

SS173.mp3

David Yellin- This is tape 2, tape 2 with Mr. and Mrs. James Cherry and that was Mr. James Cherry who wants to get along with this stuff. Alright I would like to get started again in the interest of time and your own strength we are now in Memphis and you are getting started and unless you can think of anything that happened in the intervening years that you could not, that would be significant in your own feeling and your own observation of what Memphis was like in race relations.

James Cherry- I would say that in the Memphis years that my own attitude has changed from one of strictly following and some original reluctance to become involved to a much greater willingness to become involved in racial things.

David Yellin- Was there any one reason for that?

James Cherry- No, perhaps just become a little gutsier or something like this. At the same time I still have felt that I must protect my job and I have not been as outspoken.

David Yellin- It occurs to me that we never did, excuse me define or explain your job, at least say it out loud.

James Cherry- Well at the present time and for the last 5 years I have been in charge of the advertising departments for the two leading newspapers in Memphis and which means that I am responsible for most of the revenue that the papers receive and for that reason having a key job I have to be careful as to not involve the newspapers in my own personal reactions to these things. I have no right to speak for the newspapers in these affairs and yet being one of the executives of the company it is difficult to remove myself and my own feelings completely.

David Yellin- Now are you director of advertising, is that your official job.

James Cherry- That is advertising director.

David Yellin- Advertising director for the Precimeter and the Commercial Appeal?

James Cherry- And the, yes.

Carolyn Yellin- Did you come to both newspapers?

James Cherry- Yes I did.

Carolyn Yellin- You have always represented both strips?

James Cherry- Yes always have worked for both Scripts Howard newspapers in Memphis and I have had a series of managerial jobs in the advertising department, several promotions until I have been here until now there is no where else for me to go in the ad department.

David Yellin- Oh you weren't always...

James Cherry- No, I was an assistant manager of one of the departments and then I was the assistant advertising director and then I was the advertising manager and now I am the advertising director for whatever.

David Yellin- Well they can make you advertising Chancellor?

James Cherry- True, true.

David Yellin- Well can you think Marge, now I think it would be important to tell about the starting of the Saturday luncheon group.

Margarie Cherry- Yeah that is kind of interesting because I remember saying to Anne Johnston....

David Yellin- Just identify Anne Johnston quickly please.

Margarie Cherry- Well she is a native Memphian who had developed her feelings about race in much the same way we had over the years and had made some good negro friends in Memphis, a few., But I said to Anne that I missed some of my negro friends the people that I had known well in Virginia through the league of women voters and Unitarian fellowship, that although I had been involved in some organizations in Memphis that had some negro members I had not really had a chance to mix socially with them to really get to know any of them well and that I didn't feel that I had a negro friend in Memphis and Anne said she had a few friends whom she would like to know better and she suggested that we might get together for lunch at her house one day, she would invite a couple of gals that she thought we would enjoy meeting and she was going to have Louis Freeman who also is a native southerner, I don't remember whether she was a native of Memphis but of this region who was working for the post office at the time I think. And was a Unitarian and Anne was also a Unitarian and myself and we wound up at Anne's place for lunch with this one young woman who was a teacher not at Lemoyne but at the other...Carolyn Yellin- Owens?

Margarie Cherry- Owens College, yeah. And her name was, I have only seen her once since then and I don't think she is living here any more but I think she is living in Washington.

David Yellin- Owens was the negro junior college.

Margarie Cherry- Yeah, so anyway we had a good time and we decided we would do this again. At different people's houses and invite different people...

David Yellin- There was just one negro lady?

Margarie Cherry- Yes the other woman who (muffled) asked couldn't make it or something went wrong. So we did this a couple of times and then we went to the Wolf River and at that time the Wolf River Society had not had any negroes there for lunch and Anne and I were both members and so we decided that we would invite some of our negro friends there which we did.

David Yellin- What was the date please?

Margarie Cherry- I don't know, it was about 5 years ago wasn't it?

Carolyn Yellin- It had been going a couple of years, or at least a year by the time we arrived which was in 64.

Margarie Cherry- Yeah so this time we had, oh I think Anne Willis and Maxine Smith and Anne and Louis and myself and maybe Rachel Powell was there by that time.

Carolyn Yellin- Mary Kay Thompson?

Margarie Cherry- I don't think Mary Kay was at this particular luncheon because this was still friends meeting with friends.

Carolyn Yellin- What other negros? Maxine Smith and...

