

SS172.mp3

David Yellin- This is a tape that is being made in the home of Mr. and Mrs. James Cherry, 633 Valleybrooke Rd. in Memphis. This is February 8th 1969 and the interviewers are Carolyn and David Yellin.

(Tape Break)

David Yellin- I think so we didn't have any problems. It picked up rather well. Well a way to start is we had a count to feeling good and feel as what you are talking about. So the best way to do it and also because it serves a very good purpose is to ask you a question about which you are the greatest experts alive, and that is just to tell a little bit about your own background, not from the beginning.

Margarie Cherry- Oh shucks.

James Cherry- No I want to hear it Marge, when you came to Memphis and from where you came and a little bit about that. Or start off and tell us where you were born Marge.

Margarie Cherry- Well I was born in Portsmouth Virginia.

David Yellin- Port Smith.

Margarie Cherry- I lived there all my life until I came to Memphis ten years ago.

James Cherry- That would be 58, 59.

James Cherry- 58.

Margarie Cherry- Was it 58?

David Yellin- Where were you born Jimmy?

James Cherry- We are cousins, I was born in Portsmouth Virginia.

David Yellin- Are you really cousins?

Carolyn Yellin- Yeah I remember you told us that.

Margarie Cherry- Far down the line though.

James Cherry- Not too far, we have a common great grandfather.

Margarie Cherry- Oh he wasn't so common.

James Cherry- He was common but not ordinary.

David Yellin- Well I'll be, now what brought you to Memphis?

Margarie Cherry- Job.

David Yellin- Alright.

Margarie Cherry- Kids going to school ad needing more money.

Carolyn Yellin- And you came from Portsmouth Virginia?

Margarie Cherry- No we came from Newport News which was the last place that we were.

David Yellin- So I guess however the thing that is important was that all your life was spent in the south.

Margarie Cherry- Ion Virginia, the state of Virginia yeah.

James Cherry- We lived in several places in Virginia not just in Portsmouth, we university of Virginia and in Charlottesville and then during the war I was at Petersburg at camp Lee where I was a writer for textbooks.

Carolyn Yellin- Which is now called Fort Lee.

James Cherry- (muffled)

David Yellin- I was at Lee.

James Cherry- You were at Lee?

David Yellin- For 5 weeks yes.

James Cherry- What year?

David Yellin- I will tell you exactly October 1941.

James Cherry- I was not there , didn't get there until 43.

David Yellin- Oh that was when it was a medical thing, I was there when it was a...

James Cherry- Quartermaster, quartermaster depot and...

David Yellin- I was three when it was a station where you went and then separated.

James Cherry- Oh yeah are you sure that wasn't Pickett?

David Yellin- No it was Lee. I was supposed to be there for 2 days and was there for 5 weeks, they couldn't classify me. Since it is not my tape I won't take it up.

Carolyn Yellin- We will get to that another night.

James Cherry- Yes. Well both of us are from the south, we have lived in the south, we have never lived outside the south and this is the kind of place that when we came here 11 years ago from the southern part of Virginia, people in Memphis referred to us as Yankees and meant it.

David Yellin- Oh really.

James Cherry- Yeah, I was shocked, I told him them we almost won that war for you people you know.

Margarie Cherry- Oh yeah they say oh you all are from u north.

Carolyn Yellin- Up north in Virginia.

James Cherry- North in Virginia.

Margarie Cherry- We were quite insulted.

David Yellin- Yes because Virginia was the seat of, well I meant hat in the best sense the heart of...Just again when we you married?

Margarie Cherry- 39.

James Cherry- I was too.

David Yellin- The two of you coincidence.

Carolyn Yellin- Were you at university of Virginia when you were, were you attending university of Virginia?

James Cherry- When we married that is right.

Margarie Cherry- He was a junior in college.

David Yellin- What did you take?

James Cherry- I was an English major, having started out to be a science major and I had trouble with the mathematics involved. Calculus and I didn't get along at all so I switched to English and was in graduate school and doing some instructing on the side and that sort of thing and working in the library. Scratching out a living anyway we could.

David Yellin- And how did you get into the newspaper business..

James Cherry- Sure I got into advertising business first, I went from the university to camp Lee as a writer of textbooks as a civilian I was not in the service. And while there I met a lot of people who had been drafted or had volunteered that were in advertising as civilians and they convinced me this was a fine field to get in so when the war was over I went to an advertising agency as a copywriter.

David Yellin- Where?

James Cherry- In Norfolk, and I wanted to go to New York as a matter of fact, I had some leads there.

Margarie Cherry- Veterans were getting all the jobs.

James Cherry- Yeah it wasn't that so much I didn't have any money, that we had 400 dollars that was due us from in separation pay from the civil service. But we couldn't get it for awhile so while we were waiting for it we took this job in Norfolk and then we just stayed in Norfolk and I went from there to radio, I sold radio time for oh, about a year or a year and a half. But this was back in the dead era of radio when it had fallen on evil days. You probably remember this was 48 and radio had not had its renaissance which came five years or so later really and so I didn't like radio and I was very unhappy in it and I went from that to newspapers in 1950 I suppose.

David Yellin- And where was the first job?

James Cherry- In Norfolk, as a salesman with the Virginia Pilot Ledger and Dispatch.

David Yellin- Was that a locally owned paper or a chain?

James Cherry- It was a locally owned not chains.

Carolyn Yellin- Who is the editor of that?

James Cherry- At that time the editor was Mr.....

Carolyn Yellin- Virginius?

James Cherry- No Virginius died when he was the editor of the Richmond times Dispatch. The editor of the Virginian Pilot was a rather Liberal man named Jeff H, Jaafe.

David Yellin- Jeefe? French Jew?

James Cherry- I think he is Jewish and well I think he became Jaafe when he was made editor his, he had some relatives in Suffolk Virginia who called him Jaafe.

David Yellin- Yes.

Margarie Cherry- Its like Raymond Bottom becoming Raymone Batone.

David Yellin- I mean that he has a reason for that.

