

SS038.mp3

Joan Beifuss- Is it recording now?

Bill Thomas- This will be tape 4 with reverend Harold Middlebrook,(muffled), held at reverend Middlebrook's house and the interviewers are Joan Beifuss and this is Bill Thomas.

Bill Thomas- I think Joan and I both agree I think one of the things we sort of would like to hear more about is when you were staying in the elder King household in Atlanta. You were going to Moorehouse?

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- Yes.

Bill Thomas- Do you remember any experiences there or what it was like and also how did this come about?

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- While we were in jail the second time I was in jail in Atlanta, Dr. King's brother A.D. came out to the jail to see us and Dr. King Sr. came out to see us. The word had come to Dr. King Sr. that I had taken sick there and I had come down with a very serious case of the flu. Dr. King Sr. just came out and without even asking, I think at the recommendation of the jailers said just paid the bail and took me out. I went to A D's house and for 2 or 3 days I was really delirious and really didn't know what was going on. So I stayed there at A.D.'s house at his request. And then at the request of A.D.'s father, especially when A.D. was going to move to Birmingham and I was going to move back to campus at Moorehouse and Dr. King Sr. asked me rather than do that because of A.D.'s daughter's, his older daughter had lived with Dr. King and his wife after Dr. King Sr.'s daughter got married and it was likely situation again when there wouldn't be any young people in the King Sr.'s house and they asked me if I would come and live with them and I did. I think one of the greatest impressions that man ever made on me, and we all called him dad, was that he was truly the head of the family. He never let you forget that either. Any basic moves that were made by any of the children, a lot of times by his brothers or his sisters, anybody really in the family they came to talk to their old man first before they made any moves. He was the head of the family. Any babies that were born into the family he blessed them he did the consecration. He did most of the marriages and on occasions he would do funerals of family members. He was really the head of the family. To me this was something that I had seen in my family for instance with my grandfather. But my grandfather was kind of really the head of the household and he never let you forget that. But with dad, King, you never forget that he was not only the head of the household, but he was the head of the family, and before you made a move everybody say you better talk to dad about that. The other thing about their old man that I think was a strange kind of thing that their old man had a kind of uncompromising attitude on civil rights especially. He was what a lot of people would call the martyr. And when I say uncompromising, not in the sense that he was not willing to make some compromise in order to solve a problem, but he was the kind of man that would let you know where he stood. I don't care

who you are or where you are. I remember on one occasion so vividly now, he even put Auburn Allen in his place. It was (muffled) I guess Auburn had enough money to buy and sell old man King at least one time but not twice but old man was not in a bad shape himself.

David Yellin- Is that the present major?

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- Yes. He has put Auburn Allen in his place several times in terms of how you deal with the negro community. You see he told him I =have lived with negros all my life, you can't tell me how to deal with negros since you have never been with them. The other thing is that old man King Sr. is the head of Ebernezer church and he will never let you forget that either. He inherited that church from his father in law and he will never let you forget it and that is why Dr. King Jr. was there to continue the King dynasty in the church. That is why A.D. King is giving up the pastorate of a church in Louisville, when he is making twice what he would be making at another church.

Joan Beifuss- Oh he is going back to Ebernezer?

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- Yeah. He is going back to Ebernezer as co-pastor with his father.

Bill Thomas- What does A.D. stand for, what is the name?

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- Alford Daniel Woodman, His name is Alfred Daniel Woodman King. His grandfather or Mrs. King's father was Alfred Daniel Williams, who was the second pastor of Ebernezer church and the man who did more for the church I guess. During the depression days he built the present church structure on his own land with his own money. He and several other men in the church actually laid all the bricks for the church.

Bill Thomas- Oh is that right?

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- That is an old, in Atlanta that is an old church with a long history. In 1962 I believe it was, the church celebrated its 75<sup>th</sup> church anniversary, which is not as old as some churches but then 75 or 80 years of one sanctuary and one congregation in a negro community is a long time without any major difficulties especially in churches. They renovated the church back I 58', 60' somewhere along that line. They renovated the whole church put in a new organ built an educational building. I think they borrowed 65 or 70 thousand dollars to do it. And in 63' they paid it off.

Bill Thomas- How long were you actually living in the household.

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- Well let's see I went to A.D.'s house in 61' early part of 61'. So within the King family I was there for 3 years.

Bill Thomas- Was Dr. King's various projects and movements quite the topic of conversation.

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- Dr. King was always a topic of conversation in the King household. Somehow or the other all conversations always eluded eventually wound up talking about Dr. King. The family was very proud of Dr. King Jr. And especially Dr. King Sr., very proud of Dr. King and very concerned about him. I had known Dr. King Jr. many nights he would repeatedly come to Dr. King Sr.'s house and Dr. King Sr. would always go to his house. We sat up many nights long hours, talking about the movement and where do you go next and what tactics do you go next. Dr. King Sr. was not always actively involved because of his age, at least as active as he would like to be. Dr. King Sr. was considered the council of SCLC. He was the daddy to all of the staffers and all of the board members of SCLC. All of the board members learned to call him daddy.

Bill Thomas- Was he consulted (Tape Break)...

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- SCLC was started in Ebernezer Church by a group of Atlanta ministers who were concerned about continuing the struggle that Dr. King was involved in at Montgomery at that time. Dr. King was elected president, reverend Sam Williams how was Dr. King's philosophy and ethics instructor at Moorehouse was elected first vice president and still holds that office. Dr., King Sr. was one of the first members of the board refusing to take an office. Which as certainly as the daddy of the board and the council so that Ebernezer church and Dr, King Sr. have had a long history of being involved in civil rights and what is going on. For instance, Dr. King Sr. a week after the death of Dr. King Jr., after the burial of Dr. King Jr., was in Detroit delivering the sermon for reverend Hoops' this church in Detroit. It was so strange that they had police escorts and all of this, and that Sunday morning a lot of Reverend Hoops' members could not even get into the sanctuary. Because of the number of people were there, people were standing all out doors and they had loud speakers hooked up outdoors to her the old man. He is a forcible speaker.

Joan Beifuss- Back in the beginning in the early 60's in the King household did people involved in SCLC have any idea of the scope, how large this whole movement was going to become?

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- I don't think they had this kind of idea that it could become as large as it had but I think they realized that was a good thing. Now let me back up and say that during the days of the sit-ins, Dr. King never really got deeply involved until he was asked to. Because Dr. King was not sure and he was going around speaking and this kind of thing still. Well I don't think Dr. King was sure what kind of attitude the young people who were involved then were going to assume in terms of their tactics. It was only until he was called upon by a lot of the young people to give them advice on nonviolence that he really becomes as actively involved as he wanted to be. For instance in Atlanta his home town, Dr. King never really, Dr. King advised Lonnie King for instance who was the leader of our movement and who was a member of Ebernezer church. But Dr. King never came in and said now this is the way you ought to do it. He never really got involved until

we called him and asked him if he would go to jail with us and take part in the demonstrations. And he considered.

Joan Beifuss- Would he have been partially waiting to see if it was going to be nonviolent or not?

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- To a great degree that he was getting a lot of nonviolent advice, but Dr. King always had that pressure. For instance, Dr King did not come into Memphis until he was asked. Dr. King has never gone into any city to work until the leadership of the negro community first invited him to come into that situation.

