

Interview of Mrs. Bert Wolff. Interviewed by Francesca Davis and Crystal Windless of the Crossroads to Freedom Project, Rhodes College.

Bert Wolff was and continues to be involved in many activities in the city of Memphis. A 5th generation Jewish woman with a rich sense of family history, she participated in various interracial organizations to improve the status of African Americans. For example, she was a representative on the Panel of American Women, an organization that traveled to various locations where women from different races and backgrounds would discuss their unique experiences of race and gender. In addition, Wolff was the president of the Memphis City School Board in 1983, an election year. Serving in this position she had the deciding controversial vote to integrate the Raleigh Bartlett schools which were newly annexed into the city of Memphis. After her vote, Wolff was not re-elected to the school board. Nevertheless, Wolff remained very active in the Memphis community and can be considered a pivotal agent of change.

This interview was conducted in 2006 to be included in the Rhodes College Crossroads to Freedom Digital Archive Project.

The transcripts represent what was said in the interview to the best of our ability. It is possible that some words, particularly names, have been misspelled. We have made no attempt to correct mistakes in grammar.

Francesca Davis: Okay. On behalf of the Crossroads to Freedom Project, and Rhodes College, I would again like to thank you for agreeing to participate in our project. Your contribution means a great deal to us.

Bert Wolff: I appreciate being included in the Crossroads project. The Crossroads project will present a richly varied tapestry of diversity, determination, this 20th century movement for fairness and justice for every citizen and the cross-cultures that were involved.

Francesca Davis: Well, we're just going to go ahead and get started. Could you tell us your name and your current occupation?

Bert Wolff: My name is Bert Wolff, my recent occupation is community volunteer, since I retired from a wonderful 25 year career. In 1975 I became founding Executive Director of the Memphis Epilepsy Foundation for seven years. We grew from a staff of one to eight, with services throughout West Tennessee for people with seizure disorders. I then worked for Guardsmark as Asst V.P., Public Affairs for six years, then had the opportunity to become Opera Memphis' Executive Director for three years, while we were searching for a General Director. After he settled in, I had the opportunity to become the Foundation Director for the Memphis Botanic Garden for another seven years before I retired.

Francesca Davis: Okay. Could you tell us where you were born and raised?

Bert Wolff: I was born in Memphis, Tennessee, in 1935

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at the Baptist Hospital.

Francesca Davis: Okay, and could you tell us a little bit about your parents; their names and their occupations?

Bert Wolff: I was blessed to have the parents that I had. My mother's name was Lybie Adler. My father was Johl Adler. He owned the Tennessee and Adler Hotels in Memphis. The Tennessee is now part of the Radisson. Until I was six years old, we lived in an apartment on the top floor of the hotel. Mother was an exceptionally incredible community volunteer and later in her life she became a successful realtor.

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I was born at the end of 1935, six years before World War II started. Memphis was fortunate that the government built Kennedy Hospital here during the war, one of the first spinal cord injury hospitals in the country. Prior to World War II, people usually died from these types of injuries. Mother was part of an organization called The Gray Ladies, because they wore gray uniforms and pretty gray hats. They were city-wide young, energetic women doing their part for the war effort by lifting the morale of injured soldiers, most of whom were paraplegics or quadriplegics. Mother and her sister had been professional dancers in vaudeville's big shows. They shared their talent, taught others and they regularly put shows together for the soldiers' entertainment. Mother often took me to Kennedy Hospital with her, saying, "You know, Bert, these soldiers are young men, and they're far from home. You need to go around and talk to them. They have little sisters and you will make them feel more comfortable."

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I was nine by the end of the war. Although my father was socially liberal at his hotel, regarding people of African-American decent, he had to obey the laws of that time. Segregation was a bad law.

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My older sister, Bobette, had a black roommate at Smith College, who grew up in Harlem. Her name was Yolanda. Sister brought Yolanda home to Memphis for Christmas vacation during their freshman year at Smith in 1946. That was a big no-no in Memphis. My parents got calls from everybody from the mayor on down, about Bobette taking Yolanda to all of the seasonal social events but Bobette and Yolanda flaunted Jim Crow in the face of the Memphis social scene that year.

Francesca Davis: Could you tell us a little bit more about the neighborhood you grew up in. I know you said you grew up in downtown Memphis?

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That must've been an exciting area to grow up in.

Bert Wolff: I had a wonderful childhood downtown, living in the Tennessee Hotel. Technology was not what it is now. Elevators were run by people. There were no push buttons. Our elevators had a big brass bar all around.