Margarie Cherry- You remember those headlines when they were in that wreck in the winter one time and it said Bottoms injured on icy pavement.

James Cherry- Yes it is true buried it on page 1. But I stayed at the Norfolk newspaper 2 or 3 only a couple years and got a better job, a management job at the Newport News papers which were in the same area just across Hampton Roads Harbor. And I was there about 8 years until 1958 and then I was offered a job in Memphis in the management capacity.

Carolyn Yellin- How did that happen Jim had you been, did you apply or where you sent out?

James Cherry- I let it be known to some friends I had in the business that I would accept another job if one was offered because all the jobs above mine at the paper where I was working were filled by the publisher's family and there wasn't anywhere to go. So I told our representative in New York that if anything good came up to let me know and he was in touch with the publishers here in Memphis and they said they were looking for a man and we got together.

David Yellin- Did you come to Memphis?

James Cherry- I came to Memphis.

David Yellin- That was your first appearance here.

James Cherry- Yes, I was interviewed, this was in March. I was suppose it was almost 11 years ago this weekend that I came to Memphis for my interview.

David Yellin- Oh really, do you remember your first reaction about Memphis then?

Margarie Cherry- Well I can tell you what we thought when we first heard that we might move here, we were kind of appalled at the idea you know.

David Yellin- Why?

Margarie Cherry- Well we thought well Memphis...

David Yellin- Had you heard of it in any...

Margarie Cherry- We had heard of it and we just thought of it as a little town on the river, far south, you know we thought of Memphis of deep south.

Carolyn Yellin- Well that is the way you Yankees are?

Margarie Cherry- Yeah, nothing but cotton fields and steam boats and plantations and that was all.

Carolyn Yellin- Did you have to go look it up on a map to actually see where it was?

Margarie Cherry- Yeah we were astonished to see how far West it was.

James Cherry- I think a lot of people confuse Memphis and Nashville.

Margarie Cherry- Yeah.

James Cherry- They think that Memphis is hillbillies the hillbilly capitol that Nashville actually is.

Margarie Cherry- I thought of it as being a very countrified place and our friends when they heard we were going to Memphis all said why Memphis? You know oh you won't like it there.

David Yellin- Memphis to live?

Carolyn Yellin- One of our friends when we moved down I think summed it all up by saying, he said, to live? That's it. And one other I think again I will do a tape of my own sometime but one of our most, well she was the Bennington girl, we knew in New York and when she heard about us moving to Memphis she approved thoroughly, she thought it was just marvelous.

Margarie Cherry- Bringing culture to the nation.

Carolyn Yellin- The way she put it was she said oh you know it will be sort of like joining the peace corps only now you don't have to go Nigeria do you?

James Cherry- Ooooooh.

Carolyn Yellin- So I would say that says something about the Memphis image I guess.

James Cherry- I don't want to poor mouth Memphis that much that is my original concept and reaction.

David Yellin- Yeah can you remember?

James Cherry- I didn't get that way, well of course I was very much on my best behavior when I first came to Memphis because I had to make my way in a new job and so..

David Yellin- Who did you come and see?

James Cherry- I was interviewed by Frank Adcock, (muffled) Adcock the business manager and the then advertising director Herb Tushingam. And spent the day with him and talked them up in salary a little bit like you do.

David Yellin- Did you meet Aldren?

James Cherry- Yes I did, I was introduced to Algren, I think that when I was brought in here that I had been labeled as something of a white hope, I think they did have plans for me when they brought me in, Adcock did I am confident. Because he saw that I got to meet Aldren and Ed Niemann and he saw that the chamber of commerce wrote me kind letters and the bankers (muffled)...

David Yellin- Do you recall your impression say physically, your impression of the physical city?

James Cherry- My impression of the physical city on my first 24 hours in town was that it was big and sprawling. We have a back of rather small, not small town but small city life, you know 50,000 or 100,000 people. So Memphis was the biggest city I had lived in and I thought it was a pretty good sized town and I thought it was clean and one of the first things that struck me when we came to live in Memphis was what a friendly town it was. And I am not trying to sell people any chamber of commerce concept but we made, and I made and I think Audrey did too more

friends in a shorter time in Memphis than anywhere we have ever lived. We have lived a number of places and I still think this is true.

David Yellin- How was that did you do it in business or in church or...

James Cherry- Three areas, we made a contact with the great books group and in the Unitarian church and my business friends. And I would say they are in reverse order the church, the great books, and the business.

David Yellin- What was the great books thing?

James Cherry- Well when we first came here we were sought out by great books which as you know is headquartered over at Southwester College or University whichever it is. And well they ran a story about me and how I had been an English major over at university of Virginia.

David Yellin- And do you have your master's in English?

James Cherry- No I never got the master's and I am very sorry one of these days I will have to get it.

Margarie Cherry- He had a couple of years toward it. Well you have everything but the thesis and one course maybe?

James Cherry- Majorie got sick and we had to work real hard so we didn't.

Margarie Cherry- He had a sick wife and two babies.

James Cherry- But anyhow the great books group sought us out, and we had not been in town more than a couple of weeks before they had a weekend of trained leaders at Petiginer State Park over in Arkansas, I guess you have been there.

Carolyn Yellin- Winthrop Rockefellers Mountain, yeah.

James Cherry- Yeah. And so we got to know a number of people who have remained our friends on that weekend.

Carolyn Yellin- May I ask do you think that had something to do with what Marge mentioned earlier that the western atmosphere, that the tide water, the reserve of the east coast whether it is North east or Southeast it is somewhat greater than the western friendliness. It was more than just southern hospitality there was an element of western friendliness?

Margarie Cherry- Yes I think so Memphis is more open really and Memphis is a town that wants to grow. The little towns in Virginia were very compressed and crowded and they had a lot of people in a small area, and they could care less if somebody new comes in really they would prefer that you would go on somewhere else.

David Yellin- Now what do you mean wants to grow what do you mean about that, did you feel this from the beginning?

Margarie Cherry- Don't you think so, yes, this is something that I felt when I first came that Memphis was very ambitious to grow in size and in population and in stature and that it was trying a lot of things and that it welcomed newcomers.