David Yellin- Maybe you can explain this, there was quite a lot of criticism involved (muffled) After James Meredith was shot and then Dr. King came in and continued the march.

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- One of the things you have got to understand is that before Dr. King ever continued the march Dr. King and our staff went to Bow Hospital and sat around the bed of James Meredith and asked Meredith do you want us to continue this march or until you are able to come out and take it over yourself? If you say no then we won't because this was your march, none of us would get with you in the beginning of it and the only reason we are going to help you do it now is to show to the community that one man cannot be shutdown while exercising his civil rights without others coming back to take it up. Meredith said go ahead with the march and they did. That is why the march was always labeled the Meredith Mississippi march, A lot of publicity came on it because Dr. King was on it, wherever Dr. King was publicity was there. I think that this kind of, well you have to get to know Meredith in order to understand that Meredith was a young fellow that was not always too easy to get along with sometimes and that is why I am saying that Dr. King did not really try to take over the Meredith March, but it was just a thing that Dr. King was getting the publicity of because of his name already. Meredith did not want this because he wanted the publicity himself.

Joan Beifuss- Meredith did not want Dr. King to march with him in the first place.

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- Well Meredith wanted participation, but I don't think he wanted Dr. King to march with him, because you see as I said the national press would naturally give most of the publicity on the march to Dr. King and not to Meredith. Anywhere that Martin King was anybody else would have been overshadowed. He would have overshadowed anybody and this was one of the reasons it went well. Most of us knew or course we were in Washington at the president's confab on civil rights when Meredith announced he was coming back to Memphis to do the march. We had a little skepticism about Meredith, because we were asking the question was he really concerned about doing the job or was he concerned (muffled). But the minute the man was shot this eliminated all the other stuff because the man was doing the best he could, he was putting his life out there on the limb for what appeared to be right. Dr. William Holmes Borders in Atlanta, differed with Dr. King greatly. He had knew Dr. King from the time he was growing

up and they had great differences of opinion, and Dr. Border never really came out to support Dr. King even though their church's were only a block apart. But when Dr. King was killed, Dr. Borders came forth and said no matter what other differences of opinion we had, the man did the best he could and all he could, putting his life out there on the limb, And that you respect and you recognize him and you no longer criticize him. So that I think this was Dr. King's attitude toward Meredith. Not a bunch of us liked the way he was talking about running against Adam Powell. But the point is, the man was doing what he believed to be right, and you can't fight everything.

Bill Thomas- Along the same lines and really what we are looking for is (muffled). I think maybe it had gotten backed into here, Dr. King was invited and then a mini riot broke out and the Washington march was coming up and so the national press was focusing on the question of (muffled) and could he lead a nonviolent one in Washington. But the intermix there, there somewhere, this thing was a question as to whether them at some point or some where...the Memphis thing was being used as a drum to work up the Washington march...how about this?

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- Let me say this, first of all it was never Dr. King's intention to get involved in the Memphis thing at all. We called Dr. King reverend Lawson, Kyles and I. And Joe Tricks called Dr. King several time sin terms of coming to Memphis in the early days, even before we invited Roy Wilkins and Bob Ruston to come to Memphis. Dr. King said that this schedule was so tight and that he was so jammed full that he just couldn't get here, trying to get things ready for the poor peoples campaign and all of this. For instance the night that Dr. King was supposed to have been, the night Dr. King was here the first night, that night Dr. King was supposed to be in Clarksdale Mississippi, to start the Mississippi tour. He canceled during the Clarksdale that night and changed his tour to go into Clarksdale the next morning, so that he could come here. The day that Dr. King came back to lead the first march and the march turned into violence, Dr. King was supposed to have been at Columbia University. Was supposed to have been at Columbia university and he didn't get there because he was here. Dr. King was very disturbed about the Memphis situation,. But Dr. King only came because we were involved with SCLC kept pressuring him to come. I remember as far back as 1961. I had talked with Dr. King about getting here with the SCLC affiliates here, not doing an affiliate but with the board members here and with the staff and let's start working on some of the problems here. Dr. King always had a kind of phobia I guess about working in Memphis. There was always the feeling that there was something wrong in Memphis that he just couldn't explain. That is why Dr. King never worked here in Memphis, when Dr. King was speaking here in Memphis for conventions and this kind of thing and for the board meetings, he always flew in spoke and got out as quickly as he could. He never spent any time in Memphis never over a day or two days at the most.

Joan Beifuss- What kind of phobia, I mean why...

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- I think that Dr. King felt that there was something about Memphis that he could not understand, well you have to first of all believe, as I believe I think, as he believed that when you live close enough to god that god reveals certain things to you. Old preachers for instance old Baptist preachers used to talk about whenever they would go to a church for the first time not as a pastor. If it were intended that they were to pastor that church that there was a feeling that they could have about that congregation and they would always say, I have drink of this water before. But there was a kind of vision within it. I think that Memphis held for Dr. King a kind of strange feeling that there was something in Memphis that was not right for him, I think he knew this. For instance, let me just get ahead of myself and say that Dr. King knew I believe 48 hours before his death. All of us suspected that Dr. King was going to be killed but we suspected it would be in Washington on the poor peoples campaign. I think that about 48 hours before his death he realized that it was not going to be Washington but Memphis.

Joan Beifuss- What makes you think he realized that?

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- Well when Dr. King came back to Memphis on Wednesday he was first met at the airport and served a copy of the injunction. It was later reserved on him at the Lorraine motel.

Bill Thomas- but he did get a copy of it?

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- He did get a copy of it, he was the only one with a copy, they sent all of the rest of the copies at the Lorraine. As they were reading the injunction to Dr. King, Dr. King was looking off into space.

Joan Beifuss- This is at the airport?

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- Yes, and just nodded and say um hmm oh yes. Which was not like Dr. King, even though he knew he has always violate an injunction, Dr. King took an injunction seriously. He listened to the reading and the wording and then always turned them back over to Chauncey Eskridge, one of our lawyers. But Dr. King had that kind of non-chalantness that kind of I don't carish attitude that day. Even in Atlanta when the staff was voting to come back to Atlanta, Dr. King was not even in the staff meeting which was something also. Dr. King had gone to reverend Abernathy that Friday night after the mini riot here. He had agonized with reverend Abernathy until about 7 o'clock the next morning. He told him that he had to do some thinking by himself and got in his car to drive off, which was also unusual about Dr. King because after the Decatur Georgia incident and all Dr. King never drove himself around. Young man out of our church always did the driving. Dr. King was according to reverend Abernathy just drove off, and during the staff meeting no one knew where Dr. King was and reverend Abernathy got a call from Dr. King saying that he as going somewhere where nobody knew him. Well that would be impossible for Dr. King. Just give him a motel room or something, and he said no, I already have one of our members who has a farm and I am going out on the from and just get away with it and try to get with god and communicate and find

an answer to this problem. He was really perplexed over the Memphis situation and over the Washington situation and the developments around the country period. Reverend Abernathy said that he really sounded agonized and the more he talked to Dr. King the more he began to realize that Dr. King did not really have a member right off hand that had a farm that he could go to. Dr. King was just wandering not really knowing where he was going just trying to agonize. Well then Dr. King came back to Memphis and I remember Dr. King very seldom sent anybody to talk in a mass meeting that he was scheduled to talk unless he just couldn't get there, or he was sick or something. Dr. King said he was so tired that he sent reverend Abernathy over to the mass meeting in Atlanta.

