

### SS335.mp3

This is August 8, 1972. We are in Olin Morris's office at WREC, and we are talking to Paul Barnett. This is the Memphis Search for Meaning Committee on the sanitation strike project.

David Yellin: And, as Carol Lynn said, our main concern Paul is let's tell what it isn't, that it is not about the Ray trial, and it is not about the assassination as such. Our main concern is what happened in Memphis during the sanitation strike period. Anything that could lead up to it, anything that could explain the events, the tensions and so on, and...

Carol Lynn Yellin: Excuse me, David, would you do me a favor? For my own personal nervousness about these things, having worked with these? Just check and be sure we're picking up?

David Yellin: And the best way to start is, if you don't mind, just give us a little biographical material -- where you were born, so that you can be identified, and then how you came to Memphis, and just quickly get to WREC and what you were in the spring.

Paul Barnett: Well, I was born and raised here. I went to St. Thomas Catholic grade school and catholic high school, the old Catholic high school at Central and Rozelle. I worked on the police department for a short while. I went into the service.

Carol Lynn Yellin: You worked as a policeman?

Paul Barnett: I was a motorcycle man. I was 19 years old. And I left here when the first draft to leave the city of Memphis, January 6, '41. I was field artillery. I came out a First Sergeant. I was gone five years. I went back to the police department for about two years, and then hop scotched around until I finally got into this field.

Carol Lynn Yellin: Excuse me, were you overseas?

Paul Barnett: Yes, yes, yes. I was overseas.

Carol Lynn Yellin: In Europe?

Paul Barnett: In Europe. ETO they called it, European Theater Operations.

David Yellin: How did you get in this racket, I mean what made you come to...they all say you were a good talker I guess?

Paul Barnett: '37, when they had the floods the severe floods around here, and this station right here was staying on the air 24 hours a day, broadcasting messages and so on. I was still going to Catholic high, and I said, "I'm going to go down there and see if I can help." So I came down here. And I had never been on the air or anything, but people always said they could understand what I said, so I came down here, and sure enough

they let me read some messages. That was in '37.

David Yellin: Who were "they?" Do you remember?

Paul Barnett: Mr. Wooten. Mac Todd was here. I think Bill Trotter. I'm not sure about Bill. I know Mac was here, and a couple of fellows that are no longer here anymore, and then when that was over they thanked me very kindly and I went about my merry way, and never thought about radio or television for years, and I hadn't found my niche what I wanted to do. So, I went to a local school. I won't give this guy courtesy of mentioning his name, and I worked a few small stations. I went to the west coast and broadcast baseball one year, and then I came back here. Then I went back the following year. This was in the '50s, and then I went out on television on the west coast, and then I came back and worked for WHHM here, and then I went to Pennsylvania, came back here in '64 I guess. I have been back since.

David Yellin: But then you were at WMPS weren't you?

Paul Barnett: Oh, I was at MPS in '59 and '60, and then I was news director of WJJD in Chicago. You go around and you just forget. But you're right. I guess that was one of the high spots in my career, news director of a 50,000 watt station in the #2 market.

Carol Lynn Yellin: I want to just ask one thing, when you said you were broadcasting messages I'm going way, way back, but this was the kind of thing where people would be lost or in the flood. I mean that's such a Memphis flavored thing.

Paul Barnett: Dear John, mother and I are all right. Don't worry about us, signed so and so, so and so.

Carol Lynn Yellin: So this was a combination of news and public service you were doing?

Paul Barnett: Oh, yes, yes. Well, 99.44% public service. I don't know of anybody else that was doing it at that time.

David Yellin: Then when you came back here you were on radio and television?

Paul Barnett: Yeah, I came back here to MQM, and then from MQM over to here.

David Yellin: Right. The now over here you mean WREC.

Paul Barnett: Yeah.

David Yellin: Now, if we can, kind of skip and the strike began February 12, 1968.

Paul Barnett: You're probably better with the dates. To me it was all one big mess.

David Yellin: Yeah. When did you hear about it, and can you...?

Paul Barnett: What, the strike?

David Yellin: Yes, I mean you heard about it that first day I imagine. Had you heard about it before?

Paul Barnett: Well, I attended a meeting at the auditorium in which Mayor Loeb spoke to a bunch of the workers, sanitation workers.

David Yellin: That was after it started.

Paul Barnett: No, this was the...

Carol Lynn Yellin: The third or fourth day (muffled).

Paul Barnett: Well, yeah, yeah, maybe after the strike, yes.

Carol Lynn Yellin: Early on in the strike.

Paul Barnett: Then they came out of there and said they were going to march down Main Street. They formed in front of the federal building, and it looked for a while like there was going to be a little confrontation there, whether or not the police department was going to let them take up the street. But, finally that was resolved and they started walking down Main.

Carol Lynn Yellin: Well now excuse me, this was later on. This was not after Mayor Loeb had spoken was it?

Paul Barnett: Yes it was, oh yes, oh yes. This was following the meeting.

David Yellin: Yeah. Can we go back a little bit. I'll tell you what we're interested in, Paul, and maybe you could help us, just as... since you were in and around this city, you knew this city well, you knew the leaders, you knew the power structure and so on, what do you think was the reaction here or the climate when the strike started? Did people take it seriously? You know, now we know we went through it and then Martin Luther King was killed and we had a lot of trouble here, but I want to go back and try to find out what it was like in those days. I mean, if you can recall.

