

**GREENSBORO VOICES/GREENSBORO CIVIL RIGHTS ORAL HISTORY
COLLECTION**

INTERVIEWEE: Miss Jo Spivey

INTERVIEWER: Kathy Hoke

DATE: June 12, 1990

[Begin Tape 1, Side 1]

KATHY HOKE: This is June 12, 1990. This is Kathy Hoke speaking. I am here at the home of Miss Jo Spivey. And I guess we'll begin. Maybe we could start by you telling us a little bit about where you were born, and where you grew up, and how you came to enter the newspaper business.

JO SPIVEY: I was born in Asheville, [North Carolina], and as soon as I found out what newspapering was, that's what I wanted to do. And I started when I was about fourteen as correspondent for a local paper, you know, a school correspondent for a local paper. And I would work summers on newspapers. And then I went to j[ournalism] school at Carolina [The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill] and I've never done anything else. I've worked all over. I've worked in Asheville, and in Raleigh, and in Connecticut, and in Kansas, in Florida, Mississippi.

KH: When did you land your first newspaper job?

JS: Oh, immediately after I got out of Carolina, on the *Asheville Times*.

KH: I see. What year was that?

JS: That was '40.

KH: And you were a reporter there?

JS: Yes.

KH: What year did you come to Greensboro?

JS: In '50. Yeah, '50.

KH: Can you tell me a little bit about how that job came about? Were you--

JS: I just applied for it. My husband was of course in service when we got married and that was in '41. And so he didn't get to finish school. And so when he got out of service we went back to State [North Carolina State University] and he finished school in forestry.

And then I, of course, worked on papers there and worked for the Association of Afternoon Dailies under a Linn Nesbitt[?]. I don't know whether--you probably don't even remember Linn. He was quite a journalist in North Carolina for many years. And then John got a job in Guilford County as Guilford County forester with the State Forest Service. And so I came here and applied for a job and went to work.

KH: What did you cover for the newspaper? Was--this was the *Daily News*?

JS: No, the [*Greensboro*] *Record*.

KH: The *Record*, okay.

JS: *The Record*. Government mostly, politics, civil rights, business. This, of course, is over the span of my time here.

KH: You covered Greensboro City Council, for example?

JS: Oh yeah, oh yeah, for twenty-five years [both laugh]. And that's about it. What else?

KH: Well, just tell me a little bit about--

JS: How I happened to get into civil rights covering?

KH: Well, what the city was like? Well, we can talk about that now if you'd like.

JS: Well, it makes no difference, whatever you want to talk about.

KH: Okay. Why don't we talk about how you came to cover the civil rights movement.

JS: As I said, I was covering the city, and the city owned a separate recreation--well, of course many facilities were separate recreational facilities for blacks and whites. And Dr. George Simkins and three of his friends played the white Gillespie Park Golf Course. And they were arrested for trespassing. There was a black course here but it, I

understand, was not as good as the Gillespie course. And I know nothing about golf, so I can't judge about what was good or what was bad.

But this was a prolonged case. It went on and on and on up to the Supreme Court, U.S. Supreme Court. And Dr. Simkins and his friends almost went to jail. So I had an association with Dr. Simkins for a very long time there and we have been friends ever since that time. And Dr. Simkins and his father-in-law, Jack Atkins. Mr. Atkins was a newspaper man, had owned a newspaper in Texas. And he was an attorney, and he taught at, I believe it was North Carolina Central [University]. And he filed a number of cases on behalf of students and so on.

There was a hospital case which was a landmark case because when it was settled, not only did it open all the hospitals to blacks, but it affected the Indians and the Hispanics and so on in the Southwest. Everybody that was denied access to a hospital because of the color of his skin or whatever minority was involved could henceforth get into a hospital. And along the way of course I made friendships and acquaintances with other blacks.

And so when the time came for the four students to come to Woolworth, they said that Ralph Johns, who was a white merchant on East Market Street, could call me. And so I called Floyd Hendley, our managing editor, and told him that I thought this was going to be important. And so he got Jack Moebes, our photographer down--*Record* photographer--and he made these pictures that, you know, have since become famous. Have you seen the exhibit at the [Greensboro] Historical Museum?

KH: No, I haven't seen the exhibit, but I've seen both of those pictures.

JS: You know, of the four walking?

KH: Yes.

JS: Okay. And, what else?

KH: Oh, okay. Well, tell me about--his name has just slipped my mind. You've just mentioned him? The merchant?

JS: Ralph Johns?

KH: Ralph Johns. Tell me about Ralph Johns. What was he like?

JS: A very nice guy. He was very dedicated to this and I never did--never have talked to Ralph to see what made him feel the way that he did. He might just have been a very liberal person. You know that's a shame. I should have talked to him about that, but I

never did.