Bill Thomas- This was on Wednesday?

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- Yeah we didn't have but about 3,000 people there.

Bill Thomas- This was the night of (muffled)

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- Remember I had to call Dr. King and he and I went to the telephone together to call Dr. King and he said there are people here but you ought to come over and talk to them, this isn't my crowd, this is your crowd, I can look at them and tell. So they didn't come the night of Abernathy they came the night in the storm with King.

Bill Thomas- I hate to interrupt you, but I will forget, you went to the meeting early?

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- I was there when reverend Abernathy got there.

Bill Thomas- And he came by himself did he?

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- Yea he came by himself.

Bill Thomas- Did he start to speak or...

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- NO he never even started to speak, he just looked out at the crowd. When you have been involved in dealing with mass crowds a long time you can kind of look at crowds and tell their attitude and their tone. Something about their facial expressions. And they are constantly looking and they applauded when reverend Abernathy came in but they didn't applaud vigorously because they didn't see Martin King behind him. Usually they would start applauding very loudly when they say reverend Abernathy because they knew somewhere generally there was Martin King coming behind him.

Bill Thomas- Then they would roar.

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- This particular night they kind of held their applause in reserve constantly looking for Dr. King. So reverend Abernathy called him and said this is your crowd not mine, you ought to come speak. Dr. King came over a little later in that storm and he looked harrowed and tired and rushed. He didn't look like his exuberant self. And the crowd really thundered and roared when he came in.

When reverend Abernathy introduced Dr. King he said, sometimes we get in to big a hurry to introduce a man like Dr. King. So tonight I just want to take my time and introduce Martin Luther King. He took 28 minutes to introduce Dr. King.

Bill Thomas- I heard it was awfully long.

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- It was long, He started from the time Dr., King was born and just led them all the way through and talked about all his degrees and all of that. As reverend Abernathy was sitting down and Dr. King was getting up, Dr. King we chuckled and joked and said throughout you act like you were delivering his eulogy. Dr. King smiled and we all laughed and joked about it. Reverend Abernathy sat down and we joked some more with him about it.

Bill Thomas- Do you remember anything else that was said along the joking line?

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- I just think somebody said to him, you act like you were delivering his eulogy doctor and he just laughed and he said we get into big a hurry (muffled). You know just like this. And I said, well you were really presenting him tonight.

Joan Beifuss- Were you sitting up on the stage?

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- Yeah. Generally I was usually responsible for the seating arrangement on the pulpit, of the speakers and this kind of thing. I kind of served as a liaison between COME and SCLC, being a regional officer for SCLC. Dr. King spoke and several of us who knew Dr, King sat there and commented (muffled). Because we sat there and listened to Dr. King talk about his being staff, what did he start off talking about is the nobel peace prize, he dwelt on it, which is something he had never done before. He talked about previous movements and all of this. Then he started talking about when he got stabbed. If you knew Dr. King, Dr. King never talked about his being stabbed. This was a subject he never dwelled on. Maybe more than to just mention it in passing but he quickly got off of it. But that Wednesday night Dr. King dwelled on being stabbed and he dwelled on if I had sneezed I would have missed the 1960's if I would have sneezed I would have missed Albany Georgia and all of its melodious singing, if I had sneezed I would have missed the freedom rally, if I had sneezed I would have missed Selma, Birmingham and all this. All of us just sat there and kept wondering because he wasn't his exuberance he had a more penitential attitude. It was kind of strange. I looked out and I saw Charles Turner and some other man that I knew, Charles Turner is a traveler of our (muffled) standing their crying, and people in the audience just sitting their crying as Dr. King spoke. Dr. King was really, I don't know I had just never heard him like that before.

Bill Thomas- How would you describe that speech.

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- Best speech he ever made. That was the historical speech, the I have a Dream and many of his other speeches were second rate compared to that night, he was at his best. He really never dealt with a lot of his old clichés he was just down to earth and just an old Baptist preacher with eloquence



and proper at that point. Over toward the end, where can the man go to next, climax was there. As preachers you watch each other and you watch how you build towards a climax. And he was really building toward a climax and when he got to it where he could have climaxed he didn't. He started dealing with some other issues and we said where, how is the man going to climax. He had used about three of his climaxes that we knew of already and we could not figure out where he was going to climax. And over toward the end when Dr. King got ready to climax he just raised his hand and at that point he would smile and wave to the audience and he would say My eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the glory of the lord. He is chiming out the vengeance for the grapes of wrath and he would go on and finish the whole thing and then he would stop and wave. He would finish it out and he would stop and wave at his congregation and smile and then sit down. But that night he just lift<sup>4</sup>ed his hands and said my eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the lord and just turned abruptly and he turned around and you could see tears in his eyes.

Bill Thomas- Oh my goodness.

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- He didn't finish it and he didn't stand wave he just abruptly turned and walked right out. A lot of people in the audience got disturbed because some people thought they saw the crowd getting around (muffled). I remember Dr. King just sit there and you could see some tears welling up in his eyes. And usually he would want a glass of water after that last thing he would want his water. I was getting ready to go get and he say no. He just sat there. Usually Dr. King would like to get away from the meeting right after he speaks so he wouldn't be swarmed by the crowd. But that night he didn't leave the meeting he stayed there, meet people and shaked their hands. He came by the church, by the minimum salary building and he was very troubled like. So that I think Dr. King had the foresight. That Thursday we sat in staff meeting.

Bill Thomas- Oh were you at the staff meeting?

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- Yeah Dr. King preached to the staff.

Bill Thomas- What time was this?

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- I guess the staff meeting started about 1 o'clock.

Joan Beifuss- Can we cut back just a second. The night before were you conscious of the storm outside?

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- Oh yeah you could hear it. You could just hear the storm just roaring, there are two large window fans like in Mason Temple you could hear them just rumbling and you could hear the thunder still, you could hear it. You knew it was going and Dr King spoke. Reverend Abernathy said after the message said you all were joking with me about taking 28 minutes to present Martin but what you going to say about him? It was alright for me to take 28 minutes to present Martin in all that storm if he was going to take an hour and 40 minutes to speak.

Bill Thomas- Did he speak for that long?

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- Yes. But nobody could really tell it because Dr. King had this kind of a spellbinding...

Bill Thomas- Yeah another point there do you remember before Dr. King spoke, how was he?

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- Very quiet, didn't do much talking.

Bill Thomas- Did he seem nervous?

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- Not really nervous he just seemed tired and wore. He seemed to me if you looked at his facial expression, as though he had a lot of worry on his face, my mother said, after that speech he made I called her later that night. My mother said she had seen part of it on TV. She said, Dr. King looked mighty strange, there was something about his eyes, that just didn't seem right. I said, he was just tired. He said, there was just something about that (muffled). Well a lot of people said this, that if you looked at him he had a far away look on his face. And he was no more really concerned about what was going on. When he got to the mountaintop the people just really cried and started with I have been on the mountaintop and I looked over to the promised land and I might not get there with you. This is something Dr. King never talked about before, he always talked about walk together children because you get weary, we on our way together that kind of thing. But that night he said I have looked over into the promise land and I have seen you there and I might not get there with you.

