

**GREENSBORO VOICES/GREENSBORO PUBLIC LIBRARY ORAL HISTORY
PROJECT**

INTERVIEWEE: Alvin Thomas

INTERVIEWER: Eugene F. Pfaff

DATE: August 12, 1982

[Begin Tape 1, Side A]

EUGENE PFAFF: --taped and we have your permission to so tape it?

ALVIN THOMAS: Right.

EP: Fine. I'd like to begin with when was the first civil rights activity that you were involved in?

AT: Well actually, right after the sit-ins, when CORE [Congress of Racial Equality] first got started, I was involved as a youngster.

EP: Would this have been the spring of '62 or earlier?

AT: Oh, let's see now. When were the sit-ins?

EP: From February through July of '60.

AT: It would have been shortly after that point.

EP: The sequence of events that I've been able to ascertain from speaking to other people was that after the summer of 1960, after Woolworth and Kress [Five and Dime Stores] and, I believe, the Guilford Dairy agreed to desegregate, then there was a hiatus of activity except a short renewal that fall of 1960 with the Meyer's [Department Store] Tea Room, and that very quickly they did desegregate after talking with members of the Greensboro Citizens Association.

AT: Right.

EP: And then I don't see any activity until February first of 1961 when Lewis Brandon, Donald Potts, and several others picketed the cinema that was showing the *Porgy and Bess* movie. And this was in sympathy with the announcement of SNCC [Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee] out of Atlanta, that they were going to picket segregated theatres showing this movie. I believe it had started in Chapel Hill shortly before then. Were you involved in that?

AT: Yes, I was.

EP: Were you part of that group?

AT: Yes.

EP: Who were the members of that group, and how did it get organized?

AT: Oh, boy. Actually, Bill would be the one to tell you that, my brother.

EP: I see. Well, hopefully I'll be speaking with him tomorrow.

AT: Yeah, because you can catch him at that number in Greensboro that I gave to you.

EP: Fine. I know that the group was listed in the paper under the heading Intercollegiate Council for Equality.

AT: Well, actually, most of my activity, you know, was involved with CORE more so than that organization, because they were meeting with, I think, some members of the American Friends Service Committee and, you know, that type thing.

EP: Do you know who those people with the American Friends--

AT: I remember Lewis Brandon. What was Dick's last name? Oh, boy. Man, this really takes me back.

EP: Richard Ramsey.

AT: Was it Dick Ramsey?

EP: I know he was with the American Friends at that time.

AT: Yeah, I believe that is the right name, Dick Ramsey.

EP: Ezell Blair tells me that there was an informal group of people from A&T [North Carolina A&T State University] and Bennett [College] and Dudley [High School], that the remainder of that summer and that fall and then on through that spring that--

AT: Well, CORE, well, CORE was started at that time.

EP: Oh, I see. I know that some people--

AT: I, more or less, led up the group that came from Dudley.

EP: I see. How were you contacted to participate in these activities? Do you recall?

AT: Well, there was a CORE chapter at that time, you see, and, you know, I was working through CORE, through the organization. And I more or less dealt with the high school at that time. As a matter of fact, I went to jail then, I think at one of the movie theatres one Thanksgiving Day or so.

EP: Had you been involved with the picketing that was fairly regular at the theatres in '61?

AT: Yes.

EP: Was that primarily A&T or Bennett students?

AT: Well, primarily Bennett from the beginning.

EP: I see. So they were stronger in the movement at that time than A&T?

AT: That's correct.

EP: Do you know why that was the case?

AT: Well, I don't know, other than I guess women had a bit more guts than we give them credit for. And they really took the first move. And their president, Dr. Willa B. Player, whom most would consider quite a conservative, really supported the students, and they more or less joined CORE. Actually, that's when the football team and other organizations got involved, because we moved the demonstrations out to McDonald's and the Hot Shoppes and places such as that.

EP: I understand that in '61 and '62, that you frequently met at Rev. Marion Jones' house, is

that correct?

AT: Yes.

EP: Were there meetings elsewhere as well?

AT: [pause] At Dick Ramsey's.

EP: Oh, at his apartment?

AT: Yes.

EP: Do you recall the substance of these conversations? The nature of them?

AT: Well, they were more or less centered around I guess a bigger piece of the pie. You, more or less, say--intellectualizing, you know, to some degree, although they didn't participate in direct action, and how the movement was spreading and what we must do to prepare ourselves. That type of conversation took place. You know, the fact that you were just not talking about places, desegregating places of public accommodation, but you were, you know, dealing with the whole question of equal rights and really what it means, especially economically.

EP: There was an early mention--excuse me--there was an early mention in the newspaper, I think in the December of '62 and January of '63 where the NAACP [National Association for the Advancement of Colored People], the Greensboro Citizens Association, and CORE were meeting with a group of businessmen led by Leonard Guyes, of Prego-Guyes [woman's clothing store]. Do you recall that? They were trying to get--

AT: No, I was not part of that.

EP: I see. It was involved in trying to get sales, sales personnel in the downtown stores.

AT: Right. Well, I was not involved in that group. I remember the meeting taking place, though, and some action being formed, you know, around trying to participate in that effort. But I was not involved in that meeting.

EP: Were you involved in the two-week Freedom Highway training session at one of the local churches?

AT: Yes, I recall it quite well.

EP: Do you recall what went on during those sessions?

AT: Well, they were more or less workshops on nonviolence and what it meant, how important it was to remain nonviolent, more or less the philosophy of Dr. King.

EP: Do you recall who led them? Were they people from the national office?