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Sometimes I'd hang on the gold bar by my legs for exercise. My sister and I were the darlings of the downtown. We used to walk from our hotel at Third and Union to visit my grandpa at the Adler Hotel on Linden and Main. One of the hotel's buildings is now on the historic register. It belongs now to the Church of God in Christ, although we sold it originally to A.W. Willis, who was a prominent African American attorney. Downtown was our playground, from Court Square to the river. Friends loved to visit me, because our literal playground was on the roof of the hotel. I had a swing set, and we'd swing out and could see what was going on at the Peabody. When I was six we moved to a house near the zoo in mid town.

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Everybody walked to and from school, in fact we walked everywhere-within about a two mile distance. Any further, we rode a bus.

Francesca Davis: And what school did you go to?

Bert Wolff: I went to Idewild kindergarten, Snowden School from first through the ninth grade, and Central High School, where I graduated in 1953.

Interviewer: We have a Central graduate.

Bert Wolff: I know. It was a great school then and it still is now.

Francesca Davis: You talked about your mother a lot. Would you say she was one of the people that you admired the most growing up?

Bert Wolff: My parents, grandparents, some of my teachers, our Rabbi at Temple Israel, James Wax, who was a strong advocate of Civil Rights. During the Sanitation Strike, he led a group of ministers to the Mayors office to demand fair pay, better conditions and respect for the sanitation workers. It was very controversial in the community and front page news. Dr. Marcus Orr, a history professor at then, Memphis State, was another strong role model for me when I was in my thirties. Mark was not only a challenging professor, he was an extraordinary man. He was one of the young paraplegics who Mother used to bring home for a weekend years earlier. I took every course he taught at U. of M.

Francesca Davis: Okay. And how did they influence you?

Bert Wolff: In ways, too many to count, regarding integrity, trying harder, listening to others and to one's inner voice, having the courage to speak out against the majority at times.

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Francesca Davis: Would you also tell us a little bit more about your home life, or what sort of activities you were in growing up throughout middle school and high school?

Bert Wolff: I enjoyed childhood. My parents included my sister and me often. I was a brownie scout, a girl scout. I took piano, ballet and tap dancing, played at Overton Park, but I gave all that up when I was about 13 because I also liked boys. We had a group of girls and boys who enjoyed getting together often. At Snowden and Central I worked on the Annual, was in the Glee Club and Student Council.

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Our group often met at our house, because Mother and Daddy liked having the kids, and the kids liked coming to our house. We had one of the first deep freezers that any of them had ever seen. It was a white long and deep chest, and she kept it full. There was always good food around.

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In those days we had no air conditioning, just a big attic fan and a screened porch and the living room for entertaining friends. Mother and Daddy were fortunate enough to be able to go on a winter vacation and leave us at home with my maternal grandmother, another strong role model. She lived in Chicago, and would come and stay with us two or three months at a time. She was born in Russia, the Ukraine, she was very bright. She often told us stories about her childhood, also stories from the Bible. She made the three Kings-Saul, David and Solomon seem most heroic. Her father, my great-grandfather, who I never knew, had a lot of children. But only the boys were allowed to be educated in high school.

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However, he saw my grandmother's potential, and she sometimes traveled with him when he went to other countries. She was fluent in several languages. But her life changed suddenly when she was 14. She had read forbidden books, philosophy books, political books, classical literature. She would leave her home to do this for the nearby mausoleum in the cemetery, and take a light, a lantern. Someone found out and told the Russian police. They arrested her. She was supposed to be sent to Siberia for this crime, at the age of 14. But my great-grandfather was fortunate enough to have the means to bribe the political people.

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Instead of Siberia, they sent her to Canada, alone, where I suppose they knew a relative or a friend. She married at the age of 15, and through the years had three children. She then became a single mom and raised these children herself, though times were difficult. She was a wonderful cook and handed down all of her European recipes. Grandma Rose was the first lady Hebrew teacher in the City of Chicago. My first integrated experience was with Grandma Rose in Chicago.

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I was maybe ten years old, and we went to the movies. In Memphis, you didn't go to the movies and sit next to a person of color. Only the top balcony was reserved for "colored". I can remember looking around and saying, "Grandma Rose, everybody can sit here together."

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That was a neat experience for me. My grandfather, Herman Adler immigrated here from Germany in the 1882 at about age 16. He became a citizen in 1892. His first job was working on riverboats from Saint Louis to New Orleans, transporting sugar.