Bill Thomas- Like he was trying to set himself aside.

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- Yes he was really taking himself out of the picture, and I think he saw negros like to believe that Moses knew before he went up on the mountain and god made him look over the promised land supposedly that he was not going to get to the promised land but (muffled). He said this is why he trained Joshua so he could take over the battles. But let me finish this other point. In the staff meeting, Dr. King never preached to the staff unless we were on a retreat.

Bill Thomas- Unless what?

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- We, the staff was in a retreat. This particular day he had a great deal of panic and he preached to the staff. (Muffled). He talked about love and nonviolence. A couple of fellows Charles Cabbage and one or two others that we were thinking about putting on the staff. To take them out of this situation and give them some experience in organizing and try to take them out of this whole thing they were thinking in terms of violence. The exposure to Dr. King and our staff would give them the idea of really being nonviolent.

Joan Beifuss- Were they there Cabbage (muffled)...

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- No they were never there, Dr. King had been having long sessions with them.

Bill Thomas- You did come down to the hotel?

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- During one time Cabbage had been staying at the motel. Dr. King had been staying there in order to have him coast by so that they could talk and keep conversations going. But Dr. King will say he could not envision putting any man on SCLC staff that had violent attitudes and thoughts. He was talking about being violent. So Mr. Williams started talking about violence, tactorial violence. Dr. King said he cannot appreciate any man who had not at least learned to accept violence as a tactic and not as a way of life. Not as a philosophy. He went on, on this point. Dr. King actually got up in that room and walked around in the room and preached to the staff. This was something highly irregular for him. Dr., King just always sat down and talked with us and reasoned with us. But this particular day he preached to us.

Bill Thomas- Hoe many members of the staff were there?

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- Just about all of them.

Bill Thomas- Who would that be?

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- Her had brought in...

Bill Thomas- Andy Young.

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- Andy was here anyway because Andy traveled with Dr. King.

Bill Thomas- James Bevel.

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- Bevel was here because Bevel was working in the Memphis projects. Most of the field staff was here working the Memphis project, most of them. But he had brought in all the Mississippi and Alabama field staff who were organizing for the poor people's campaign. He had called in from Atlanta, T.Y. Rogers and Bill Rutherford who is the executive director.

Bill Thomas- Now who is T.Y.?

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- T.Y. Roger sis out of Tuscaloosa, he is the director of affiliates for SCLC. (Brenauw Lafein?) was the program director that was here. Dot was here, Doc Copleman. Doc Copleman is the director of adult and citizenship education for SCLC.

Bill Thomas- Doctor Copleman. It seemed like he had pulled in most of the staff.

Joan Beifuss- Was this unusual for something like the Memphis march.

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- Yes, yes. Just for the Memphis march unless Dr. King was planning on making it a prolonged campaign. And with the poor people's campaign working at the same time you see Dr. King would not have pulled in all of the staff for a field conference, not in Memphis.

Joan Beifuss- Would he have also been planning, you know the poor people's campaign same time as he was in Memphis.

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- Well let me say this the person that Dr. King spoke here, we, JI Lawson and Bill Smith, reverend Bill Smith, reverend N. Charles Thomas and Andy Young were sitting on the periphery of the pipe bomb behind Dr. King. While he ended up speaking. So we wrote a note to Dr. King to call the march for the next morning. Said that he could have got 50,000 people to march the next morning and this would have provided an impetus towards the poor people's campaign. Jim Lawson signed it, I signed it, Andy Young signed it, and we handed it to Ralph Abernathy and he read it and looked at it and so Ralph signed it. Now usually this was the kiss of luck if Ralph signed it because Martin usually listened to Ralph a great deal. We handed it to Dr. King and Dr. King ignored it and sat down. Well we rushed over there to talk to him and reverend Abernathy got up. Ralph said Dr. King you know I think what we ought to do is we ought to lead a march here in the morning before we go on to Clarkesdale of about 50,000 folk marching downtown. The folks just jumped up shouting and Dr. King got up, I think if he had done that there would not have been any violence in the beginning because the forces of violence would not have prepared themselves. Dr. King got up and said no, we don't really have time to really plan for it. Tell you what next Thursday, a week from this coming Thursday I will come back and lead a march. So that was how we happened to lead the (Muffled)

Bill Thomas- Then he got back up after (muffled) He got back up and announced the Thursday march.

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- So we kind of put Dr. King in the position of kind of having to come back and lead this march. But Dr. King sat there and spoke. Dr. King and reverend Abernathy were both great lovers of catfish. They had called down to the Lorraine and ordered some catfish. They usually knew to just bring up two plates, but that particular day they only brought up one plate. And when they found out the manager was so upset that he ordered the girl to go back get another plate and Dr. King said no, that is alright. Ralph and I can eat out of the same plate. Come on Ralph let's eat together. And they sat there eating fish together eating fish together out of the same plate.

Bill Thomas- Was this during the (muffled) meetings?

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- Yeah. Well Reverend Kyle had fixed dinner for Dr. King and for the staff and all of us were going to reverend Kyle's house for dinner. And Dr. King got up and was speaking and Jose had asked about this tactical violence and this violence philosophy that he had dealt with. Dr. King summed up his message by

saying well maybe I have been too rough on our staff. Maybe I have expected too much of you all. Except for see maybe I have got something that you all haven't got. He said, maybe I have overcome the fear of death. That's all he said, let's go eat in here. All the staff got up and was leaving out to go get ready to go to dinner. And Dr. King got dressed and came out and was joking with Jesse Jackson.

Bill Thomas- Before you get away from the staff meeting. What was the reaction of the staff to..

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- Well the staff was kind of be thrown but we could appreciate...we all sat always for Dr. King to give words, but to us Dr. King's words were like genius. We waited for these words. And a lot of us, were getting, all of us were at some point or another would get into our own little battles which we were working and use words that Dr. King had used in his staff meetings just to us. So we, the staff always, going into a staff meeting you had a lot of joking and jiving and playing among staff members but whenever Doc got up to speak it got quiet for the leader was speaking.

Bill Thomas- Is that what they called him?

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- Doc was the leader. He was either Doc or the Leader to us. When we would get an....Hey Doc what about something, or hey Leader..

Bill Thomas- Was most of what Dr. King said at that staff meeting did it concern, the question of nonviolence and whether anybody would not accept nonviolence at least...or was there some talk about the marches coming up?

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- No the talk was basically about nonviolence, remaining nonviolent, sticking together nonviolent.

Bill Thomas- I wonder why? Was there a drift towards?

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- No I think, well Dr. King knew that around the country there was the tendency more and more toward becoming violent throughout the country and Dr. King was saying the staff in essence had the opportunity to keep the movement nonviolent by our actions. But as I said more than anything else Dr. King knew of his death. I think he had foreseen it. I think he was attempting to leave with the staff, words and ideas and thoughts that would keep the staff working along the philosophy that he had taught over the last 10 years. I really believe this. Just as Jesus gave the great message in the upper room with his disciples and broke bread with them, I think that is what Dr. King was doing giving to his disciples. His last message. On the total mission that they had before them and he was preparing to break bread we were going to Reverend Kyle's house to break bread. Was it a long standing...