AT: Well, there were some people from the national office of CORE that came in, yes.

EP: Do you recall what individuals they were?

AT: [laughs] I thought that might be your next question. Isaac--what was Ike's last name?

EP: Reynolds.

AT: Reynolds was one.

EP: What was he like?

AT: Very dynamic gentleman, quite conservative but quite outspoken.

EP: In what way was he conservative?

AT: Well, he was conservative, let's say, in his thoughts. His whole approach to nonviolence was a bit conservative at the time, to be dealing in the kinds of questions that we were dealing with. Because at that time, people were still a bit violent in certain areas of the country, because those guys not only worked in Greensboro but I think they came out of Louisiana from the beginning. And Bruce, Bruce Baines, I believe was his last name, was also a [CORE] representative along with Ike.

EP: Did you get any instruction in negotiating techniques and that sort of thing?

AT: No, we didn't, we didn't quite get into that. You see, more or less what we were trying to do was an effort to bring more--to attract more people, to get more people involved, to get the grassroots involved, and how we go about doing that. That was the main real substance of the workshop--and the different organizations, you know, that existed, sometimes it might even consider something as simple as compiling a list of black organizations, or black businesses rather, where they may be, you know, necessary that

their services be rendered for some reason or the other.

EP: Do you recall any of the other examples of generating grassroots involvement?

AT: Yes. When I became chairman of CORE--don't ask me what year that was, I would imagine, let's see, 1969, '68, '67, that was about '67, '66, I guess--I started a program called Operation Dialogue. And that was right after the passage of the Civil Rights Act [of 1964]. And of course, along with Operation Dialogue, we also tested the Civil Rights Act by actually going to places to be served, and we were turned down quite a bit.

EP: So there were still a lot of places that were closed?

AT: That's correct.

EP: Even after the '64 Civil Rights Act?

AT: That's correct.

EP: What sort of steps did you take to open up these hold-outs?

AT: Well, through negotiations, more or less, it took place. Because, you know, we told them that we would write to Washington and take the necessary steps, because it was the law. And actually, they more or less gave in.

EP: Did you ever actually have to initiate any suits or contact the Justice--

AT: No, we never had to initiate any suits or--I think we, maybe we, there was one picket line that went up at Apple Brothers restaurants, at one of them, because I understand they had more than one. But at the Apple Brothers restaurant there in Greensboro, we had to do some picketing. They were one of the last few to come across.

EP: Did you encounter any threats of violence at this time?

AT: No.

EP: Was there anything like the police coverage that there had been during the height of the massive demonstrations?

AT: No, no, it wasn't that type of coverage where you had hundreds of people, because numbers were smaller. And, you know, as you really get down to attacking the real

problems, the numbers get smaller and smaller, you know. The hands stop clapping, and, you know, it's not the dramatic action that one finds in the height of demonstrations, I guess like a campaign. You can't campaign all of your life.

EP: Right. Did you participate in the--even before the McDonald's thing and the places downtown in the spring of '63, I understand that in '62, there was some small picketing of the Biff Burger on Lee Street.

AT: No, I was not involved in that.

EP: Do you recall what other of your students from Dudley were involved with CORE?

AT: Yes. Pinkney Moses. P-i-n-k-n-e-y, I believe. He is now an attorney in Greensboro. Ernest Pitt.

EP: Do you--did they have the same commitment to nonviolence that the people had had in '61, '62, and '63?

AT: Yes.

EP: So this--

AT: Because that small core of people that was left to work with really had to be dedicated to keep coming out, because, you know, again, we didn't have the dramatics. We were really dealing with real hard-core issues and facts and trying to work through the Human Relations Commission and that type thing.

EP: Was it more difficult to generate effective tactics in favor of economic goals than simply the opening up of public accommodations?

AT: Well, yes, it was very difficult. I guess that's one of the things that led me into my major at the time, which happened to have been labor education. I went to graduate school at Rutgers University after leaving A&T because I wanted to make some type of economic contribution, and at the time, the labor movement was about the only, the only real avenue. But certainly, economic contributions were--I mean, the economic question certainly was on our minds, because we were thinking first just desegregating places, and how we were going to do that became a problem. But just the day-to-day, you know, activities and with the arrests still going on, you know, that type of thing, it kind of kept you busy running from pillar to post.

EP: I'd like to go back and try to take your involvement in as chronological a order as possible. Did you participate in the picketing against the Hot Shoppe?

AT: Yes.

EP: Can you--I understand it lasted only about four days.

AT: It wasn't very long, no.

EP: Can you describe what happened?

AT: [pause] Someone went in--I don't remember who the representatives were--to be served and, of course, they were turned down. And at the time we were picketing across the street there at McDonald's and--

EP: Oh, you were also picketing McDonald's?

AT: Yes. Right.

EP: So it wasn't just confined to the Hot Shoppe?

AT: No, it wasn't just confined to the Hot Shoppe.

EP: Were there other places also?

AT: At the time, those were the main two.

EP: I see. Were there different people who directed it from day to day, or was there one central leader?

AT: There was one central leader.

EP: Who would that have been?

AT: My brother, Bill.

EP: I see. So by this time he had already been elected chairman?

AT: Chairman of CORE, yes.

EP: I see. I know that there--you've already talked about Isaac Reynolds. Some of the other names of field workers from CORE that I've run across at that time were George Raymond, Hunter Morey--

AT: Jerome Smith.

EP: Jerome Smith. Do you recall Jerome Smith? I'm trying to get an idea of what were they like as individuals?

