

SS039.mp3

Bill Thomas- This is tape 4 with, tape 5 with reverend Middlebrook and that is a record, how about that....Well one of the things I was about to ask. Seems to be running almost too good now.

Joan Dreifuss- Don't touch the mic.

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- Is it kicking now?

Bill Thomas- No.

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- That's what I was wondering about. Ask about some voice modulation.

Bill Thomas- Alrighty. So there was no planned service.

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- There was no planned service just that they had brought the casket. Brother Abernathy repeated a few words of scripture and we sang We Shall Overcome. Then the staff acted as pallbearers to carry the casket from the funeral chapel to the hearse. From there we proceeded on to the afterwards, police escorts and all this kind of stuff.

Bill Thomas- At the airport, understand that there were some national guardsmen there or something? And what were they doing?

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- Well supposedly to hold back the crowd. Now I understand it got kind of brutal with 1 or 2 people. I didn't really get a chance to see any of the national guard because when we pulled into the loading area of the airport where they of course would load the body onto the plane, most all of us got out because the plane was going to be late getting there. We went into a sort of conference room at the airport. Ramsey Clark was there, I think he was the attorney general. I know he was at this test (muffled). Two or three of his associates were there some FBI folk. And they were just there talking with people and they were supposed to be kind of conferring with local police officials and all on the assassination. We sat around up there for a few minutes. We were getting with certain persons who were going on the planes and we were figuring out we had John J. Hooker's private plane also. A.W. Willis had called him and gotten his private plane down because he knew that there wasn't going to be enough room on the other plane for everybody so that then we are, those of us who are going on by the Hooker's plane left earlier than the regular plane because we knew that the other plane would go faster than our little clipper jet will go. Ironically enough we beat the other plane back to Atlanta.

Bill Thomas- Now Mrs. King did not get off the plane is that right?

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- No she did not get off. There perhaps would have been more room on the other plane but then several of the staff persons and Mrs. King's personal secretaries and all were going to travel on the plane with her and the

children of course wanted to travel on the plane to pick up the body. So I think there were about 16,18,20 seats or something like that on the plane already. I think about 8 of them were already taken up when the plane got to Memphis.

Bill Thomas- Did you hear of any difficulty, even momentary difficulty, in removing Dr. King from the airport?

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- Not to my knowledge. Did you all hear that?

Bill Thomas- The only thing I did here, there was some, some question arose at some point and I am getting this second hand so it just may be nothing, but there was some type of legal problem arose and I forget who...

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- There can be no legal problem in moving a body from one state to another after the body has been embalmed that is the only requirement. To have the body embalmed and that had been met.

Joan Dreifuss- Probably a hangover from the Kennedy assassination.

Bill Thomas- I am sure that is what it was because the thing I heard somebody say was...

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- Of course, I don't even think they had embalmed Kennedy's body when they moved it had they?

Joan Dreifuss- No.

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- yeah, but with Dr. King, in fact you would not have really been able to move the body. Because his jaw bone had been broken by that bullet and his whole neck was just standing open all the way to his collar bone on then right side. The embalming had been done a beautiful job, because the only thing you could see on Dr. King was a little small scar where they had put all of this flesh back together and put it back together in place and left one little small scar.

Bill Thomas- Was there any...this was kind of a gruesome setting, but was there any discussion among the staff, I heard that some, I just heard that some had felt that the wound shouldn't be covered in order that everyone would see the violence....

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- I wouldn't know anything about that, no. I don't think any of our staff could have stood looking at Doc in the condition he was before they ...then the other thing is laws, state and national laws in terms of embalming. Would not have permitted the embalmers to have left him open like that. One of the requirement of the...if they had then you would not have been able to open the casket.

Bill Thomas- Well I also heard that this was at some point Mrs. King called and she was worried about the wound, how they might not be able to open the casket or something.

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- Yeah the main thing that happened that Mrs. King wanted to know in Atlanta, and this was before the body was ever put in state. She and the children and one or two others went in to look at him, many of us tried to persuade her to keep that casket, but she preferred another casket of course for Dr. King. Because this was kind of open couch like, that is what the funeral directors call it, where just the top portion kind of the middle section up is open.

Joan Dreifuss- Kind of a bed type thing.

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- Yeah that's kind of what it is.

Bill Thomas- And it was a metal?

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- Yes, it was a metal casket.

Joan Dreifuss- She preferred it.

