

SS095.mp3

F. Jack Curley- Oral history project, today we are interviewing councilmen Fred Davis. Today is May 22nd and we are at Mr. Davis' office at 1365 Airways, Mr. Davis is an insurance man. This is the investor's insurance agency. The two interviewers are F. Jack Curley and Joan Beifuss, spell your name.

Joan Beifuss- B-e-i-f-u-s-s.

F. Jack Curley- B-e-i-f-u-s-s.

Fred Davis- To be in apposition to make contributions here and there.

F. Jack Curley- Well it is a real big contribution and we do appreciate it. Mr. Davis...

Fred Davis- Just call me Fred.

F. Jack Curley- Ok. Fred then last Sunday we met for the first time and I was very interested in many of the things you had to say. I wonder if we could start off this particular recorded interview with some background on your own background. Where you came from and how you got into business and how you decided to run for city council and your interest in politics and so forth.

Fred Davis- IS this is on now.

F. Jack Curley- Yeah we are on.

Fred Davis- Ok, now, well I was born and bred up I was born in south Memphis in this area close to Trig and Florida. That is the best known part of the are where I was born there, that corner there. I was actually born on Horace St.

F. Jack Curley- I know right where that is.

Fred Davis- And just off of Olive which is in the rear. You know I kid with folk quite often when they say, t hey talk about being born in the slums here and there, some people will talk about being born in the servant house in the white folks serving house, rich white folk serving house. Well I say I was born in the real colored folk. You can't get much further back than that. And I was out yesterday evening by where I was born and I am going out one of these days and take some pictures of it before they eventually tear it down.

F. Jack Curley- Or it falls down.

Fred Davis- No, people still live there were I was born and it is fairly good...

F. Jack Curley- I have been to that section, yeah.

Fred Davis- That particular house is in very good shape for the street and the area. But, I grew up in the split family that was only very short in reconciliations between my mother and my father and because of that we were poor to start with and

because of that it made things a little bit rougher and we had to start to learn to make a contribution to the family pretty young. As a matter of fact...

(Tape Break)

Fred Davis- I guess I can't, I guess my first job was really before, after I was old enough to go to school, not real job but there used to be, you remember piggly wiggly stores?

Joan Beifuss- Sure.

Fred Davis- Well I, somebody made me a little wagon and I used to go to the front of the Piggly Wiggly stores on the corner of MacElmore and 3rd and when people would buy their groceries I would pull their groceries home in the wagon. Well I went to Florida school and for the first 4 years and then my mother was a very religious woman and she took me out even though she couldn't afford it really. Well this was during the war when she took me out and she was up in Oak Ridge working as a maid and cleaning up the fence.

F. Jack Curley- Oak Ridge Tennessee?

Fred Davis- Yeah.

F. Jack Curley- Well that's interesting.

Fred Davis- And we were left with a neighbor who kept us and she sent money back to keep us and also at that same time she took me out of Florida school and sent me to a 7th day Adventist school because they were taught bible, we were Baptist incidentally. I hated it, I really didn't like it. I didn't hate the bible I just really hated not being with my friends in Florida school, in public school.

Joan Beifuss- Where was the 7th day Adventist school?

Fred Davis- Over on Mississippi and Jeanette, right down from Mississippi and Walker. The church is just, was just recently sold and then they moved out, I stayed in there a couple of years and then I went across town after that.

F. Jack Curley- Did you have any brothers or sister?

Fred Davis- Well I have actually there are 7 of us, but I have 4 sisters who were the sisters by a previous marriage of my mother and I have three brothers. After that I went out to leave with my father out in Hollywood, out in North Memphis that is how I started to be out there. And then I started to have (muffled) school and then I went to Manassas. Then in between then we were talking about the cotton picking.

F. Jack Curley- Yeah.

Fred Davis- Even before I was there say first, second, third grades, fourth grade, I guess maybe second, third, fourth grades I don't quite remember now. We used to go over into Arkansas, all of us my little brother one next to me and my mother and I

in September or October I don't remember and we would stay over there until around Christmas time when its cotton starts to run.

F. Jack Curley- And your school would just be lost?

Fred Davis- Yeah well I had to make up and I always did make up, I made fairly decent grades even when I got back.

Joan Beifuss- Did many families do that?

Fred Davis- No, not many families even in that neighborhood do that.

F. Jack Curley- Go out picking cotton?

Fred Davis- No not picking cotton but go and stay over in Arkansas for a couple of months.

F. Jack Curley- I see they would just catch a truck and come back?

Fred Davis- Yeah well we did that too but after a while. For a few years I remember we used to go over to Arkansas to the plantation I remember the name and everything Mr. Anderson. It has been quite awhile since I saw him I just remember the name of the plantation and work picking cotton and I would save my money from the cotton we picked and we would come back and then go over to Sears Roebuck and this is the way we got our clothes to go back to school for the next year. And then, in between times, after this sometimes before this we would catch the trucks over, my mother and me and pick cotton and sell candy and these things. We used to drag a box of candy on the back of the sack and people would come over and buy candy from me during the day.

Joan Beifuss- Were you the oldest child?

=Yes I was the oldest boy and well it didn't hurt me at this point, it could have but I remember so fondly. I didn't remember it so fondly after that I used to be in the field watching the buzzards fly around and....just you know if you ever watch buzzards they do that lazy flying all the time. The first thing I know the mother had pulled up a cotton stalk by the root and cotton green boles and all and was yelling go to work, go to work. And I would go back to work.

F. Jack Curley- That's smart.

Fred Davis- We went through the same kind of thing actually through grade school, even after I went to live with my father until I got my first public job, I think I was 12 then. At the Brass Rail, it used to be a café.

F. Jack Curley- Yeah.

Fred Davis- The Brass Rail right across the street from court square, kind of court square, yeah I think it is court square.

F. Jack Curley- Yeah, I know where it is.

Fred Davis- I got a job washing pots in the summer time when I was 12 with my friend. I had a real close buddy and I later got him on and he was very good looking kid and he was real playful, he didn't have to work as much as I did and sometimes he was pretty on the job, he got us fired. And then the day we got fired we were out behind the place, kind of figuring out what we were going to do next and the fellow came over from the Peabody hotel and asked us if we wanted to work were we looking for a job. We said yeah and so he took both of us over and I guess I was in front, I don't know how the man chose, but he hired me as a busboy and a grill of the Peabody and then later on I got my buddy on again and he got fired that time, he didn't fire both of us.

F. Jack Curley- He didn't fire both of you?

Fred Davis- No after we worked there for a few months but for some reason he found a way to fire my buddy again, you know he played a lot but it was very good looking kid, he was dangerously good looking. Because the white women would take a liking to him and then in those times that was murder. A matter of fact he had to quit a couple jobs because of that. And then I got work later on upstairs in the dining room of the Peabody and eventually on the skyway and the roof. And we started just waiting tables and all the way through college, as a matter of fact this is the main way we got through. I got through. And then I met my wife in college.

F. Jack Curley- What college did you go to?

Fred Davis- Tennessee State. The summer after I graduated from high school. Incidentally in high school the president of the student council, and editor of the school paper in our graduating year. So, we didn't, even working...

Joan Beifuss- So what did you do work at night, after school?

Fred Davis- I would leave school early in the day time and then go to the hotel and come back at night. It was areal education if you got through it most guys didn't get through it. I would go back to the hotel now and see a lot of guys who are..

F. Jack Curley- Still there?

Fred Davis- Still there, because we made a comparatively made a lot of money once you learned what you were doing and some of the guys just got too good for them and they quit school.

F. Jack Curley- To stay there.

Fred Davis- I enjoyed everything that the hotel life had to offer as far as running around, but I never quit sometimes I would leave school at 2:00 in the afternoon on the way to the hotel and never get back home just work at night and then sleep on the benches or go out and get some dinner, or breakfast.

F. Jack Curley- And just stay and go to school.

Fred Davis- Yeah and I would go back to school the next morning, they would go to bed, OI would go back to school the next morning.

