't think so. At any rate--

Q: Wait a second. Nobody planned to continue it to begin with? I mean, it was just supposed to be one?

Robinson: It was just supposed to be this one thing, right. It was supposed to be this one thing. It wasn't thought of as a continuous project at all. That wasn't on anybody's mind.

John Lewis was on the bus that was burned, and Diane Nash and the people in Nashville said, "Well, you know, it cannot be dropped. You cannot let violence win over non-violence. You've got to do something right now." So it was the SNCC people who came in at that point into Birmingham, and Farmer was not planning to go on the next leg of the--he tells you in his book, but he was there. One of the CORE girls, I think from New Orleans, kept talking to him, assuming he was going to get on the bus. So finally he got his bag and got on the bus, and then they went on and got arrested in Mississippi and you had the Mississippi stuff.

Well, CORE didn't want SNCC to have credit for their Freedom Rides. SNCC wanted to keep pushing them, and so CORE was organizing Freedom Rides as SNCC was organizing, and all of a sudden you began to have irritation between the nonviolent groups. It had a lot of irritation with the NAACP before, but this was another kind of irritation.

Q: SNCC was independent of SCLC by then.

Robinson: I think so. I think so. Then it was beginning to act in an independent way.

Q: Probably was. Probably couldn't have otherwise.

Robinson: Well, SNCC never did take a lot of orders from SCLC. Ella Baker was in on the organizing of the SNCC group at Raleigh, and I was at that meeting.

Q: Oh, you were?

Robinson: I was at that meeting. I wasn't involved with organizing SNCC, but she invited me down and I did talk a little bit at the mass meeting at night, saying that CORE would do whatever it could to help. There was no way, in my view, that CORE could dominate the student sit-ins, and it seemed to me that we did not need to be rivals as far as action was concerned. Now, I was always concerned with money, so when it came to fundraising, I was interested that CORE would get as much credit as possible, but that didn't mean--actually, CORE got its success partly because it was a little bit anarchistic, you know, [~~unclear~~]. So obviously we were staying within the rules of nonviolent direct action. They could decide to do this even though the convention that said we should put our emphasis on employment, but then decided to do restaurants; they did restaurants. This kind of anarchism had been fruitful, and so I felt more or less the same way about--between groups.

At the same time I wanted to get as much money as I could for CORE. So when we had that television open-end program with ~~Glen~~ Len Holt [phonetic] representing CORE and Martin Luther King on it, I was delighted with ~~Glen~~ Len Holt, because every time he talked about it, he'd mention the name CORE, and King talked about nonviolent direct action and he was wonderful. He never once mentioned the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. I

said his fundraisers must be furious. [Laughs] So I understood this kind of competition, but I didn't really understand the kinds of jealousy that went on when it came to action.

CORE at one point--well, you'd have to go to the John Lewis book, but I think he indicates that Diane Nash called CORE about this continuing the Freedom Ride and was told that, "Sure, go ahead with it." But then, of course, CORE felt that it had to keep doing it, too. So, in my view, it got kind of out of hand, that there was too little sifting through people who would go on the Freedom Rides and there wasn't enough emphasis on staying in jail. There were a number of people who went and then were bailed out right away, and that was bad from a technical point of view, I thought, but it--

Q: Discouraging to the ones who stayed in.

Robinson: Yes, it was discouraging to the ones that stayed in and it was bankrupting CORE. I was very concerned about that.

Q: You were having to bail people out? I mean, CORE was having to bail people out?

Robinson: CORE was bailing some people out, yes. We had a bail fund. The bail fund with Andrew Norman had had a lot to do with that initially. The Aaron Norman Fund, which his mother really ran, they provided bail money for a lot of people in CORE. And then one of the foundations, the Taconic Foundation [~~phonetic~~] O.K., I think, gave money to CORE for a bail fund. That foundation eventually, I think, went out of business. The man and his wife who provided most of the money took a small plane somewhere in the Caribbean and disappeared.

Anyway, things were getting bigger and bigger, and I wasn't very happy with it, and, of course, Marvin Rich and Gordon Carey weren't happy with having me around the office, really, either. I was in New York CORE, which several people there were very critical of a lot of things that were going on in the national office. I think any kind of criticism that came from New York CORE was attributed to me, and it wasn't always the case. But anyway, it was not a pleasant office or a pleasant situation, and I hadn't felt pleasant to any of these people either.