Paul Barnett: Well, after a couple of days with the garbage being out, you know, no pickups to speak of, the longer it went, the more people began to notice it. And there were little things happening in the city, and meetings and the union people were here of course.

David Yellin: Did you hear in the newsroom of this station, or just being in the news media sense anything happening?

Paul Barnett: Each day, each day...I think so. I think so. And then they began to bring in other leaders, you know, other supporters shall we say, and you knew that eventually something was going to happen. No one had any idea of course it would end up the way it did.

David Yellin: And also was there some indication always, what was this strike about, was it a union thing, was it a racial thing. I mean can you recall?

Paul Barnett: Well, I think it was, it all started over wages, and unionization. They wanted more money and the union convinced them that they could, by their representation they could get more money.

David Yellin: Do you think that there was any pressure put on the men? I mean, what I'm trying to do is trying to help you because four years, and as you say, so many things happened -- to try to get back and what was going on in the newsroom, you know, when you make your assignments, what you're thinking about?

Paul Barnett: Well, when you have something like that where the entire city is affected, you have, what over 1000 men I would say in the sanitation department. You've got 1000 families involved there. That -- it took something pretty big to break that would pull you off of this particular thing and put you on something else, because we tried to man the union meetings, and city hall, the mediation.

David Yellin: Did you go to a lot of these?

Paul Barnett: Yes, I was up there when, up in the Claridge Hotel and they were having a, they brought in this gentleman from a firm I don't know, (muffled). Is it Humco he's with? There's a mediator.

Carol Lynn Yellin: Frank Miles.

David Yellin: Frank Miles.

Paul Barnett: That's right, that's right.

David Yellin: He's with Bruce (muffled).

Paul Barnett: Bruce, yeah, it's out there in the same Cook place, you know, yeah. And I remember that. Noel Clarkson was the cameraman and we were up there.

Carol Lynn Yellin: In some of the early mediation, or early meetings, in particular when Mayor Loeb was very insistent that, as that he wanted the city's business to be public business, and he did have the news media there, or insisted that the, that this be covered. And were you there when some of those, like when the ministers -- do you remember that, when the ministers got into it?

Paul Barnett: In city council chambers?

Carol Lynn Yellin: Well, they had some meetings that were sponsored by Rabbi Wax and the Ministers Alliance and those were (muffled).

Paul Barnett: I don't recall.

Carol Lynn Yellin: We're just, some of them were covered by television, and we were wondering...but you did cover. I interrupted you when you were covering that very moment of the march, and I want you to go back to that because I didn't mean to interrupt you.

David Yellin: You mean the 23<sup>rd</sup>? The first macing?

Carol Lynn Yellin: When the men were lining up to march down...

Paul Barnett: Yeah, then they went on down, went south on Main.

Carol Lynn Yellin: And you were there covering that (muffled)?

Paul Barnett: Yes, yes. At Gayoso there was a police car rocked by that, I don't mean rocks thrown literally, but it was rocked from side to side, you know.

David Yellin: Now, excuse me, on that, did you know anyone who saw that, or did you see it?

Paul Barnett: Oh, I was there.

David Yellin: And you saw it?

Paul Barnett: I was there.

Carol Lynn Yellin: Do you have any broadcasts preserved of your description of that?

Paul Barnett: I don't know. I don't think so (muffled).

David Yellin: Well, please describe that now.

Paul Barnett: And, then there was just wild confusion there for a bit, and some of the marchers ran south on Main, some went west on Gayoso, and I guess they went other directions. Of course I could only go one direction, and I went west on Gayoso. And that was the first -- that was the very first bit of that kind.

Carol Lynn Yellin: Were you on...?

Paul Barnett: I was on foot, yes.

David Yellin: When you went west you mean you ran a little bit?

Paul Barnett: Yes. Yeah, I ran quite a bit during the whole thing.

Carol Lynn Yellin: Did you get any of the gas or the mace that (muffled)?

Paul Barnett: There hadn't been any used here yet that I didn't get some of it, that's right.

David Yellin: That wasn't the big one, though, that you got?

Paul Barnett: No, no.

David Yellin: Because I remember that broadcast. Paul, in your opinion, the police were ready for something. Why do you think they were? Had they had any (muffled)?

Paul Barnett: I don't -- not necessarily ready, that they were anticipating this. I think the Chief MacDonald and his people figured that sooner or later something would come, but see this march was almost over. It only had another few blocks to go when this incident took place.

David Yellin: So that you're saying that in a sense the strategy or the defense strategy of the police was, it may not happen this day, the next day, but one day it might.

Paul Barnett: Yeah, that's right. In other words you, if it keeps raining long enough, you know, you're going to say, well, you know, it may not quit, we better make some kind of preparations, and I think that's what Chief MacDonald and his people were thinking. But they were, to my way of thinking they were looking out for all concerned. You know, of course they had the marchers. They had to protect them. Many of them didn't take part in this thing. They went to the side of the street up on the sidewalks.

David Yellin: Many of the marchers?

Paul Barnett: Yeah. Others didn't, and then you had the merchants you see, from the store, and they had all came out. Somebody put out a report the windows were broken in Goldsmiths. That isn't true. Some of the marchers went in Goldsmiths, you know.

David Yellin: To get out.