F. Jack Curley- Well what happened when you got out of college? Did you go directly into the insurance business?

Fred Davis- No I, when I got out of college, I got deferred, draft deferred so that I could finish and my wife had finished a year earlier. By that time we were engaged and by the time I come out we were married. She was, as a matter of fact my lab instructor in a county that the student at Tennessee State that has the highest scholastic average in the county gets a sort of scholarship to conduct a lab for sophomores and juniors and I was a junior.

Joan Beifuss- That was were you met?

Fred Davis- Yeah.

F. Jack Curley- What's her name ?

Fred Davis- Josephine, Ellen (muffled). And I was out of school and I got out of school in May and then un July I went tot eh army.

Joan Beifuss- What year was this?

Fred Davis- In 1957. And then I was in the army about 6 months and then I was sent to France. I was in France about 6 months and then I sent for her so we got a job keeping books and she gave me enough money to send for her.

F. Jack Curley- Were you a non-commissioned officer?

Fred Davis- Yeah. This was some of my army buddies couldn't understand how we could do it and I never told them how I could have a house and off post with my wife and my child over there on private's pay. But we had these two accounts and she is a real frugal with the money and she was an expert on budgeting, really an expert and this is the way we were able to make it and then I came back out of the army and tried for jobs in my field because I had been picked by the Tennessee state to go in the union combat as a trainee in the county, I was the first negro they had in a county and this came quite in a funny way because I had been sleeping through classes and just doing things backwards to things as I do them now. The man from union combat came on and I am digressing a little bit to fit this in now union combat came to the campus looking for a negro to integrate their accounting department and he interviewed some of the guys. We had a much higher scholastic average and some guys had been in the army and out already, which would have been an attraction to Frank, anyway he took two fellows from the campus that he interviewed and at the request of the head of the department the third space was saved for me and everybody on the campus asked why would they ask for them to save the third space for me of all people you know because I guess of the image that

is being presented there. Anyways the men obliged me and saved the third space for me and all three of us went up there and you know the kids were playing odds on who would get the job and I came back with it. I was chosen above the other 3.

F. Jack Curley- Now this was before you went in the army?

Fred Davis- Oh yes I was a sophomore.

F. Jack Curley- But you had something to come back to here?

Fred Davis- I had something to come back to yeah, but I didn't come back to it because I really wanted to come back home because most of, I was, I worked between sophomore and junior year and between my junior year and senior year and only came back by invitation. They brought you there the first year and you had to be evaluated and if you didn't measure up you didn't get back. So I could have gone back to union combat but I wanted to come home because there was so many things I wanted to get involved and I wanted to do, especially after the army experience.

F. Jack Curley- So you came here when?

Fred Davis- Back in 1959.

F. Jack Curley- 59. So we are at 59 and we are back in Memphis.

Fred Davis- Right.

F. Jack Curley- What brought you back to Memphis.

Fred Davis- Well I just said so many of my friends had said that they wouldn't come back because they said they didn't want to go through what you had to go through when you got back home they couldn't find jobs. Well I maintained that, this was just a private thing with me, a feeling that I had that those of us who are privileged to get some learning, some education really owe something to the rest of the people who really didn't have the opportunity or who had the opportunity and didn't have the will to go through with it. So I felt that we ought to come back and get in it and do what we could. I tried to get a job in business, in accounting which was my area and I couldn't.

F. Jack Curley- Nobody was hiring?

Fred Davis- No. So you just to get a good job with Goldsmith of Firestone or anybody it was just absolutely impossible

F. Jack Curley- That was in 59.

Fred Davis- Yeah. Even since then I was fired by the state because of my political convictions in 60.

F. Jack Curley- Oh you went to work for the state then?

Fred Davis- No I went to work for an insurance company, when I came out, well because of the fact that I couldn't get any other area, I didn't have any particular ideas about insurance but a friend of mine was getting promoted, a friend of a friend of mine was getting promoted to a staff manager and northwest mutual and he suggested that I go down and talk to him. (Muffled) which was a dinner that was in Orange Mound, this is how I happened to be in Orange Mound in the first place.

F. Jack Curley- Oh I see.

Fred Davis- I took his debit..

F. Jack Curley- What is this term debit?

Fred Davis- Well his root really he calls it.

F. Jack Curley- The general area?

Fred Davis- Yeah. I didn't get it immediately, you have to start sort of a trainee basis and the fellow had three more months to go in the company when I came there. So I started as what you call a builder, just knocking on doors asking people if they buy insurance (muffled). Anyway it was a funny thing, I went out the first time by myself and the first door I knocked on the lady came and said what you want. It scared me out of my boots. I said I am representative from Northwest mutual Insurance Company I would like to talk to you....I don't want to buy insurance. And my heart jumped in my mouth really and it started to rain and I was so glad it was raining because I had an excuse to go back and said it rained today. And I went out the next day, I don't remember when I sold my first policy but I remember I was alone and it was in this area out north Memphis just off of parkway in this area what had turned out the Poplar Manassas area, out in there. They tore a lot of that down now. Anyway, after while with the training I had and especially being trained in business that once I could get into a person's house, he held me in good stead and I could really show them the benefits of insurance, so I had to develop a skill or technique for getting in.

Joan Beifuss- The foot in the door.

Fred Davis- Yeah and eventually I became pretty adaptive tot eh point where I felt there was no house I couldn't get in. Just made it almost impossible to honestly turn me away, Eventually I got this debit out in Orange mound and by the time I had been running around out there I North Memphis, I was ready for this debit out here and I started to work out here and at the time, I had another problem, at the time I looked so young to the people that they didn't wan to do business with me because I didn't look old enough for them to have confidence in me for them to give me their money you know. But eventually I became known for a different kind of confidence because they just couldn't understand or believe that someone was out here with a debit and insurance and was supposed to have as much training as I had, but I got involved eventually with civic activities out here. I joined the civic club, now as a

matter of fact I was vice president of the civic club of Orange Mound and I lived in (muffled).

F. Jack Curley- Because of your business interests.

Joan Beifuss- it's your territory.

Fred Davis- Yes. And it just led from one thing to another and eventually I moved out here and I joined a church out here and the people took to me and I took to them and then when the problems started to coming up particularly during the civil rights periods march, a lot of days when I was supposed to have been out selling insurance I had to book at the office and the book at home and I was marching down the street with the picket sign.

F. Jack Curley- Now which sit-ins are these?

Fred Davis- Oh you know during the period when we were breaking down the lunch counters and the libraries.

F. Jack Curley- When did this happen, see I am new here in town.

Fred Davis- What 62? 63? 5 of us are marching and desegregated the fair grounds.

F. Jack Curley- Really?

Fred Davis- As a matter of fact that it got to a point at the fairgrounds that he had to call a riot quarter not because of us but to keep people from pulling up (muffled) thank you. Like I said it was during this time we were fighting these battles of opening up the fairgrounds and the day we opened up the fairground there was a mass meeting at Mason Temple and I believe Roy Wilkins was here and they jailed us. And Russell Sugarman and A.W. with us and (muffled). Anyway about 5 lawyers came down to get us out, it as funny because when he came around the prisoners in jail, the trustees said should I feed them, and the guy on the front desk said no that is them NAACP niggers and they are going to be out of her in a little while anyways, and we were sure enough, I wouldn't have eaten it but anyway they wouldn't feed us. We were finger printed mugged the whole shooting match.

Joan Beifuss- Who was with you?

Fred Davis- A fellow named Nelly Rominson, you know Nelly Rominson's staff member down at (muffled). A fellow named Bradley who was an agent at Northwestern mutual.

F. Jack Curley- So you have been involved in this from the very beginning.

Fred Davis- One other fellow I think he works for Hans bakery now. But anyway that, the library, the lunch counter, the whole shooting match we were a part of and when we started, when they started the double shifts a the schools, do you remember?

Joan Beifuss- No I wasn't here then either.

Fred Davis- Well anyway they, when we first started pushing for desegregation of the schools, and I think they still have it in summer schools I am not sure, but to keep from desegregating the schools because of over crowding they started two shifts at Melrose and at Booker Washington. Some kids had to come at 7:00 in the morning and stay as late as 5:00 in the evening.