Carolyn Yellin- Did you find as newcomers that you were able to, did you feel that you were able to bring much influence to bear on the course of the direction the city was taking?

Margarie Cherry- Yes I think so and mainly through our contacts in the university communities and through the league of women voters and through the friends we made in the human relations committee, the friends we have in government in Memphis and the county and the state and it is surprising to me, I feel that we have very much involved in the...

David Yellin- Now this is interesting and we will get to these all of these but how come that you were like this? How come you were interested in well, great books came from your intellectual pursuit.

Carolyn Yellin- Well I want to take it back even farther, before you left Virginia. Had you always had the feelings that you arrived in Memphis with let's say concerning racial matters as southerners.

Margarie Cherry- Oh certainly not.

Carolyn Yellin- Do you recall, can you recall a moment or an event or was it a slow change or did you go from conservative to liberal overnight?

Margarie Cherry- It was a slow change, a series of changes, I remember as a child arguing with my mother about colored people and saying that it seemed to me that they really were the same kind of people that we were. And mother pointing out to me that they had great disadvantages and they were to be helped in any way possible and were always to be treated kindly. We were not allowed to use the word nigger in our house and if we were ever caught speaking rudely or treating rudely our colored persona we were reprimanded or punished and so I developed this paternal feeling that most well brought up southerners have very early in life and felt really good about it you know and really went out of my way to help colored people whenever I could and I remember that when Jim was in college and one of our best friends went to the university of Michigan for while at Ann Arbor remember when Ralph...

James Cherry- Ralph Epperly?

Margarie Cherry- Yeah he was from Norfolk Virginia and he and Kay, his wife were our closest friends in Charlottesville and he came back to visit us after a year in Michigan and explained to us how negroes felt and this was the first, this was our coming to terms with the word negro. Which was quite difficult and he said that they didn't want to be taken care of or helped or whatever that they just wanted their rights and they wanted to be treated as equal people and they wanted you

know good jobs and good places to live and all this kind of thing and so I kept saying that we had always been kind of colored people and we were glad to see them get ahead and we kind of riled at it for a little while and it kind of got to me though, some of the things he said I didn't understand. Because it sounded as if the colored people were not grateful for all our help and interest.

David Yellin- Do you remember when this was?

Margarie Cherry- This was 1940. And then I began, my eyes began to open a little bit and I noticed that walking down High St. the main street of Portsmouth one day and we were home on summer vacation negro woman turned her head and sort of spat as I came along side of her and I began to notice hostility and began to feel hostility from these people for the first time in my life. So I started doing some reading and when we went back to Charlottesville I got out a book called the negro caravan, or something, it was a collection of negro writings and for the first time in our life I saw how these people really felt about us, about white people, and about the way they had to live and the about what they wanted out of life. That was kind of shattering. So I sort of digested that for a couple of years and I didn't know what to do.

Carolyn Yellin- Marge excuse me did you talk with people about it? Did you and Jim talk about it or did you and your family talk about it?

Margarie Cherry- We began to talk with our family about this time.

David Yellin- Now who are we do you mean you and Jim?

Margarie Cherry- Yeah when we were at home visiting Jim's family, my mother was dead and some of my brothers were in the army and there weren't many left and my father had re-married so we didn't really have a family left at my house but I had some younger brothers and sisters whom I were still three with whom I still talked and we had many talks about this and they have come to feel as we do. They are all (muffled) I mean all of my brothers and sisters.

James Cherry- I remember one time at my house though when you got up from the dinner table and walked out of the house and headed for the bus stop of something to get away from there because of the attitude that my two younger brothers had on the race question.

Margarie Cherry- Well we were having dinner, Sunday dinner at Jim's house and we had been discussing things and they were really pretty, well you know they just hadn't begun to think about things at all and they were very sarcastic and oh what is a good word just contemptuous of our feelings and I didn't want to say anything angry or ugly and I knew if I stayed there any longer I would because I just been boiling for as long as I could without busting out someway so I just got up and left. I said if I stay any longer I am going to say some things I will be sorry for so I went.

David Yellin- You went and you took a bus?

Margarie Cherry- Yeah.

David Yellin- Where did you sit in the back?

Margarie Cherry- Well it is funny you should say that I did begin to sit in the back of the bus as a protest. And I started writing letters to the editor about how segregation should be done away with.

Carolyn Yellin- To the editor of the paper that Jim was working for?

Margarie Cherry- No he was not working for a paper at that time.

David Yellin- Yeah that is right that is before. Now when you found this, we don't mean for you to vie but just to kind of fill in the picture, when you did find this and you read this book and you discovered that the feelings that colored negros had, afro-nationals and some of them. You were married then because you were married 30.....now I know. Where were you in this at this time Jim?

James Cherry- I was bringing up the rear as I have for a long time in our sociological development. Margarie has usually taken the lead in these things.

Margarie Cherry- Well I am curious that's all.

James Cherry- Well you are braver than I am and...

Margarie Cherry- No it is just a matter of personality.

James Cherry- You do things and you are more (muffled) than I. I suppose that I was one of these southerners who hadn't particularly thought about it one way or the other since I had gotten over the senseless prejudice, the unfeeling prejudice that I had grown up with. And I think even then that I was sort of a person of goodwill which I have tried to be for the most well that I can since then. And Margarie, I saw that Margarie was right, I thought she was but I wasn't quite as concerned about it as she was. And so when she would make a step I would follow along.

Margarie Cherry- He would follow along to keep me from getting thrown in jail or beat up or something.

James Cherry- Well this is true I had to protect her, well there is something to this and later on when we did get involved with a number of interracial groups as they were called.

David Yellin- Can you be specific what were they?

James Cherry- Well I think this, Margarie you correct me if I am wrong, our real involvement began before the 1948 election when we were, we got involved in the Henry Wallis campaign for president.

Margarie Cherry- Well do you remember how that started?

James Cherry- I think so.