Paul Barnett: They brought in police reinforcements. But that all cleared up rather quickly that particular bit.

David Yellin: Then, just to refresh you, that's the 23<sup>rd</sup>, and then the ministers came in, and then the union people were given the injunction, and then...

Carol Lynn Yellin: That was March 6. Working on these dates...

David Yellin: And then through March other people came in, such as Bayard Rustin, and...

Carol Lynn Yellin: This was the escalation stage.

David Yellin: And Wilkins. And then were you, did you cover when Martin Luther King came in the first time, down at the temple? Were you there?

Paul Barnett: Yes. See this all -- the headquarters were down around Linden and Hernando, down at the AFSCME, I think they had a headquarters down there in one of the buildings down there next to the church, and they were using the church for meetings. We were not allowed in the church for the meetings they had. We'd wait until they came out, and then there was always someone who would act as a spokesman. I think what you basically really want from me is what happened the first day.

Carol Lynn Yellin: March 28<sup>th</sup>.

Paul Barnett: Is that way day it was?

Carol Lynn Yellin: The day that the march broke up, and Martin Luther King left the march.

David Yellin: Yeah.

Paul Barnett: The group that day, now you talk about sensing something. I could sense that.

Carol Lynn Yellin: What time did you arrive down there?

Paul Barnett: Oh Lord knows, I don't know. Plenty before they were supposed to leave, and I had some young people stick their head inside the unit and...

Carol Lynn Yellin: That day you were not on foot, you were...?

Paul Barnett: No, I was in the unit. And cursed me and asked me if I was with them. You know, if you're smart you'll just keep your mouth shut (muffled).

David Yellin: Your unit has the name WREC, it's a car, a sedan.

Paul Barnett: That's right.

David Yellin: You were driving, or you were in the back, or?

Paul Barnett: I was driving because the cameraman was out.

David Yellin: And you were alone?

Paul Barnett: Yeah, but he was -- I actually had a cameraman, but I was looking back and Reverend King had just driven up, and they were right in the middle of Linden and Hernando, and I was northbound on Hernando, about 15-20 feet from Linden when the march started. And I was in front. So we came on down, came on up because we were northbound, up Hernando to Beale, west on Beale. I don't know, there were thousands of people. And I was in front.

Carol Lynn Yellin: May I just ask, as you were in front, were you sort of clearing the way, or were there any police?

Paul Barnett: Oh, no, no, no. No, no, no there. If you'll -- I'll get to, because they were, the leaders were in front and some of the top police brass up there also with them, as there were in all these marches.

Carol Lynn Yellin: Were motorcycle police going ahead, or?

Paul Barnett: Of course they had the motorcycle men blocking off the thing, and then they had each intersection was taken care of before we got there. And there was singing and shouting and we crossed Third westbound. Between Second and Third, and I broadcast this, I saw a group of about maybe 15, 20, 25, I forget at this point, with what looked like tomato sticks, you know sticks that you put in the ground for your tomatoes to grow around, on the sidewalk and they got out, off the sidewalk and blended in with the front of the march. And I commented at this time this could be trouble because they all had sticks. We hadn't gone 50 yards, and the first window that was broken was in a building that has since been torn down, was in the middle of the block between Second and Main.

David Yellin: On the right or the left?

Paul Barnett: On the south side of the street.

David Yellin: South side.

Paul Barnett: South side, where Light, Gas, and Water building is now.

Carol Lynn Yellin: What kind of a store do you...?

Paul Barnett: I don't know.

Carol Lynn Yellin: Was it Paul's or?

Paul Barnett: Oh, no, no, no, Paul's is way back down. Paul's is at Third and Beale.



Carol Lynn Yellin: I know some of the pictures showed the looting going on.

Paul Barnett: Well, and see this is much time after this. And, it seems as though the sound of the breaking glass just was like a shot, you know.

David Yellin: A signal, or, not a signal.

Paul Barnett: Yeah (muffled) something to instill in them, we're going now, you could feel that. Then I heard a couple of windows on the far side, on the north side by a pawn shop there.

David Yellin: Now how were they broken, Paul? Did you see them?

Paul Barnett: No, by that time I was completely engulfed.

David Yellin: Around the car?

Paul Barnett: Yes.

David Yellin: Do you think they were broken with those sticks?

Paul Barnett: I'm sure of that. I'm sure of that.

David Yellin: So the implication would be that, and I'm thinking of somebody hearing what you're saying here, that those guys who came from the side and joined the march with those sticks probably were part of that group breaking windows.

Paul Barnett: Oh yes, oh yes, and without that you know, I -- who knows, it may have never happened.

Carol Lynn Yellin: One other thing, those sticks. Could you identify them as the sticks that were, that the "I AM A MAN" signs had been on?

Paul Barnett: Oh no, these were sticks, these were just long tomato sticks.

Carol Lynn Yellin: And they weren't sticks that they had torn, picket signs.

Paul Barnett: No, no, no, no. These sticks were much longer than that.

Carol Lynn Yellin: Very good, very good, yeah.

Paul Barnett: And, there was mass confusion then. They had, there were people down back in line and this, that, and the other, but there was complete disorder. No one had any control over the marchers. No one. So, went on up, turned west on, turned north on Main off of Beale, and just glass a breaking everywhere. Glass on Beale, on Main

Street then right on the corner. And what happened I don't know. I understand that the officers all have walkie-talkies and they were keeping in touch with Chief MacDonald, and before they got to McCall, or right at McCall he said, "Step 'em." You know, so the full march never made the north turn onto Main Street. I have always said that I think had the several thousand -- had this happened after they were stretched out on Main Street there wouldn't have been a window left on Main Street.