Joan Beifuss- Right, rather than transfer them out..

Fred Davis- Right, so we started demonstrations between, against that. And at that time the whole family was at it because we had my oldest child wasn't school age and my middle child was in a stroller and she was pregnant with the 3rd one and we were marching around the board of education the whole family. Sitting and the whole gambit. We have been involved a part of the whole process.

Joan Beifuss- Was NAACP leading that whole movement at that time.

Fred Davis- Yes, yes, the NAACP.

F. Jack Curley- Were you involved with them?

Fred Davis- Oh yes, all the time, I am a director of the NAACP now and I have been very close to the NAACP all the time., I am part of the strategy planning and a whole part of NAACP.

F. Jack Curley- Yeah how did you end up getting into politics.

Fred Davis- 1959 when I came out of the army Russell Sugarman was running for public works commission and I wasn't here a month before I was in the middle of that campaign. Incidentally I have mentioned that I was the president of student council in high school in almost every class all the way up I was in.

F. Jack Curley- So you have always like politics.

Fred Davis- I have been the president of the class or something. President of my freshmen class in high school. College was the only, was the crucial time when I didn't take over active leadership in politics, and it was because I had to work, I carried two jobs in college. One I got a regular job mopping floors in the cafeteria and on the nights I had parties to serve. I would pay somebody to do my floor cleaning and then I had parties at the hotel. So this prevented me from participating in campus activities to that extent. But when I came back out of the army I got back into it again, and Russell's campaign but I remember Russell was running for the public works commission.

Joan Beifuss- Had you known Russell Sugarman before?

Fred Davis- No, no, a friend of mine I.J. Graham who teaches over at Booker Washington now was also working as an agent at North Carolina Mutual at that

time and he knew Russell as a matter of fact his family was a very prominent family around town, he knew everybody. He took me down and got me involved. His father is one of the big republicans in town, he is republican. So when the Shelby County democratic club was being put together, we reformed, re-structured (muffled) Sugarman, and A.W. Willis and this gang became a part of it I came in just after they did at the time.

Joan Beifuss- Was that in about 1959?

Fred Davis- Yeah about 1959 and I was working out here at that time and nobody had ever been able to organize this area ever, and I organized it. Set up 5 precinct clubs incidentally all of them out are policy holders.

F. Jack Curley- Are what?

Fred Davis- Are policy holders. Well about that time they had a lot of confidence in me.

Joan Beifuss- That was your foot in the door to politics.

Fred Davis- And, we start to working and organizing a campaign from 1959, since that came up until now I have been involved in every campaign this town has had, every one. Whether it was the charter referendum or the congressional race just voter registration campaigns, every campaign of any kind I had involvement.

F. Jack Curley- Were you for or against the program of progress?

Fred Davis- I was for it I worked hard for it but I helped to defeat its predecessor the consolidation because we were dealt out on that.

F. Jack Curley- I see.

Fred Davis- But in 1962 I believe I got a call from Russell about 11:00 that night.

F. Jack Curley- From who?

Fred Davis- Russell Sugarman.

F. Jack Curley- I see.

Fred Davis- About 11:00 one night and he said, hey how would you like to serve on a democratic executive committee. I said, oh I wouldn't mind. He said, ok be ready when I come by. He came by to pick me up and we went out and there was a petition made ready for me and I submitted my petition and submitted my name, I had no opposition. So I was elected to the democratic executive committee in 1962 and my term was up in 1966, and I ran again this time I did have opposition, reverend Jay McDaniel was one of my opponents, a fellow named Bill Parrish was one of my opponents. I don't remember another, I believe those two. Bill Parrish didn't come close and I beat reverend McDaniel by about 6,000 votes. So I was re-elected to the democratic committee in 1966 and then I started planning right after that to run for

the council but I didn't tell anybody. I just started putting together and doing the candidate's things which I would need to have done if I should win. Just before, well during that time is when I, by this time I was out of the insurance business. Let me see, yeah I was out of the insurance business. I went to work for the state as an auditor the second negro auditor that the state has had. A friend of mine, Rufus Jones, how know has a super market down in, his family who always was in the grocery business but he has his own store down in West Junction now, a very nice store incidentally was a first and later on I was hired. When Clement ran, I have forgotten. When Clement ran for senator the word came down that everybody had to support Clement for senator. Anyway he had made some statements, some pretty strong statements..

F. Jack Curley- Racist type thing?

Fred Davis- That we couldn't live with, I don't remember what they were but I...it's kind of hazy now, but anyway there were some sort of racy statements and the Shelby county democratic club did not support Clement and as a member of the Shelby democratic club I couldn't either and we were working for the state. So the word came down if you don't, you know, you look out, and we were forced to contribute because of the fact that people say that people are not forced to contribute tot eh governor's campaign, well you are. Word came down.

F. Jack Curley- If you want to keep working.

Fred Davis- Right, word came down that, I forgot what percentage of your salary you had to contribute to the state and we did, but what we wouldn't carry is the stickers on our car. And we didn't go and got up around to the rallies and when he was in town everybody for the state was expected to be there and your department head came around to take names to see that everybody would be there to see that he had a crowd because we wouldn't confirm. We were out on an audit one day and we are auditing some store out at Binghamton and we were told to be back in at 3:30, no at 4:00, 4:30. And at 4:00 we were handed our dismissal notices that we were being dismissed for the cause with a half hour notice.

F. Jack Curley- No two weeks no nothing?

Fred Davis- Half hour. So I didn't mind this but this was a part of the political game and either you stood up for what you believed in at whatever costs or you didn't. Later on I went to work for the registrars office.

F. Jack Curley- You dot his at the same time that you can sell insurance?

Fred Davis- Well let me go back into...what?

F. Jack Curley- The auditing?

Fred Davis- No I wasn't selling insurance then. I was talking about getting prepared. After we won that democratic committee position and the power that it has and we

decided in our own minds that we would like to be a part of this council I got my insurance license. I was out of the life insurance business and then I took the exam to qualify for this kind of insurance business building fire casualty, it is a general insurance business which I a different area. This would prepare me to have a business of my own. Incidentally, originally Russell Sugarman se up this agency jointly. Then I qualified and really stayed, licensed and really stayed. I haven't gotten a broker license yet because I didn't want to set up the kind of situation that you had to have an office in the office district area and everything once you got your broker's license I didn't want to go through all that so I just got my salesmen license to be ready to move the next step when, should I be in a position to. And I had, was keeping a couple of sets of books, we were doing this for a long time just to keep in touch with the accounting area. Just to keep in practice my wife and I. So we had started laying a base to go on our own in the event that we should win the council.

F. Jack Curley- In other words you were freeing yourself to be on the council.

Fred Davis- Right, right, but none of my political associates or close friends really knew this, or knew that I was quietly preparing my self.

F. Jack Curley- Even Russell Sugarman Didn't know.

Fred Davis- No nobody knew, just my wife, that we were laying the groundwork.

F. Jack Curley- You waited until you were pretty sure that you were ready to move?

Fred Davis- Right, because there was some question as to whether even after I had made up my mind that I wanted to there was some questions as to whether I should and then after we had done all this and we had made our intentions known, my friends Russell and A.W. never talked to us very much about it but some old people talked to me about trying to talk me out of running because they didn't feel a negro could win in this district.

Joan Beifuss- I was going to ask you what is the breakdown on your district?

Fred Davis- 52F. Jack Curley- white, and 48F. Jack Curley- negro, and they were just absolutely convinced that no negro could win in this district. I

F. Jack Curley- It is an amazing performance.

Fred Davis- And they were afraid that I would run a segregationist would run against me and I would get through the primary and that he would beat me in the run off.

F. Jack Curley- Well they had good basis for thinking that it has happened many times.

Joan Beifuss- Why do you think then you picked up that white vote that you needed?

Fred Davis- Well I had been, I had the organization, I had the people.