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- Well she ended up with an African mahogany wood casket. It was kind of the same kind of casket that Bobby Kennedy was buried in only I understand, well not understand but I know from having my experience with funeral directors, that this one was a little bit more expensive even than Bobby Kennedy's. For one of the things that Dr. King did have was the side handles and the front handles. But Kennedy's casket did not have any handles on it at all for the pall bearers to carry it. They had to carry it from under the side. Plus she wanted it glass enclosed, you know wanted it glass encased. Also, the suit Dr. King had on and the shirt were not his.

Bill Thomas- Oh really.

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- No, because he only had the one suit he had brought with him and it had blood stains and all of this on it.

Bill Thomas- This was a black suit he brought with him?

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- Yeah, and naturally she wanted to, Dr. King was kind of almost an impeccable dresser. Everything had to almost be in place. Naturally she did not want him being seen not looking like he ordinarily looked. So she would want to change his clothes and do just one or two other minor things that would be necessary.

Bill Thomas- The clothes whose?

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- I ma not sure, I never asked. I know as I looked at the shirt it looked kind of like some of the shirts that Solomon Jones would wear you know with the fancy collars and this kind of thing but I never asked whose clothes they might have been, they might have been just some clothes at the funeral home. YOU know funeral homes keep a supply of burial suits and this kind of thing, I never looked to see or asked.

Bill Thomas- One other thing on that same line we were wondering the hospital, and afterwards, what had happened to Dr. King's clothes, the clothes that he wore? It is like Lincoln's suit or something.

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- You know I am glad you mentioned that because I will have to mention it to reverend Abernathy. I know we did get the blood from the balcony. Jose Williams having been a chemist himself took it to another biochemist who was a friend of his and had it treated or something that is preserved. I know we got the blanket that had been used to cover him up with, and we found the spread that had been used under his head. As I think about it I really don't know what happened to the clothes. It had been mentioned that they would perhaps bring the suitcase back to Memphis and put it up in the motel room where he was staying and make it a museum like. I am not sure yet, because I haven't been up there, I really haven't taken the time to go up there, sometimes you don't like to go back to certain places. But I haven't been inside the room lately since its really been re-done since the laying of the plaque. I wanted to see if they brought the suitcase back. Because I know they put the plate back in the room that he had eaten the fish out of. And they were talking about putting that suitcase back and fixing the room back into the same situation that it was when he was assassinated. I don't know so I think we will look into that see.

Bill Thomas- It is really a very historical item.

Reverend Grant Harvey- Oh ok gee well were are, I think we are probably done except for some back tracking and some of these things you may not know anything about and then we can skip over them. One of them we are wondering and that hasn't been answered completely. During the mini riot, the one that broke out, do you know how Dr. King left that march?

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- Well I know how it said he left there. Supposedly reverend Starks carried him through a little alley on Main St. over to Front St. and I understand flagged down a truck and Dr. King and reverend Abernathy and reverend Stark drove in this truck, a negro driver stopped their truck and drove them over to the Rivermont. Now this is my understand in just talking with certain people. Reverend Stark...have you talked to him yet?

Joan Dreifuss- No.

Bill Thomas- No.

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- Well you ought to talk to him because he can tell you. Because you see when it broke out I was down on Beale and 3rd. I had seen people walking by with sticks in their hand that they had torn off of signs

Bill Thomas- Right, Right.

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- And I never really got to Main St. to see what had happened.

Bill Thomas- Ok we will talk to reverend Starks on that. Now how about Larry Payne?

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- Yeah well I was one of the first people to get to Larry's house after the incident had broken out. I knew Larry's family his sister, used to sell Avon products.

Bill Thomas- Now his parents were separated, were they not?

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- I talked on, I went to the mother and to see what we could do and when I got there she was just hysterical and almost passing out and I managed to talk to her and her mother and calm them down. This kind of thing and then I went out, Solomon Jones and I went together, because I had not really heard of the shooting and all. Solomon Jones had come and got me and asked me to go with him.

Joan Dreifuss- How had his mother heard about it do you know?

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- His mother saw it. Well not exactly saw it but he got shot right behind his house.

Joan Dreifuss- His mother was out there?

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- He got shot right behind his house and somebody told his mother and his mother ran right out of the house crying that she wanted to get to her child. And she saw the policemen after the boy had been shot and saw the policemen kick him some.

Bill Thomas- After he had been shot?

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- Yeah, and then she was crying let me get to my child, and the policemen put the gun up to her head and she fainted right there.

Bill Thomas- Really?