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- Well it last from about 1 until about 5.

Bill Thomas- Oh it was.

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- It was about 4 hours with Dr. King doing most of the talking. Dr. King's brother A.D. had come up from Florida where he had been down at Florida speaking and nobody had expected him to come up that night. Well he had come up unexpectedly that Wednesday night. And they had sat together and called Dr. King Sr. and spoke with their mother.

Bill Thomas- The night before..

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- The same day, that day. And Dr. King told dad well let me speak to mom again I just want to hear her voice.

Joan Beifuss- Did Coretta King (muffled)

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- I don't think so. We sat there and joked, oh I guess that was the best episode that we ever had together. Because part of the time Dr. King was in the most jovial mood I have ever seen him in.

Joan Beifuss- This was at the staff meeting?

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- Just before staff came.

Joan Beifuss- I was going to say, can you say anything about Dr. King's sense of humor at all because people just normally seen him on television leading marches and what not, and not laughing or being jolly.

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- I tell you he is a very jovial person, at times. Dr. King was first of all very serious about the movement. (muffled) But Dr. King could find a lot of witty things to joke about. He could joke about other preachers very easily. We could sit sometimes and listen to other preachers and Dr. King would say watch him shift into gear. He is about to shift into second now and that is when he will get his little tune. He said, now watch him come on home. That was when he was getting ready to squall. We could joke about these kinds of things. On the day of the assassination Dr. King joked quite humorously about his father because Dr. King was saying, we were sitting there and he was saying you know we were talking about a 2 dollar minimum wage law in this country. I had to realize that is I was going to preach about a \$2 minimum wage then I was going to have to be the first to start practicing it. So the other day I gave my maid at the house a raise up to \$2 an hour. Somebody said, well you don't have to worry about it because Harry Belafonte is going to pay her anyway. He was just joking. Most people don't know it but Dr. King would never have been able to pay most of his bills and keep his head above the water had it not been for Harry Bellafonte. Dr. King had no kind of scholarship fund for his children no kind of savings prepared for his children. But Bellafonte had established a trust fund from his concerts for Dr. King's children. Bellafonte was our chief fundraiser so that we could easily joke about this. SO they said what about dad. He said well dad just gave his maid a raise too, now she makes \$25 a week. You know people going to talk about how cheap dad was. I remember when we took dad out to the restaurant to eat up in New York he said dad just sat there and I said dad let me get the tab, and dad said well alright. See he was really waiting on me to

say let me get the tab anyway. I got the tab and dad said well let me pay the tip. I said the bill came to about 40 some odd dollars and dad called the man over and handed him about 50 cents. This was the kind of thing we were sitting there joking about, and he would talk to his dad or his mother and say let me talk to mamma again.

Bill Thomas- No when he said mamma he meant Coretta?

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- No he meant his mother, his mother. They talked to mom twice. Then they called back and talked to him again.

Joan Beifuss- This was Wednesday night?

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- This was Thursday, before the staff meeting. Dr. King was really in a jovial mood, we talked about a lot of comical things. We talked about humorous events that had happened during the civil rights movements in other cities.

Bill Thomas- Such as, do you remember any of these?

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- Oh we just talked about some people, local people who have been very humorous. Very serious people but were being very humorous people. They are outlandish in themselves. There was a very devout and dedicated man who had trouble registering to vote because he had been convicted once before of second degree manslaughter, he hit a fellow in a car. He had served an approved sentence and he had served his term and he was not able to get one of the state courts to grant him to restore his civil rights. He had run for mayor of the city of Selma without being a registered voter.

Bill Thomas- L.L. Anderson.

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- Yes. We were just talking about this kind of thing. Well, so we joked on until about staff meeting, and then we went to the staff meeting as I said before and Dr. King came out and he was joking just the exact same telling Jesse, Jesse had on a turtleneck shirt now, Jesse you ought to put on a tie to go over to Billy Kyle's house for dinner. Doc I am not going to throw on a tie, this is the way I am going to dinner and if I can't go to dinner with my turtleneck on then I am not going.

Bill Thomas- Now Jesse Jackson is with...

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- Director, he is the national director of operation breadbasket.

Joan Beifuss- I heard Jesse Jackson on radio last night on a nightline show.

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- Oh was that on last night?

Joan Beifuss- He said operation breadbasket is the economic arm of SCLC. Is that correct?

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- That is right.

Joan Beifuss- Then all the economic SCL programs come under the term breadbasket..

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- We were forming another department when I left the staff fulltime. When I left the field, and (muffled) affiliates division and the summer program like they do have. I was going to take the director's shift of the division we were hoping to call, the economic opportunities division. Take our affiliate divisions all over the country and make use of government funds through poverty programs and housing programs and this kind of thing. But the doctor advised that I needed to take a rest because I was run down and I was weighing about 112 pounds believe it or not.

Bill Thomas- For history how much do you weigh now?

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- 158. So that I had to take a break. I had to take the job of rebuilding Selma after the big march and that was a problem. After we didn't get the department off of the ground, Breadbasket then took over the real economic arm of SCLC. Fred Bennett out of Atlanta, the southern coordinator of Breadbasket, he was the first man to serve as the directive operation of Breadbasket but then when we went to the northern campaign and found Jesse Jackson in Chicago, Jesse was a much more eloquent young man and was really able to communicate better with people than Bennett. Really all over the country, Bennett was the kind of fellow he was an old army sergeant and Bennett was used to giving orders and not suggesting to people how they could proceed. Then the other thing, Jesse took Operation Breadbasket in Chicago working under Bennett. In a years time added about \$3 million to the black community, something Bennett hadn't been able to do in one big while. So naturally a board meeting time the board would vote to elevate Jesse, but still leave Bennett as the coordinator of southern breadbasket but also give Bennett a little more responsibility on account of personal assistance of Dr. King around the house. He handled a bit of Dr. King's household responsibilities.

Bill Thomas- Who did?

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- Bennet, Fred Bennett. So that Jesse was, well Ben Bratch who was the director of Operation Breadbasket band out of Chicago.

Bill Thomas- I keep going back, I am sorry but this is so important because unless somebody remembers exactly what happens on the sequence that maybe be lost. The staff meeting broke up and it was close to 5 you think.

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- Yeah it was close to 5. And we were getting ready to go to dinner.

Bill Thomas- Reverend Kyles for dinner. Now did Dr. King go back to his room?

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- We was, the meeting was in his room.



Bill Thomas- In his room, so he stayed...

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- And got dressed.

Bill Thomas- How was he dressed in the....

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- Just had on a shirt with the collar open and a pair of trousers.

Bill Thomas- Very casual.

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- We stood right on the outside walk while Dr. King was getting dressed.

Bill Thomas- And everybody was waiting for Dr. King?

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- Yeah, we were all waiting for Dr., King.

Bill Thomas- And Ralph Abernathy...

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- And Bernard Lee.

Bill Thomas- Bernard Lee.

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- See Bernard was, Bernard Lee's position on the staff and the board is the special assistant to the president. His basic responsibility (muffled). Or making travel arrangements, hotel arrangements, taking care of Dr. King's and reverend Abernathy's clothes, cleaned and taking care of their bags, bringing their speeches to the meetings, seeing that podium is set up, working in coordination with the local people to make sure everything is set up.