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Two of his five sisters settled in Memphis. Eventually he made enough money to buy a tavern in the District called Pinch, where most of the Jews lived at that time. The rest of his family eventually came here due to the Holocaust, the most chilling event in our history. In 1933 one of his nephews in Germany, Justin Adler, had just become a doctor. He applied for travel papers at the City Hall, and the Gestapo was already cracking down on Jews' travel. A German officer questioned him, saying,

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"You can't go to Hamburg". Justin replied, "Why not?" The man, said, "You need to find another country to practice medicine. Is there anywhere you can go?" My cousin thought, "I do have an uncle in Memphis." "Well, you better go there as soon as you can and never come back here". The officer stamped approval for him to travel to the United States, Memphis Tennessee. I don't know the whole story, but at that time Grandpa started working on getting his remaining sisters, their children and grandchildren out of Germany. He enlisted the help of his brother-in-law, who owned a very fine ladies' store at that time, called Levy's

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at the corner of Main and Union. I have letters that my grandfather wrote to congressmen, to senators, to every influential official you can imagine, about letting our family come to Memphis. It was not easy, and there was a Jewish quota. We were a fortunate family. By 1940 the last family had gotten out-barely.

The young father had been arrested, but the family was able to pay the officials a bribe. Now, the descendants of Grandpa, and his five sister, their children,

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grandchildren, great grandchildren and great-great grandchildren are, alive. We're now in about the fifth generation of those, who might not have ever made it out of Germany, had not my cousin come here early enough to tell Grandpa what was actually happening there, so that the long process to rescue the family could evolve in time. It's a wonderful tribute to my grandfather.

Crystal Windless: That's amazing. You have such a rich family history.

Bert Wolff: I'm very blessed.

Crystal Windless: Could you tell us where you went on to college?

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The fall of 1953, I attended a small liberal arts school, Sarah Lawrence College, in Bronxville, New York, as a freshman. Once again, Mother's so called friends admonished her. This time it was for sending me to a "communist school", because the school reached out to understand all cultures of the world and invited speakers who expressed all points of view, not only that of the United States. The United Nations was fledgling and new. Often our speakers were diplomats. It was the height of the "McCarthy" era and a lot of folks were intimidated. I had a wonderful experience which probably further influenced my life. Sarah Lawrence was as close to New York City as a 45 minute train ride and what an eye opener for a 17 year old from Memphis, TN. We saw plays, skyscrapers, ballet from the top balcony (binoculars were provided by putting a dollar in the slot of the seat back in front of you), off Broadway productions. The classes were small and taught in a way similar to graduate school. My classes averaged 14 people, each. I went there only for one year, because I came home to get married against the wishes of my parents although they supported me in the end - I was still 18. I continued my education at the University of Oklahoma,

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where my husband was stationed as a dentist at Tinker Air Force Base, about 30 miles away from Norman, Oklahoma, where the university was located. One year later in 1955 our first child was

born. That was the same year the Brown versus Education's Supreme Court ruled that "separate but equal" is not really equal, the Brown decision.

Life in Oklahoma was an eye opener because of prejudice against the Native American underclass. After two years in the Service, we moved back to Memphis, where I continued my education at then, Memphis State. By 1960 we had four terrific children under the age of 6. Because of the pace of family and volunteer activities, I attended the University of Memphis off and on through my forties.

Crystal Windless: Can you tell us what the transition was like, going from being in New York, in a liberal arts school for a year, and then eventually returning back to Memphis, and the way things were here?

Bert Wolff: Yes, but first, I want to briefly tell you about my first personal life experience

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with school integration. My roommate at Sarah Lawrence was white, but my suitemate across the hall was African American and from Alabama. We became close friends and I first became a member through her of the N.A.A.C.P. in 1953. Before I left home, Mother had said, "Just pack what you have and buy your winter clothes when you get there. The prices and selection will be better." However when I arrived it was freezing because of an early cold spell, and my new girlfriend across the hall

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said, "Until you can go shopping, you're welcome to borrow some of my clothes, wool socks, a sweater, whatever." It seems like such a small thing now, however we had never had the opportunity. I didn't live in Memphis again until my husband was discharged from the Army. Although my focus was mainly on establishing home, family and volunteer work in a few organizations, it was 1960, after our fourth child was born and our oldest was getting ready to begin public school that I began to find my own voice to help make a difference, for Memphis to become the city that it must become.

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By the time we moved back to Memphis in 1957, the voice of change was beginning to be heard.