AT: Yes, oh, he was quite a dynamic individual with a lot of substance. Thought all of the time, really understood nonviolence. He was a real teacher and trainer, quite committed. I've never seen a more committed individual.

EP: Were these young men and women, or were they somewhat older?

AT: They were just a little bit older than the college crowd, just a little. You might say in their early twenties, you know, or mid-twenties.

EP: I see. Did they--did you have specific instructions as to what to do when you reached the Hot Shoppe or McDonald's?

AT: Yes.

EP: What were your instructions?

AT: We were to picket.

EP: I see. Had you had any previous experience in picketing?

AT: Well, yes, as I said, across the street at McDonald's. Before then, it was one of the movie theatres. One Thanksgiving Day, we had a demonstration--that was during that same period. And we tried to go in and then we had prayer, prayer service. We also had people in jail during that time. And the movie theatre was not far, so we went by the jail and had a prayer service there, and went to the movie theatre. I was arrested that day.

EP: Was nonviolence and this emphasis upon religious service, was that a tactic or was that a heartfelt commitment? Was that--

AT: That was a heartfelt commitment. And as a matter of fact, even when the crowd was very large, there was a plea on each day before each march, that any fingernail files that one

may have, please leave behind, anything as small as that. There was a real commitment to nonviolence.

EP: Do you recall any times that Mr. [James] Farmer [national director of CORE] stayed at your house?

AT: Yes.

EP: What was he like?

AT: Oh, Jim's quite a man, quite a man. Quite humorous, you know, and he's relaxed. Quite an interesting individual. He read all of the time. And he was always abreast of current events so it was a real pleasure to talk with him, and it was never a dull moment.

EP: Did he talk strategy and tactics at your house?

AT: Some strategy and tactics, yes, informally.

EP: I gather that frequently these field representatives would also stay at your house, is that correct?

AT: Yes, that's quite correct. My mom fed them all.

EP: I understand--I've come across memos that there were things like, they were requesting funds from the national office to reimburse your mother for food that she fixed for them, or to pay for telephone calls.

AT: Oh, yes. Yes, right.

EP: Did they stay in Greensboro for extended periods of time, or--

AT: Yes they were, some for extended periods of time.

EP: So they weren't running back and forth to different cities and different states?

AT: Some were, but some would also remain.

EP: Do you recall any intimidation or violence or threat of violence on the part of either onlookers at McDonald's or the Hot Shoppe?

AT: Yeah, I think there were some threat of violence at the Hot Shoppe. Things got a little bit rough.

EP: Could you just--

AT: People started to throw eggs and that type of thing.

EP: Did the police do a pretty good job of keeping them away from you? Or not?

AT: Well, we dispersed shortly after then because our purpose had been reached. And nothing serious took place in terms of anyone getting hurt or anything of that nature. But we dispersed shortly after the egg-throwing and that type thing.

EP: Were you ever intimidated by the police?

AT: Not really, no. Not in Greensboro.

EP: I understand that the Hot Shoppe hired some private guards to keep demonstrators out after the first day or so. Were you ever turned away by any of these men?

AT: Yes.

EP: Were they rougher than the police, or?

AT: No. They would simply state the policy, what they were there to do. You know, and that you're not welcome in this establishment.

EP: Did you ever make any attempt to get past them?

AT: Yes, there were some attempts made.

EP: Was there any shoving or altercation at this point?

AT: No, because again, nonviolently, once we tried, that was--and there was conversation with management going on simultaneously--that was, you know, the best thing to do at the time.

EP: Did you ever participate in any of the negotiations?

AT: Yes, I did.

EP: Was it directly with management or through Armistead Sapp?

AT: Well, more or less through Armistead Sapp.

EP: What would he say?

AT: Well, he would more or less, I guess, state the two positions and try to more or less mediate the situation.

EP: Was he adamant that you simply--“We simply will not desegregate,” or was he trying to work out some kind of way in which they could?

AT: I really think he was trying to work out some type of way in which they would, because he knew that he could not win at the time.

EP: Did you ever go to any of the sites where the Freedom Highway Program actually was put into operation?

AT: Yes, I went to Durham on numerous occasions. We had numerous conferences and seminars that took place in Durham, North Carolina.

EP: Was this the same kind of thing?

AT: It was the same type thing, yes, whether it be Holiday Inn or whatever the case might be. I recall one very large demonstration at the Holiday Inn there, and Jim Farmer came in to speak.

EP: Was that--I read in the newspaper where there was a big mass meeting. And I think Roy Wilkins spoke, and Jim Farmer spoke. And then at least five hundred people walked to one of these places, and there was a big demonstration out there on the lawn. I think this was out on the highway.

AT: Yes, that's correct.

EP: Did--do you recall what happened? I mean, once again, I'm always looking for was there ever any threat of violence, any exchange?

AT: There was no violence. It was a very peaceful demonstration.

EP: Do you--would you compare the enthusiasm? Was there more enthusiasm, larger participation at Durham than Greensboro, for instance?

AT: Maybe in terms of that, that demonstration. But no, I wouldn't say as a whole, because I spent more time in Greensboro, of course, than Durham. And when I went to Durham it was for a specific occasion, you know, such as that demonstration and the rally, or for the workshops that took place there. But I would have to say Greensboro, because we had the two colleges, you know, right there at--well, more than two, really, participating--and, plus, community people, you know, starting to come out. And the demonstrations grew and grew and grew in Greensboro. So on a constant level.

EP: Did you have much occasion to observe B. Elton Cox?

AT: Yes.

EP: What was he like?