Margarie Cherry- Maxine Smith was secretary I think of the NAACP our vice president or something at the time. And Anne Willis, was A.W. in politics then?

James Cherry- Yes.

Margarie Cherry- He was, well anyway, I remember that those two were there and so we began thinking that this was such a fun thing for us and such a nice way to get to know one another.

Carolyn Yellin- May I interrupt did you have a good reaction at the wolf river? Did you have to make special arrangements or did you just go ahead and do it?

Margarie Cherry- Oh no, we just went nobody said anything, and so we decided that day, it was Anne's idea she said, why don't we expand and why don't we start meeting in restaurants and this way we can help desegregate the restaurants and get more people each of us get word to friends that we know who would like to become involved in this. Who would like white friends who would like to meet negros and so forth and we won't have any organization, we won't have offices, we won't have programs, because we were all so involved. The first reaction was I can't, we can't do another single thing. I was president of the league at the time and really working myself to death and so they said ok, it will be just a very informal meeting we will just meet and we will draw straws to see who will find a place for the next meeting, and get out the notices and there will just be none of this regimented stuff at all. So we did, each of us drew up a list of friends whom we thought would be interested in doing this kind of thing and we got notices for our first meeting and first luncheon and it was held.

Carolyn Yellin- Do you remember where?

Margarie Cherry- I think the first one was held at...it was either at the downtown (muffled) one of the restaurants in the downtown...

David Yellin- At the motel?

Margarie Cherry- Yeah right across from the Sheridan Peabody. And that we had some subsequent ones at the Sheridan East which was another motel. I remember we had good receptions from both of these places, Hollin Fields at the downtowner was most...

James Cherry- (muffled)

Margarie Cherry- No, we couldn't get into the Villa.

David Yellin- That's right you just had the Villa recently for the first time.

Carolyn Yellin- The Villa and the Embers were listed I recall as the restaurants...

Margarie Cherry- Yeah we had trouble from both of those.

Carolyn Yellin- Because by the time I joined there were some 200 hundred people on the mailing list I believe and I think the thing that needs to be said about this was that when Memphis went into its crisis period the, this was one of the groups that truly survived the stresses and strains of polarization..

Margarie Cherry- Yes.

Carolyn Yellin- One of the few, because I was at the lunch in the February luncheon right after the strike had started and in fact I sat next to Dorothy Lawson, Jim Lawson's wife and we discussed the strike at that point and there was only 6 white members, it was at the Villa it was the first time they had, they had gone back to the villa. There was some 409 people there and there were only 6 of us who were white and Dorothy Lawson was saying that this is what was so discouraging to her about this groups was how the white attendants fell off, you know where are you when we need you? So Maddie Singstack and someone from Memphis state, the 3 of us were hostesses for the March meeting which indeed was scheduled for the day after the first, the Martin Luther King march.

David Yellin- The one that was postponed by the snow.

Carolyn Yellin- And, the one that was postponed by the giant snow storm...

Margarie Cherry- It was going to be held in the Peabody wasn't it?

Carolyn Yellin- And it was at the Pea body and wee had 40 people out and it was just about half and half and it was an interesting thing because at that lunch we suddenly got a whole new group of concerned people from Idlewild Presbyterian church, white women who suddenly..

David Yellin- They came out of the snow.

Carolyn Yellin- From Southwestern a good many people from Southwestern College and it was approximately half and half and Mary Collier at that luncheon showed pictures of the strike meetings and the strikers and they took up a fund for the strikers.

David Yellin- The Southwestern's president's wife was there wasn't she?

Carolyn Yellin- I believe so and then the following in April it was held on the Unitarian church on the river and from then on it has grown,. I don't know have you been recently Marge?

Margarie Cherry- No I haven't I haven't been since (muffled).

Carolyn Yellin- They have now, there are so many new people in it and it must be up to 4 or 5 hundred now.

Margarie Cherry- Oh yes I have too I was at one of the summer ones at the (muffled) with the swimming pool we had a picnic around the swimming pool. But there is something to be said about this organization in that real friendships were formed through this and (Audio cuts out) Some times she would bring someone else along that could talk about it better than she could. So we began to become very well informed on things that were going on in the negro community and on some of the needs of the city which many of us hadn't known about before.