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Scott entered first grade at Avon school in 1960. The morning I took him to school that first day, there were six young black children, who also entered the first grade that year. And not against the curb, but in the school yard at the schoolhouse door, there were about five police cars and

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I guess about a dozen police. They were actually there to protect the children, but it was a very startling scene that I was not prepared for. At that moment, I made a pledge to myself that I was going to do everything I could for my children, for all children, and help try to move forward in any way I could. This was five years after the Brown decision. I got involved in the PTA at Avon School, where my children went to school, until we moved to the Shady Grove School district a couple of years later.

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By that time, our city knew that we were going to have to desegregate public schools but it was impossible to do it naturally since neighborhoods were completely segregated. The system was strictly segregated. The Federal Government demanded that we prepare this city for desegregation in public schools. A federal program was established to do this named "the Emergency School Assistance Program".

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I had spoken to the principal of Shady Grove, and said, "You know, this is so unnecessary. All we have to do is do it voluntarily,

and we won't have a lawsuit. I was naïve. She said, "You know, Mrs. Prosterman," (my last name then) "I'm going to submit your name to be part of a city-wide committee being established to prepare Memphis for desegregation." That was a first for all of us being involved in this historical task. Our group hashed out difficult issues and bonded. Herman Ewing, head of the Urban League, especially impressed me. He was kind, pulled no punches, was straightforward.

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Our mission was very controversial and somewhat hated, because we were preparing Memphis for sudden change that, was mostly unwanted. It would drastically change the black schools, as well

as the white schools, because it had to be done through “cross-town” busing. Black parents were afraid. White parents were angry and afraid. In the long run busing to achieve racial balance was detrimental to the school system in the following way. Many unqualified private schools sprang up to escape busing. The racial balance that was desired was never achieved because of white flight, so it never stabilized the public school system. The first years of integration, a minority of courageous white and black families, whose children had to be bused to far-away schools, did not remove their kids from public schools., but the desired ratio was never reached. However it was also a new beginning.

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Integration didn’t come all at once. It came in stages. Let me fast forward and talk about Dr. King, then go back to the schools, because that’s the way I was most affected. Many of us, were changed for life when Dr. King came to Memphis several times, again the night before his death. He was a powerful, heroic man. He moved us all. The time was so tense, scary, too. My husband at the time, did not want me to get involved. He was not really prejudiced as much as he was afraid.

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But of course, a group of us were determined to stay involved in spite of fear, and we did. You’ve heard about his last visit here that powerful night, the horrible storm, the crowd at the church, his humility and calm, the drama, his incredibly riveting speech. And you’ve heard about his assassination.

Francesca Davis: We’d love to hear.

Bert Wolff: How if affected us? In the immediate aftermath there were riots, mainly in the business and industrial areas of town. A dark to dawn curfew was strictly enforced throughout the city. That and all that went with it was the fearful, dark side. For many Memphians, there was and is still hope for Dr. King’s” Dream”. There was a huge meeting at Crump Stadium immediately after Dr. King’s assassination, a very early-on meeting of blacks and whites coming together.

There were other efforts of individuals and groups. The series of events that led to Dr. King’s visits and death here affected people deeply.

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Frances Hooks, the wife of Reverend/ Judge/ Commissioner Ben Hooks, Althea Price, the wife of Dr. Hollis Price, chairman of - President of LeMoyne Owen College here- were guidance counselors at Carver High School. They started a program called the Volunteer Guidance Counselor Program earlier in the sixties. A group of us who were white signed on. The Fund For Needy Schoolchildren was formed. The Free Lunch Program gained approval. Jeannie and Jed Dreifus, Harriet and Tom Stern and a few other philanthropic families were involved and also initiated a small program, enabling high achieving African-American kids to enroll in the elite eastern prep schools. Russell Sugarmon and Marvin Ratner formed Memphis' first integrated law firm.

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Others were instrumental in much needed change in the education system. The Memphis School Board had always been appointed by the Mayor and all white. A movement grew to change the make-up of the Board by legislation. After a long political battle in Nashville, the voting districts were realigned, guaranteeing the election of three black candidates, The first Memphis School Board **election** was in 1970.

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After the death of Dr. King, Frances Hooks started an integrated book club. Whites were not used to driving in black neighborhoods, and blacks were afraid to drive in white neighborhoods. We determined that we would only read consciousness-raising books about civil rights like the biography of Malcolm X, which was way off the charts for whites at that time. And we read "The Spook Who Sat by the Door", which was about integrating the white corporate world.