AT: Oh, he was quite a gentleman. Young preacher, very dynamic speaker. Quite committed to the cause. He gave a lot to the cause. I recall one weekend riding down to South Carolina, where he was invited to speak, and it turned out to be a very small crowd. But we were starting a voter registration drive down there. He would do almost anything he was called upon to do. Quite a committed individual.

EP: Was this, at this time, prior to the big demonstrations? Was this sporadic, or were you meeting all the time or talking informally or--

AT: Yes.

EP: What--did the targets ever change or the tactics ever change at these targets?

AT: Not really. It was more or less how to mobilize people and get people involved.

EP: Well, why was it so hard to--I gather that the, the actual membership of CORE never really amounted to more than about a hundred people or a hundred and fifty at most.

AT: That's correct, yes.

EP: Why did people not actually--I know that a lot of people turned out for the demonstrations, but why didn't more people join CORE?

- AT: Well, because when the demonstrations stopped, you know, then the enthusiasm died down, you see. You know some people thought, I guess, we had reached our goals. The numbers just happened to shrink. I think that was the normal thing to do.
- EP: Well, when the work--Freedom Highway workshop was over and the emphasis shifted to Durham, and Statesville, and Hickory, and so forth, Charlotte, did things die down in Greensboro, or did Greensboro CORE continue to plan activities and carry--
- AT: We continued to plan activities, and a lot of our activities, as I said, dealt with the Human Relations Commission. And we tried to work through them when we had certain problems--you know, people not, you know, for these requests of, "We can't find this type of individual," and that kind of thing.
- EP: The newspapers--this is one reason why I'm conducting so many interviews is because the newspapers has virtually no coverage of any activity from the desegregation of Hot Shoppes until the initiation--
- AT: Right. We had very little coverage. We would contact the press before things would take place, but actually the stars, you might say, were gone.
- EP: Oh, so they would only come out whenever the members of the national office would come out?
- AT: That's correct, right. Things were happening, although we got very, very little press coverage at that time.
- EP: Did you continue to picket and this sort of thing?
- AT: There may have been sporadic picket lines at places that were the last to be desegregated. I said the Apple Brothers was one of the targets, and perhaps maybe another suburban place. But there was very little picketing. There was more or less planning of strategy, workshops on nonviolence, the program called "Operation Dialogue" where we actually went out and knocked on doors, found out what people needed and what they wanted, and tried to address those individual concerns.

And we were quite successful in doing that, whether it was painting a house to showing one the way through the welfare system, for an example, that might qualify that were not, may not have been receiving any benefits. We aided the community in which[ever]--whatever way we could, and that was the main emphasis. So you could see that something like that would not be as dramatic as singing freedom songs.

EP: I gather that the sequence of officers went something like this--and correct me if I'm wrong--the first chairman was Wendell Scott. And then he had to resign, and Ezell Blair was temporary chairman until Bill [Thomas] was elected. And I gather that Lois Lucas, and Reverend [James] Bush, and Reverend [John] Hatchett from over at Bennett were rather influential as advisors and on the executive committee.

AT: And Dr. Elizabeth Laizner.

EP: Yes, and Dr. Laizner. Then I get the impression that somewhere around the early spring of 1963, about a month or so before the outbreak of the major demonstrations, other people seemed to dominate, like [A. Knighton] Tony Stanley and--

AT: I don't think they dominated. They were, they were very good advisors.

EP: I see. Did the others tend to pass away from the scene?

AT: No, because Rev. Hatchett still appeared, Dr. Laizner was there until the very end. Things continued to happen.

EP: Was there much division or separation of opinion on tactics and goals, both short-term and long-term, that were discussed?

AT: Not really, no.

EP: Did you hold an official position in CORE, prior to being chairman?

AT: Yes, I was chairman of CORE.

EP: I see. Prior to that time, had you been any office?

AT: No, I didn't hold an office. Maybe sergeant-at-arms or something like that on one occasion.

EP: Well, it seems to me you would hold a unique position above the rest of the membership. You didn't have an office and you weren't on the executive committee, but your brother was the chairman and I gather your sister was very much involved, so--

AT: Yes, she was.

EP: You must have been privy to, to some of the private meetings that were held. Is that true?

AT: Yes, that's correct.

EP: Do you recall what was discussed in those executive committee sessions or meeting at your home?

AT: More or less, the running of the organization, the financial status of the organization, where we were headed, targets that would be selected next, bail monies, because it was very difficult for lawyers--although attorney [Floyd] McKissick basically represented us. You know, he had to be compensated in some way.

EP: How did CORE generate--the local chapter generate money? Was it from local dues or fundraising activities?

AT: Well, there was some fundraising activities, and there were dues, although there was very little was collected.

EP: You mean if people didn't pay, they weren't booted out or anything?

AT: [laughs] Oh, by no means. People were basically students, and, you know, most students were poor.

EP: What sort of fundraising activities were involved?

AT: I think that there were maybe a few at Dick Ramsey's place.

EP: What would these be? What type of activities?

AT: [pause] I really can't answer that.

EP: Okay. The reason I ask is, in the CORE memos, it looks like there was a freedom song record that was cut, and I thought it was in New York. And somebody, Evander Gilmer told me he thought it, one may have been cut right at A&T. And then the sales of this records kind of generated funds for the national office, which was then shared with the local chapters.

AT: Right.

EP: Do you recall that?

AT: Yes.

EP: Was it A&T or New York?

AT: I can't say where the record, you know, actually originated from, but I do recall, you know, the revenues, you know, generated from it.