Margarie Cherry- I wrote a letter to the paper about desegregating busses and I had a postcard from a lady saying that she thought from my letter that I would be interested in a meeting that was going to be held by the southern conference for human welfare in Norfolk Virginia under certain date and I was invited to come. I had never heard of this organization and I had never attended and integrated meeting my whole life and I was petrified at the idea. I think they were still illegal at the time.

David Yellin- You were petrified why? You were afraid to go?

Margarie Cherry- Yeah I didn't know what I was getting into because at that time I was still thinking, what kind of people would associate with negroes? You know, this is what people who don't know though I haven't thought it always think about people who associate with negroes. What kind of person could that be, who would associate with a colored persona and why?

Carolyn Yellin- We saw precisely this reaction last two night s ago at the coliseum at a hockey game when a white couple and a negro couple came together and they observed the little usherette who met them nearly fainted and she was unable to seat them and unable to do anything and ran over and talked to the her fellow ushers and let them find their own way to their seat.

Margarie Cherry- Yeah so anyway.

David Yellin- Two nights ago.

Margarie Cherry- Yeah I went to the meeting.

David Yellin- Probably a girl scout.

James Cherry- Yes. Whose parents are Christians, good Christians.

David Yellin- Well let's not jump ahead. So this meeting now did you go?

Margarie Cherry- Yes I went.

David Yellin- you went alone?

Margarie Cherry- Yeah.

James Cherry- No. I went.

Margarie Cherry- Did you go?

James Cherry- I certainly did.

Margarie Cherry- Well excuse me Jim I didn't remember that.

David Yellin- But you were behind her.

Margarie Cherry- What I remember that in that period that I did go some places to myself that I had trouble finding them because they were in negro sections and all but I am sorry I forgot about that. But anyway we went and it was our first time to be with colored people as people to people just all sitting around together people who were intelligent enough or educated enough to talk to as human beings and so I was still feeling very scary about the whole thing just about being in the company of negroes because you see our whole lives you were separated on the busses you were separated in the churches, you were separated in the schools and when you asked about it you were told it was a matter of law, it is against the law you see to sit next to a colored person so that you got the whole feeling that there was a criminal aspect here and to do this kind of thing is bad and this is something that is hard for a southerner to shake who has been reared in this kind of thing. You have the feeling the whole time that the cops are going to come in any minute and carry you off because you are sitting down in a room with colored people. It's really weird, but anyway, I was fascinated by the people.

David Yellin- This is very interesting about the (muffled).

Margarie Cherry- This is an important element to remember.

David Yellin- (Muffled) being made into law.

Carolyn Yellin- And this is perhaps the resentment of the supreme court changing that law that was such a protection for the (muffled).

David Yellin- I Had not heard of this aspect before.

Margarie Cherry- You never had to think about the moral aspects of the issue because it was against the law to do it and no matter what you thought of it you had to obey the law.

Carolyn Yellin- Law and order.

Margarie Cherry- So anyway it was fascinating to hear these people who could speak English and had ideas and were well-educated and one of the men who impressed us most as I can remember was a man who should have been a professor of philosophy a brilliant man and well educated and intelligent and he was running a gas station and I was pretty insensitive about this.

James Cherry- Was that Gilliam?

Margarie Cherry- No. I can't even remember his name now.

James Cherry- There was also a man who represented the negro newspaper in Norfolk.

Margarie Cherry- That was him yeah.

James Cherry- A this was a pretty good newspaper except in those days it was the Norfolk Journal and Guide and it did a good job for the negro editorially and then it would accept all this lousy advertising about hair straightener and bleach and phony stuff that wouldn't work and white people who I suppose were selling the products were taking advantage of the readers of this paper. The publisher permitted it and that bothered me but anyway he was a good so far as his civic works. What was his name Walker? Scott?

Margarie Cherry- No not Scott.

James Cherry- Ok well it doesn't matter.

Carolyn Yellin- After you had done this Marge and Jim did you feel better?

Margarie Cherry- No I felt worse.

David Yellin- Why?

Margarie Cherry- Because I knew what I was letting myself in for which was harassment and possibility of being jailed because we integrated every concert and every public meeting we went to as a protest we would go and sit in the colored section and...

David Yellin- Now this was before 54?

Margarie Cherry- Sat in the colored section on busses. Yes it was while it was still against the law to desegregate on busses.

James Cherry- This was 47, this was 1947 and we were back in.

Margarie Cherry- 46 and 47.

James Cherry- In Tidewater Virginia.

Margarie Cherry- I was scared for my children to.

James Cherry- I was scared for my (muffled).

Margarie Cherry- In didn't know what was going to happen when you do something like this some thing...

David Yellin- Yes and you were scared for your job?

Margarie Cherry- Yeah when you do something unheard of you don't know what people are going to do to you know. You know that they can be rough and you don't know whether they are going to be or not and all you have to do is to hope that they do not.

David Yellin- And in 47 that is 22 years ago and that is a long time ago.

James Cherry- Yes well we were young people too and we didn't know a lot but...

David Yellin- I mean you went and sat in negro sections?

Margarie Cherry- Yeah.

James Cherry- The meetings had to be in negro sections because you couldn't have an integrated meeting in a white section you see.

Margarie Cherry- Well I am speaking of going to concerts and sitting in the colored section at the concert and sitting in the colored section on the bus.

Carolyn Yellin- Movies? Did you sit in the colored section?

Margarie Cherry- They didn't allow negroes in movies.

James Cherry- There was a separate movies.

Margarie Cherry- There was a colored movie in town and that is where they went,

James Cherry- But there was a concert when Paul Roberson came to Norfolk. Big thing and Paul had declared himself a communist and gone to Switzerland to live and pretty well separated, ex-patriated himself.

Margarie Cherry- Had he done that then.

David Yellin- Before the Wallis thing.

James Cherry- Yeah and he came to Norfolk for a concert and the Wallis forces and the southern council on human welfare and other liberal groups were trying to promote attendance at this meeting...

Carolyn Yellin- And you do mean the Henry Wallis forces, if you think of the present day Wallis forces, all Henry.