David Yellin: Well, yeah -- I am curious, why do you say that, I mean?

Paul Barnett: Because, they broke every window until they were dispersed, every window around them.

David Yellin: Now, does that mean that...

Paul Barnett: From McCall back all the windows were broken.

David Yellin: Now were there those, that many with sticks in it, or?

Paul Barnett: Oh, no by that time they were breaking any way.

David Yellin: So the thing spread, not only from those with the sticks, but to other people in the march?

Paul Barnett: That's right, that's right, that's right, that's right.

David Yellin: Now...

Carol Lynn Yellin: You felt it was people in the march joining by that time?

Paul Barnett: Yes, oh yes because there was -- see a lot of those guys with the sticks, as soon as the going got tough they dropped their sticks and took off.

David Yellin: And they just stimulated others enough...

Paul Barnett: That's right. That's the word I was looking for a while ago. It was a sort of stimulation when they heard the breaking glass.

David Yellin: Yeah. Now again, this is kind of an opinion and obviously because you are a trained newsman, you've had a lot of experience, do you think this was planned?

Paul Barnett: I wouldn't (muffled). If, any way I would say I would be wrong.

David Yellin: Well, that's an answer, right, you know, I mean. And we're not certainly trying...

Paul Barnett: The wrong segment, you know, I mean, by one segment let me correct

that.

David Yellin: And certainly this is privileged information, and we are not trying to put you on the spot, and...

Paul Barnett: I tell you what happened, you know. There's no disputing the fact.

Carol Lynn Yellin: I think I heard your news broadcast that day. And, in fact, Dave and I were talking earlier and I think it compared in the tension you created for the people listening at home, it compared and we said with the Hindenburg broadcast.

Paul Barnett: Well, somewhere in the station that tape is available.

David Yellin: I think we have it.

Paul Barnett: Do you?

David Yellin: Yes, yes.

Carol Lynn Yellin: Well, I remember it from that day because I was listening at home, and I just sat, and I was holding my head like this...

Paul Barnett: I think everyone in Memphis must have been listening to that. I have never -- it did more to enhance my career than anything I know.

David Yellin: Well, let's get you out of it. I mean, we can't leave Paul Barnett hanging in the middle of a -- what happened, can you remember?

Carol Lynn Yellin: I have to ask, you were still driving the car at this point and you were trying to drive and keep from having your own windows broken.

David Yellin: And also broadcasting.

Paul Barnett: That's right.

Carol Lynn Yellin: And keep the car moving, and not run over anybody, and talk into your microphone.

Paul Barnett: That's right.

Carol Lynn Yellin: I don't know how you did it.

David Yellin: Where was your microphone?

Paul Barnett: It sits up on the thing there, and I'm just, it has a little...

David Yellin: (muffled)

Paul Barnett: Yeah, and I didn't know whether I was getting through or not, but...

David Yellin: And is that played in the tape machine, or is that directly to the station?

Paul Barnett: This particular time I was live.

David Yellin: You were live (muffled).

Paul Barnett: But they taped it as it went on air. They taped it off the air as they say.

David Yellin: Yes, but you went on as you...

Paul Barnett: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

David Yellin: Okay, now what happened with all of this, I mean?

Paul Barnett: Well, the police moved in. The police moved in, and again, the marchers went in various and sundry directions. I went on up Main, and I saw Reverend King go up McCall. At Detroit and McCall I saw him get in the vehicle.

David Yellin: Now when you say you saw him go up McCall, he was walking? Fast?

Paul Barnett: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Carol Lynn Yellin: Who was with him, do you?

Paul Barnett: I don't recall.

David Yellin: But you saw him, right? He went...

Paul Barnett: Oh, yes.

David Yellin: He got into a vehicle.

Paul Barnett: See, I had interviewed Dr. King several times walking the highways of Mississippi after James Meredith was shot.

David Yellin: So you recognized him?

Paul Barnett: I recognized him, he recognized me. And, you get to know people like that.

David Yellin: Was the car waiting for him, or?

Paul Barnett: To my knowledge the car was northbound.

David Yellin: The reason I do this, I have the worst sense of direction.

Paul Barnett: Well, it was going towards the rear of Goldsmith's, see.

David Yellin: Right.

Paul Barnett: There's a hill there. He stopped and got in, and over to my right was a bunch of people picking up rocks, see? And there was one policeman there on one of these little three-wheelers, and there was so much going on. He was by himself. He didn't know what to do. I didn't know what to do. I got to worrying about my cameraman. So, I couldn't get down McCall, so I went on up to Gayoso, back to Main, and then south back on Main back down there where the police were driving them back. By that time the tear gas was thick.

David Yellin: And in your car as I recall.

Paul Barnett: That's right, that's right.

David Yellin: How did it get in your car, I mean other than I guess...

Paul Barnett: Well, I rolled the window up, and then I rolled the window down, see? I lost all thought of fear. There was, as you say, it showed in my voice the nervousness, the tension. And, the first thing I knew, God it was late in the day, late in the day. And there are so many things that happened that there's no way to sit here...