EP: Was most of this money sent to New York or retained--

AT: Yes, most of it was sent to New York.

EP: How much money raised this way would the local chapter keep, on average?

AT: Bill could maybe tell you about that much better than I. I'm not too close to the figures.

EP: Do you recall the boycott and the picketing of the S&W that went on in October and November?

AT: Yes. Yes, I was very much involved in that.

EP: What happened on the occasions that you were there?

AT: Well, there was picketing and singing of freedom songs, and there were places that had not desegregated. And you know, that was our goal, to desegregate those places.

EP: And you were arrested at this time?

AT: Yes, I went to jail during that period, too.

EP: What happened at this arrest? I gather that you were booked and then released? Is that right?

AT: Yes.

EP: Were the police rough in any manner?

AT: No.

EP: Fairly courteous, or at least--

AT: Fairly courteous.

EP: Where were you held? Were you placed in cells?

AT: On one occasion we were. On another occasion ,I think they took us to the armory or some place such as that.

EP: This was in '62?

AT: Yes, I believe. And booked us and released us, but it was several hundred people, I guess.

EP: I see. One thing that is, I'd like to track down if I can, John Hatchett said that it was his firm belief that at this time when the demonstrations were really going strong, and there was--in the late fall--and there was a request by the Human Relations Commission or the Mayor's Committee on Human Relations, under Bland Worley, to, for CORE to suspend demonstrations. And he said he and several others were very much opposed to it, but that James Farmer used his influence when he came down here, ostensibly to support the demonstrations, to really tell them to accept this truce and call off demonstrations for a while. Do you know anything about that?

AT: No, except that we took James Farmer's position.

EP: I see. Was there ever any implied coercion that you might lose your affiliation as a CORE chapter?

AT: No.

EP: So it was all done voluntarily on your part?

AT: Yes, right.

EP: Do you--I've heard from Tony Stanley and others that said, "Well, it was near the end of the semester and it was hard to generate things when so many of the students had gone home." Did CORE continue to meet during this time and strategize what they'd do if nothing happened?

AT: Yes. The groups were smaller, but we continued to meet.

EP: What--were there ever any alternative suggestions as to types of tactics, like a mass turnout of the students in the high school, or filling one of the big stores and having a

massive sit-in in one of the big stores?

AT: Well, we were doing that, having massive sit-ins and that type thing.

EP: The reason I ask that is Lewis Brandon said that, for instance, some of the things that were discussed was--get, you know, hundreds of people to go into Belk's and just sit down on the floor.

AT: Yes.

EP: Was that ever done actually?

AT: I don't think--I don't know. Something tells me it was, and something tells me it wasn't. I really don't know on that question.

EP: I get the impression that this was a little bit farther than most people wanted to go at that time in terms of direct action.

AT: I think so. As far as being the appropriate action at the time.

EP: Did you get much support from the adult community?

AT: Yes, quite a bit.

EP: Do any specific individuals come to mind?

AT: No, not right, right away here.

EP: What was the nature of this support? Was it just moral support, encouragement?

AT: It was encouragement, moral support. We were participating in voter registration drives at the time, and people loaned their automobiles or participated in taking people to the poll. We had been participating in that drive, "Get Out the Vote." We were doing a number of things that the community really came to bat for us for.

EP: Do you recall when things geared up again? The only thing the newspaper talks about after this, this time period where the mayor's committee made a study, and I think they came out with a report December twenty-second, which actually said that they, they morally supported the stand of the students, but that they had no power of enforcement, and that they urged that demonstrations be law-abiding and this sort of thing. The only

thing that I see after that is that three times CORE picketed city hall for about an hour at lunchtime, three different times in March. Do you recall that?

AT: Yes.

EP: Were you a participant in that?

AT: Yes, I was.

EP: So you had graduated from Dudley by this time?

AT: Right.

EP: When did you graduate from Dudley?

AT: Let's see now. I graduated from A&T in '69--'68, '67, '66--'63, I believe.

EP: So you were a freshman at this time, right?

AT: Yes. I didn't go directly into A&T at that time.

EP: What did you do?

AT: I, I took up a hair-styling course, as a matter of fact, before I went to A&T.

EP: So you were essentially out in the working world?

AT: Well, going to school. But I had lots of time.

EP: Do you recall--Elizabeth Laizner makes reference to a meeting that she says took place in Pfeiffer Hall at Bennett, where Bill--she says she remembers vividly, he was leaning against a piano, and there was this discussion of, well, do we do something in a small way this spring, or do we wait and plan over the summer and do something massive in the fall? And I--some people have said it was voted on to do something immediately, or it was left up to the executive committee, and that what they came up with was this decision to not only picket McDonald's on May eleventh, but that the leadership would be arrested as a symbolic act. Do you recall that?

AT: Yes.

EP: I see. When did you begin participating in the massive demonstrations?

AT: Well, I was participating in the massive demonstrations all along.

EP: Did you picket McDonald's in May of '63?

AT: Yes.

EP: What was it like? I gather that there were a large number of--

AT: I remember they threw eggs at us. Again, McDonald's was right across from the Hot Shoppe, and that took place at the same time. Well, more or less at the same time, one right after the other.

EP: I get the impression that the--the newspapers says something about as many as eight hundred people there, either hecklers or onlookers, or--in other words, a fairly hostile crowd, and about eight or so policemen. And that there was always a threat that you would be attacked. Did you feel that way?

AT: Oh, yes, yes. That was probably the closest to an attack that I had experienced in Greensboro.