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It was a most enriching time for us and a time of bonding. Our first meeting was at a black schoolteacher's house, who lived on South Parkway. After the meeting, we discussed where we were going to meet next. One of the white women said, "I'd love to offer my house. I've got to tell the truth. I'm really frightened to come in your neighborhoods at night."

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Althea Price, was statuesque -tall, commanding and outspoken-a beautiful woman. She stood up at that moment and looked ten feet

tall. She said, "My dear, what makes you think we feel comfortable driving in your neighborhoods? We could be arrested without committing any crime." That settled the discussion and our group continued for several years. We would meet one month in a white home, and one month in a black home. At the same time the Jed Dreifus breakfast club for men, started downtown at the Little Tea Shop to discuss civic and political issues. The group continued for so long, that it finally became integrated gender-wise as well as color-wise and absorbed our group in addition to a crowd of progressive thinking Memphians.

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The decades of the sixties, the seventies and eighties were enriching, enlightening, challenging. People of good will found one another and grew. Jocelyn Wurzberg, had heard about a group called the Panel of American Women, very soon after Dr. King was assassinated, and she initiated the group we started in Memphis. There were about 40 of us. Panels were made up of four women- an African American, a Jew, a Catholic or Greek Orthodox(white minority) and a WASP(white, Anglo-Saxon Protestant)-four women per panel. We went throughout the city-to schools, churches, the colleges, business and civic groups, and told our stories.

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The panel was welcome in some quarters, met with some hostility in others.

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The panel still gets together annually. The experience made us life-long friends. One of our panel members, Happy Jones, came from a socially elite family. Happy was a prominent young leader and go-getter who jumped deeply in, to initiate change in Memphis.

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She had the connections to be able to open closed doors. She was chairman of the Community Relations Commission, formed by Mayor Wyeth Chandler soon after he was elected Mayor in 1970. Reverend James Netters was Executive Director. Happy took us Community Relations Commissioners on a bus ride through downtown Memphis and through the projects, and made us get out and walk

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through alleys where there were dead rats and rented homes that should have been condemned. We also saw drug dealers hanging out near schools. She graphically showed us how the underserved lived day in-day out. She pushed the envelope to help us realize that there was a privileged Memphis, and a not privileged Memphis. She still is a courageous agent for change today. Desegregation and real integration have different meanings, and occurred in stages from the 1960's through the mid '80s. I hope someone else will cover "Black Monday's" in 1969, a one-day-a-week strike of sorts. The N.A.A.C.P asked parents and teachers to keep their children home from school, not to do any shopping or business. It was effective and commerce suffered. When busing desegregated Memphis public schools in 1973, my children attended White Station High School.

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It was difficult in the beginning, there were light moments, too. The experience was positive for my children. My son, Gary, had the as big an afro as anyone in the school, white or black. And my daughter, Melinda, had very light, long blonde hair.

The girls especially, had not seen either white boys wearing an afro or up close and personal-hair like Melinda's. They were curious about both and couldn't understand, "How'd you get that hair, Gary? It's so nappy."

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When summer began after the first year of busing, Gary got a summer job for three of his black friends and him, cleaning houses for a builder who we knew. Yet a lot of mistakes were made as far as the integration process began, during the first part of that first semester. When two high schools were paired, sometimes the principal or the football coach was not ready for it mentally. For example, the white student council of the home school where black students were bused to, might remain the student council.

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For example, at White Station elections were held during the first week. Nobody knew anybody the first week except from their own community and the white kids were elected. Tensions ran high, naturally. The Board of Ed. initiated sensitivity training for teachers and students. Things improved and the school year was a

success. I was a volunteer leader for the school system during that effort. At the same time we had another program through the Chamber of Commerce. We had a little office in the basement of the Peabody Hotel, where we operated a crisis hotline, 24 hours a day. We volunteered for shifts; some of us black, some of us white, some of us leaders, some of us grassroots. We were trained to answer questions, whether rumor or fact. That hotline existed for a couple of years through the sponsorship of the Chamber of Commerce.

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Small projects that could make a difference seemed to come together to make a bigger difference, but it all took time. Now I ask you to fast forward 10 years, from 1973 to 1983. I had been elected citywide to the Memphis School Board in 1980. I was president of the Board in 1983. Early that year, even before the school year began, Dr. Herenton, who was school superintendent then, and the NAACP Legal Defense Fund attorneys came to the two of us and said, "We're willing to go back to neighborhood schools, but something has got to change first." When Memphis was given its desegregation order, the Raleigh Bartlett area had not yet been annexed into the City of Memphis, and

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Their schools had not integrated. We had to go back to a busing plan, Plan Z, and bus African-American kids to the Raleigh Bartlett schools, and had to assign white Raleigh Bartlett kids to black schools. We had to prepare the community once again. 1983, was my final year of my term. I had decided to run again because I wanted one more term to work on issues, some of which I'm talking to you about now. I visited Memphis schools about three times a week for four years.