James Cherry- Yes this is true all Henry, A. Jr. So I recall now gosh you people are making me dig up things I had forgotten. We went to the concert and the place was alive with Norfolk police who seemed to be cataloguing the faces of particularly the white people who went because they had expected the negroes to be there but the white folks were there, and this is a historical note of one of the great vassals of our day. I was greatly disappointed because Paul Roberson stood there with his great voice of his and cupped his hand behind his ear to listen to himself sing. It makes so he sounded right and though I am sure it helped his tone it certainly was poor theatre.

David Yellin- He was a radio performer it seems. Just that is the old radio bit.

Margarie Cherry- Was he using a mic?

James Cherry- I don't remember, I just remember that he did this throughout, he cupped his hand.

Margarie Cherry- I remember there was quite a tug of war before the concert because he had said he wouldn't perform for a segregated audience and the Norfolk police had said they would not allow a desegregated concert.

James Cherry- This was in a municipally owned auditorium the concert. And as Margarie it says it was illegal not to segregate and it was not segregated. And so but...

Margarie Cherry- This was the first time as far as I know.

James Cherry- But it came off and this was probably....

Carolyn Yellin- In the south or in...

Margarie Cherry- In Norfolk.

Carolyn Yellin- In Norfolk.

James Cherry- All we could speak for I guess.

Margarie Cherry- A public concert that was not segregated and it was our little handful that did it and we expected the police to close in on us at any moment you know, but they didn't for some reason, they didn't make any arrests that night.

James Cherry- You asked how we felt about this ting, what our attitude was. Mine was always one of reluctance at this time and protection. I was going along with something while Margarie was in it and she knew I didn't want her going to these marginal neighborhoods by herself and I would go along. And though I didn't object to what was going on to the integration to the interracial things and to the progress and I certainly wasn't trying to slow it down in anyway at the same time I was never enthusiastic about it at this stage in my life.

David Yellin- Did you wish it would go away?

James Cherry- I didn't really expect it to go away but I was sort of taking the attitude, why me, why us. I mean let somebody else do this.

Carolyn Yellin- It should happen in a easier way.

James Cherry- Yeah I mean well, it is what you have to face ultimately when you realize that you yourself is personally involved in something that is difficult and uncomfortable and you wish someone else could go out there and fight the fight. But she was fighting the fight and I was sort of...

Carolyn Yellin- Did you have any compensation in the new friends you made with black or white at that time.

Margarie Cherry- Of course yes.

Carolyn Yellin- Did you meet other white people? White southerners?

Margarie Cherry- Yes. But...

James Cherry- The most memorable of whom was a 50 dollar a night prostitute.

David Yellin- Oh.

Margarie Cherry- Yeah she was a very interesting woman and we didn't meet her through this we sort of got her into it. We met her when one of the reporters was...

James Cherry- That is true, yes that is true. I had forgotten.

David Yellin- You mean he brought her to a meeting?

Margarie Cherry- He brought her to our house one night, a friend of ours who was a reporter on the paper...

David Yellin- On a night off obviously.

Margarie Cherry- She was a very intelligent and talented woman and we liked her so we started taking her to concerts and she was interested to politic and things so she started going to all the meetings too.

James Cherry- Well anyhow the question, I sidetracked but the question is the new friends that we made.

Margarie Cherry- Yeah...

David Yellin- And at the same time what about your old friends and family what was the...

James Cherry- We kept them all. We didn't run off any family or any friends I am pretty sure.

David Yellin- How come?

James Cherry- And this took some tight rope walking as a matter of fact.

David Yellin- You knew what you were doing?

James Cherry- I don't know if they did or not, I certainly didn't go around bragging about it to our other friends and I suppose for awhile I led quite a double life of trying to keep both side of this balanced.

Carolyn Yellin- Was there any essence of guilt in your feelings that you were doing it, rather than guilt that you hadn't done it?

Margarie Cherry- No, I didn't feel guilty either way. I couldn't have done it earlier because I didn't understand what was going on and I certainly didn't feel guilty about what I was doing then, I was fearful but, I didn't feel guilty at all. I felt liberat4ed in a sense, well I couldn't help myself from being involved it really wasn't a matter of choice I felt that I didn't have a choice once I understood how these

people were living and how they felt I, there was nothing else for me to do but join forces with them.

David Yellin- Jim I am about to say some thing I don't know how true this is but you have touched on it. You said you were afraid of your job. I sense the difference is that Marge didn't have this pressure.

Margarie Cherry- Right.

David Yellin- In other words Marge and women essentially can sort of arrive at something just out of their own sphere without except as of course that it would influence you. But when you went to anything it was always who you were in relation to your job and so on and so forth.

James Cherry- True.

David Yellin- So that you didn't have the same kind of liberated feeling that Marge did?

James Cherry- I think I still don't quite, I think that this always stays in the background of the bread winner.

Carolyn Yellin- I think this is what was I was getting at when I said was there any feeling of guilt about the fact that Marge and you ultimately were getting involved in these things. Did you feel that there might be a conflict of interest in your job that you might even be doing detriment to the financial interest of your employer.

James Cherry- Well not at that time because my job wasn't sufficiently important to my employer I am sure for him to know or care really what I did on the outside. But well, the point that hasn't come into this so far and I think we can get it in now because I think it contributes at this stage. The Henry Wallis for president movement, rapidly became in Norfolk and offshoot of the communist party activity in Norfolk. And Margarie and I watched this develop and we will say here for history and for now and for the future that we did not then approve of what was going on.

Margarie Cherry- Well we fought it, we fought the take over.

James Cherry- We were amazed at the efficiency and the ease.

Margarie Cherry- It was fantastic.

James Cherry- With which these people did move in and convert...

Margarie Cherry- They brought some professionals down from New York.

David Yellin- It is amazing that you were able to see it.

James Cherry- A bunch of liberals they didn't particularly hide it but they took a bunch of do gooders really, interracial group dedicated to a political ideal and

converted them some of them against their better judgment too, into a communist group.