F. Jack Curley- Who was your opponent in that race?

Fred Davis- Well in the run off a fellow named Vaughn, Elmer Vaughn, but I had seven opponents in the primary. But anyway, after they tried to talk me out of it, I listened to them, my wife and I, at first I decided and I decided as a family we came to the point and we would talk and she decided that she was willing to go with me, win or lose and that I was locked in firmly that I was ready to go. So after we got everything all locked in and said we are going to roll win or lose, then we announced it, but the Shelby county democratic club did not run my campaign, even as a part of democratic club.

F. Jack Curley- They were (muffled).

Fred Davis- And I couldn't afford to have them too close to me because I couldn't afford to have anybody close to me who didn't absolutely believe I could win or act like that. I mean anybody who I thought was terribly nervous or just didn't believe..

Joan Beifuss- Then you had your own organization.

Fred Davis- Oh yes, my own organization, my own money, my own everything.

F. Jack Curley- You made it through to the run off pretty easily?

Fred Davis- Well, the first good thing happened to me in the beginning when I persuaded my friend Dr. Charles Pinkston he has an office across the street.

F. Jack Curley- How do you spell his name?

Fred Davis- P-i-n-k-s-t-o-n, Charles Pinkston, dentist right across the street there and who is a friend of mine. I won his company in the insurance business. I sold him \$30,000 worth of insurance. (Tape break).

Fred Davis- Where were we?

F. Jack Curley- Well let's see.

Joan Beifuss- You were just about to win the councilcy.

Fred Davis- Oh, the first thing, the good thing, Charles Pinkston had contributed money to anything that I had asked him to during the previous years but he had never participated actively. He is a good name he comes from a well known family in the area, they are well healed, they aren't rich but...

F. Jack Curley- They know where their next meal is coming from.

Fred Davis- That's right. And with this kind of background, I needed him to help me. He came to my house one night to talk and incidentally even tonight he won't let anyone touch his insurance program unless he talks to me. He came by the house to talk about his insurance program. I asked him if he would be my finance chairman,

and he agreed to be. Well this gave me the kind of credentials that I needed in some areas with some negros...

F. Jack Curley- Where you weren't so well known.

Fred Davis- Yeah that I couldn't get to, He got them for me. And with his name on my stationary, if Charles is with him he must be okay.

F. Jack Curley- Were there any other negros in the primary?

Fred Davis- Oh yeah a fellow named, he is on (muffled) commission, Lonnie Brisco, ran against me in the primary, but he came out way down he wasn't even close. So we got through the primary and I led the field and at the same time I had Laureen Osmond as a teacher as my campaign manager and the two people were, the real difference was George Peters who is now executive sports editor for the Precimeter and Jim Gallanack who is a lawyer, a year old graduate with Hanover something. Well anyway George and Jim had heard about me through a fellow named Irvin Saulky who was a lawyer down with Russell Sugarman. He introduced them, we were introduced through them, no, I went down to the Precimeter one day to talk about an endorsement and George Peters met me. He said I have heard about you, Irvin Sulky has been talking a lot about you and these were the real wheel hausses as far as the white community.

F. Jack Curley- And they really worked for you.

Fred Davis- They worked like champs.

F. Jack Curley- Is that true.

Fred Davis- As a matter of fact they got, a Jewish fraternity out at Memphis state to work on my campaign. He just went out there and told them they were going to work on my campaign, at firs they didn't want to but afterwards they really got interested and they really hustled.

F. Jack Curley- Really got out and found a favor.

Fred Davis- How about they knocked on almost every door that we didn't have somebody else in the white community to knock on for us in the white community starting at Oak Haven and coming back this way.

F. Jack Curley- My word.

Fred Davis- And then I knocked on doors in the white community and I had other friends and white folk, I had Rab Lewis who is local brother and law was a part of (muffled) I had a really and truly thoroughly integrated campaign. And these guys got me money, they did everything they could possibly do to help to win. And then I had my precinct club, probably about 5 precinct clubs set up when Russell ran they ratted around and the young people all were marvelous. I went through the Glenview area one time knocking on doors, just a few of us. And I talked to

somebody over there, he said when are you coming through our area, I said I been through there, and they said well we haven't seen any evidence. I said next time I come over there you will know it. I came over there with 10 car loads of young people just jammed packed. They fell out of those cars like bees, just swarming all over the place in drop tops and Dana Curtis is a friend of mine, the Curtis Company up here, brought his bugs out, he has a Volkswagen.

F. Jack Curley- You can get a lot of people in a Volkswagen bug.

Fred Davis- How about 7. And we went through that place and they couldn't say they didn't see us that time.

Joan Beifuss- Now were you working for Willis also or were you staying clear of the..

Fred Davis- No, no I was working, we campaigned for, I imagine we did more campaigning for Willis in a concentrated area than any, we did not try to shake the team we campaign hard. As a matter of fact (muffled). She wouldn't have had it up and led a group like that with just me. We had Willis' picture on one side with a car and (muffled) on the other side. There was people in the democratic campaign that said we didn't campaign for Willis. I think that was because of a kind of bitterness because of the way Willis' campaign see had been going in this area compared to mine.

F. Jack Curley- He wasn't as well known.

Fred Davis- Well he was as well known but he had been the victim of a smear tactic which stuck real well.

Joan Beifuss- It sure did.

Fred Davis- And he was also a victim of an Ingramania and the negro just felt that nobody, they felt that god shouldn't run against Ingram.

F. Jack Curley- Is that so they felt that strongly about mayor Ingram.

Fred Davis- They were mad at him about that, and we campaigned hard and we have always had a very tight organization. I mean nobody up to that time could get anything done unless it got my okay.

Joan Beifuss- Now then when Willis lost in the primary then the whole organization just kept working for you is that right?

Fred Davis- Yeah.

Joan Beifuss- I mean the organization stayed together even after Willis lost in the primary, yes.

Fred Davis- Yes but my own organization was still carrying the brunt of the ball.

Joan Beifuss- Did you have the endorsement of the newspapers?

Fred Davis- Well yes the first time I had the endorsement of the Precimeter and I think there commercial endorsement of a negro opponent I believe and he was beaten so badly. I didn't know if the Commercial was going to endorse Vaughn or me the next time.

F. Jack Curley- Who did they endorse?

Fred Davis- They endorsed me.

F. Jack Curley- Did they.

Fred Davis- So the last time around I had both papers, a lot of my friends wrote letters and they pulled and they pushed.

F. Jack Curley- Did the paper publish a fairly good percentage of them? Of the letters that were written?

Fred Davis- No they didn't publish any of the letters that were written I just know that people wrote letters and went to the editors.

Joan Beifuss- Now did Mr. Vaughn conduct a racist campaign at all?

Fred Davis- He slipped into it, this was part of the thing that hurt him. He got on the sound truck and made the mistake and going back to George Peters and (muffled) house. They lived next door to each other, they have town houses, they are close friends. And as I said they own tow houses separate next door to each other, saying if you elect Elmer Vaughn you will have a nigger for a councilmen and they heard him, and they were furious. He said it on more than one occasion. They came back and told me about it and we started planning whatever strategy that we could to combat that.

Joan Beifuss- What did you do to combat something like that?

Fred Davis- Well we informed our people just informed them what was going on and then George's newspaper men reported it and I think Vaughn was confronted with it and he didn't deny it, one day down at the, it was reported to me that he came down to the newspaper office and reporters confronted him with it, he didn't say he didn't, he didn't say that he didn't do it and the newspaper printed it, I mean I have clippets. His tactics, and this hurt him with a lot of the white votes that he would have got.

F. Jack Curley- Sure because he is a moderate white.

Fred Davis- Right and I have got calls form white folks that said they had been prone to vote for Vaughn but after that. I didn't retaliate, I didn't come back...

F. Jack Curley- That would have been a mistake.

Fred Davis- And after I didn't come back at him with this same kind of thing this really cramped his style and we just pulled the heat on him.

Joan Beifuss- Now how much did you beat him by in that election?

Fred Davis- By about 1,400 votes. When the first box came in I knew I had won.

Joan Beifuss- Did you start celebrating?

Fred Davis- No because I went to the shower. I always know that the first boxes are white boxes and I had a high enough percentage of the first white box that came in that I knew that I had one and incidentally, Maryanne Lee ...