EP: Was there a great deal of fear on the part of the demonstrators?

AT: There was some fear, yes.

EP: Anticipating attack or whatever?

AT: Well, yes, there was some fear. I don't think that it would be normal if I said that it wasn't.

EP: Sure. I gather that crowds followed you back to the campus--

AT: Yes.

EP: --and there was some rock and bottle throwing?

AT: There was some, yes.

EP: Do you know whose idea it was to extend these demonstrations to the downtown area?

Was it kind of a consensus or spontaneous decision?

AT: I think it was a consensus.

EP: I see. Did you participate in the mass meetings and the demonstrations over at the theatres and the cafeterias?

AT: Yes.

EP: Were you ever a monitor or in charge of any group or anything like that?

AT: No. On occasions, I led a few workshops.

EP: I see. I gather that the arrests were fairly routine until the massive arrests on Wednesday, May fifteenth, and--when about four hundred and twenty some people were arrested. And then Thursday, there was a march that, where no one was arrested, because there were no, no attempts to enter any of the places. And then that Friday, May seventeenth, was the first of the masses of arrests where people refused bail. Do you recall how the decision was made to initiate "jail, no bail"?

AT: No, I don't recall that. Bill could tell you that.

EP: Okay. How many times were you arrested?

AT: Oh, I would imagine maybe seven or eight times.

EP: Did you ever refuse bail and enter one of the incarceration centers?

AT: On one occasion we had to spend a night in jail.

EP: Was that city jail or--

AT: Yes, city jail.

EP: So you were never out at the polio hospital or the National Guard Armory?

AT: Oh, yes, I was out there, too, yes, right, right.

EP: Did you ever spend several days there? I think some students spent as much as a week out there.

AT: Right. I spent several days there.

EP: What was it like?

AT: Well, it wasn't the most comfortable setting in the world. You had to more or less adjust to your surroundings and comfort one another.

EP: Some people have said there was an attempt at organization for communication immediately, and other people say that they never even saw any CORE people and that they were totally unaware of what was going on, on the outside. What was it like in your group?

AT: Well, I don't think that there was ever really a moment of total unawareness, because there were people getting in each day, people bringing us food each day, and the community really helping us out, along with my mother. And I don't think there was ever really a point of, you know, total unawareness, although I think that would be a normal assumption that some people would make.

EP: Did Bill or any of the leadership ever go in there or communicate with the people there?

AT: Sure, sure. Not as a total group, but he would see some of us and we would communicate that to the remainder.

EP: Did most people go in there with the understanding that they were going to stay there until something broke?

AT: Yes.

EP: Were they--were you transferred with other male students to the National Guard Armory, or did you--

AT: Yes, I remember that.

EP: Did you spend a night there or several days there?

AT: Yes, I spent the night there.

EP: And then I gather you were released some time in the afternoon?

AT: Yes, that's right.

[End Tape 1, Side A-Begin Tape 1, Side B]

EP: --series of marches on one Sunday while y'all were there, and I know that they had police dogs there, but I hadn't heard any--

AT: That may have been the occasion, because it was a Sunday.

EP: Did you actually see the people that came there under Jesse Jackson and sang, prayed, and so forth?

AT: Yes.

EP: Could you describe it?

AT: Well, it was a prayer session where we prayed for those that were in jail. We prayed for our movement and people in our movement, people in the country.

EP: Were you inside or outside?

AT: Outside. I was not inside at the time.

EP: Had you not been arrested yet or already--

AT: I had gotten out of jail, but I was participating in demonstrations. I was out of jail.

EP: Okay. The reason I ask this: it's kind of confusing from the newspaper accounts. The way I understand it was that they put both men and women for the first few days in the polio hospital, and then they moved most of the men over to the National Guard Armory. And then, from what I can ascertain from the paper, they released the male students that afternoon and--or evening, and the paper says about twelve men refused to walk out and had to be carried out by the sheriff's deputies, and that later that evening, the women at polio hospital were released like between midnight and three a.m., and everybody was released at the Harrison Auditorium. Does that sound right?

AT: Yes, I think so.

EP: So was it at that time that you got released, and--or had you been released prior to then?

AT: Well, as I said, I'd been in jail about eight times. I think that I had gotten released prior to then. I recall the demonstration.

EP: The impression I get from that night was that there was a lot of confusion, a lot of anger. People initially had felt that they'd been tricked out of jail without any concessions on the part of the city. And they booed, actually booed Dr. [Lewis] Dowdy [A&T president], and that a number of people spoke, including Ezell Blair and Dr. Darwin Turner [A&T faculty] among others. Do you recall any of that?

AT: Yes, I do.

EP: Well, does that sound like a fairly accurate--

AT: Well, some of that took place, but they were basically people who really didn't know what was going on.

EP: You think that most people did or did not know what was going on?

AT: Most people did.

EP: So that was just a small contingent rather than a lot of people?

AT: Yes, very small. Very, very small.

EP: Oh, I see. Did you know that some concession had been, had been ironed out?

AT: Yes.

EP: Do you know what this concession was? Was it the appointment of the committee under [African American physician] Dr. [George] Evans? [pause] Or something--

AT: I think that was the next series of events, if I am not mistaken.

EP: Once again, I'm trying to work out the specifics of what happened. I get the impression that--I thought that there was a late-night meeting at St. Stephen's Church, at which mayor pro tem [William] Trotter attended that same evening. And Lewis Brandon said, "No, no that would have been the night of the first big arrest on May, May fifteenth." And that during the course of that week, finally, the mayor announced this, this committee was going to be named. Do you know anything about that?