David Yellin: And recall exactly.

Paul Barnett: One hit one, one policeman would get hit, the policeman hits somebody. One of our cameramen got a thing, Sheldon Robinson, had his camera up filming some stuff and he got hit with a billy. Took 23 stitches I believe, something like that, and he's still got a curled finger from that.

David Yellin: By what, by the marchers?

Paul Barnett: No, I think he was hit by a sheriff's deputy. I laugh about this, but there they are -- all the boys know me, and I got as much tear gas as the marchers, but that's part of it. You're there, and you...

David Yellin: They couldn't ask you who you were.

Paul Barnett: That's right. They had more to do than to worry about me. And, if...

Carol Lynn Yellin: Let me, I think maybe now is the time to ask you about something that I heard, and I don't know. I didn't remember hearing this on the air, and this may

be just one of those wonderful apocryphal stories that gets started, but a woman at a party not too long ago, not too many months ago, claimed that, she said, “You’ve got to talk to Paul Barnett some time because I remember hearing him on the air when he let someone into his car and the man tried to rob him.” Now is this a true, I said I don’t remember that.

Paul Barnett: No, she has her facts, but they’re a little distorted.

Carol Lynn Yellin: Well, this is what, I’d love to hear the true story on that.

Paul Barnett: I just drove off after so many hours.

David Yellin: We’re still on the 28<sup>th</sup>, right?

Paul Barnett: Oh, yes. Still on that day. So, I don’t know how I got down to Vance, but I went down Main to Vance, and Vance to Third, and I was northbound for the hotel. And I look over on the sidewalk on the west side of Third Street and there’s a guy with his hands up, and a man with a knife on him. So I haven’t got any sense. I stopped you know, and I get out of the unit, and I said leave the man alone. And they both turn and look at me, and it’s a black man with a knife on a white man, which would make no difference, a man had a knife. So I tell the man, I said run, run, come on over here. So he broke and ran and came over, and I opened the car door, he got in and the man with the knife ran south on Third. So I said, I’m all shook, you know, at this time. I said, send me the police. A man’s being held up. They said, “Where are you?” And I couldn’t think of where I was. And then I should have known they’d never have been able to get a policeman to me anyway. But I had started over to help this guy. That shows you, you know, you... and the man’s standing there with a knife. But I brought the guy up here before or until this moment have I ever seen him or heard of him.

David Yellin: Really? And the guy was holding him up for money?

Paul Barnett: Literally, in broad daylight there on the sidewalk.

Carol Lynn Yellin: He figured the police were busy, so he might as well.

Paul Barnett: He figured just about right, too, and I’m telling them send me the police you know.

David Yellin: Well, we’re glad to get that (muffled).

Carol Lynn Yellin: Didn’t the man every thank you for saving his life?

Paul Barnett: If he did, but I’ve never heard from the man since.

David Yellin: Yeah. Now, so that day in all that time you never went back to the station, you never stopped, you just wandered?

Paul Barnett: No, I just wandered in and Mr. Brakefield, our president and general manager here, he saw me and he shook his head. I didn't realize it, but my shirttail was out, and he told somebody, "If ever I've seen a picture of dejection, that's it."

David Yellin: Really?

Paul Barnett: Uh huh. I went back and sat there and talked to them like I am you on the zero hour, John and Fred.

David Yellin: About it, about what happened?

Paul Barnett: Yeah, uh huh.

Carol Lynn Yellin: You don't suppose they would have a tape of that?

Paul Barnett: No, no. I've heard them say they wish they did have. But a little bit after that I went home. But then I had to come back because there was trouble all over the city that night, and after I had taken a bath and kind of rested a bit I was all right.

David Yellin: One thing, you said this was one time, and I gathered what you meant was that very early, as soon as you came on in other words that morning, we're going back, you sensed trouble.

Paul Barnett: That's right. There was no leadership. Like the boys coming up and cursing me, you know. Most of the time prior to that when they had anything they'd have marshals, and somebody down there to lead, but...

David Yellin: But the whole atmosphere was one of disruption.

Paul Barnett: The whole atmosphere you could feel it.

Carol Lynn Yellin: Now, may I ask. Do you remember one of the things that people have mentioned is that Hamilton High School, something had happened there and a rumor got started among the marchers. Were you aware of that, or did you hear anything about...

Paul Barnett: I went to Hamilton School.

Carol Lynn Yellin: When they tried to leave Hamilton High School to join the march or some such thing.

Paul Barnett: Now, we went down there, we went down there and they had been rocking the police, this time throwing rocks.

Carol Lynn Yellin: Throwing rocks.

Paul Barnett: And, a couple of them were hurt. The kids' rocks hit the kids. And...

David Yellin: Is that how that girl got hurt, you think?

Paul Barnett: Yeah, yeah, because the police never -- because we monitored. And I know they asked about using gas, and I forget whether there was -- was this at the same time?

Carol Lynn Yellin: This was early that morning.

David Yellin: It was morning, yeah it was 8:30 or so.

Carol Lynn Yellin: So, you had a reason to be tired that day if you had covered that. Because then they went from there.

Paul Barnett: But Noel Clarkson and I could run into more things.

David Yellin: Now, excuse me. Noel Clarkson was...

Carol Lynn Yellin: A cameraman.

Paul Barnett: Is a cameraman.

David Yellin: Was your cameraman all through (muffled).