F. Jack Curley- Who does the movie reviews.

Fred Davis- Right is a real close friend of ours and Maryanne was at the house that night and she was going to tabulate it for me. She said you have the first box, and I said baby we just won. She said how can you tell? I said that is the first box and its all white folks and if I got that many white votes on the first box it is over.

Joan Beifuss- Do you know what percentage of the white vote you got do you have that written down?

Fred Davis- Oh we estimated about 14 or 18F. Jack Curley-

Joan Beifuss- Is that all?

Fred Davis- We had hoped for 10F. Jack Curley- , see we knew if we got 10F. Jack Curley- .

F. Jack Curley- Of course you could swing it pretty easy if you got 10F. Jack Curley- .

Fred Davis- But we got far more than 10F. Jack Curley- we got far more of the city class.

Joan Beifuss- Now did you support either Ingram or Lobe or did you stay clear?

Fred Davis- No I stayed clear, but I definitely could not support Ingram. No matter what the negro community said in mass, I know, I felt then and always felt through his whole campaign that he was bad news for us.

Joan Beifuss- Why?

Fred Davis- Because he was a opiate.

F. Jack Curley- Ah, exactly, that's right of course that's it.

Fred Davis- He put us to sleep, we wouldn't fight him and no matter what he did there would be no reaction from the black community. As a matter of fact in 1966 he got an injunction against the sanitation workers to keep them from striking...

F. Jack Curley- And nobody said a word.

Fred Davis- And nobody said word.

F. Jack Curley- Yeah, T.O. Jones mentioned that the other day when he was here, he said if Ingram had been in we wouldn't even be organized.

Fred Davis- Nothing would have happened and this is what bugged me during the garbage strike. The same preachers, O.Z. Ellis, T.O. Jones and all the people who were down there berating the council and berating means that on the day I held a hearing to try to get something done, with the same people around during the last part of the administration and who were the same people around who were campaigning most vigorously for Ingram.

F. Jack Curley- Yeah and (muffled).

Joan Beifuss- T.O. Jones campaigned for him?

F. Jack Curley- Oh yeah, sure he did.

Fred Davis- That's right. So now he is the guy who was talking about the bad situation but who was campaigning for the guy who had beat him down before and Ingram came in on the back of a garbage strike.

F. Jack Curley- That's right.

Fred Davis- T.O. Jones, was (muffled) for trying to organize the union and the guy who said we are going to help you do something about it, help you do something for you, was, when he went out of office, things were bad enough when he went out of office that they felt the need to strike again.

F. Jack Curley- Yeah, alright now this brings up a real interesting thing here. Once you got on the city council you hadn't been on it a few months until you really found yourself in the middle of a Mixmaster. This whole garbage strike situation, when did you know this was a serious mess? Did it hit you pretty soon? It seems to me some of them very late like Jerry Blanchard.

Fred Davis- Oh well it hit me soon. But not as a strike per say. You see as a part of he movement and as an old hand..

F. Jack Curley- You knew it was a part of the civil rights, racial thing from the very beginning?

Fred Davis- I couldn't see the people who were, it was apparent that were involved in this thing, not using this as a vehicle to do all kinds of things or to push for all kinds of things to ring up old grievances in all kinds of areas. So even before the sanitation strike per say, that took on the implications that it did I knew it was going to be much rougher and I knew that the it was going to be a long time before some of the people involved in that thing would turn it loose. Because there were some particularly there were some members who under normal circumstances would have received no notoriety, couldn't have been in the forefront of anything. And here is a situation, here is a vehicle that they can use to get in front of TV cameras and

talk to the city council in front of a crowd. There are some guys who aren't going to turn something loose like this quickly.

Joan Beifuss- Now when the strike first started though, the first day of the strike that Monday morning when the strikers didn't show up for work, there wasn't, none of the negro administrators were (muffled) then. Was it a clear labor dispute on the first day for instance? Or do you think it was planned...

F. Jack Curley- When did the ministers get involved, or when did you know this was coming this way?

Fred Davis- Well, after it, well they really got involved in the mass after the first couple of weeks when it appeared that after the injunction period and it appears that the union wasn't able to carry on and somebody needed to come in and this is when they really got into it, in my estimation.

Joan Beifuss- Ok that was before the macing incident.

Fred Davis- Oh yeah, oh yeah.

F. Jack Curley- and before the meeting. Yeah because by the time the meeting on February 22nd that you mentioned earlier ministers were obviously..

Fred Davis- Oh yeah, they were very much a part.

F. Jack Curley- Was Zeke Bell at that meeting, Ezekiel Bell.

Fred Davis- Yeah Zeke Bell I think he was probably the one most responsible for tearing it up. The one the hearing that I had?

Joan Beifuss- Yes now go back a little bit.

Fred Davis- Incidentally Zeke and I are old, we came through the same grade school together and we came through Tennessee state together so we know each other well.

Joan Beifuss- You committee you had the one that brought in the recommendation to the council.

F. Jack Curley- Well let's get the recommendation what was it?

Fred Davis- Well see the recommendation was that there should be dues check off through the credit union which the union said it absolutely would not accept.

F. Jack Curley- Oh really they finally did accept.

Fred Davis- Yes. And a signed contract. We made no recommendations at that point concerning wages...(Tape break)

F. Jack Curley- Now let me see if I can sum some things up at this point because I think I missed a turn somewhere. You said that you could not support Ingram because he was an opiate which I thought was a real pregnant phrase a real interesting way of putting it, and now Henry Lobe is anything but an opiate. Are you saying that the strike as it came about once it had developed and became a method of politically attacking Lobe with the council or just a method of perhaps getting some old grievances.

Fred Davis- See that was the underlying thing. I firmly believed that Ingram was involved in the background even those there was people in the forefront in the beginning.

F. Jack Curley- Oh is that so.

Fred Davis- And I had a feeling that he was...

F. Jack Curley- Making trouble..

Fred Davis- Engineering this whole thing.

F. Jack Curley- My word, that is very interesting I have never heard that.

Fred Davis- I have newspaper clippings where he had met some out of the way places with the union people at the height of the strike. And Lobe has a very bad image.

F. Jack Curley- Yeah couldn't be much worse.

Fred Davis- At the very beginning.

F. Jack Curley- Don't you think he heard it to like ya'll come back to work and we will take care of you.

Fred Davis- Yeah, well he did.

Joan Beifuss- Ok now to go back to your committee that came into the council with the recommendation, you were under the impression at that time then that the council had the power to make this recommendation and then the mayor would then carry out the council's recommendation?

Fred Davis- Well we did have he power. We made the recommendation for dues check off through the credit union and a signed contract.

Joan Beifuss- Now that was the meeting on Thursday I think.

Fred Davis- On Thursday, now, before that, I had all the councilmen at my house trying to win a wage increase for these men. We started very high and worked on down, and as it ended up, I had enough votes to get through a 15 cents wage increase. So the 15 cents wage increase that the union came out with contrary to popular belief was not won in that conference room between the city and the union,

it was won in my living room and what happened was the city kept marching the union back on amounts until they got them back to 15 cents and union said we are going back in (muffled) because we already got the word that you would vote for this.

Joan Beifuss- And that was what mayor Lobe was so mad about..

Fred Davis- That the word leaked out.

Joan Beifuss- Yes.

F. Jack Curley- How did the word leak out do you know?

Fred Davis- A woman I don't know which one, one of the negro councilmen's told what would happen because we had said we weren't going to reveal this, and this is what I have started to reveal that Friday.

F. Jack Curley- In that stormy meeting?

Fred Davis- Right. What had been warned at that point.

Joan Beifuss- Now so you met on Thursday, was there pressure on you at that council meeting on Thursday, there was a number of spectators.

Fred Davis- There was tremendous, that was the day they made the bologna sandwiches and brought their lunch and said they were going to stay in there all night. What did family, we had some pretty heated sessions and I felt I was being taken advantage of because they would do things and I was before the cameras and I couldn't fight back. So what ended up happening was that I would call a recess and call them back in the conference room and cuss them all out and then go back to..

F. Jack Curley- This is the leaders, like Zeke Bell..

Fred Davis- Yeah, yeah , yeah.