KH: He was a source of yours? You had talked to him a lot before--

JS: Oh yeah. I knew him. Well, he wasn't a source for the things that I had covered, you know like George Simkins and some of these other people, he was not.

KH: He was just someone you knew back then?

JS: But, he--you know, the paper at that time was where the arts center [Greensboro Cultural Center] is now.

KH: Right.

JS: And, of course, the paper now isn't too far from where Ralph was. And Ralph was--I think it was the second or third hundred block of East Market [Street]. I'm not sure which it was. Anyway, he was before council from time to time. And I got to know him and wrote stories about him and his appearances before council about various things. So that's how I got to know Ralph. And you get to know lots of people, you know, when you're around the city that long [laughs].

KH: Yes. Well, tell me what--tell me about your recollection of segregation at that time--how it worked, what people thought about it--if they thought, why people thought about it, if they thought about it.

JS: Well, it ran all up and down the scale. Now there were, of course, people who--I guess you would call them "rednecks," who would actually harm black people. You know, the Ku Klux Klan and that type person, who would actually harm black people if they could do it in the dark, or secretly somehow. Then there were other rednecks who did not care for black people but they wouldn't hurt them. I mean, I remember, if you want some anecdotes--this isn't really a anecdote, but a story. There was a young man, a rural man, who got involved with the wrong kind of group. And they broke out the window of a black attorney's office at night.

KH: Which attorney was that?

JS: Well, it was [J. Kenneth] "Ken" Lee as I recall it now. Don't--I could be mistaken, but in my recollection it was Ken Lee's office. And so the father of this boy found out that he had been involved and he beat the bejeebers out of the boy. So there, obviously the father was also a redneck, but he was not going to have his son mixed up with doing anything to

hurt people.

Then there were the more educated and genteel type white people who had been accustomed to all of their lives seeing black persons in roles as servants. And, you know, they, black people, were fine in their place. You know, quote, "in their place." And then there were people I guess who, I guess, you know, it was just lip service that, "Some of my friends, my best friends are black." You know, that line.

And then there were some people who sincerely were helpful. You know, Dorothy Bardolph taught at Bennett College. And there were several white professors and so on at Bennett. Now, whether they're--and at A&T [North Carolina A&T State University]. Now, whether there were any at UNCG [The University of North Carolina Greensboro] at that time I don't know because I didn't cover that. But one person we ought to mention here--actually there was another woman reporter, Dorothy Benjamin, who covered education and she really got into civil rights coverage before I did with *Brown v. Board of Education* decision in '54 and I got into it in '55. So, we, of course, [laughs] had a good deal of conversation back and forth.

KH: Is Dorothy Benjamin still in this area?

JS: She died.

KH: Oh, I'm sorry.

JS: She died in I think about 1970. Oh, she was a wonderful woman. I still miss her. Because we had the same kind of sense of humor. And, on up to, you know, many, many years after she died, something would happen that would be funny to me and I'd turn around to tell it to her and then realize that she's not there.

KH: So the two of you would talk about local politics and how things were shaking out? Who was saying what?

JS: She would tell me, she would tell me a lot about things that were happening on the school side. You know, there's--I still haven't figured out a lot of this because, you know, there's the--you know about the Lumbee Indians, of course. Well, some of them are very, very dark. And the day of desegregation of the schools, some poor old redneck wino, when this little Indian girl went to--well, she was already going to that school, but he somehow thought that she was a black and he accosted her. I mean, she was just a little girl.

And there are in this town many, many black persons who are as white as we are. And they're many white persons who, particularly in the summer, you know, get very, very dark. And I just never have been able to sort this whole thing out because it just

seems so strange to me that a white-black person, and a black-white person--it just doesn't make sense, you know. Do you know Dr. Simkins?

KH: I know his name. But I've never met him.

JS: He's quite, he's quite fair. He's not really as fair as his wife. Now his wife is fair--white. I mean, she's black, but she's white. She's, as I said, Jack Atkins' daughter. And they have a very beautiful daughter who is totally white.

And the fellow who was the--there was a--after they started negotiating to integrate Woolworth, they set up a committee that was headed by Dr. Hobart Jarrett from Bennett College, who was quite fair. And Dr. W. L. T. Miller, who was a dentist--he was so fair that he had freckles. His wife is very fair. She is a very talented artist and still--Eva Hamlin Miller. You may have run into her--still paints around here and exhibits.

And so the day that they integrated Woolworth, Dr. Miller and I were standing in Woolworth talking, and he would tell me this tale about his son, who of course is white. And they had kept from the son all this business about race and so on. And the boy did not know all of the hassle that went on about race.

And so when it started a lot of it in the paper, he said, "Dad, what is this all about?"

So, he [Dr. Miller] said, "Well, son," he said, "We are not supposed to eat at certain places that serve white people, Woolworth being one."