Margarie Cherry- They didn't know, most of them didn't know what was going on honey, nobody ever said they were communists they denied it if you asked them point blank.

David Yellin- I see you underestimate yourself I was at the convention in Philadelphia.

James Cherry- Well we didn't go we were we all moved to (muffled) Some of our good friends went.

David Yellin- I must confess that I didn't see anything but I happened to run into a commentator that you might remember at the time called Balkage.

James Cherry- Yes Balkage talking.

David Yellin- In fact, we were going to do a show together and that is how I met him, that is how I met Jerry Dickler and Blakage I met him at Shy Park at the convention and he said this is frightening young man. I was in Germany in Nuremburg when Hitler got started, and I have never seen anything anywhere that reminded me any....I didn't know what he was talking about.

Margarie Cherry- See what had happened was, the reason that we were so close to it is that were you on the board too, I was on the board, the Wallis for President committee in Norfolk? Well I was on the board and I saw these new people come in from New York and Immediately sort of take over. And the first symptom was that all of a sudden there began to be a great deal of talk of Russia and the Russians, the Russian attitude and what Russia did in this and that.

James Cherry- And political prisoners in Cuba and in Baptista and how we had to free them,

Margarie Cherry- Well I forget what the situations were I just remember that all at once Russia was very great and everything that Russia did was very fine and everything that the United States did was totally wrong and ridiculous. I kept saying that this is sill that the Russians have done so and so and that's wrong and bad and dumb and they shouldn't be doing it and the Americans have done some bad things and made some mistakes but look at this and this you know. They would poo poo everything that had to do with America and everything that had to do with Russia was fine and rosy. So I started asking more specific questions and it became apparent to anybody that knew anything about communism that they were right down the party line.

David Yellin- It became apparent to anybody but Henry Wallis.

Margarie Cherry- Well he didn't sit down and talk to these people evidently.

David Yellin- He was not aware of what was going on?

James Cherry- I don't think he was.

David Yellin- No he was not.

Margarie Cherry- No I don't think he was either.,

Carolyn Yellin- I was going to say I know precisely what you mean because you can sense it when people are taking over a liberal organization. I saw this happen to a university chapter of the ACLU at Northwestern and suddenly two people that as far as I knew weren't even students started appearing at the meetings and objected to the fact that the local ACLU was going to defend both people who were accused of sympathy with the Germans and the Japanese as well as confidence before owners who had been put in jail in Oklahoma City and this was during the soviet Russia....

David Yellin- Soviet Germany.

Carolyn Yellin- After the Soviet and before they had gotten together or after they had broken or something.

David Yellin- Yeah after the break in 39. Ok well now, there you after 48 and you are still in Norfolk.

Margarie Cherry- Well that's why when you asked if the friends we met of sort of white liberals sort of compensated for this I didn't say anything because in Norfolk most of the people we met did join forces with the communist element. And either that or they impuriated the whole thing entirely. The interracial movement along with the Wallis movement and got the hell out of the whole thing. So I remember one meeting in which everything came to a head and most of the members didn't know what was going on but there was one issue in which the communists or the communist front people felt it was important to them which they had to beat through and I knew this was a crucial issue and I was fighting it and I was totally inexperienced politically and made a real ass of myself and did it all wrong and got very emotional and everybody thought I was nuts and I lost and the other people won and I resigned from the board. But I did go to the state Wallis convention as an observer because I was fascinated by the way these people worked and I wanted to find out everything I cold about their technique and remember it. So I did. But gosh I remember at the same time the chairman of the communist party in Norfolk was a woman and her name was Irene Whitledge and she was conducting this school, I ma now thinking (muffled) this is a matter of public knowledge she used to write letters to the paper and everything.

James Cherry- And sign her name and title.

Margarie Cherry- Yeah, but she was conducting this school on communism or series of discussions for party people, people who were interested in joining the party and I asked to come because I didn't tell her because I wanted to find out everything that

I could and she said no I couldn't come. So I was never allowed to find out what they actually tell people as they are trying to rope them into the party but anyway when we moved to Newport News this was a better situation because they were more liberal and there were not this communist element there, they had made really greater strides in some ways than Norfolk had I guess because there was a negro college there.

James Cherry- That was part of it.

Carolyn Yellin- Is that part of a navy base?

Margarie Cherry- Well navy bases are all around that whole area, so there was an army base there too and an air force base.

James Cherry- Yes and here was a scientific atmosphere climate there which didn't exist in Norfolk. There was a aeronautics laboratory called NACA, national advisory committee on aeronautics, which was sort of the grandfather of the NASA. And so there were many scientists from out of town and there is one little not here that I had forgotten too....before we had left Norfolk and went to Newport News it was the only time I had ever been invited to run for Congress.

David Yellin- Oh really?

James Cherry- I was offered the job as nominee as the socialist party for the second congressional district in Virginia, and I turned it down.

David Yellin- This is restricted information of course.

James Cherry- Yeah.

Margarie Cherry- Well we voted for Norman Thomas that year after...

David Yellin- In (muffled).

James Cherry- Yeah we fell out of love with Mr. Wilds and we voted for Norman Thomas.

Margarie Cherry- We couldn't vote for Harry Truman at the time (muffled).

David Yellin- Now I can account for 3 votes for Norman Thomas.

Carolyn Yellin- I want to get on before we, I want to get on to Memphis.

James Cherry- We are going to run out of tape.

Carolyn Yellin- In that, to just compare the climate in Memphis in 58 with what you had found in Virginia.

David Yellin- In the what ten previous years I guess.

Carolyn Yellin- Did you feel that Memphis was behind Norfolk, or Newport News?

Margarie Cherry- In some ways it was ahead.

Carolyn Yellin- Now that is interesting.

Margarie Cherry- It wasn't as bad as we expected it to be by far.

David Yellin- Now in what way? It being...

Margarie Cherry- The city.

David Yellin- The city in relation to race or..

Margarie Cherry- Yeah.

David Yellin- Liberal?

Margarie Cherry- Both.

Carolyn Yellin- Jim shaking his head you don't agree with that?