Joan Beifuss- Well who were the leaders at that point?

F. Jack Curley- Jim Lawson, was he there?

Fred Davis- No, Slip was there, Jim Lawson was there and a fellow named....

F. Jack Curley- Were there any white preachers there?

Fred Davis- No, I don't remember any white preachers there.

F. Jack Curley- Is this the meeting where T.O. Jones changed his clothes.

Fred Davis- Not hat had been done before two weeks before. T.O. Jones, O.Z. Evers, all t his group see it is our running, these people who were there O.Z. Evers was Ingram's top negro henchmen. He was the fellow that sat through the last part of the

administration and let Ingram do all of these things that they were doing and yet he never said anything about the condition of the sanitation workers and these were the workers he used as a vehicle to get Ingram in, in the first place.

Joan Beifuss- Ok so now I am still on Thursday. Did your committee meet in an Andy room while these people were sitting in the council chamber?

Fred Davis- Well what happened is they decided they were going to just turn this thing out and I decided I wasn't going to preside any more we just dismissed the meeting. So from one thing back to the other we finally decided we would go on and meet. Well as it ended up t hey said they were going to demand a recommendation from the council. And we told them we would not make any kind of recommendation or come out with any report unless they agreed to leave at the end. At that time I was furious. I felt that I had been taken advantage of and things had been said of me by people who I feel hadn't contributed near as much. So they had strategy meetings and they decided we would accept these conditions and we did. Incidentally we had investigated, reverend Neders had investigated the possibility of using the credit union as a vehicle for dues check off prior to the time we made the recommendation, so we weren't just making something off the top of our heads. It was checked out even before we came to that meeting.

Joan Beifuss- Ok, now that, so that was Thursday that your committee made the recommendation, then Friday morning the entire council met in closed session to consider your recommendation?

Fred Davis- Yeah because I think we went over there that afternoon. And they met in closed session but what happened was, the council wouldn't permit me to make this recommendation in open session the next day. They wanted, they listened to the recommendation of the committee in this meeting and then they drew up a recommendation of their own. Now this is the point where the conservatives on the council prevail. At this point there was so many members of the council who were saying, they felt Lobe was doing it just like they would have done it if they were in Lobe's shoes.

F. Jack Curley- Hold out.

Fred Davis- That's right and they didn't want Lobe to do anything, and they didn't want to do anything at all to stop Lobe, or to slow down Lobe from doing exactly what he was doing. So this, the tenor of this statement reflected this, that this is an executive problem and we aren't as a council going to get involved.

Joan Beifuss- Now the conservative members on the council at that point, do you think they had any idea of how the racial overtones come into the whole picture?

Fred Davis- Yeah.

Joan Beifuss- They knew that?

Fred Davis- But I think they were convinced they could win back.

F. Jack Curley- By playing them.

Fred Davis- By pressing it by just holding out.

F. Jack Curley- Alright...

Joan Beifuss- So the council voted against your recommendation?

Fred Davis- Yes.

F. Jack Curley- Would this then force you to a certain extent into a coalition with these people who criticize you so bitterly the day before?

Fred Davis- No I was, I felt....

F. Jack Curley- You were kind of the man in the middle.

Fred Davis- I felt part of the cause and I wanted to do everything I could to carry the ball for the cause on the council. But on the other hand I didn't want to be turned into the performed which I feel they wanted me to turn into.

F. Jack Curley- I see.

Fred Davis- I could have been the glory boy the same that (muffled) turned out to be and they tried to get me to do the same thing that Tollison did. To tell Lobe off, to make the grand statements, appeal to the crowd, but I didn't want to be locked into this kind of image, this is not my style, this is not the way I normally carry on and I just refuse to do it you see.

F. Jack Curley- That's incredible.

Fred Davis- And some of my good friends come to me and people that are astute politicians, I respect told me that you got to do it, you got to give the crowd what they want. They want to hear you give it to them, and I said I am not going to give it to them I am with them, I am carrying the ball but if they want me to get up and give them a kind of performance I am not going to do it. And one fellow came up to me and said Mr. Davis why won't you speak up for us, and he was half drunk, and this is what the negro wants. He wants to hear someone speak up, what he gets, what he is after, if he hear the white folks told off he is satisfied even if he leaves empty handed. He said Mr. Davis why don't you speak for me....I called him off and said look, there are three of us on this council that are black. It takes 7 votes to get anything through here, now what do you want. Do you want a performance or do you want results? Now if you want results then I, these folk aren't going to cooperate and aren't going to work with me and deliver performance, deliver a bill of goods to you if I get out here and do the kind of thing that you are asking me to do to them in front of...they are just going to back off. Now I am here to get results and I don't know do you understand that? And he said yes, I do understand that.

(Muffled). Generate some kind of respect some kind of something with these people that you have to work with because we need 4 more votes. So he understood that but I was just talking to one man individually.

F. Jack Curley- Do you think this has hurt you politically?

Fred Davis- No, no.

F. Jack Curley- Because they have seen the results now.

Fred Davis- Because you see up to that point nobody had ever questioned my integrity but there was people that would just use anything as a tact to build at themselves to glorify themselves, to cut anybody down to stand on their shoulders, to stand a little higher. Well I know just as soon as those lights go off just as soon as the mass meetings are all over and all that stuff they wouldn't have a platform anymore but I still would and I could carry on and I could deliver and I could....if people would see that it took more than 2 months or whatever it is for the people to find out what kind of a guy you really are and if you lock yourself into something well they don't think you are really doing a good job unless you foaming at the mouth and ranting and raving. Then you have to holler a little louder each time you have to do somebody (muffled). So I just couldn't get locked into a mess like that.

F. Jack Curley- I see your point.

Joan Beifuss- Now well that Friday let's see that council meeting wasn't held in the council chambers.

Fred Davis- No it was held in the auditorium.

Joan Beifuss- So more people could get into it so there would be more room.

Fred Davis- Correct.

Joan Beifuss- Now were the people that came to that meeting the strikers and the sympathizers were they under the impression that it was going to be an open council meeting or they were going to be able to talk again or ...

Fred Davis- No, we told them, they may have been under the impression but we told them, that the committee would report and that the whole council would come back and make its recommendations the next day. Now what the masses of them thought is what they were told to think, what was advantageous to the people were leading that thing at that point. And some of the things, now I will tell you the truth that some of the people leading the strike said, knew that this really wasn't the case at all but there was some thing they felt like they had to say and had to do in order to keep the problem with them and keep the momentum of the thing going. I recognized this. This is part of the game, I just got caught in the middle as far as this kind of thing was going. And I recognized that but I couldn't let that dictate my style of (muffled).

F. Jack Curley- No I see your point of course. You were working in a constructive, you were trying to end the thing not just..

Fred Davis- I was trying to deliver, what they want. The only people who could be, the only persons who could advocate for the cause on that council were the black members of the council. And as a black member I put myself in a situation that all the white members of the council would turn a deaf ear to what I had to say...

F. Jack Curley- If you played the demigog?

Fred Davis- Yeah. Then I just didn't have any hope.

F. Jack Curley- Well tell me something did the other two members of the council who were negro pretty much agree with you, were would reverend Neders been?

Fred Davis- Well Neders...

F. Jack Curley- Seems to have had the same...

Fred Davis- Yeah well he has gotten caught in the middle because I have a lot of experience but more political experience than Patterson has. Even though Patterson was elected to the legislature, I was in the game when Patterson was still in office.

F. Jack Curley- I see.

Fred Davis- But I suspected that Pat had (muffled) running for the legislature.

F. Jack Curley- You think he was looking ahead.

Fred Davis- The image didn't need to be created. This as really and truly how I feel about the thing. And now I think reverend Neders wanted to dot he best he could but being such a novice he just didn't know what to do.

Joan Beifuss- Was councilmen Blanchard supporting you at all?

Fred Davis- Yeah.

F. Jack Curley- He already was.

Fred Davis- Yeah.

F. Jack Curley- That is a surprising person to me given the tone of his campaign the original campaign. Did he surprise you?

=Yeah he did.