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- I took people from the U.S. Civil Rights Commission and so forth over there and took some reporters and a friend of mine who is with the Tennessee Council on Human Development over to talk to witnesses and people who actually saw the shooting. Who say that Larry Payne had not been involved in any looting. And that he was standing in the doorway leading into the basement of a building, he and some other fellows and this was kind of where they hung around together. They saw the police just swarm in the area and they had heard what was going on and everything, and they kind of closed the door so they would not be involved in what was going on. The policeman ran up to the door and just put the shotgun to the door and told them to come out with their hands up or they were going to blast through the door. Just one of them and the other one was still back in the car. So Larry Payne opened the door and came out with his hands behind his head and the police just put the gun to his stomach and said something to him and Larry nodded his head and the police pulled the trigger.

Joan Dreifuss- There was other kids back in that basement room though?

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- There was one other fellow that we know of?

Bill Thomas- Who is that do you know?

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- I don't know his name. So the police pulled him on out and went down into the basement and came up with a knife. And said that Larry had drawn a knife on him. Everybody in the neighborhood was asking if Larry supposedly had been involved with looting and he was supposedly have had a television, where was the television? The police never found a television. The first rumor that came out was that they had been chasing the boy and ordered him to stop and he had dropped the television and all of this. But the neighbors saw the boy being shot. It my understanding that quite of the neighbors who had seen it were on ABC, were told by their social workers that if they got involved in it and gave any more information that they would be cut off from the welfare and all this kind of thing. It was a really gruesome episode.

Bill Thomas- Did you know Larry Payne personally?

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- I just knew him, I didn't know him as well as I knew his sister and somebody else. I mean I had seen him.

Bill Thomas- Did you attend or what did you do with the funeral?

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- I made all the arrangements.

Bill Thomas- Oh did you?

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- I made all of the arrangements for the funeral and I was one of the ministers to deliver the eulogy for the funeral.

Bill Thomas- And you tell us a little about that?

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- Well the funeral had originally been planned for a Monday night which would have been good in terms of attendance. But we asked the family to change it because the curfew was on. It just happened that they lifted the curfew the evening of the funeral, so we could have gone on with the funeral that night anyway but we had planned it for that Tuesday inst4ead of that Monday night. When they came to me and told me that no body had done a funeral program. I later discovered that the church that his father was a member of had done some work towards a program and had fixed they program in actuality. But it was a good thing I had gone on and planned it because their church choir was not there and none of the people they had planned to put on the program where there. But I called the high school he attended and got the high school choir.

Joan Dreifuss- What high school?

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- Mitchell Rose. Yeah got his high school choir there, and we had some expressions from his principle. Reverend Ezekiel Bell did the prayer at North Parkway Gardens. Malcolm Blackburn at Clayborne Temple did the scripture and H. Ralph Jackson had remarks from COME. Another minister represented the mother's church. I did the first eulogy and I did it very short because I don't like long funerals. Reverend B.T. Doomis the father's pastor did the main eulogy.

Bill Thomas- Why was the funeral held at Clayborne Temple?

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- For several reasons, number one we wanted it there because Clayborne was the center of the movement. We felt that his death was really related to the movement.

Bill Thomas- Was relevant.

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- Yeah, secondly, Clayborne provided a larger place rather than going to Mason Temple. I don't know whether you heard of the Barkays?

Bill Thomas- Yeah.

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- Well that funeral was also held at, well two of the boys, two of the boys. Three of the Barkays funeral were held at the Clayborne Temple at the same time.

Bill Thomas- This was after the plane crash?

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- Yeah. So that Clayborne, Johnny Aces funeral some years ago, you remember Johnny Ace was a blues singer that was involved in a Russian roulette game, you know.

Bill Thomas- Yeah.

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- His funeral was held at the Clayborne Temple, Clayborne has served as a kind of place where a lot of events are held. Because it is the second largest perhaps of the negro churches in town. Mason Temple being the largest. The only other place you would have considered going for a funeral of this kind would have been to Mason Temple but I didn't know how the crowd would be and we knew we could get Clayborne Temple without any charge at all so we went there. Malcolm Blackburn has really opened Clayborne and tried to make it a part of the activities of the black community and this is why we were there. I demanded that the funeral would be a robed affair. That all participants on the funeral must be robed.

Bill Thomas- For dignity?

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- To add some dignity to his funeral. And I demanded brevity. I didn't want any long and drawn out funeral. But something that would add to the dignity that should be there. We had left the body and stayed in the family had an opportunity to see the body before the funeral, it was my request that they

not open the casket in the end of the services. The father had gone along with it and most of the family but the mother demanded that the casket be opened.