James Cherry- I was shocked when I came to Memphis with first the number of negroes as compared to the number of negroes in Virginia, the proportion of black to white and also what seemed to me to be a considerably inferior type of negro to those that we had known.

Margarie Cherry- That is true.

James Cherry- The farm, these were the field negroes or some many that I used to see waiting for the bus down near Main St. near Goldsmith's bus stop.

David Yellin- Now just to be clear there were more negroes here?

James Cherry- Yes. Many more negroes in Memphis than there were in Virginia.

David Yellin- And the caliber you say.

James Cherry- And the caliber seemed to be lower.

Margarie Cherry- They were not as well educated and not as well dressed.

James Cherry- Right, they were poorer.

David Yellin- More subservient.

Margarie Cherry- They seemed petrified to me.

David Yellin- They seemed what?

Margarie Cherry- Petrified. The people who would ask, who would knock on the door and would ask to work in your yard you couldn't understand them they would mumble so and they would never look directly at you, this was very different and I couldn't make them understand me and I couldn't understand them and it was the

same way with the women I hired to work as maids, we just couldn't communicate they seemed to be afraid of any kind of a human relations hip at all. This has changed a good deal since then but I it was true when we first came.

David Yellin- Not to catch you or anything, but why did you say however that Memphis was ahead? What did you mean or do you want to explain that?

Margarie Cherry- Let me think there were some desegregated areas in Memphis. The busses had not been desegregated at the time.

David Yellin- Not until 61.

James Cherry- Nothing had been desegregated.

Margarie Cherry- Well then what made me think that but I did think it.

Carolyn Yellin- Did you feel that the establishment in Memphis.

David Yellin- Were they overtly more kindly that's a...

Carolyn Yellin- Let me recall something, the Little Rock crisis had come in 57.

James Cherry- 54.

David Yellin- No.

Carolyn Yellin- Well the supreme court ruling had come in 54.

James Cherry- That's right.

Carolyn Yellin- You must have moved here just a year or so after the trouble in Little Rock.

David Yellin- In Clinton.

Carolyn Yellin- So, and Clinton Tennessee.

Margarie Cherry- Yeah it must have been the school desegregation..

David Yellin- Well that didn't take place really until well into the 60's.

Margarie Cherry- That was what I was thinking too.

Carolyn Yellin- Were you aware, I was going to say that were you aware that there was some attempt being made to face up to this among say people who were running the city or did you feel, Jim again is shaking his head.

Margarie Cherry- Well was Edmund Orgill mayor when we came? Yes and he was a liberal mayor.

Carolyn Yellin- Yes that.

Margarie Cherry- Yes that must have been it and there were a number of let's see...

Carolyn Yellin- Ed Niemann the newspaper editor.

Margarie Cherry- Mr. Niemann was the editor of the Precimeter, there were liberal editorials being written there were liberal pronouncements being made from the mayor's office. The Memphis, MCCR, Memphis committee on community relations was just being established when we moved in.

James Cherry- A little later.

Carolyn Yellin- And the (muffled) election was Keifhoffer the senator...

James Cherry- He had already been elected.

David Yellin- Now could it be, now this may be it Marge because I think this is significant about Memphis to really understand for instance just to go back and we came here 5 years ago. There is something that has to do with your reaction, there is something about the physical appearance of Memphis it is clean and it is wide. And the people here were, and this is what I think changed as a result of the Martin Luther King assassination, were somewhat confident of themselves in the relation and so there was a serenity, an awkward serenity.

James Cherry- A complacency really.

David Yellin- Well you can call it complacency but it was complacency I think there was that nobody was disturbed about the relationship.

Margarie Cherry- Well I know one thing that interested me.

David Yellin- So you felt it was better.

Margarie Cherry- Yeah.

David Yellin- The negroes weren't complaining.

Margarie Cherry- One thing that interested me was that we were able to go to desegregated meetings without any problem and I had not expected to be able to do this in Memphis Tennessee.

Carolyn Yellin- Were most of these held at some place like Lemoyne College at that time?

David Yellin- Because see Memphis State was not yet...

Margarie Cherry- No I remember going to a church to hear Jim Lawson speak on behalf of FOR, the fellowship of reconciliation, they were trying to establish branch in Memphis and I went down with our minister's wife to hear him.

James Cherry- Well as I recall the league of women voters had some negro members then did it not, because you became active in it.

Margarie Cherry- Yes.

James Cherry- I think it was desegregated and that was one of the things you were early involved in.

Margarie Cherry- Yes just a couple of negro members and I was surprised at this.

David Yellin- The Saturday luncheon groups started?

Margarie Cherry- No that started because Anne Justin and I started that group and we started it about 4 or 5 years later, it was not in existence when we came.

David Yellin- Oh well we will want to get to that.

Carolyn Yellin- But I am was going to say you got into league of women voters immediately and I know at the time we moved here which was 5 years ago you were the president of the league of women voters, wasn't that about the time you...had you held the office, had you held other offices in..

James Cherry- Yes I held board positions. I was vice president in Virginia when we left there.

Carolyn Yellin- So you had been and you looked up the league of women voters as soon as you arrived here?

Margarie Cherry- No they looked me up. I had hoped to get a few months rest.

Carolyn Yellin- I think for the record that it is interesting to note on tape that the league of women voters quietly folded up and closed us door about last year wasn't it.

Margarie Cherry- A year ago.

Carolyn Yellin- In fact before this happened before he assassination.

David Yellin- But somehow I see some significance in your, or remembrance of things past that it was a different kind of city.

Margarie Cherry- It was better than I thought it would be.

David Yellin- Yeah we even bragged to people I remember our first year we went to New York and told them how Memphis really has this thing under control, I don't know what we said.

Margarie Cherry- And then when the busses were desegregated without incidence and the schools were desegregated with out incident and the libraries.

David Yellin- And the department stores.

James Cherry- The pubs and the zoo and...