He [Miller's son] said, "Well, I didn't know, Daddy." He said, "I've been eating there for years." So, I never have really quite figured out what all of this--what all of the hassle is all about.

KH: Well, I guess all of this variation in skin color points to a lot of--over the years--a lot of, you know, sexual relations among blacks and whites.

JS: I doubt it. I doubt it. I think a lot of it--well, undoubtedly some of that is true. But I think that a lot of it has a lot to do possibly with the fact that we have come into more temperment zone and you just don't see as dark people here as you do where its blistering sunny. I mean, I'm not a geneticist so I wouldn't know, but I'm sure that there is some sexual, some cross-breeding there.

KH: I suppose that for many folks, segregation was seen as something that always was and presumably always would be, or was [that] not the dominant way of thinking at the time? Was there before February 1960--did many people think that things would change or--?

JS: Well, I don't know that anybody really ever thought that much about it before that. Now I--

KH: Well, maybe I should say before the *Brown* decision, I suppose, a lot--there was a lot of thought about change to come after the *Brown* decision.

JS: Yeah, because there was all sorts of things devised to try to get around it, like freedom of choice, and then this busing bit came up, and all that stuff. I don't know what people really thought about it. I think probably a lot of it had to do with the more affluent persons than it had to do with the background and, you know, on on back to where there was a "massa" and the slave, and all that sort of stuff.

And as I say, they had seen blacks only in the context of servants. I think possibly with some of the people like the Ku Klux Klan, the people of that type, they had to feel that they were superior to something. And that was all that was left for them to feel superior to. And they saw their security slipping away. And I think maybe that might have had something to do with it.

KH: When did you notice Klan activity picking up? You started at the paper in 1950? Was there much Klan activity at that time? When did you notice it picked up? Was it after the *Brown* decision? Was it after the sit-ins started? Do you remember when that was going on?

JS: [pause] That must have been some--in 1950, cause I can remember going to a Klan rally, where they burned a cross. And it was out in a field. And I can't remember where it was. And I know that the police officers, or sheriff's deputies, or whoever it was, told me before they knew I was going to be there. And they said, "Don't speak to us or call us by name because we will be there, you know, as security, and we don't want to be identified." So the officers that I saw I did not recognize at all. And that's all I remember about it.

And when that was, I do not know. I remember seeing the cross burn. And there were many crosses burned. And, you know, that must have been all along, because Ben Smith, who was--what was he? He must have been superintendent of education, or something.

KH: When *Brown* decision--

JS: He got a cross burned in his yard. And Dorothy and I--Benny, [the nickname of] Dorothy Benjamin and I were both terribly harassed from, you know, from go one. And that continued on up--actually, the last call I got was after the Klan-Nazi thing [on November 3, 1979]. Now I did not cover that because it was on a Saturday and Martha Woodall was working that Saturday. So I didn't have very much to do with that.

But I think there was--I'm sure there was collusion because Dorothy was known

as the “nigger-loving slut,” and I was the “nigger-loving bitch.” And they would write--when they’d write their old letters, they’d address her as “nigger-loving slut,” and me as “nigger-loving bitch.” And when they’d call at home, they’d call on the telephone at midnight, one, two, three, four--

KH: At your home?

JS: Yeah. And they’d sometimes just breathe in the phone, and sometimes they’d say, “Nigger-loving bitch.” You know. One day my daughter got--oh, she was about four--and she, you know how little kids run and answer the phone, and they scared her so bad she wouldn’t sleep by herself for about a week. And I did get a little concerned and a little mad then. And Benny and I talked about it and we finally decided that if we quit writing they would have won and nobody’s children would be safe. So we just kept right on and kept her away from the telephone.

But what I started to tell you--the last call I got was sometime not too long after the Klan-Nazi thing, and my daughter, who’s now married and lives in Raleigh, happened to be up that weekend and the phone rang and she answered it, she came back in the kitchen, and she said, “Mother, that lady called me a witch.”

And I didn’t say anything. But I thought, “Oh Lord, don’t tell me it’s starting again.” [laughs] But she doesn’t even remember, thank goodness, about that thing when she was four--she was too little. And I’m just as glad. But I had to ask her after she got grown if she remembered it and she doesn’t remember it.

KH: Well, it must have been kind of frightening at that time?

JS: Well, it was in a way. Now, I wasn’t the only one and Benny wasn’t the only one. Bill Snider had a bottle thrown through his picture window and I think it was on the Fourth of July, and he had three or four daughters.

KH: Bill Snider was the former--is the former editor of the *Record*?

JS: Of the *News*, of the *Daily News*. And so his daughters always--whatever holiday it was--his daughters always, until they got grown, always dreaded that holiday coming up. They’d always get scared around that holiday. And then another reporter, this old guy told him that people’s children were getting killed all the time, you know, run over by cars and all that sort of stuff. It scared him to death about the safety of his child. And I used to actually also worry about the safety of the students who were picketing and so on.