Joan Beifuss- Kind of secretary?

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- Kind of traveling secretary. That is what it is a kind of a traveling secretary.

Bill Thomas- Now he is from Atlanta?

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- Bernard is from Montgomery, Bernard came out of the Montgomery movement with Dr, King he was Dr. King's youth child over at Alabama State during the Montgomery bus (muffled), he had to pull out of Alabama State because of that. T.Y. Rogers was the regular affiliates was Dr. King's assistant pastor during the time of the Montgomery bus boycotts. There is within SCLC a great many people who have been involved with Dr. King for a long period of time. Bernard was in the room also him and King had drinks and where going to dinner.

Joan Beifuss- Now Abernathy and Dr. King shared this room?

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- And so did Bernard. It was a very large room and strange thing is that three of them have been known time and time again to share

the same room. This is nothing that is new. Dr. King there were two people that Dr. King always wanted around, if it was possible. And that was Ralph Abernathy and Bernard Lee. And then Andy was there and Andy had come to the point that (muffled). Jose and Andy I think were sharing the same room. As I back up Bernard may not have been staying there that night. Bernard might have been staying with Andy that night. You know I am just not exactly sure which was there. I know Andy's room was right next to Dr. King's room so it might have been Bernard was staying there. But 90% of his time would be spent anyway in Dr. King's room or wherever Dr. King was.

Bill Thomas- Andy Young was on one side who was on the other side?

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- On the other side, nobody. That room has been set up as a kind of bridal suite or something. There was a way that you could open the door to that room and another room on the other side of it you could open the door in between and it would provide a kind of bridal quite or some thing but I am not exactly sure how it was there.

Joan Beifuss- Nobody was there?

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- But nobody was staying there. After the staff meeting we walked around talking and Dr. King came out and hollered down and told Jesse to wake up A.D. because he was staying downstairs with his brother and tell him to get dressed to go to the dinner, he was downstairs.

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- No he was on the floor just below about two rooms down.

Bill Thomas- Did you see reverend Kyle?

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- Reverend Kyle was there. Up on the platform up on the balcony Dr. King was standing out over the balcony right at the edge. Let me just interject this that another odd thing was that Dr. King never smoked in public. He never carried cigarettes in his pocket even though he smoked. Because a lot of the people in the negro community are fundamentalists. Could not accept a man smoking and principle of Dr. King Bernard always carried his cigarettes and Dr. King never smoked in public. But that particular day I seen him leaning over the rail of the balcony smoking a cigarette as he talked. Reverend Kyles had turned and was walking down the balcony towards the steps to go down. Reverend Abernathy and Bernard and Andy were standing in the room right behind Dr. King. Reverend Abernathy was the closest person to Dr. King. When Dr, King was leaning over the balcony and Ben Branch was standing there and Jesse Jackson said look Doc here is Ben Branch.

Bill Thomas- And Ben Branch is who?

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- Ben Branch is the operation breadbasket band director from Chicago.(muffled) Yeah he had a band here in Memphis.

Bill Thomas- Do you remember the name of it?

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- Yeah it was Ben Branch's band and he had a group called the Largulls of which he sings.

(tape Break)

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- So that Ben was standing there and...

Bill Thomas- Where were the members of the band were they around?

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- No, just Ben. I don't know where the rest of the members of the band were, they might have been eating in their hotel room or somewhere practicing or something.

Bill Thomas- Were there lots of people in the courtyard?

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- Mostly staff persons and a few other persons. A few young people were there, who had gone over to the motel. And a few adults who were around because they knew Dr. King and the staff were around. You know people just naturally come around wherever Dr. King was.

Bill Thomas- It was very relaxed.

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- There were quite a few policemen that were standing on the peripheral, on the street outside.

Bill Thomas- There were no policemen in the courtyard though?

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- No none that I saw.

Bill Thomas- You couldn't see the policemen?

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- Oh you could see the policemen. Yeah.

Bill Thomas- Where were they? Were they, now there is a hill right across the street and of course the rooming houses on that.

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- No they were down on the street. They were down on the street.

Bill Thomas- And they were just hanging around?

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- Yeah.

Bill Thomas- Are there any cars?

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- Police cars yeah.

Bill Thomas- Are they...

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- On the street, on the street. Parked at the curb. Dr. King(muffled)...hey Breanne how you doing I want you to pray for us tonight real sweet now. I want you to pray precious lord take my hand and pray it real sweet now. She said, I will do that for you Doc. Just about that time when he went to raise up is when Jesse Jackson went to say hey Doc, and just as he raised up the bullet, you could hear the bullet enter the spine and Dr. King fell back.

Bill Thomas- How did it sound to you?

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- At first it sounded like an automobile backfired. And it seemed as though we were all standing there looking up at Dr. King, Bevel says that he and Orange, James Orange, one of our staff members were about to get under a car. And the first thing they did was to duck when they heard the sound. And Chauncey Eskridge who was a lawyer ran out to the sidewalk looking in either direction to see from which way the bullet had come because he was trained in law you know. But the police all ran to us asking us from which way did it come from.

Bill Thomas- And what did you do?

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- Well we naturally ran up the steps toward Dr. King because we had seen him, it looked really as the bullet, as if Dr. King had been lifted up off of his feet. Reverend Abernathy was there leaning over and somebody ran back in the room and got a towel and James Orange ran into one of the rooms and got a bedspread and somebody was in another room getting a blanket. Cover him up with a bedspread under his head. Reverend Abernathy was the first person to get to him and we were standing there looking at him and it looked as though Dr. King was trying to speak but he couldn't.

Joan Beifuss- Were you on the balcony?

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- Yeah by that time we were on the balcony because the steps were right there near us and reverend Kyles rushed back he never did get off of the stairs. It looked as though Dr. King tried to speak, and couldn't, and for a long moment he just laid there with his eyes looking up at reverend Abernathy, the eyes were just staring as if they were really communicating with each other through their eyes. Then it seemed to us as though Dr. King's eyes kind of rolled. It took the ambulance a long time to get there.

Bill Thomas- You know who called the ambulance?

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- The police had to call the ambulance because they couldn't get the switchboard fixed. It really looked like it took a long time because the fire station was right behind the motel. The back of the fire station and the front of the motel meet and it took them an awful long time to get there, an awful long time.

Joan Beifuss- What did you do and what were the people standing next to you...did you crowd around Dr. King?

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- No we tried to give him as much air as possible. But naturally all of the staff are going to be trying to see, their leader has been harmed. We kept hoping but it was many of our beliefs really that Dr. King was dead already. A.D. , when they took Dr. King to the hospital A.D. did not know what had happened because he was in the shower, getting rid of all his...

Bill Thomas- So he never came out.

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- He probably come out just about during the time that the ambulance was pulling off. He heard the siren so it encouraged him to dry off and get dressed and come out and see somebody was sick or something. I met him because Andy and Ralph (muffled) I rushed in and I talked with A.D. and I brought him up to date and...By that time I guess the news was hitting the radio and everything. Police had cordoned off the area but...A.D. called his mother and father to try and give them some assurance because he knew they were going to hear it. Jesse Jackson called Coretta. And Coretta, by that time the mayor of Atlanta had heard the news over the wire. And he rushed to Mrs. King's house by police escort and...