Carolyn Yellin- And these were the lines of communication, went slowly, one by one (muffled) were snipped and clipped and cut off through the women who had no jobs, to that they had no worry about why, they were able to protect this and in fact I think our concern at this point is and has been that the negro members should not withdraw. At this point in February 1969 I think for the record it should be said that polarization is not as great, is not so great that this has happened yet. And my friends even in Nashville only a few hundred miles from here told me that in that city it has gone much farther that the integrated groups of this sort, there is a coffee club very much like this in Nashville and it broke up over a year ago, the black members with drew and I think this is, this needs to be on the record somewhere and now is.

David Yellin- Alrighty, well now anything else, we wont have to go into the league of women voters, that has really no, is not Germaine to this situation we are talking about. I don't think it dissolved because of the..

Carolyn Yellin- With racial tensions did it?

James Cherry- No.

Margarie Cherry- No.

David Yellin- If wee could because I think it would be real good if we can get Jim and your job. Let's get to the strike and whatever you want to tell us if you want to start at random...

Carolyn Yellin- How did you personally feel when the strike came and as the situation developed?

James Cherry- Well first of all let me say that I think that the significant thing in Memphis was not the assassination but the strike. I think the strike simply presented the climate in which the assassination occurred and it might have easily have occurred in Birmingham or Atlanta or wherever they had been able to get Martin Luther King exposed but the strike itself was a shattering experience for the white community in Memphis as well as for the negro community because it made us realize that the complacency was the word I used, or comfort or something like this was also a word used here a bit ago, was false. That we had a veneer of satisfaction here but down below the polarization really existed and the strife and the stresses were all there and I think I may have been a little bit less surprised than some people because I had always thought of Memphis for many years as a police oriented town and I don't know how many people have thought of Memphis that way. Memphis has on the Memphis police force and the Memphis power structure have always been very close to the FBI and John Edgar Hoover which is a result of a close affection between the Memphis newspapers and especially the Commercial Appeal the more influential of the 2. A close relation between those, the personnel on the editorial sides of the of the papers and those people who write editorials and Mr. Hoover personally and as a result we have always loudly been in favor of law and order even before law and order became a popular cry such as the strike as the demonstrations have taken place all over the country.

Carolyn Yellin- Jim may I interrupt, did this then at a period where other sections in the south were having disorders because people were causing like Little Rock and the FBI came in as the U.S. Calvary to save the situation for the federal government. In the confrontations with local power, did this at that time then make the police not bull connorish as they were in Birmingham?

James Cherry- I think that is partly true, I think that..

Carolyn Yellin- They were cooperating with the federal government?

James Cherry- I think they were cooperating with the federal government instead of thinking as the federal government as their adversaries.

Carolyn Yellin- Which was true in much of the rest of the south.

James Cherry- This is true.

David Yellin- I don't want to interrupt what you say but something has just kind of flashed. What influence did anybody and particularly Frank Aldren who you would certainly say was more influential than Charles Schneider is or Frank. What influence did any or either one or both have on the appointment of Holloman.

James Cherry- I don't know so I should not....

David Yellin- Alright well, your explanation makes so much sense and the fact of Holloman being an ex-FBI man and not at all connected with the police here suddenly was taken out of a job and put into this..

James Cherry- I feel that the Commercial Appeal was truly gratified that Mr. Holloman was given the job but what if any influence they had in his appointment I just don't know.

Margarie Cherry- Could I interject something here. I remember being informed by some of the people we met in Memphis fairly soon after we arrived that Memphis police tended to brutalize negroes and there was one incident with a Jewish man which was highly publicized in which the police had been insulting and he brought suit as I recall but this was kind of a undercurrent that we were always aware of that the police were supposedly pretty tough when dealing with minority groups.

James Cherry- It was a tough police force and Claude Armor of course was quoted as saying that he was going to maintain law and order in Memphis and he didn't care whose ass he had to run out of town in order to do it (muffled).

Margarie Cherry- We felt that he was fair even though he was tough.

Carolyn Yellin- Well I was going to say that if Claude Armor has still been the police commissioner that the handling of the strike would have been different? Do you think this is true?

Margarie Cherry- It is hard to say.

Carolyn Yellin- HE was the safety commissioner he was in charge.

David Yellin- But he didn't come in until after the..

Margarie Cherry- I would have felt that he would have.

Carolyn Yellin- And they would quote the fact that at the time of the picketing at restaurants that he put, when he had the ku klux klan marching on one side of the street and the NAACP pickets on the other and had the police lined up in the middle of the street to keep them apart and everything was law and order.

James Cherry- And he also told John Casper who proposed to come to Memphis that if he set foot in town he would have him arrested immediately.

Carolyn Yellin- This was the one responsible for the Clinton Tennessee agitation.