AT: I was aware of what was going on, but I remember very little about that.

EP: Do you recall--I understand there was a truce from May twenty-fifth through June third. Do you recall that and how it was arranged and everything?

AT: Truce?

EP: I gather that what happened was, after this committee under Dr. Evans was set-up, and I think Bill served on it, that it was agreed that CORE would not demonstrate, at least not downtown. And from--

AT: I don't know about that.

EP: Okay.

AT: I don't think that there's very much truth to that.

EP: I see. Did you participate in the sit-down on Greene Street led by Jesse Jackson?

AT: Yes.

EP: What happened there?

AT: Well, there was a sit-in.

EP: Did you know that you were going to sit-in on the street?

AT: Yes.

EP: Did most people know?

AT: I think there was a little bit of confusion that may have taken place on that occasion.

EP: Jesse Jackson, was he kind of a figurehead leader or did he sit in, participate in the substantive discussions of strategy?

AT: Oh, he did very little of that. [unclear--both talking at once]

EP: In other words, in other words, the executive committee or the leaders of CORE would inform him about what he was to do?

AT: On most occasions, yes.

EP: Was he cooperative, or kind of a maverick?

AT: Kind of a maverick.

EP: [laughs] In other words, you weren't sure he would do what you had told him to do?

AT: On occasions, yes.

EP: Did he ever pull a surprise on you?

AT: No, not really.

EP: I see. Did you know him very well?

AT: Yes, I knew Jesse quite well. I know Jesse quite well.

EP: What was he like?

AT: Well, Jesse was, I believe, captain of the football team at the time and quite involved with that. Also, getting involved politically. And he stayed quite busy.

EP: Did he have anything to do with CORE before the beginning of the mass demonstrations that spring, I mean--

AT: Very little.

EP: I see. I--do you recall what happened that evening in the exchange between Jesse Jackson and Bill, Bill Jackson of the police force?

AT: Captain Jackson?

EP: Yes.

AT: No, I don't.

EP: I see. The next night--I mean, I gather that, at least the way Bill described it to me and Tony Stanley--was that when they arrested Bill [sic, Jesse Jackson] the next morning, this

really played right into CORE's hands. That when they found out the police wanted him for--had a warrant for him, they arranged for him to be at the St. Stephen's Church. And that Captain Jackson came there and they thought he would come on in and yank him off the podium, and they had photographers there. And when that didn't happen, they went out and Jesse surprised him by shaking his hand and going off to jail.

AT: I think Captain Jackson was always quite cooperative. Quite cooperative.

EP: Do you ever recall talking with him?

AT: Yes.

FP: What were the nature of these conversations?

AT: Well, they would more or less be conversations that he would want to hold with my brother. But I would recall him calling the house on several Occasions, and they worked very closely together. Captain Jackson was extremely cooperative.

EP: He would come in person?

AT: He would call.

EP: By telephone?

AT: Yes.

EP: Did--I get the impression that CORE always informed the police, or most times, before a demonstration.

AT: Yes, that's true.

EP: Would you go down in person to get the permit or would you not worry about permits?

AT: No, we always called them and informed them.

EP: I see. Did you have anything to do with the release of these pamphlets? I think Bill said that they had a big banner headline, something like "They've arrested your great leader," and that this really turned the people out the next day, or the next night.

AT: Yes.

EP: How was that arranged? Was it rather hastily arranged? How were the pamphlets distributed and that sort of thing?

AT: It was kind of hastily arranged, you might say, but we found enough community people to put an effective, you know, organization to work on it.

EP: Did most people know that you were going to sit down in the square that night?

AT: Yes, I think so.

EP: It was discussed in the pre-march meeting?

AT: Yes, I believe it was.

EP: Were you involved in that?

AT: Yes.

EP: What happened?

AT: Well, at a certain time we were told we would have a sit-in at the square, and that's exactly what happened. We were given a signal, that's what we did.

EP: Do you think that you took the police by surprise?

AT: Yes.

EP: I gather that as the marches went on and kind of reached a peak, that the marchers were tired, the police were tired, that this was about as close as it ever came to breaking out in more traditional police repression or possible violence between the two groups. What is your impression of that evening?

AT: Well, I think patience were at an end, at an all-time low.

EP: Did you ever see any police brutality?

AT: Not really. I think they may have wanted to do some things, but Captain Jackson had things very much under control.

EP: Okay, this is where a period of real confusion sets in.

AT: I only have a few more minutes.

EP: Sure. Let me summarize by--I gather that there was one more march the next day, and, but then that within a week, the mayor had made a statement and the Human Relations Committee had been formed, and that CORE had agreed to a truce that summer to try and let the Human Relations Committee work out something. Do you recall the mechanics by which that was worked out?

AT: No, I do not, and I don't recall a truce taking place.

EP: Oh, okay. Then I gather that Bill worked as a field secretary for CORE that summer, is that right?

AT: Yes, I think Bill did.

EP: What did you do? Did you continue to attend CORE meetings?

AT: Yes, and I did something for the summer with the, I think with SNCC [Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee] or the NAACP. I was in one of their summer voter registration drives.

EP: Where?

AT: Held in North Carolina--oh, boy.

EP: Would it have been down toward the eastern part of the state?

AT: Yes.

EP: Yeah, I gather that was a SNCC concentration there.

AT: Right.

EP: Well, just to summarize, between the end of the demonstrations in the summer of '63 and your election as chairman in, I believe you said '66?

AT: Something like that.

EP: What did CORE do? Did it more or less fade away?