So, I talked to General James R. Townsend--he was a retired general--he was the city manager here. And I don’t think he was--he was sort of conservative. But, I mean, he was a good guy and told him that I was concerned that some of these picketing students,

particularly the girls from Bennett, might get hurt.

And so he said, "Well, Jo, you don't need to worry," said, "I have talked with my people and I have told them there is going to be no bloodshed in this town. There's not going to be anybody hurt or killed and if any of you cannot live with that, resign."

So I didn't worry so much after that. Because he apparently had told all of his police-type people and, you know, public safety-type people, and firemen, and everybody who might be called out that they were to protect these students. If anybody--well, of course if the students had done anything, you know, that was breaking the law they would have been arrested. But that nobody was--it was said that no blood was going to run in his streets.

So I think that he has never been given much credit for what he did. He actually put my house on a police survey route, too, so they would check this house every time they went around, so that I wouldn't be bothered.

KH: Were you ever bothered at home? [both speaking at the same time] Other than phone calls?

JS: You mean, did anybody ever come here?

KH: Yeah.

JS: There was a car that used to come and it would go down the hill. It'd come up the hill and pull in the driveway and shine the lights in the picture window, pull out and go back up the hill and then come down and, you know, that would go on for a while. See, I never told my husband what I was into.

KH: You never told your husband about the stories you were writing?

JS: No, I never told him. Well, he read the stories. But I never told him about--

KH: About the phone calls?

JS: Well, he knew the phone calls but I never told him about the harassing things. And so when that car kept coming up and down he got his pistol and put it on the chest of drawers. We had a chest of drawers in the foyer then, and he put that out there. And that scared me worse than anything because you know there were kids in and out of here all of the time. It worried me because I was afraid somebody might get hold of that pistol. But, no, nobody ever threw a bottle through my window or burned a cross on my lawn, or anything like that.

KH: Did you get letters at work?

JS: Oh yes.

KH: Or phone calls at work, that were of that type, nasty?

JS: I can't remember. I probably did. But I got so many phone calls. I mean, every reporter gets so many phone calls, I can't remember. But I got letters that were like that, lots of letters.

KH: What were the gist of the letters?

JS: Well, just "nigger-loving bitch," and you know, all this usual rigmarole about, "If you don't stop all this, what's going to happen to you."

KH: Did you ever get letters from black people in town?

JS: What do you mean?

KH: Black people in town who noticed your stories and maybe had a suggestion about something else to write about? Was that something that happened? Or maybe commented on a story that you had written about?

JS: Well gosh, I talked to them three and four times a week, so I guess--

KH: But folks you might not have met at that point? Just like you might have gotten nasty letters that you get?

JS: I don't remember. I don't remember.

KH: Okay. Did you ever meet Ben Smith, the superintendent? No?

JS: I may have, but I don't remember.

KH: Do you remember what Dorothy Benjamin had to say about him?

JS: I think that he was a pretty good superintendent.

KH: I believe he--Greensboro's school board under Smith's initiative was the first school board in the state, and perhaps the nation, to say that Greensboro schools, local schools,

would integrate.

JS: I don't recall, because I wasn't covering that.

KH: Okay. Well, let's move up a few years, up to February 1960. And I'd like to ask you to tell me a little bit, a bit more about how--what you remember about that day, going to the Woolworth's to cover that story? You got the phone call?

JS: Well, I got the call about 4:15 [p.m.], you know, we got off at four then. And it must have been about 4:15, because I had just got home. And so it would have taken me five or ten--I don't know what--minutes to get Floyd Hendley and Moebes started. So, it must have been [pause] ten, five minutes of five [p.m] or so, maybe have been five or after five when I got back downtown. And both of the front doors of Woolworth were locked and I--the night, you know how stores dim their lights at night, but they still leave the lights on--I could see people back in the back, but I couldn't tell what they were doing.

So there were a few people out front but didn't seem to be an unusual number of people. So I thought, well now, the best thing to do, I went over across the street to where--you know where the Dixie Building is now? At the corner of February One Place [formerly Sycamore Street] and Elm Street--and there was a ladies' dress shop there then called Prago-Guyes. So I stood underneath the canopy there so I could see. I never did see Jack Moebes. And it never did--it really didn't occur to me to go around on the--it was called Sycamore then--on that side, I had sort of forgotten. I never went to Woolworth's very much so I had forgotten, or didn't know about that side door.

So the first thing I saw was Ezell Blair, [now known as] Jibreel Khazan. I knew him by sight. And he was leading the other three up Elm Street and [pause] everybody was just standing on the side of the street. Just, I mean I never saw anybody raise their hands, say anything, or anything. And I, of course, was across the street, but the four went on up to the Jefferson Square and turned right and presumably went back to the college [A&T].