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That fall and spring semester the majority of time was concentrated in the Raleigh Bartlett area schools. We had parent conferences and meetings continually. Ada Jane Walters was the principal at Craigmont then, which was the hot high school, and she did everything she could as a principal to prepare the school to no avail. Finally in late spring, the school board met vote on whether the school board was going to approve this action or not. We had three blacks, three moderate whites, Tom Stern, J.C. Williams and me and three very conservative white commissioners, one who was president of the John Birch Society.

The meeting began at 5:00 p.m., and everybody who wanted to speak, got a chance to speak for five minutes.

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The school board auditorium on Avery was so overcrowded that the fire department had to ask enough people to leave the auditorium to meet the fire code. From 5:00 p.m. until 1:15 in the morning, the discussion and debate went on, tempers were thin and finally the vote was called at 1:20. There were four against, and four ayes. I was the president and the last vote, and of course I voted to desegregate the Raleigh Bartlett schools. With that, there was a huge sea of angry people rushing forward to the dais. Several men on the school board staff stood in front of me to protect me. I had be escorted home but from that night until election day in November, I got obscene phone calls every morning between 2:00 and 4:00 a.m., saying terrible things about me and superintendent, threatening my family, calling me nigger lover, and worse. I received bomb threats, too. For six months I experienced what some of our civil rights leaders went through for a much longer time period.

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I was defeated in the election on a cold, rainy November day, when all the Raleigh Bartlett people went out to vote against me, and many friends in the rest of Memphis stayed home because of the cold, steady rain, thinking I would prevail. There was no mayoral election to draw the voters' passion in this city wide, run-off school election.

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The one sided battle against me made me stronger, rather than weaker. To those empty souls, I was the enemy, to another part of Memphis I was looked up to for caving in. That was twenty-three years ago. Much has changed. The corporate world has changed. People's hearts have changed. You see mixed race families today. Neighborhoods aren't segregated by enforcement. Dr. King would have felt good about those things. He would have despaired about other problems facing our schools and neighborhoods, our city. We've yet to "reach the peak of that mountain top".

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We lived in East Memphis, and we had a friend who was principal of an all black high school. His home had to be purchased by a white person, and then sold to him in order for him to live in this neighborhood. That was our neighborhood experience.

Crystal Windless: Well, wrapping up, I just have one final question. You talked about your many efforts and things that you've been involved, and how there were controversial and heated issues. I think we'd like to know what was it amidst all this controversy and all the things that you went through, that kept you going throughout all of it?

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Bert Wolff: Well, a couple of things. My family and four incredible children, first and foremost-they were completely supportive and understanding, not just of me, but of the purpose. After the school board decision had the community up in arms, Maury Greiner, who was the station manager at WMC TV called me. He said, "You know Bert, you have to keep in mind." "It's just a few cowards who are threatening and abusive, causing all this trouble, because the silent majority is silent." That reinforced me.

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I knew I could not win the school board race, something I want very much. But the thought to compromise values or myself was never in my mind. I didn't let anybody know that I knew that in my heart. It was tough. But a good thing happened the day after the election. I received a call from Ira Lipman, a well known community leader and successful business man, who owns a leading national security company. At that time it was headquartered in Memphis.

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He said, "Now that you've lost the election, what are you going to do with your life?" I had been Executive Director of the Memphis Epilepsy Foundation for seven years. He offered me a position at Guardsmark and I worked there for a few weeks short of six years. Ira Lipman, himself, accomplished more than people know to further better race relations in this city. I learned a lot from him and enjoyed working for his company.

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It is true that "When one door closes, another door opens.

Crystal Windless: Well, we want to let you know that you definitely were not defeated. And you have done so much for the city, and I'm sure we all are grateful at the Crossroads to Freedom Project, are grateful that you've taken time to share your story with us today. So thank you.

Bert Wolff: Being here today to talk about civil rights issues from 1960 to 1984 has been a pleasure. It is probably the first time I have consciously gone down "Memory Lane" to this degree,

recalling how that period was a most enriching time in my life, a time of learning about one's own strength and conviction for the greater good.

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