AT: No, it didn't. This is when we started testing the Civil Rights Act, the civil rights law, so we had continuous demonstrations. We started the organization--I mean the project called Operation Dialogue, where we went out into the community and knocked on doors and actually started to solve problems and concerns of the community. We held neighborhood meetings relative to that. We participated in voter registration drives, "Get Out the Vote." This was a continuous process.

EP: I gather that after Bill, that Ralph Lee was elected chairman. Is that correct?

AT: I think so.

EP: Do you know who the--was there a general turn-over of officers or did the same people tend to stay with CORE?

AT: Well, no. I think Bill had left town to go away to work. He was in New York[?], New York, at the time.

EP: Ralph Lee indicated to me that--he said that these activities you described went on, but mainly he recalls that he was really concerned and preoccupied with paying off the debts that they had incurred and working with the financial side of the chapter. Would you know anything about this?

AT: Well, yes, some.

EP: Was that true? Did you have debts to pay off?

AT: Yes, there were debts to pay off.

EP: And did the money generate from the same kind of thing that you talked about earlier?

AT: Yes.

EP: Did you ever get much money from the national office?

AT: Not an awful lot [laughs].

EP: I see. So, so they didn't, I mean they, they, their premise that I understand from CORE was that they existed to send money to the field, but you're saying that you didn't get

much from them?

AT: Not very much. That's my recollection now. You may want to check with Bill on that. But not under my leadership.

EP: Do you know who succeeded Ralph Lee as--

AT: I think I succeeded Ralph Lee.

EP: So you were the next chairman?

AT: Yes.

EP: Well, was CORE by that time largely defunct in terms of membership and activities? I mean, was it winding down?

AT: Yes, the members were gradually getting smaller.

EP: Do you remember when the chapter actually--did it come to an abrupt end or just sort of fade away?

AT: I think that it just kind of faded away. I went away to graduate school and I never heard a word after that point.

EP: Did you have an office?

AT: Yes, we operated off of Gorrell Street at the time, but not throughout my entire tenure there, no.

EP: Did you give up that office or something?

AT: Yes, we eventually gave up that office up. There was no need for it.

EP: [coughs] Excuse me. Too expensive and not enough participation?

AT: Right, right. Exactly.

EP: Do you recall when--some people indicated that--well, Ralph Lee indicated to me that no one ever was quite this blunt with her, but there was a feeling that they were turning away from Elizabeth Laizner, that gradually white participation was, was kind of discouraged

in terms of advisor and leadership roles, and that little by little people stopped going to her place and communicating with her.

AT: I don't think that's the case.

EP: Did she stay active right to the end?

AT: Yes, she stayed active right to the very end.

EP: Did other people replace other people, like Tony Stanley and Elizabeth Laizner and so forth, as advisors?

AT: It would be difficult to say who, so I--on occasions there were advisors, but no one on a continuous basis as you may have found Tony, and Dr. Laizner, and Rev. Hatchett, and various others.

EP: When you were chairman, do you know who were the other officers were--recall who the other officers were?

AT: I think Betty Wall was still treasurer.

EP: So there wasn't much turnover except in terms of chairman?

AT: No.

EP: Did these re-elections take place as a regular thing, operative thing of the chapter or just as someone left?

AT: No, they took place as an operative thing of the chapter.

EP: Did you--when you left graduate school, did you return and find the chapter defunct or--

AT: Yes.

EP: And nobody was around, is that right?

AT: Right.

EP: Well, surely there were other things going on in terms of civil rights activities, is that correct?

AT: Yes.

EP: But they just weren't of the demonstrative, direct action type?

AT: Right. Right. There were other groups formed.

EP: Did you continue in civil rights activities?

AT: Well, at Rutgers [University], I was chairman of the Black Graduate Students Association.

EP: Did you--I'm sorry.

AT: No, go ahead.

EP: Did you keep many records while you were chairman? Like minutes or list of members?

AT: I wouldn't have that. I think if anyone would have it, it would be Betty Wall.

EP: I see. Well, was it kind of a--was the dynamics of the chapter such that you really didn't keep much records, that it was kind of word of mouth?

AT: No, there would be an agenda set each night. They would be very organized meetings, awful lot of discussions and debate over, you know, things that may occur, questions at hand. But I can't say an awful lot of records were kept.

EP: So the high point of the chapter, in terms of involvement, would have been the spring demonstrations of '63?

AT: I would imagine so.

EP: I see. Was there any specific person you worked with at the paper to generate publicity?

AT: At, at where?

EP: With the newspapers.

AT: No.

EP: Or the television?

AT: No, but Bill, Bill, Bill again could answer that, because things took place during the height of the demonstrations while he was chairman. But Bill would be the best person to answer that. And I think there may have been people at Channel 2 News and various other contacts, but Bill could answer that more exact.

EP: Well, after you graduated from Rutgers, what was your career since then?

AT: Well, I went to do graduate study in the field of labor education. I was their first graduate student to receive a masters in that area. And--

EP: At Rutgers?

AT: Yes. And I simultaneously studied under A. Philip Randolph. I worked for the A. Philip Randolph Institute as education coordinator, and--

EP: Did you actually work under Mr. Randolph?

AT: Yes, right. I did private study under Mr. Randolph.

EP: And what is your current occupation?

AT: Well, currently, I'm getting ready to move to Norfolk, Virginia, and I'll be looking for employment down there. [laughs] I'm getting ready to relocate.

EP: But you're still in the field of labor--

AT: Yes, labor relations education.

[End of Interview]