F. Jack Curley- (muffled) under that kind of rough exterior.

Fred Davis- He is.

F. Jack Curley- He is open to new information.

Fred Davis- Right and he is hard to judge, you can't just create a box and put him in it because he will end up over here somewhere. I met Jerry Blanchard in a very strange kind of way. When I was here working for the county registrars office, (muffled) the whole time I was conducting my campaign the campaign was over and I had won and some people in the courthouse didn't even know I was running. I mean they saw no change in my demeanor at work or anything to tell that I was, I was a candidate. Come in at the regular time, left at the regular time, but not..

F. Jack Curley- They didn't make that connection that you were the Fred Davis that was..

Fred Davis- No they couldn't make that connection because they expected more of a flurry, like I should be working like mad when I was down there working in the day time. When I come home I picked it up and carried it home. But getting back to the way I met Jerry Blanchard. He came down to the courthouse one day and brought me a speech or something from Abernathy or somebody from Atlanta concerning our form of government and I, he had come at one time and he missed me and he had come back again and he said are you Fred Davis. I said yes, well I want to give you some thing I am Jared Blanchard. I want you to read it, it may benefit you. And I said, thank you and he left, just like that. I had never seen him before, and after the campaign we all warmed, I asked him about it. I said, why did you bring that thing down there to me. He said, well I looked at the paper and I started to really look into your background and I said to myself that fellow is going to win, I better get to know him.

Joan Beifuss- Well then on that fighting when the council decision was announced to the large meeting. Then the macing incident...

F. Jack Curley- And then started to march from there didn't you?

Fred Davis- Yeah.

Joan Beifuss- Now where were you then, the macing incident?

Fred Davis- Oh well, I was home for the macing incident. They stayed down there for a pretty good while.

F. Jack Curley- That's right they had a sit-in sort of thing.

Fred Davis- Afterwards. And I left the council with James and I came straight home. I was still smarting from the previous day because I felt that I had really been done in by people whom I consider friends of mine and who knew where I stood and I just felt that no matter, I just felt that my background, my performance, lack of humility, my frequent sacrifices in the year's past to an extent far beyond theirs would have put me in position....

F. Jack Curley- Could we really get some names here, I think I know some, one of the people you are talking about has to be Zeke Bell.

Fred Davis- Yeah. I felt disturbed then this features (muffled) because I think he was apart of the problem.

F. Jack Curley- Now Zeke hadn't been here long enough to really be an Ingram man had he.

Fred Davis- No Zeke wasn't an Ingram man.

F. Jack Curley- He just seized the situation?

Fred Davis- Now see, well, you have to understand that Zeke is Vasco and Maxine's pastor.

F. Jack Curley- See I go to that church.

Fred Davis- And they in ministering, pastors (muffled) soon get civil right, and NAACP and everything orientated.

F. Jack Curley- So he has got to make his mark.

Fred Davis- So I guess in a sense he was making his mark, incidentally he was down here yesterday.

F. Jack Curley- Now wouldn't Vasco Smith have enough sense to know what was going on and to realize that it isn't going to do any good for Zeke to pull against you?

Fred Davis- I presume Vasco knows that...you see Vasco was down there the next day. He was the one that told the people that the city had all of this money.

F. Jack Curley- Had what?

Fred Davis- Had all of this money. You remember they said they have such much money, the city has plenty of money at this meeting that Friday Vasco came down and spoke.

Joan Beifuss- (muffled) Turner was speaking too at those.

Fred Davis- No, Jesse Turner came down that Thursday.

Joan Beifuss- Yeah he spoke there too.

Fred Davis- The debate, Jesse Turner came down and said he was going to get a bucket of (muffled). It was that Thursday of the hearing but I had left and they were still down there.

F. Jack Curley- Jesse Turner kind of stayed clear of this whole thing didn't he?

Fred Davis- Sort of, I think this was the most notorious thing he did was to come down and said he was coming back to get a bucket of (muffled). There was some people who were instigating this thing whom was in the forefront of this thing, who for the most part had not made substantial contributions to the cause (muffled).

F. Jack Curley- I see.

Fred Davis- This was in the front. The numbers of people who had made substantial contributions in the past that deal with these people, even though they were sympathetic to the cause and were with us and I am one of those people.

F. Jack Curley- They were pulling off in a non-productive, or counter-productive direction.

Fred Davis- Well in a sense. I think that the garbage situation should have been settled, the problem should have existed in the first place.

F. Jack Curley- Were you generally in favor of allowing some sort of union recognition?

Fred Davis- Yes, see I, this is, from the very beginning and I can get newspaper clippings and radio. When no black councilmen would dare come out of his shell I was making statements over WDIA for publication, to the entire black community. I was making statements for publication for both newspapers as to what my personal position was long before T. Patterson said one word.

F. Jack Curley- Yeah.

Fred Davis- Before anyone I was out there by myself, by my lonesome. And then only after it became the thing to do, that these people come out and make their reservations known, because I don't consider it any courage or to show any integrity, if integrity is the right word to come out when you have the crowd cheering you on and you have a ready made platform. I believe that the time to show what's in you is when you go out there alone, when you don't have the cheering squad when you subject to get cut up and cut off and that's when I went and I didn't feel the necessity to put on a performance for the crowd once they got there.

Joan Beifuss- Well now what was your reaction when you heard about the macing on Main St.? You were at home.

Fred Davis- I felt very badly about this, I felt that this was something which was unnecessary. On the other hand actually it wasn't there, it wasn't on the scene to see to what extent maybe there were provocations by the police, if the police were attacked, if they were in there and the only thing I read was second hand account and I have been in enough of these kinds of things to know that sometimes that you can't rely on second handed accounts. I know the macing thing was bad. But I also know this. No matter how much mace was shot, no matter how little mace was shot at all..

F. Jack Curley- Instead of bullets?

Fred Davis- Was something that could be used to generate plenty of emotional appeal and his would not, this incident would not have been permitted to go by without making the most of it.

Joan Beifuss- Right, ok now it was my understanding that the COME coalition or whatever it was formed right after the macing incident. Where you in on that?

Fred Davis- No, no. You see after I was very close, as I said I was a member of the board of directors of the NAACP and I am, was the financial secretary for Shelby county democratic club, all the checks come to me for the last 4 years for the most part, (Muffled) signed by me. So anytime anyone has money...

F. Jack Curley- Yeah your there.

Fred Davis- Yeah. But after that came and that performance I just felt that they had attitude that this was our thing and you are part of them and they had cut me out. I didn't (muffled) there were some things they were saying and there were some thing they were doing that I didn't agree with.

F. Jack Curley- So you are no longer with the Shelby county..

Fred Davis- Oh yes, oh yes but this COME organization this (muffled) This whole thing that was going on right then I felt that maybe I could serve best by just being aware of what was going on and trying to carry the ball, I tried to get the council to act positively to the demands, the constructive demands that were being made instead of being a part of the storm's act. And this was the position I took.

Joan Beifuss- Right, had you worked with Jim Lawson before?

Fred Davis- Oh yeah, see, Jim Lawson, I know Jim Lawson well. Jim Lawson's wife and I graduated in the same class at Tennessee state. We all came up there together, Dorothy Longsmen and Zeke Bell, and Jim and I were all in the same class and I know Jim, it hadn't been 2 weeks before that Jim and I had a dinner together. We aren't strangers we know each other well.

F. Jack Curley- You reckon you will ever have dinner again?

Fred Davis- Yeah.

F. Jack Curley- Maybe when it has all blown over.

Fred Davis- I mean, this is political, this is not as personal.

Joan Beifuss- Ok now when COME came out with the recommendation on the boycott and the suspension of the newspaper, taking the newspaper, you were opposed to that?

Fred Davis- No. I think there is some kind of outside pressure needed to be exerted.

F. Jack Curley- What did you think of the boycott as a technique the downtown being boycotted.

Fred Davis- I didn't think much of it.