Paul Barnett: All through. (muffled) when Dr. King was shot.

David Yellin: Yeah. All right, now the Hamilton thing, when you went down there and you said the kids threw rocks, and that was where the girl was carried out and that's when the rumor spread that the police.

Paul Barnett: And they were rocking the ambulance people, you see?

David Yellin: Who came in for her?

Paul Barnett: Yeah.

Carol Lynn Yellin: Well, one of the reports that we've heard in all of this taping was that the rumor that was started that went through the march was that a girl had been killed by the police at Hamilton High School, which is of course this thing of the rumors that get started, and in that kind of tense atmosphere.

Paul Barnett: Yeah.

David Yellin: Now, we know it didn't, it wasn't so, but do you remember that rumor?



Carol Lynn Yellin: And we know it wasn't so, but you don't remember hearing (muffled)?

Paul Barnett: Oh, no. There was no way for me to hear it, see?

Carol Lynn Yellin: You were in your car driving.

Paul Barnett: That's right, that's right.

David Yellin: Yeah, okay. Paul, then the next thing if you want to, you could skip, we go to the 28<sup>th</sup>, and then I guess now we can come to the 3<sup>rd</sup> or so when Dr. King came. Did you meet him at the airport, or were you there?

Paul Barnett: No. I didn't meet him at the airport. From then on, one day was another.

Carol Lynn Yellin: The curfew was on.

Paul Barnett: Yeah, yeah. One day was another.

Carol Lynn Yellin: A lot of extra police, and the National Guard was here.

Paul Barnett: Yeah, yeah. We drove around town and I'd give reports about the deserted streets and like that.

David Yellin: Now, I wonder if you can recall something. We're now on April 4<sup>th</sup>. And...

Paul Barnett: I was over in radio. I was doing both radio and television. I had just finished a newscast. I walked out of the door of the broadcast studio.

David Yellin: Now what time is this?

Paul Barnett: Sixish. And I hear the monitor, "Martin Luther King, Dr. King has been shot" off the police monitor. And I thought then, "Oh my God." So, I knew he was at the Lorraine. I went out, jumped in my automobile, and I was down there within five minutes from here.

Carol Lynn Yellin: Nobody had to tell you, you just went.

Paul Barnett: I went, sure, you know. And when I got there the ambulance had just pulled off, and I talked to some of the boys that were down there.

David Yellin: Now by boys, you mean police.

Paul Barnett: Security, that's just the way we (muffled).

David Yellin: We have to translate for you.

Paul Barnett: With the boys. Some of the boys told me that what had happened, and Noel and I put up our gear. We got interviews of people that were talking to him when he was shot that CBS ran that night. And somebody called me off to the side and said, "He's dead," and said, "I don't care what you hear," said, "he's dead."

David Yellin: Now why would that person do that? What authority would he have, if you can identify him, fine, but.

Paul Barnett: Well, I can't and won't identify him, but by where he was hit.

Carol Lynn Yellin: It was someone who had seen him. There was no way he couldn't be dead.

Paul Barnett: And I have since learned that from medical people that for all practical purposes he was dead when he hit the concrete, you know, just that quick.

David Yellin: Now this is, when you say the somebody who told you, was that somebody who was on the scene?

Paul Barnett: Yes, yes. Oh, yes. You see they had squad cars all around there.

David Yellin: What did they tell you happened? Can you recall? Or what were you told?

Paul Barnett: One of the people in Dr. King's party, and as fate would have it, our camera jammed just a little bit, during this particular interview, and he said he was standing up there talking, and all of a sudden he said, "ooh," like that and kind of jumped in the air and came down.

David Yellin: Really?

Paul Barnett: And that much that I have told you there, we lost.

David Yellin: I never heard that on the air.

Paul Barnett: We lost that.

David Yellin: Nobody ever said he made any exclamation at all.

Paul Barnett: His chauffeur was there. I talked to Jesse Jackson, who is very prominent, Reverend Jackson, who is very prominent in Chicago now; and, Reverend Kyles, a very nice man that talked to me, and I did four, five, six interviews down there, and that's

what CBS used for that special they had that night. It originated live from here.

David Yellin: Now, some time during the day, I believe this station announced room 306. Do you recall that?

Paul Barnett: That he was in room 306? No, I don't. It may have been me, but I just don't recall it.

David Yellin: We're also collecting film and so on. We don't have that news broadcast or anything.

Paul Barnett: CBS has it, if they'll...

David Yellin: Well, we went up to CBS and they're going to hopefully give us a lot of their news. Well, that's actually as far as we want to go in time. Now if we could just, if you could think a little bit. Are you sort of back in the period?

Carol Lynn Yellin: Did you go to the hospital that night, then?

Paul Barnett: No, I believe someone else went. You see, my job was to stay down there.

Carol Lynn Yellin: Yeah. And one other thing, how did your cameraman, Noel...

David Yellin/Paul Barnett: Clarkson.

Carol Lynn Yellin: Was he just immediately available when you said you went immediately to the Lorraine, did he join you for the ride to the Lorraine?

Paul Barnett: No, no. I went in my car.

Carol Lynn Yellin: And then how did you get him there? Or how did you...?

Paul Barnett: He just came. Noel is that kind of a cameraman.

Carol Lynn Yellin: He knew and you knew, and nobody had to tell either one of you.

Paul Barnett: That's right, that's right.