Bill Thomas- I wonder why, why did she does this? Emotional or..

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- Well yeah and this really added a lot more problems though. She almost fell in the grave at the cemetery.

Bill Thomas- Oh really.

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- And it stormed that day, it stormed.

Joan Dreifuss- What time was the funeral?

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- The funeral started at 3:00 I believe it was, and it was storming.

Bill Thomas- Was there a lot of people?

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- Very large crowd and especially on a school day too.

Joan Dreifuss- A lot of kids where there?

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- A lot of kids came to the funeral.

Bill Thomas- I think on the, which of the black newspapers carried a good story on it. They said there was some fainting among the young girls or something.

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- Larry was well known among the young ladies. The girls considered Larry to be very handsome and considered him to be playboy.

Bill Thomas- He was a very nice looking boy.

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- Very nice looking boy.

Bill Thomas- So he had a (muffled) Acquaintanceship.

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- Most of the girls knew him, most of the fellows knew him. He was a very popular young fellow around his school. So this is one of the reasons why it was fairly well attended. The crowd, the other ministers that were there was in large number those that weren't even on the program. It was a sad funeral of course, but up to the point of the opening of the casket I think it was a very dignified funeral.

Bill Thomas- Then how did this come about?

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- Well, after the eulogy we were getting ready to go and then the mother told the funeral director I want the casket opened. The funeral director looked at me because I had made all the arrangements. I went down and

talked with her, the only arrangement I didn't make is the choice of the funeral home.

Bill Thomas- What funeral home was it?

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- Ford and sons had the funeral. They are very good friends of mine but let me say off the record, I mean...

Bill Thomas- You are officially off the record.

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- As long as this does not get to them, I would really much rather that Lewis get the body. Because I think we could have gotten almost the same funeral at a much cheaper rate than we did. I think Mr. Ford knows this and because we got him up out of the bed late at night to come down about 3:00 one morning to come down to Clayborne temple to let's talk about it. Because with the publicity he got and all from the funeral, for instance Lewis was going to give them embalming plus the casket that Dr. King was carried to Atlanta in to the family and to SCLC the whole thing for \$300. Which would have been only cost to him, because for the casket he would have paid around \$300, he was not charging him for the embalming at all. Whereas Ford and sons was charging the family nine hundred and some thing dollars before the grave was included.

Bill Thomas- Of course the family couldn't very well afford this.

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- Well the father had a about a \$250 burial and he had to borrow money to pay for the rest of it.

Joan Dreifuss- Did SCLC not help with the funeral expenses?

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- Well, not SCLC but local community eventually came across some money to help with it. But you see it is difficult, it would have been impossible for SCLC to do something because this is not SCLC's project.

Joan Dreifuss- Yeah.

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- SCLC was invited by me also. A lot of people are saying that the local community should have bore all the expenses first for dr. King's funeral. Because Dr. King was invited here to help the local community. I don't know this whole thing, Dr. King was of course covered by an insurance with SCLC as a staff member, he was not a staff person except he received \$1 a year in order to cover him within the insurance program. But the family that were paying were poor people. So we were thinking how best we could bring these charges down. In light of the fact that the man was getting a lot of publicity from that funeral.

Joan Dreifuss- So did he come down in price?

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- Oh I think he came down about \$200.

Bill Thomas- It was still more than the family could afford.

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- \$900 was still more than the family could afford.

Joan Dreifuss- Now the eulogy at a funeral like this does the eulogy span away from the actual person who has been killed going to the police?

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- Well the, I , we set a tone before with those who were to speak, that the eulogies and the remarks carried over the fact that this death points up more than ever the need for more people to get involved in correcting a wrong that has been done. Rather than dwell on the individual himself. Because well in funerals at my church I don't dwell on individuals, at least not the individual that is deceased. For this does nothing other than to excite and get the family that much more worked up. And eulogy ought to be designed that you don't work up the family, that you try to comfort and ease them. But also to challenge them and those in the audience to do something more than what they are doing. Did you watch Dr. King's funeral on television.

Bill Thomas- Yes.