Margarie Cherry- Yes.

Carolyn Yellin- The right wing agitation.

David Yellin- Alright well...

Margarie Cherry- And the way he through a cordon around the first school that was desegregated and wouldn't allow anybody in when the television crews from NBC or some place sort of bullied their way through and said but we are NBC and he said I don't care if you are you know what you get your such and such out of here. Or I will put you in jail and they did.

James Cherry- The point I wanted to make, with a background, a philosophical background of believing in law and order and having been exposed to his philosophy largely by the newspapers over a period of years then when the strike came there was a built up feeling on the part of the white community that nothing must be permitted to go wrong but the strikers had to, had to be overcome. That law and order must win and the strikers could not have their way here in Memphis and if there were to be any disorders they were to be put down.

David Yellin- So it wasn't that they, that the strikers were disorderly but the people in Memphis have been so conditioned and associated that anything against the establishment as being disorder.

James Cherry- I think this is true.

David Yellin- Because the strike itself was not disorderly.

James Cherry- No, this is true.,

Margarie Cherry- Well there was this feeling that people who are employed by the city like firemen and policemen, you know, sanitation workers, hospital workers should not strike, that they are public servants and as such they should stay on the job.

David Yellin- That in itself is disorder.

James Cherry- And just as important, more important when the strikers marched along Main St. and boycotted the downtown merchants. This became in many people's eyes a form of disorder when...

David Yellin- You would be close to that because did that hurt your advertising?

James Cherry- The advertising was not hurt substantially until after the assassination and then as a result of the curfew more than anything else, not the boycott so much.

David Yellin- In other words the department stores and all of these who boycotted advertised probably more?

James Cherry- Not more but, not much less.

Carolyn Yellin- Jim did you..

James Cherry- You see the department stores were doing fine jobs in their branch operations they weren't really losing much business.

Carolyn Yellin- I was going to say that business was (muffled)

James Cherry- Downtown but it was made up for in the others and a year later it has not come back, it has come back some but it is still hurting it is still down.

David Yellin- Now did you feel any impact from the boycott from the newspapers themselves of the negro community had?

James Cherry- The newspapers certainly felt the impact. We lost, I don't think I am at liberty to say just how many thousands but it was a very large number.

David Yellin- Did you reduce your advertising rates?

James Cherry- No we did not. We did not reduce our advertising rates nor did we take any official cognizance of the boycott or the loss of circulation. Feeling that it would be temporary and as soon as the conditions cleared up the boycott would end and the strike would...

David Yellin- It would be another week or so and it would be over.

Carolyn Yellin- Was there ever any feeling at the newspaper that some concession should be made editorially that you know of in order to win back these boycotting?

James Cherry- Yes a number of concessions were made editorially while the strike was still going on. I think that oh the designation of individuals by white or negro by race was dropped at this time.

Carolyn Yellin- How about the classified ads of negro housing, do you know when that changed?

James Cherry- That was changed, at the same time.

Carolyn Yellin- During the strike as you recall?

James Cherry- During the boycott and which was coinciding with the strike and just which exactly came first I wouldn't be sure. Whether or not it came after the assassination I just don't recall, I think perhaps it did just come after and that was one of the things we did.

Carolyn Yellin- Well explain while you are on that why this in a sense was a pragmatic...

James Cherry- In a sense we did not require negro houses to be segregated. The fact of the matter is that negro neighborhoods are still segregated in Memphis and many people did prefer to advertise their property for sale as being in a negro neighborhood. We did not require in the paper that it run in any particular classification. It could have run in the geographical location or in the city at large classification but there was one negro property for rent, negro property for sale which some advertisers did want to use. And with truly racial considerations aside for the moment was a convenience to the reader who wanted a house...

Margarie Cherry- A negro coming into Memphis and not being able to tell by looking at a street whether it was in a white or colored section would get a lot of rebuffs before he finally got to a....

James Cherry- But we found a way to drop it and we all thought it would cost us business but it didn't at the same time we dropped it we alphabetized the listing so that by street names and it was possible for those who wanted housing in a certain area to find it without going to a separate classification.

Carolyn Yellin- I wanted to ask about the acceptance of ads, now you accepted ads from people supporting the strikers.

James Cherry- Yes we did.

Carolyn Yellin- But I do want you to tell about the ad, that I do know of the threat that you personally received for refusing an ad.