Carol Lynn Yellin: That's where you belonged.

Paul Barnett: Like if the firemen see smoke, that's where you're supposed to head.

Carol Lynn Yellin: I wanted to ask one other thing, because I want to go back to March 28<sup>th</sup>, and not to skip around too much, but one of the things that most impressed me about that broadcast, your famous broadcast, was the feeling you were feeling for the city itself.

I mean, I almost had the feeling of the city crying. You seemed to be speaking for the whole city.

Paul Barnett: I actually had tears during that.

Carol Lynn Yellin: I know you must have.

Paul Barnett: I hate to admit it, but I did.

Carol Lynn Yellin: You said you just couldn't...

David Yellin: The tenor that I get it, and I think it's the same thing you're saying was, you were so sorry it happened, you know, this is so senseless.

Paul Barnett: Yeah, that's right. This is our city, it happens every place else, but it's happened here.

David Yellin: Right, I think yes, in fact that's what you said, yeah. Well...

Paul Barnett: I don't have a copy of that.

Carol Lynn Yellin: Well, what do we have?

David Yellin: Well, when I say I feel sure we have it, maybe it's so vivid in my memory.

Paul Barnett: I've got a box of tapes, David Yellin that I'll let you have if you'll dub off what you want.

Carol Lynn Yellin: If we have it, we'll...

David Yellin: Dub them? Oh bless you.

Paul Barnett: I've got a box at home.

Carol Lynn Yellin: And we find we have something that you don't have...

David Yellin: When can we get it. Unless we get it tonight or tomorrow, we'll never...

Paul Barnett: Tomorrow, if you'll come by tomorrow.

Carol Lynn Yellin: And we'll check what we do have on what...

Paul Barnett: I'd love to have those things back to back to back.

David Yellin: We'll put them all together, and we'll dub them off for you.

Paul Barnett: If I had a tape this size, back to back to back.

David Yellin: Suppose we did that. We'll make a dub and then make.

Paul Barnett: You can tell which one is which. And there's other things in there. I've marked them the King thing, Dr. King thing, and so on. I mean, I didn't go into great detail.

Carol Lynn Yellin: You wouldn't have any of your, say anything like when you interviewed Dr. King on the Meredith march, you wouldn't have any of that would you? This was just actually what we're really interested in is this period of the sanitation.

David Yellin: Ok, we'll do that, we'll take them, we'll put them together and make a dub for the whole thing and then give you back one whole tape with all of them on it.

Paul Barnett: If you'll come down here tomorrow afternoon, I'll bring them with me to work.

David Yellin: All right.

Carol Lynn Yellin: I'll be down here tomorrow afternoon.

Paul Barnett: I'll leave them at the desk.

Carol Lynn Yellin: I have to be down at 4:00.

Paul Barnett: And I can't impress on you enough that they're all I have.

David Yellin: We know that.

Paul Barnett: I didn't tell you about them to start with.

David Yellin: No, but we know that.

Paul Barnett: I don't know what sequence they are. It's going to take some listening.

David Yellin: No, you know, I say you couldn't have them in more tender hands, because...

Carol Lynn Yellin: I guess we've been handling this kind of thing.

David Yellin: You know we may lose them or something may happen, but we sure won't.

Carol Lynn Yellin: No, but that's why we care about these things. We had a feeling at

the time, and what got us started was that there was something here that shouldn't get lost. There were a lot of things here that...

David Yellin: Four years, we're not going to louse it up now. Maybe one final thing, and I sense you want to go.

Paul Barnett: I've got to. I worked last night and wasn't supposed to. I am a bachelor, I have a girlfriend. I might as well have a wife.

David Yellin: Well, I'll give you a note. Let me just ask you, kind of almost a summation in this sense. How did you feel the people reacted, the people in this city, say reacted let's start with Dr. King? In a sense.

Paul Barnett: By reaction you mean?

David Yellin: I mean how did they take to him? He came the 18<sup>th</sup>. He was coming the 1<sup>st</sup>. He came the 3<sup>rd</sup>. He was going to have another march. This has nothing to do with his being shot here, because that is, let's say outside of that, but this is our...

Carol Lynn Yellin: It's hard to recreate what (muffled) at that time.

Paul Barnett: It, that really isn't a newsman's (muffled).

David Yellin: Well, I'm not talking to you as a newsman, because you see we're...

Paul Barnett: Whatever bit that I learned, I learned through the news, you see? And of course I talked to people, both sides. People knew I was involved in it, and come up, and some of them were highly vociferous, you know. People would stay home, mind their own business we wouldn't have all this. Other people say, "Well, he should have been here earlier." And it's according to who you talk to.

David Yellin: Right, right.

Paul Barnett: Without spelling it out.

David Yellin: Yeah. Again, what...see, because actually what our main thing is, and we have heard everything, and we're trying to put this together not for us to make a judgment because we're too close to it, but for people 50 years from now. We're trying to find out, kind of recreate the climate. How would you as a newsman if you had to make a broadcast in your car with the windows down, and say this is Memphis, spring '68. How would you describe the feeling of Memphis '68? Was it a city in tension, was it a city confused?

Paul Barnett: Oh surely a city full of tension and confusion. I say this, that a majority of the people kept their heads. If they hadn't we wouldn't have a building in Memphis.

David Yellin: Now how do you mean that?

Paul Barnett: Well, if both sides..