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- You saw Dr. May's eulogy. If you notice Dr. Mays never really talked about Dr. King. What he talked about more about no matter how long you live the length of life is not important, but what you do while you live. He talked about other men who have died early but who have made contributions to their society. This was really a challenge to those persons who were there, to so live while you live that your life will be meaningful. This is what we attempted to do. Reverend Dumas is not a trained man, the man who delivered the main eulogy but he got it very well when he talked about green grass. Over toward fall being cut down, reverend Dumas has an old farm. They talked about grass growing and getting tall but sometimes you put the lawnmower to the grass before it gets too high. The analogy of what he was trying to say was that sometimes life is taken even before you get old. That life is taken even very young, so that you must make a contribution to life starting early so that whenever death comes to you, that you will die knowing that you have done something for a cause. It just happened that Dr. King was out of the city when we got the word Larry had been slain. I think that if we had requested Dr. King to, and he came back in the next day following the funeral, I think it was the next day or maybe a week later I don't know the time now. I think if we had requested Dr. King to he would have come back to deliver the eulogy. For I remember in Alabama when the little girls are killed in the church Dr. King went back to deliver the eulogy himself. And on several other occasions he has delivered eulogies of people that have been slain in the movement. So that I don't know there was this whole thing of now we have to get right because...I think had we not did Larry's funeral the way we did it we could have very easily that same day...That is one of the reasons why we didn't want to have that funeral that night. Because we felt had we had that funeral Monday night with the emotions that would have been generated in that funeral and opening that casket that the mother did, that those kids would have left there and as I said they had not lifted a curfew hour when we had the funeral changed. Those kids would have left there and the policemen would have said something to them out of the way about get off the street nigger. The first

thing we would have had was this kind of situation which could have easily brought about a real riot in the city.

Joan Dreifuss- Did you consider letting the funeral go ahead at the boy's own church without bringing it into Clayborne Temple?

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- Into the father's church, yes we did. We considered it. I called the minister because the minister is a fraternal brother of mine. And the minister said to me whatever you do it is alright with me. Wherever you decide to have the funeral because the boy was not really a member of the church. I mean he had been baptized but he had not been there in quite some time. They were thinking of having it there because the father was a member of the church and they were going to have it at the father's church because the boy lived with his father.

Joan Dreifuss- I was just thinking in terms of kind of keeping things cool.

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- Well wit the atmosphere that existed during that period of time and knowing the kind of church that the father was a member of, a real hooperistic shouting church down at Trigg Bill Thomas- Florida too which is one of the baddest corners in town among negros. One of the worst things you could have done was to carry it on at that church.

Bill Thomas- What church was that?

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- What is reverend Dumas' church? I don't even remember the name of it right off hand.

Joan Dreifuss- Was it a Baptist church?

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- Yeah, it moved into the building where Mt. Moriah used to be at Trigg Bill Thomas- Florida. It is a yellow brick church that sits right up there on the corner, it sits high up off the ground. I cant thin of it as well as I know the church.

Bill Thomas- Then the so what happened at the cemetery?

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- Very emotional, after the body had been committed by reverend Dumas, was it reverend Dumas, I can't remember whether reverend Dumas committed the body or whether reverend Jackson did, one of us did it. I can't remember which but one of us did it. The family, the mother really got emotional again, well she had fainted in the church. She has a history of a heart condition so you know. Well the mother almost jumped into the grave, and it was kind of muddy and all this and we were trying to hold her back in al of our robes and all this got very muddy. It was a bad scene.

Bill Thomas- She didn't want to leave though.

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- No. The hearse couldn't get all the way up to the grave, it kind of got stuck and we had to kind of get it out,.

Joan Dreifuss- What cemetery was it?

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- New Palm. It was a kind of bad situation.

Bill Thomas- Well ok, let's see is there anything else.

Joan Dreifuss- I am sure there are millions more.

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- Justin Epps will be back in town on Saturday.

Bill Thomas- Oh he will? He is an awfully difficult man to get a hold of.

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- He has been in town he just left yesterday.

Joan Dreifuss- I know he is kind of in and out do you have contact with Jesse Epps?

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- Yeah.

Joan Dreifuss- Could you get us to Jesse Epps do you think.

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- As far as I was going to say you should call down and tell Brandon that you are...

Joan Dreifuss- Brandon that is who I have been talking to for the past 3 weeks.

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- Tell him to put you on Epps schedule for a Saturday and I will, when Jesse comes back in I will, you better tell him to put you on for Monday.

Bill Thomas- Will he be here?

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- Yeah he will be here next week and when I see him on Saturday I will just kind of buckle him down.

Joan Dreifuss- Oh that would be great.

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- Keep this appointment..

Joan Dreifuss- Is reverend Starks in town?

Reverend Hal Middlebrook- He is back, he has been in Israel. (Tape End)