I have since found out that John Erwin, who was a vice-president of the Greensboro branch of the NAACP [National Association for the Advancement of Colored People] was--had gone into Woolworth prior to the four men arriving because they needed somebody there. Do you want me to talk about things that I heard?

KH: Sure. Sure.

JS: Because he felt that--or the chapter, the branch--felt that if they got arrested for trespassing, or if, you know, they got beaten up or anything, then somebody needed to be there to protect them. So he was already in Woolworth, and I found out later that George Simkins was up in front of Belk, which was on the corner of Market and Elm at the time.

But I never saw either one of them. So I'm afraid I can't tell anything very exciting because I just went back home.

KH: Well, I guess--

JS: And then the next day I had--I had stories--I don't remember what they were, but it had to do with city hall. So Marvin Sykes went down to cover the second day. And there were--we've got that picture of the two sit-inners and then two others at the counter. And then I think some more came later in the day. But then I--after that I was able to clear my schedule and everything, or plan ahead to where I could cover it all. So everyday I was there. And I--

KH: And the *Record* broke the story, didn't it?

JS: Oh yeah, because I don't know whether the *Daily News* ignored it or whether they didn't call the *Daily News*. They did not have it. Well, Marvin--actually Marvin's story wasn't very much. And they didn't use that picture of them walking down February One Place till several years later. I think the story that I wrote in, I guess 1970 on the tenth year anniversary, was the first time they used that picture of the four walking down the street. It was some time later anyway. And of course now everybody seems to be real pleased that it happened here and, you know, want to get in on the action and all that sort of stuff.

KH: But it wasn't that way in 1960? What was it like? What was the city--how did the city leaders react? Mayor and city council, and the city manager and--

JS: Well, I told you about the city manager. I mean, the city manager said, "This was not going to happen on his shift." [laughs] I think probably, most of them--now we had one black council member, Waldo Falkener. And Ed Zane, a wonderful little man, he wouldn't appreciate my calling him little, but he is little. He comes to about right here. [laughs] But he is the sweetest and nicest man you'd ever want to know. And he I think sincerely is liberal and thinks that, you know, people are people. And so he was the negotiator for the city in trying to get everything all worked out. And of course Hobart Jarrett was, finally ended up as the one who--and Hobart was also president of the Greensboro Citizens Association, which was a very influential black group.

And this picketing and stuff went on for years. Each year they would seem to have, you know, try to get a new focus. And all the ministers were very--oh, another thing I forgot to tell you.

Before the sit-ins there had been other attempts to open up things. As a matter of fact, Jibreel Khazan's father, Ezell Blair Sr. and his sister had a year or two prior to that gone to Woolworth and sat down. And some fellow who didn't know any better had

served them. And then the manager found out they were there and ran them off, now so I understand. And I understand there were others but I never could confirm those. So let me see. That, that, I believe is the only one that I can think of. So, let's see. What were we talking about before that?

KH: We were talking about the reaction of city leaders to--

JS: They, the rest of the members of council sort of wished it would go away. Oh, I know what I was talking about. Each year they would try to focus on something, you know, like one year, economics. One year they tried to get the theaters open. That didn't do too well. Because I think people just, you know, going to the movies was not a very, a thing that seemed to be a great priority with a lot of people.

They did the restaurants for a couple of years. As a matter of fact, in '62, I think, somewhere along in there--maybe it was--'63 was when Jesse Jackson got into it. And then of course with the Civil Rights Act of '64, everything had to open up and there wasn't much you could do about it.

KH: Well, it was clear things were changing from early 1960 through all of the sixties. What do you recall about the--just the way people were talking about segregation and change and the prospect of school integration. What do you recall about what--especially what the white city council members had to say about all of this? How were they looking at the change that was going on around them, all the people marching in the streets, the national attention that was being focused on the issue of segregation?

JS: Well, I guess some of them wished that it would go away. Some of them were--wanted to change it. There were so many things. You see. They had separate pools for blacks and whites. At one point the city closed all its pools and sold them. At some point in time, you know--I guess, it's hard to get your chronology straight without going back and researching all this. But I remember the Gillespie Park Golf Course clubhouse burned. And there was some suspicion that it was set. And I think that that was maybe after the Civil Rights Act of '64, but don't hold me to that, because--

KH: After the golf course was integrated?

JS: After it was ordered to be integrated. Then the swimming pools. Ralph Johns bought the black swimming pool. And the swim association bought Lindley Park. And it seemed like they were operated privately for a time. It seemed like the black pool was closed down because it didn't meet the health standards or something. Then there was such little stupid things as they had separate libraries. And they had separate, you know, they had separate water fountains that said "white" and "colored."