Margarie Cherry- Yes and I was chairman of the social action committee with the church at that time that let me see, well it was long before the department stores were desegregated but one of the first things we did was to write a letter to leading department stores asking them to desegregate and also to restaurants.

Carolyn Yellin- So I can see why you do feel you had an influence on the course of events in the city because you did.

David Yellin- You did.

Margarie Cherry- Well I don't know how great it was but I was involved with the people that were trying to get things done and we did succeed in getting things done.

David Yellin- But could you say that all during this time let's put this as the watermark, April 4th 1968, until then or until the strike certainly, there was a feeling among all of us and now I include us because we had been there now 3 or 4 years that Memphis did have things under control really.

Margarie Cherry- Yes and.....

David Yellin- It wasn't as good as some but it was not out of control.

James Cherry- It was making steady, unspectacular, but steady progress.

Carolyn Yellin- I felt that the options weren't closed, I felt that all things were still possible in Memphis.

Margarie Cherry- Yes I did too. And I remember writing to friends that Memphis was making such good progress we had done so and so and so and so this year and things are going along so well and race relations were excellent and some people from out of town were writing back to me that they had heard otherwise. Some colored friends one a priest who has worked in human relations in Virginia and with whom we have kept in touch he was in North Carolina and has been in North Carolina for the past few years and he said that he had been in touch with some priests from Memphis and that they did not share my feeling and it was evident that they had been closer with some of the negro community than I had. Carolyn Yellin- I would even put on tape the reminiscence that I once tried a little magazine piece on something about Memphis and in which I was fairly enthusiastic about this and indeed started it with an anecdote of how good race relations seemed and the comment from a New York Editor was that it was a bit gushy. I thought well that is just cynicism but it turns out he was quite right.

David Yellin- Of course we tried to rewrite it and I think it was the first realization then that things weren't...

Carolyn Yellin- Yes we Dave, and I were going to write together as we had done before in a rewrite and we had gotten an idea of we would redo this as and still be bale to say the things we wanted to say is letter to our liberal friends in the north come on down south you will love it. But as we really examined some of the points we wished to make we realized we were reporting things as we hoped they were rather than perhaps as they really were.

David Yellin- And if you are going to be for history it was for Harper's and it was Jack Fisher who said....And then we said and I think, to carry this through then we finally said that we could not do it because if we told the truth or what we thought was the truth we might lose our own effectiveness and also because if it did ever get published and we felt that we would rather live the experience and do something about it rather than write about it and he said fine he understood this. But I think that is kind of to me it is significant and we really have not as far as I can recall not gone into this with many of the people we have talked with. And that is that there is a soporific effect that Memphis has on one and I think it did have on people who had lived here.

Margarie Cherry- Yes and the negros that we met through the human relations council and other organizations seemed relaxed and content and you know at peace with the way things were.

David Yellin- I think that is why the sanitation strike was so significant.

Carolyn Yellin- May I just say we do have another tape to get to the events of the sanitation strike so perhaps if we just finish this off and get all our background here.

David Yellin- No this is fine but just we can get some more details. Now you came her and Marge you joined things, the league of women voters and not the church, the Unitarian church...

Margarie Cherry- We had a liberal minister at the time.

David Yellin- Yeah, talk a little bit about that.

Margarie Cherry- No Eugene Leaning. As a matter of fact when we first came to church it was with another minister, Jean came shortly after we did.

James Cherry- 2 or 3 months after we did.

Margarie Cherry- Yeah and he was all for getting involved in the racial situation here and did so, his wife also, and I remember my first experience of discontent from the negro community was with some college kids who were, what in the world were they protesting. We had joint meetings of our young people's group with some negro young people's groups and they were waxing indignant over these conditions in the schools I think it was. It was the bus desegregation thing that was going on at the time.

Carolyn Yellin- This was at the time that....

David Yellin- This was 1960's.

Carolyn Yellin- Kyles was...

David Yellin- That was when the busses were desegregated.

Margarie Cherry- Yeah the busses were being desegregated and some of these kids had gotten in trouble with the police.

Carolyn Yellin- True and the NAACP was leading that desegregation campaign of the busses.

Margarie Cherry- Yeah that's right.

Carolyn Yellin- Did you ever join the NAACP or were you involved in? Either in Virginia or....

Margarie Cherry- I was a member in Virginia for a couple of years and they never invited me to a meeting. When I first joined I asked about when the next meeting would be held, and they told me a certain day and a certain place and I went there and there was nobody there. So I called people up and I said I went to the meeting and there was no meeting and they said oh isn't that too bad we had to change it and I guess the word didn't get around. That was the last I heard about a meeting one way or another. I would ask occasionally and they would say that they hadn't met or they had met and I must not have gotten the notice. But it became very evident to me that they were willing to take my money and use my support but they were not willing to have me help make decisions. So I withdrew my membership.

Carolyn Yellin- Do you feel that there was suspicion or was this simply one organization that they wished to....

Margarie Cherry- Well I just felt that they felt that they knew more about what they wanted to do than did and they didn't want me maybe getting in there and possibly weakening their position or trying to weaken it so they just closed me out without giving me a chance to find out what sort of person I was or what I might have to contribute.

Carolyn Yellin- Let me ask one other question a comparison of the negro leaders that you knew in Virginia and the negro leaders here, did you feel from these integrated gatherings that there was competent negro leadership here, militant or how would you have described it Marge?

Margarie Cherry- In Norfolk?

Carolyn Yellin- No here.

Margarie Cherry- In Memphis.

Carolyn Yellin- As compared.

Margarie Cherry- I think the negro leaders in Memphis are on the whole of a higher caliber than the ones in Norfolk. At the time we were in Norfolk you see it was still very much an underground movement.

David Yellin- Yeah I think that has to do with it too.

Margarie Cherry- Yeah because these negroes who were involved in it..

David Yellin- They didn't know they were allowed to be leaders in a lot of ways.

Margarie Cherry- Yeah that is right and everything that was being done was being done underground it was not written up in the paper and the NAACP was not coming out and making demands and things like that.

David Yellin- Well we have to stop because we are at the end of the tape.

(Tape End)