Joan Beifuss- Were you in the room when Jesse Jackson called Mrs. King?

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- No. But from my understanding he just told her that because none of us knew, as I said we believed that Dr. King when we looked at him and saw but we kept hoping of course. So all he told Mrs. King was Doctor was shot and was hurt. (Muffled). A.D. said before we got any word, he had not even seen Doc, he said he is dead already. I said no no don't say that. He said, He is.

Bill Thomas- I understand that B.B. King...

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- He was on vacation down in Florida and he had spoken that morning...

Bill Thomas- Was there anybody with him?

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- Yeah he had a state senator from Kentucky. He went not really on vacation but on a speaking assignment,. I guess he had taken a couple days off to relax if possible. A State Senator and then another representative the secretary of the Kentucky Christian leadership conference was also there.

Bill Thomas- You don't know who these people were?

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- Oh I don't know who these people were...

Joan Beifuss- State senator white?

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- Uhhh yeah.

Joan Beifuss- And he was staying at the Lorraine?

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- No it was waiter, two (muffled) She had gone down also to speak, it was really a kind of convention they were having down in Florida. A.D. was a speaker and the Kentucky state senator was a speaker, and gentlemen who was the secretary of the Kentucky Christian leadership conference had gone down just for the ride and the experience also. More and more now persons within our organization within our affiliates, especially within our northern affiliates try as much as possible to come south. To get the experience of what is really going on and to really be in touch with what is going on. So this was nothing unusual. It was unusual that A.D. should just happen to come back to Memphis, to see Dr. King rather than go on back to Kentucky to take care of some problems that were going on there. From there on out I guess it becomes kind of a confused about what happened because we stayed with A.D. most of the time. We got the word that Mrs. King was going to the airport to catch an plane with the mayor of Atlanta already distraught and disturbed...

Bill Thomas- Was there any discussion or anything as to who would go to the hospital.

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- No discussion there, that was automatically understood. It was automatically understood that 3 people would go. Reverend Abernathy, Bernard Lee and Andrew Young. That was understood. There was no question about that. In terms of the hierarchy of this you see there was no question about it.

Bill Thomas- And did they go in the ambulance with them?

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- Yeah, now reverend Hoops heard the word, he was at the courthouse and he got the word up at the courthouse and one of the Sheriff's patrol cars took him directly to the hospital and left his car at the county building. He was at the hospital also as the board member.

Joan Beifuss- how did you find out about King's death?

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- Well, after it took so long that we didn't hear about him we really knew. But then reverend Abernathy then came back, and told us that Dr. King had died. Well we first heard the word on television really. We learned over the years that you take so much that the radio and television and the newspaper said with a grain of salt and you wait to see. So we waited. But we kind of had that feeling all along, and then when they came back and told us of course...they came back saddened and we were already kind of saddened and then all of the young people and everything around the motel were saddened and their was much more confusion and the newsmen had gotten out just like that. All of this added to much more confusion. We also got the word that the man's wife that runs the motel had heard about King had gotten shot at the motel and she was an avid follower of Dr. King. She just had a stroke, a brain stroke right there on the spot. Well of course this added some more tension because the minute she had the brain stroke she went unconscious. All of these things working together.

Joan Beifuss- Were you and Dr. Abernathy (muffled)

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- No we were down in A.D.'s room. We closed Dr. King's and reverend Abernathy's room, we closed the door. The bloodspot, I didn't lock the door, I just closed it, then reverend Abernathy then went back, came back, the first place they came was A.D.'s room.

Bill Thomas- (Muffled) Did reverend Abernathy have a meeting or anything like that?

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- Well the first time, the first thing they did was pick a (muffled) They all went back to the back room all 5 of us, Abernathy, Bernard, Andy Young, A.D. and myself. I guess the only reason I was brought in was because I lived with the family. Some of the staff members had already left town. T.Y. Rogers, Bill Rutherford were already gone.

Joan Beifuss- Where did they go?

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- They were going back to Atlanta. They had already bundled out. They had not gotten away I think they were just at the airport when they got the word. They called back to Atlanta to break the word to his mom and dad.

Joan Beifuss- Who called?

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- I think A.D. called. Somewhere in between and I am really trying to organize...While they were taking care of the first (muffled)R.S. Lewis had met us and that was the man the film director who was already loaned his cars and this kind of thing to Dr, King for transportation.

Bill Thomas- Actually Solomon Jones was an employee of..

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- R.S. Lewis, right.

Bill Thomas- And when Dr., King was in town...

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- He always rode in one of the Cadillac's, white Cadillac with....

Bill Thomas- White Cadillac with a black vinyl top.

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- Always. I am trying really to get things organized in my mind because somewhere right after that we went to reverend (muffled) house. I am really now trying, you know because after you think about it so many things happened so fast that you really have to try and organize what really happened. But somewhere in there we went to reverend Kyle's house and forced themselves to eat. Joseia and Andy and some other people came over and they ate.

Bill Thomas- Was this the..

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- Dinner that had been planned.

Bill Thomas- The dinner that had been prepared.

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- They had rose stem chitlins and turnip greens and all that.

Bill Thomas- This was going to be a soul food...

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- Yeah well this is what they were calling it a soul food dinner. Because Dr. King was saying I can go to a restaurant anytime and get that restaurant food but I want some soul food. Mrs. Kyles and her mother and 2 or 3 other young ladies from their church had really prepared a soul food dinner.

Joan Beifuss- When you got to the Kyle's house it was still all laid out...

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- They had two tables set up for the staffers.

Bill Thomas- The tables were set and everything?

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- The tables were set and everything. And Mrs. Kyles was just you know kind of torn up, not just because she had fixed us dinner but because of Dr. King's death of course. I guess it was after reverend Abernathy and them came back because the specials, the news specials, the news stations started running the specials about Dr. King and Joe Bishop had come on and he had cancelled his whole show. A.D. watched it, watched it as they pieced it together. I remember reverend Abernathy, just before we left reverend Abernathy had called Joe Lowry who is chairman of the board and live in Birmingham. Somebody had asked him what do we do now.

Bill Thomas- Because this was on tape how does he spell his last name?

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- Lowray. Lowray is the chairman of the board, and Lowray and (muffled) didn't call me to ask me what to do now for your new president is right there with you. Trying to think, if I remember correctly this was when we left A.D. at the house and we went back to the hotel. Lowray told us of course you know the constitution provides that the vice president at large in the event of anything happening to the president automatically becomes the president and so that is your man and you follow his instructions, and I remember after that reverend Abernathy and some others of us went over to the funeral home, to see Dr. King's body. This was early in the morning something like 6:00, or 5:00.

Bill Thomas- If I can backtrack just a...

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- I am assaying that all of this is so scattered, at this point, it's kind of difficult as I think about it now, I really never had to really organize in my mind what happened in any sequence. It is difficult now because so many things happened so fast to really put the pieces together in any kind of real order.

Bill Thomas- When Mrs. King was called and the mayor, of course she didn't know that Dr. King was dead at that time, mayor in Atlanta drove her to the airport, was



there an understanding here that she would be coming in and did somebody got to the airport?

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- Yeah. We understood she was coming in that night and I don't think that anybody went to the airport actually. What we had done is we had called several funeral homes to prepare for calls for the next morning. To take the body top Atlanta.