And there's another funny story about that. I was on the panel with a lady whose sister lived up North and had brought her young daughter down to visit the Greensboro lady. And so they had been in the courthouse or somewhere where they had the white and colored, and this little girl saw the "colored water" sign with great anticipation, went over to it to get a drink of water. And she comes back with her face just fallen. She said, "Mommy, that water is not colored," she said, "It's white just like the other." So all water apparently is white. [laughs]

KH: And children didn't understand what segregation was?

JS: Oh no, this child had lived up North, had no idea what segregation was. And restrooms were the same way. They had colored and white restrooms. And I was trying to think what else--oh, just everything was just colored and white. And as far as what people thought, [coughs] I guess they--all across the whole spectrum--the people that I knew were all hoping that it would, you know, everything would just open up. Because it seemed sort of silly.

I think probably people like Mr. Zane were very concerned with getting it done without anybody getting hurt. I think others were, too. I think General Townsend was bound to have seen the writing, the handwriting on the wall. He wanted it done without anybody being hurt. He wanted it done legally. I guess some of the council members and other public officials couldn't care less. And some of them probably were rednecks and, you know, didn't want it to happen at all. But right now I can't recall anything that anybody said to me one way or another about how they felt about it.

KH: Tell me about how the newspaper handled coverage or supervised the reporters in terms of covering the sit-ins?

JS: We never had any supervision at all. Now what the *Daily News* did I have no idea. Floyd Hendley, again, he was sort of like General Townsend. He was a conservative, but he was a newspaper man first. And--

KH: He was the city editor, is that right?

JS: No he was managing editor of the *Record*. And he could see that this was a news story because hundreds, a couple of hundred of years of practice was beginning to fall, and he knew this was a big story. So Robert Register, who was the city editor and who had the same feelings that I did about this subject, of course, never gave me any supervision because he figured I knew what I was doing. And as a matter of fact, I mean, I knew these people and they would talk to me, and there wasn't anybody else on the staff that they would talk to. So, as far as I can remember, nothing I ever wrote was ever changed

one word.

KH: Other than you and Dorothy Benjamin, were there any other reporters writing about civil rights or segregation?

JS: No. Maybe--

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

KH: And this was true of newspapers all over the country who would describe black people as Negro with a capital N? Is that your recollection?

JS: At one time that was the practice. And I don't remember when "black" got in there, or if it was ever, ever--yeah, I'm sure black got in there somewhere. And then after a time, [coughs] no racial identification. I know at first, also, we did not carry black obituaries. And then Floyd Hendley changed that. But I don't remember when.

KH: Did the *Daily News* change that about the same time?

JS: I don't remember. I have no idea. I don't remember what they did. Because we had entirely different staffs then and entirely different managing editors and executive editors, or whatever they called them, and city editors, and everybody.

KH: Do you remember when the *Record* stopped using a racial identification in crime stories? Sometime in the early seventies, maybe? The sixties?

JS: I just don't remember. But I know that they quit. And I don't remember. Now, do you know Bob Farley up at the paper? Bob Farley was--

KH: The historian?

JS: Yeah. He does that thing for the "People & Places," about forty years and twenty years ago?

KH: Right. I've not ever met him.

JS: As I recall it, he was managing editor of the *News* and Slick Sheppard[?] was the city editor. [pause] So maybe they could give you some insight.

KH: Okay. Okay. Well, do you remember who--I guess in the fifties and most of the sixties

the staff was all white, is that correct?

JS: Yes, the staff was all white. And for a long time the staff was all white. I guess Tina Miller[?] was probably--no, I don't remember if Tina came on the Women's Page. I don't think they called it that, or did they call it that? I guess they called it Women's Page [Women's Department]. I can't remember whether she came on Women's Page or as a reporter, but I know for a time she was a reporter. And we did have black reporters off and on, and black interns, but I can't remember their names and I can't remember when they started.

KH: How did Tina Miller come on board? Did the paper make an announcement that a new reporter was coming? Did everybody know before she arrived that she was a black reporter? Do you recall what was said?

JS: I don't recall, but as I recall at the *Record*, nobody would give a damn because we were all quite liberal.

KH: But was it a special occasion of any sort? Did the editors make any note of it in some matter?

JS: I don't recall that they ever did. She went out to lunch with us just like all the--everybody else did. And subsequent black reporters did the same. I mean, it was no different from any other reporter. But I can't remember who the reporters were. A lot of them were summer interns I know. And then there was one after Tina, I think, or maybe along with Tina named [pause] Blanche Alston[?], and she later married a fellow named Robinson. So she was there as a reporter and probably she was at the same time as Tina.

KH: Okay. Things got a little bit more polarized in the late sixties, both within the black community and the Greensboro community at large. The black power movement divided black folks across generations, and I imagine things were more tense overall.

JS: Well, I tell you, I guess you're talking about the Black Panther-types now.

KH: Yeah. Yeah. Right. What do you recall? Did you cover that?