David Yellin: Now you mean both sides, black and white.

Paul Barnett: Black and white had gotten up in arms over this; you see, a majority of the people stayed at home, both ways, black and white.

David Yellin: Why?

Paul Barnett: Why get out and stir up any more dust?

David Yellin: No, I don't mean was it right or wrong, but why.

Paul Barnett: I am not saying what is right and wrong.

Carol Lynn Yellin: Let me, I think I know what you're saying. I have forgotten who it was, but one of the black ministers, I believe it was Reverend Gilbert Patterson or someone said something to the effect that, what he saw here was not just a potential for a riot or looting, that kind of thing, but said what scared him was that there was a potential and it was never realized, but a potential for what he called a real race riot in the old fashioned sense, a black against white fighting in the streets.

Paul Barnett: Oh, oh there's no question.

David Yellin: Really. Yes, that's what I mean.

Paul Barnett: So the sensible people stayed home.

David Yellin: You mean they sensed this? That at any...

Paul Barnett: Surely, surely.

Carol Lynn Yellin: A race war in the streets of Memphis.

Paul Barnett: Why, why go out and leave myself open, white and black, you see? Because anyone on the streets during those times, you were fair game. We were fair game for shots, or rocks, or what have you.

Carol Lynn Yellin: In the same that when the police couldn't tell who was a cameraman and who wasn't, and no one stops to ask questions when things, who's wear when it gets to that point.

Paul Barnett: I say this, why no one was killed at Main and Beale, or on Main between McCall and Beale, or down to Second Street, white, black, policeman, non-policeman,

bystander, participant, or what, I'll never understand.

Carol Lynn Yellin: On March 28<sup>th</sup>.

David Yellin: Now, that's an interesting question that almost just occurred...

Paul Barnett: You stop and realize, there was nothing but a few bumps.

David Yellin: But you see, nobody had guns.

Paul Barnett: The policemen had guns. Thank God, see -- that guns were not used.

David Yellin: Yeah, yeah right.

Paul Barnett: They used gas. But if you stop and think about it, David. The worst thing that happened was some people like the cameraman with the busted fingers, somebody with a busted head, some of the policemen had bruises, some of the marchers had bruises.

David Yellin: It's called the mini-riot. Isn't that odd?

Paul Barnett: Thank God...I tell you what. If that was a mini I don't ever want any other.

Carol Lynn Yellin: You don't want to see the maxi riot.

David Yellin: Yeah, but compared to the riots around the country it's a...

Paul Barnett: That's been what, four years ago.

David Yellin: Four and a half now.

Paul Barnett: Memphis has never been the same.

David Yellin: Now what do you mean by that?

Carol Lynn Yellin: That's what I was going to ask you.

Paul Barnett: Memphis has never been the same race-wise.

David Yellin: Now, in what way. Now you can't -- you've got to follow through on that, Paul. Better, worse.

Paul Barnett: The things that happened during that time, to antagonize -- maybe that's a poor choice of words, or that caused the confrontation between the officers and the marchers, and later on, Dr. King's death. It embittered many people, and I just think that



things have never been the same.

David Yellin: Now, I gather from what you say that they were worse after this.

Paul Barnett: That's right, that's right. It seems as no one trusts the other any more.

David Yellin: So, suspicion and mistrust.

Carol Lynn Yellin: Would you say that, you used the word embittered. Do you think on the black, among black people.

Paul Barnett: I hesitate to use the word embitter.

Carol Lynn Yellin: Hardened, maybe, or I guess we use that old word polarization so much, but.

Paul Barnett: But, I don't think I'm qualified to really go into it, but from a human standpoint, my white friends and my black friends, things have never been the same.

David Yellin: Yeah, but still things have never been as bad in Memphis as they are elsewhere.

Paul Barnett: Oh that's right. Oh, that's true. That's true.

Carol Lynn Yellin: And would you say it's true today.

Paul Barnett: Surely.

David Yellin: And I wonder, I mean, what's your explanation for it as a native...

Paul Barnett: Well, we have some fine black leaders now. We have got some very sensible people in the black leadership. Fred Davis is a fine man; Judge Odell Horton, and others along that line, (muffled).

Carol Lynn Yellin: Many of them are survivors of that period, some of them, too.

Paul Barnett: And other people that I don't know by name.

David Yellin: Could this have been avoided, overall question? I mean, I just feel...

Paul Barnett: No, I'll accept your overall question by saying I am not qualified to say, because there are too many angles, too many things to figure into it, David.

David Yellin: Yeah, right. I mean nobody is qualified to give the answer, in a sense, that's what we're trying to find out by getting everybody's testimony.

Carol Lynn Yellin: That's what we've been trying to find out for four years, and we don't know.

David Yellin: You know, but a lot of people say, "Well..."

Paul Barnett: The only the way you can do it is, "if", and when you "if" anything it's hypothetical.

David Yellin: Or stop the world and start over.

Paul Barnett: That's right, you know, and I've asked people questions, if so and so. Man will tell you right quick I'm not going to answer an "if" question.

David Yellin: Right, yeah, ok. I think we've gotten...

Paul Barnett: That's right at 9:05, 9:10, you've got all you're going to get tonight.

David Yellin: Well, we'll give you overtime.

Carol Lynn Yellin: You're one of those newsmen that has the clock in his head. Winds us up fine.