James Cherry- Well we had an ad offered to us a couple of days before the King assassination. It would have actually run on that same morning had we accepted it and it, I discovered it was not a new piece of copy, it was a photograph showing Martin Luther King at the highland of folk school in company with Miles Horton and Aubrey Williams, I think I don't recall it exactly and some other people who had been accused of communism which had already run with an inflammatory headline and a descriptive copy below in a Georgia Newspaper which is, I wish I could recall the name of it but it was a white supremacist newspaper which had been really I think established for this purpose I mean a really racist newspaper.

Carolyn Yellin- I know the ad because there is a billboard with that ad just outside of Tulsa Oklahoma which was put up there by the Birch society.

James Cherry- Yeah well it was brought to us and cash payment was accepted for the ad to run and it came to my attention and I advised everyone that we would not accept this advertisement and we....

David Yellin- Was this your decision?

James Cherry- This was my personal decision.

David Yellin- You didn't have to go to anyone else?

James Cherry- I didn't go to anyone else. I didn't risk any other opinion on the matter at all I simply was not going to run. So I refused publication of the ad and we notified the advertiser who had paid us cash.

Carolyn Yellin- An individual?

James Cherry- An individual yes, and we...

David Yellin- Paid cash how across the counter?

James Cherry- Yes he had brought us cash money across the counter in full of which we had given him a receipt and when I turned the ad down I had a phone call from I had a solicitor inform him that we were refunding his money and we were not accepting the publication and I had a phone call from him immediately demanding

that we publish it and threatening that a bomb would be set off in the newspaper office if we refused.

David Yellin- You spoke to him on the phone.

James Cherry- I spoke to him on the phone.

David Yellin- Do you remember what he said?

James Cherry- He said don't be surprised if something happens to the newspaper office if you don't and to you if you don't run this advertisement and I reported this to the police and he was questioned but I do not think that he was arrested. I also reported to the police that he might be a possible suspect in any plot that might have existed to kill Martin Luther King.

David Yellin- In those very terms?

Carolyn Yellin- Afterwards you reported to the, after the assassination.

James Cherry- Yes I did, after the assassination no, because this whole affair is quite close in time to the assassination.

Carolyn Yellin- This happened the threat to you was somewhere around April 1st or 2nd.

James Cherry- I think the 3rd actually the day before the assassination, the ad would have run on the day of the assassination and if and it was so inflammatory sensing the situation we had some disturbances the week before if you remember I didn't want to publish it.

Carolyn Yellin- This was after the original march that Martin Luther King led, the one march that broke up.

James Cherry- Yes that is right this was after the march was broken up a week earlier.

Carolyn Yellin- And they wanted to run it after he had been accused of...

James Cherry- After he had been accused of...

David Yellin- What size ad was it?

James Cherry- It would have been an ad not quite a quarter of a page.

Carolyn Yellin- For both newspapers?

James Cherry- I don't remember whether it was for both newspapers or only one but I know it would have run in the Commercial Appeal.

David Yellin- You spoke to him, he said this and your reported the threat to the police and what did they tell you?

James Cherry- Yes and they told me that they would investigate and as a matter of fact I did not report it directly to the police. I reported it to the city editor whom I knew well and who was in touch with the police on all the, on all (muffled).

David Yellin- Who was that at the time?

James Cherry- The city editor at that time, was we have had personnel changes. The man I talked with though was Angus McCarren who is still with the newspaper.

David Yellin- And then he reported it to the police.

Margarie Cherry- Didn't you say that the police had a file on this man?

James Cherry- I think they found out then that he was...

David Yellin- Was he from Memphis?

James Cherry- He has been in and out of Memphis but he had been in Memphis for some time before this affair.

Carolyn Yellin- Had you known of him before or was it a new...

James Cherry- New contact for us he was not a regular advertiser nor was he someone that we had associated earlier with.

David Yellin- Do you know where he is now?

James Cherry- No, as a matter of fact I meant today to look up the correspondence because I wrote him a letter in returning his check. That was another thing that he demanded that if we didn't run his ad that we in refunding his money give him a full explanation of why we had refused the ad.

David Yellin- Did you do that?

James Cherry- No I simply wrote him that we had found his ad unacceptable for publication and we were returning his money, truly yours signed my name and all this. This is policy whenever I refuse an ad I never give a reason why.

Carolyn Yellin- Were you afraid that this might extend to your family, were there any threats made to Marge or...

James Cherry- No not to me.

Margarie Cherry- But I was afraid because his office was on the ground floor and there is only a glass window between him and the street. (Tape End)