JS: I never had any problems with the Black Panthers. As a matter of fact, Nelson Johnson--I guess that's one of the ones you're talking about--Nelson Johnson was a most dependable individual, as far as I was concerned. If Nelson told me that he would have a piece of information for me at such and such a time, he'd have it or he'd call me and tell me why he couldn't get it. I never had any problem with any of those people. And I went on

picket lines where they were and all sorts of things. [laughs] I don't know, I just wonder if they were misunderstood. I know some of the city officials would have bad things to say about them. But I just wonder if maybe they felt that the city officials had let them down.

KH: The Black Panthers felt that way?

JS: And felt that maybe I hadn't or something because I never had any problems with them. There was a fellow named Vince McCullough, and I don't know what ever happened to Vince. And--

KH: Lewis Brandon?

JS: And Lewis Brandon. And, [pause] I can't remember any of the other names. If you have some other names I can remember.

KH: Lewis Brandon, he's the only other one that comes to mind right now.

JS: Well, you see, along about '69 there was a young man, a student named Willie Grimes, who was killed on the A&T campus, and it was never determined who killed him. There was a big, really a big dust up about that time. I guess maybe that's what you're referring to. And there was tear gas and there was some of the little kids, you know, like at Lincoln Junior High School, and then the senior high school, Dudley, were involved. Now, there was one incident that--all of these things are still--it's been so long ago. But there was a student at Dudley who was running--

KH: Claude Barnes?

JS: Clyde--Claude Barnes, who wanted to run for president of the student body, and the teachers, or whatever the power structure was, said that he couldn't be a candidate. Now you probably know more about this than I do, since you know his name. But that's my recollection, that he was not allowed to run. And after all of this dust had, all this had dust up and Willie Grimes was killed and four or five police officers were injured, and they'd called out the National Guard, or the state Guard, or whatever they were, it turned out that the reason that he was not allowed to run was that he did not have a C average. That's my recollection of it. And, God, I hate to tell you all of this.

KH: Does it seem--how does it strike you, looking back on it, lets see, twenty-one years later? To think about, you know, this high school student election--the controversy over that spills into the community at large and the city officials, the white city officials, feel that

it's somehow, quote, unquote, "necessary" to bring in the National Guard to control things. Why did it all transpire this way?

JS: Well, I really don't know why they brought in the National Guard. I'm sure they must have felt like it was necessary because there was an awful lot of stuff going on. And it seemed to me that we had a curfew. Somewhere along in there we had a curfew. But it seemed to me that it all could have been avoided if the school office had just said, "This is why this child can't run." And that child's privacy, it seems to me, was secondary to somebody getting killed and a number of police officers getting injured and the National Guard coming in. And oh, there was a whole lot of stuff about the National Guard roughing up some of the other students. Now whether that happened or not I don't know. But it all just seemed so unnecessary. And that's as close as I ever came to wanting to hit somebody, I guess.

KH: Wanting to hit somebody?

JS: Yeah, one of the school people. I was just about ready to pop him in the nose.

KH: Somebody at Dudley High School?

JS: No, no, this was a white person. I shouldn't have even brought that up.

KH: Oh! Huh! Well. Uh, it's a little hazy to me, maybe you could explain what your anger was directed at.

JS: Because when I finally got through there was a man named Winkworth[?], or something like that, they called him "Winkey," and he was superintendent of the schools. So I finally got through to Winkworth, or whatever his name was, and he told me why they had said that this boy could not run for student body. And you'd have to go over and look at the files. But as I recall, I had a story that afternoon. Somebody could have told two weeks ahead of that, what the problem was, and I think it would all have been avoided. But in the meantime, you see, it looked like this boy was being discriminated against and the Black Panthers had--

KH: Of course this was in an all-black school at the time?

JS: Well, things stayed all black and so on--or all white--even after they weren't supposed to be, because all sorts of machinations went on and to keep things the way they were.

KH: Who do you think led that status quo, keeping the status quo, the pressures from ordinary

white people in town? Or from people--

JS: Well, you're getting into an area that I'm not--Dorothy Benjamin could have answered that.

KH: Well, maybe I could rephrase the question. You've probably read William Chafe's book, *Civilities and Civil Rights*, in which he argues that integration or desegregation could have happened much sooner had the people in power--the elites of the town of Greensboro--had they taken the initiative. But it was more in their interest to keep the status quo going, a paternalism of sorts that fostered people talking to each other but also hampered any change.

JS: Well, I can't quarrel with that, but I don't know that of my own knowledge. Now you understand that the city does not run the schools.

KH: Right. Right.

JS: The city at that time--the city council at that time-- appointed the school board. Now since, of course, it's all changed, and the school board is elected.

KH: Okay. Well, just a few other questions. Let's see, you retired in the late seventies, is that right? Or the early eighties.

JS: No. No. No, '84. I think.