Bill Thomas- By car?

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- No to take the body to the airport from the..

Bill Thomas- I see.

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- We had also called one of the funeral homes to get a car to meet them at the airport, so we were making preparations for her coming in. Then we got the word that she would not be in of course she had already gotten the word at the airport one of the reporters had walked up to her, had walked up to the mayor and had asked the mayor if he had a comment on the death of Dr. King and the mayor said, I didn't even know that Dr. King was dead. (muffled)

Joan Beifuss- Was Mrs. King standing there?

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- Yes and she heard this of course and this just really...son the mayor took her back home because she was already too torn up to really try and travel. So then we got the word that they would not be here but she would be here the next morning to provide, to take the body back to Atlanta. Then the confusion really started because the word had come down that Bobby Kennedy had called Mrs. King to say he would send her a chartered plane out of Atlanta to bring Dr. King's body back to Atlanta.

Joan Beifuss- Who is your contact person in Atlanta through all this, I assume you are not talking directly to Mrs. King.

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- Well no but to a great deal we are, to a great deal we are talking directly to Mrs. King and we are talking to Dr. King's personal secretary Dora McDonald.

Bill Thomas- In Atlanta?

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- In Atlanta at the house. You know I talked with several other persons within the Atlanta office. Then we start getting calls from Chicago from C.T. Vivian and other peoples that are coming in to Memphis to you know. Well after we got the word that Bobby Kennedy was going to charter a plane, then we get the word also that air Force One is supposed to be taking off from Washington to come to Memphis to carry the body back. None of us had any confirmation of this, but we said if it was, this was too big of a political thing to play with Dr. King. So that what we would do if it became too much of a problem we would just charter a plane ourselves.

Bill Thomas- Was this thought about in connection with Bobby Kennedy's offer.

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- But you see we would have accepted Bobby's offer which eventually happened as I understand. But you wouldn't have wanted to accept Bobby's offer if the president was sending air force one. You have got to be careful with what kind of politics you get involved in especially with a man like Dr. King who never really himself endorsed any of the political candidates. Who tried to remain aloof from endorsing political candidates. That you had to kind of watch this kind of thing.

Joan Beifuss- Throughout this whole night are individual staff members breaking down or were you all so stunned that you could go through the whole night without even realizing....

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- I think at the first news of Dr. King's death all of us kind of cried. But I think we tried to get away in ones and twos with people we were closest to, to do our crying and not do it publicly or not do it before A.D. or before reverend Abernathy, since we had to try and maintain a certain amount of balance for them.

Joan Beifuss- Was Dr. Abernathy ever....

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- Abernathy cried a little but he was very beautiful, he maintained a type of control that I had never see. You could see his eyes getting a little red you know But you never really saw him crying, not like Andy. Andy just broke down. Bryant maintained himself in public. The first time I really saw reverend Abernathy cry was when he committed the body at the funeral. (muffled) The first time I really saw him shed a tear. As he prepared to leave the tomb. But I think the staff did something that was beautiful. Somebody made the comment that we have the greatest staff since Jesus put the disciples together, Josea I believe made that statement and somebody in that room who was not part of the staff made the statement no we have the greatest staff that was ever put together even before Jesus put the disciples together, because when Jesus put the disciples together they broke up in fright and ran. But the staff stays together to plan what the next moves should be. And then we started working on preparing reverend Abernathy's statement to give at the press conference the next morning. So many things that had to be done.

Bill Thomas- Was there some sort, of course (muffled) would be a natural one to call and sort of thing.

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- Repeat what did you say?

Bill Thomas- Lewis. I don't know exactly the background there, was there any connection....

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- Well Dr. King met R.S. Lewis out at the airport one day, I think Lewis was going out of town, when Dr. King first came into town for the first march. We were going to use another car or something some local people had taken

their car down. Somebody said to Lewis, you ought to loan Dr. King your car. Lewis told Solomon Jones take Dr. King back in my car and wherever else he wants to go as long as he is here this car is at his disposal.

Joan Beifuss- You mean this connection was first made just in March.

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- Yes so that Dr. King and R.S. Lewis Jr. developed this kind of relationship, that Lewis just automatically whenever King came into town it was understood that Dr. King would ride even in R.S. Lewis' car or he would ride in Mrs. Cornelia Crenshaw's car. Whop is a local lady.

Bill Thomas- Oh but he had ridden in Mrs. Crenshaw's car before?

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- Yeah but most of the time Dr. King rode in R.S. Lewis' car.

Bill Thomas- This meeting occurred sometime ago at some other time when Dr. King came in did it.

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- No just in March.

Bill Thomas- Oh just in March.

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- And they developed a beautiful kind of relationship. I called one or two other funeral homes to try and get some cars before but there cares were so busy that we couldn't get them right then, but Lewis always made a car available whenever we asked.

Joan Beifuss- So Solomon Jones also had not met Dr. King prior to this spring?

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- Not until after March.

Joan Beifuss- That Thursday night was there any talk amongst staff members about who had done the shooting?

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- No. We talked about a conspiracy. See we long believed the system would eliminate any person who challenges the system. We talked about the fact that (muffled) Birmingham and Selma, St. Augustine Florida...even Mississippi on the march didn't nobody shot him because Dr. King was not presenting a real challenge to the status quo, to the system. But the minute Dr. King start talking about organizing all the minority groups, Indians, Puerto Ricans, Mexican Americans, negros, and Appalachia whites, that this then presented a challenge tot eh system and to the status quo. And it meant that those who were in power would no long be in power because what you were going to do is have a nonviolent social revolution. We were about to have a real social revolution and they have to eliminate the man who is talking about putting it together. The system eliminated jesus, not because he was healing the sick, not because jesus was feeding the poor. But jesus started talking about poor folks getting together to overturn the

powers that are, and fix it so that the haves are no longer become just the haves, and the have nots—all of them become haves. And you eliminate the have nots.

Bill Thomas- This is a real challenge to the system.

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- That's right and when you come to the system at this point then the system gets rid of you. And this was one of the things we talked about, reverend Abernathy and the statement while we were preparing his press statement. That he wanted his statement to be kind of like the statement that Johnson made on the assassination of Kennedy, humble but firm. And somebody said to Ralph you don't have to be too humble Ralph because nobody believed that you had anything to do with the assassination of Martin King. But when Lyndon Johnson took office a lot of people had the sense of feeling that Lyndon Johnson had helped to assassinate him. All this kind of thing went on, but it was a point where more and more the staff realized that right then there needed to be togetherness. And nobody wanted to leave Ralph Abernathy, we looked out the door and there were the tanks rolling up the street and this kind of stuff by the motel and this just built a little bit more tension and the curfew had been slapped on. We were getting reports and rumors of riots in Washington and Kentucky and Chicago, all across the country. This kind of thing, how now do we speak to all of these problems when we have the most nonviolent leader in the history of the country has been shot down. How do you deal with this kind of thing?

Bill Thomas- Did you call your wife any time during this or what?

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- Yeah I called her and she didn't answer and I got worried. I called another friend of ours where I thought she might have been of she was there. She has said that the curfew was on. So I asked her (muffled) She said I am here now, just go on and let me stay here. If I remember correctly (muffled).

Bill Thomas- Was there any planning...(Tape Ends)