Q: Had they chosen--I'm backtracking a bit, but had they chosen Jim Farmer to be a figurehead or to really--I mean, did they really want somebody who had a certain program and he had that program going?

Robinson: Well, I think it's different people thinking different things. I think as far as Lula was concerned, it was for running things, and that may have been true with Gordon Carey. With Marvin Rich, it's my opinion that he felt he could run CORE and Farmer would be the figurehead.

Now, it didn't work out that way. It worked out eventually that Marvin was doing all of the fundraising, including labor fundraising, foundation fundraising, and in charge of whoever was doing the direct mail, and doing a lot of things to running the office, but he was not running the organization. Farmer was supposedly running the organization. Farmer didn't make decisions very quickly, and a lot of things just sort of floated up in the air, as far as I could gather. I thought that was true before I left, but it apparently got much

worse as time went on. So it kind of ran like topsy some of the time, but it achieved a lot at the same time.

But it began to fray at the edges as far as non-violence was concerned and then eventually as far as inter-racialism was concerned, and Farmer didn't stand up to that. He tried to play it politically, which didn't make much sense. He had a white wife, after all, but when people decided to fire Jim Peck as ~~Correlator~~ CORE later editor, you know, he let it happen.

And people like Rudy Lombard, a lot of the black people and white people were really disaffected. Farmer needed ego satisfaction more than he needed non-violence, really. So it's not really surprising that when he realized he couldn't hold on to his position in CORE, that he thought he could move over to a government-funded thing on education, which apparently he was encouraged to think that. It didn't actually happen.

Q: In CORE or a different poverty thing--? "War on Poverty"

Robinson: It was something else, poverty, but I think it was before the war. I don't know. Anyway, it was something that he thought he was going to get, and so he left CORE for it and didn't get it, and he favored McKissick [Floyd McKissick] rather than the man who had done a lot of his office work. Who was it? He ran that welfare thing after he left CORE. He was from Syracuse University. But Farmer in his book said he thought McKissick could control the wild people better than the other guy. But anyway, McKissick didn't do it. McKissick went along with Black Power and McKissick insisted on a much higher salary and so on.

[George Wiley]

for himself.

The salary question was always difficult anyway, because when I was executive secretary, I was working for less money than Marvin was working for as community relations director, because he wouldn't come for the same amount of money. Now, eventually, of course, I was up to his level, at least. I was up to--I'd gone from six thousand to eight thousand, I think at the time I left CORE, which was about his level. But Farmer got more when he came, but he didn't get a lot of money and McKissick insisted on more money right away and then didn't really run the organization.

But McKissick was someone that Carey favored, and Carey--I don't know what went on with Carey. He was always a little bit flaky, but he was influential with Farmer. And there was somebody else, Turner or someone, who was influential, too. Both of them pushed McKissick, and that was really the kiss of death. From McKissick straight on to Roy Innis.

[a woman]

Now, a lot of the unraveling, but it happened, I suppose anyway, because things moved too fast and you're attracting too many people to what had become a bandwagon, which was quite different from the amount of dedication that it required when you've worked and worked and worked and you made one step ahead, and all of a sudden, and this was true, I think, of people who'd been in a long time, including me, you wanted everything at once, which, of course, doesn't make sense.

Harrington

I was in New York CORE and ~~the~~ Gladys ~~Herring~~ [phonetic] was climbing derricks on the construction sites and we were picketing the--

Q: In her little Chanel knockoff suit. [Laughs]

[City]

[Harlem Hospital in Central Harlem]

Robinson: And the picket lines, we were picketing the hospital site and all that, and New York ostensibly was all in favor of civil rights, but when it came right down to it, they were not in favor of breaking down the walls of segregation in the Building Trades Union. So there were things like the stall-in, I'm thinking of, which, in retrospect, doesn't make much sense, and it didn't--what we needed to do was ~~to do was~~ to go back to the old constant work on things, but we weren't in the mood to do that anymore either. So the movement disintegrated in part from rising expectations that rose too far, too fast and from declining dedication and discipline.

Q: It sounds like the economic situation right now.

Robinson: Yes. Oh, yes. Oh, it's terrible.

I'll make you more tea. Okay?

Q: Okay.

[END OF SESSION]

Note: When we picketed the construction site for Harlem Hospital, I was there very early the ~~that~~ morning Malcolm X came by and joined us — rather surprised, I think, that several white CORE members were on that line at that hour.