KH: Eighty-four. Okay, and I guess by this time, I guess the paper became the Landmark [Communications, Inc.] paper in the early seventies. Did the paper change much after Landmark bought it? Did it change much in terms of the way you and other reporters covered issues of civil rights or race relations? Did you notice any change?

JS: No, I didn't notice any change. No. Pete Bush was the publisher--what is the--publisher, is that what they call it? Oh, I loved Pete. Pete's a good guy. And Pete backed me up on a couple of things. Sometimes the paper had to--well, actually, what it was about it was--you know that property that we, where we occupy now was redevelopment property and there had been all sorts of rumors about what was going to be done with that property, which of course was prime property.

And I had written stories about some of these rumors and some people had--Red Benton over in Winston-Salem, I think, was the one who said that I had nixed his project by writing about it. Well, all I had done was just reported what was being considered. So when it came time for the paper, when I found out that the paper was thinking about

buying it, well, I didn't think we were any different from anybody else. So all the people at the paper got real upset because, you know, [they] didn't want it out. And this had come out in a public meeting of the redevelopment commission.

So I went to see Pete Bush and I told him, I said, "It's not fair. It's not fair that you treat other people one way and we don't treat ourselves another."

He said, "You're right."

So we had the story that afternoon. So I have always loved him ever since then because that's the way a newspaper should run. And I've never, I mean, I never saw any difference. Now I don't know what it's like now. Benson was--and I got along fine with Benson.

KH: Bob Benson?

JS: I don't have any quarrel with him. Of course, he was--

KH: He's gone now.

JS: Yeah. As a matter of fact as recently as--you know, I was on that February One Committee to commemorate February One, and we were all trying to sell tickets to the banquet. He bought a whole table. And it had been six years, seven years, whatever it had been since I'd had any association with him. And he still bought a whole table. So, he's always been very nice to me.

KH: Okay. Well, I guess we'll close here unless there's something else you might like to add.

JS: No. I tell you, a lot of this stuff, as I said, is so long ago that I've--being a newspaper reporter, you like to check everything. I would feel much happier if I could check some of this stuff and be sure that I--my memory was not serving me badly. Particularly that school story is one, you know, about, well, Barnes. But I never had any problem with Black Panthers. I thought they were fine, fine guys. I didn't see--I thought they were trying to--maybe their method was a little bit different, but I think they were trying. They just were taking a little bit different route.

KH: They wanted to see change happen and didn't see enough change happening the way things were going.

JS: Well now, if you want to talk about that a minute. We have come a long way, but we still have an awful long way to go. Because you look at things. This neighborhood, I don't know of a black person in this neighborhood. There are token blacks all over everywhere. Churches, and they should certainly be the first place it would seem to me. There are few

churches that are integrated. Some of them may have tokens, but there are few that are integrated. Schools, it just seems to me, seem to be heading back toward the same way they were, you know, before '55. Or does--this is just from reading in the paper and listening on the television. Or am I interpreting it wrong?

KH: As far as I know that's correct. Dudley High School-- I'm not sure if I have figures right--but [it is] at least 80 percent black, and I think I've heard more than that.

JS: So, well the thing--the solution to the thing would be if you had true open housing where--I mean, I don't know what the percentage is, but I imagine it's about 30-35 percent black and the rest are white, and want to add a few minorities in there. If you could have it spread all over like that, you would have no need for school busing, no need for this. You could go to neighborhood schools. You could do everything.

And honest to goodness, people are--all people are alike, no matter what race they are, and you make friends with people with whom you have something in common. Now, there are some black people that I don't get along with, and there's some white people that I don't get along with. You don't automatically get along with somebody because he's white or because he's black. You get along with them because they have something in common. But then you still don't go around being nasty to them just because you don't have anything in common with them.

But I just wish it would--that people would--I don't know [laughs]--oh, I wished they would just be kinder to one another. I think this kindler, gentler crap that [President George H. W.] Bush put out, I wish it were true. But I can't see that it--we're going that way very fast. I wished we did have a kindler, gentler society. It worries me tremendously about a lot of these things.

You know, before I got this shingles mess, I was chairman of the Community Development Committee, which is a subgroup of the planning board, and we were working so hard on housing for the low and moderate income. And we had \$352,000 that we'd been carrying in our budget for three or four years for shelter for the homeless, which will be added to whatever is finally raised, and we put that in there the first year that I was chairman, which was four years ago, and it's still in there. And they still don't have, still don't have a place. As far as I know they're still waiting for a court decision on that place on Lee Street, which seems to me to be a very good place for it. And all of those poor people.

It just--it makes your skin crawl to think about them having to be out in the cold and no place to eat or sleep, or wash, or--and a lot of them, you know are, are--have mental problems and really don't know what they're doing. Don't know how to take care of themselves in the wild, in the wild, so to speak.

KH: Okay. Well, I think we'll stop here--

JS: Okay.

KH: --and I thank you.

[End of Interview]