F. Jack Curley- You didn't.

Fred Davis- It was something to generate the people but as a technique to get results. I didn't think very much of it and here is why. Because on the whole black community is not sophisticated enough to really understand, and I may be wrong I may be underestimating, to understand these reflective methods. In other words, we put pressure on Goldsmith's so Goldsmith's can put pressure on Lobe so Lobe can do what we want him to do. You see we have had our best results with the one to one technique, that is we put pressure on Goldsmith's so Goldsmith would do something, you see. They, the black community can understand and really will draw the support the one to one situation. We will boycott his store and put them out of business because they won't react to the kind of thing. Bam you get immediate and good response, gut response. But so much of the response to this boycott, was not gut response, I guarantee it.

F. Jack Curley- On a an intellectual level of anything.

Joan Beifuss- No.

Fred Davis- It was intimidation, it was persuaded response and gut response, but I thought gut response is the kind of response from people that don't do these things because they don't want to do them, not the kind of response that they don't do them because they feel fear to not to do them. And this is where you get your real.

F. Jack Curley- And that had to be used to keep people out of the downtown area.

Fred Davis- It had to be used.

Joan Beifuss- How effective was it do you know?

Fred Davis- What?

Joan Beifuss- The boycott.

Fred Davis- I think the boycott as a boycott was effective, but the boycott in Memphis in terms of getting Lobe to do what they wanted him to do, it was not effective.

F. Jack Curley- When did you know that Martin Luther King was coming in?

Fred Davis- Hmm?

F. Jack Curley- When did you learn that Martin Luther King was coming in and what was your reaction to that?

Fred Davis- I remember exactly when I learned that Martin Luther King was coming in. I really had mixed emotions about it. I hoped that he could do something constructive, I was worried that it may not turn out constructively.

Joan Beifuss- Wait now hold just a minute, did you think that the tension was reaching a high point in the city before Dr. King came in or did you notice that the (muffled) racial communication that type of thing.

Fred Davis- Before he came in?

Joan Beifuss- Yes.

Fred Davis- Yes, I felt it and I think this was suggested. I think tension was suggestively built up sometimes in the past, if we don't have a crisis we will make one, we will create an artificial crisis in order to get the power structure to react to an abnormal situation since they won't react positively in a normal situation sometimes you have not created a crisis and just make them to react to an artificial crisis. I felt that this may have been happening, I didn't have a lot of close contact with the leaders because there was some people who were out front very vocal that I did not respect and still don't respect.

F. Jack Curley- You mean in terms of SCLC?

Fred Davis- No not in terms of SCLSC, in terms of people who were involved in the top are of the COME group. Numbers of them I say, a large proportion of them I do respect. And I still do respect. There were some people who had authority in it who had substantial parts and I did not respect them and I do not respect them.

Joan Beifuss- Well it was kind of coalition organization.

Fred Davis- Yeah.

Joan Beifuss- You yourself did not go to any of the meetings at Clayborne Temple?

Fred Davis- I went to some of the meetings at Mason Temple but never any of the ones at Clayborne Temple.

Joan Beifuss- Did you hear Barrett Ruston for instance?

Fred Davis- no I wasn't at it, the night that he spoke at Mason Temple I believe and the night he spoke at Mason Temple I was on WKNO, I probably would have gone, but the next one I was there and the next one I was there.

Joan Beifuss- Did you know Dr. King?

Fred Davis- Personally? No. I had seen him on the one time, when I was at Tennessee State he came there to speak.

Joan Beifuss- Oh really, way back before the Birmingham?

Fred Davis- Yeah. Well anyway he came to Tennessee, before the bus thing he came to Tennessee to speak while I was still there so I had seen him and I heard him then and I had generated as most Americans had a respect and an admiration for him.

F. Jack Curley- Even at that time he was eloquent I guess.

Fred Davis- Yes, yes he was.

Joan Beifuss- So that, you did not meet Dr. King when he came in for that first march?

F. Jack Curley- The march that got broken up.

(Tape Break)

Fred Davis- I had met him I think on his second speech because I don't know whether it was Ben Hooks, or Jim Lawson that introduced me to him. One or the other because Ben Hooks and my pastor reverend Holmes and somebody else, all came with him the second time because we couldn't get in any other way because crowds too thick and we went in with King when he came.

Joan Beifuss- Was that the night before his assassination when he spoke?

Fred Davis- No. I wasn't there the night before the assassination, the was the time, the speech before, the night before his assassination.

F. Jack Curley- Alright, what were the reactions of the people in the city council and your constituents if you can tell us to the riot where the King march was broken up?

Fred Davis- That was, I think that was mixed emotions. Some people, well they felt that it was that King certainly had no control of it he could not have prevented it. Incidentally before we marched out of the temple..

Joan Beifuss- You were in the first march?

Fred Davis- Yeah. I was in the first march.

Joan Beifuss- Yeah I thought you were.

Fred Davis- I was in the second march, let's see how many marches were there?

Joan Beifuss- Two, there was the one with King leading it and then the memorial march.

Fred Davis- Well I was in both of them. Before we were at the temple I was talking to Jesse Turner and looking at the ruffians walking up and down the streets and there was some whinos in the crowd that we couldn't get rid of, couldn't do anything with, nobody could do anything with. I said Mr. Turner, do you believe that we could conduct this march and come all the way around and come back to this place without incident? He said, no chance.

Joan Beifuss- He said what?

Fred Davis- Absolutely no chance. I just don't believe he could.

Joan Beifuss- So why didn't they stop it then?

Fred Davis- Couldn't.

Joan Beifuss- I know I was there and I marched with Dr, King that day too but there were women with children marching near me and what I couldn't understand why they couldn't try and call it off before it even left the temple.

Fred Davis- At that point that march was so locked in until, if they had tried to call off the march at that point it would have blown up right there plus it as reported to me that there was some of the people that had already picked the stores they were going to loot and they were just waiting, they were route side.

Joan Beifuss- Tell me who was in charge of that march were the COME people setting up that march?

Fred Davis- As I understand it they were. You see I wasn't very (muffled) to the COME people as an organization, I knew each one of the folk as an individual.

F. Jack Curley- In other words you were there because it was necessary to (muffled) and you probably wanted to march with Dr. King but you weren't in on the planning of it.,

Fred Davis- No, I had nothing to do with any of the planning of any of the demonstrations.

F. Jack Curley- The other night at Sunday school, I mentioned something about my impressions from talking with Dick Wells, the man who conducted that meeting. Was that the march that the riot that happened afterwards, there were people that had made plans that had come to break things up and you seem to feel the same way. Any organizations you can identify?

Fred Davis- No.

F. Jack Curley- Do you think the invaders came to make trouble?

Fred Davis- I think if there was trouble they were going to be a part of it, let's put it this way. I think that the kids, some of them were doing what they thought they were expected to do. Because there are so many statements made many times by ministers that says we are talking to you, if you don't react to us we just don't know what these kids are going to do. They just might do anything, we just can't control these kids. With constant suggestions like this...,

F. Jack Curley- You have to prove it.

Fred Davis- I just feel that the kids felt that their response and actions of that day were the expected thing.

Joan Beifuss- Well now let me ask another point because at least in the white community the assumption was after that march broke up was that Jim Lawson, Jim Lawson because the scapegoat I think for that march breaking up and I know that Lawson had worked with King before that he had conducted nonviolent (muffled) for King before and none of this was done here.

F. Jack Curley- Why it wasn't better organized?

Joan Beifuss- King would come into such an unorganized situation and why Lawson would allow such an unorganized situation to grow up in the first place.

Fred Davis- Well you see it was not, in my estimation a carefully controlled thing in the beginning. There was no real top leader, no man in charge that everybody had to listen to in my estimation. So this person could say I am going to do that, somebody else could say I am going to do this, and no one real person had the power to know that we are going to do this. So the mechanism of putting the hand of control over marks like that together that you have in a strictly SCLC conducted march was (muffled). You see if King's people had been here, they would have said ok, we are conducting this march and you everybody are going to abide by our rules or else, we are on top. Now the SCLC had the kind of image that King could have sent his folk in here and they would have said, everybody would have hopped to it. But unfortunately this was not thought of and I don't know whether King felt that Lawson had been through this enough to have the kind of control he needed to not have to worry about this (muffled). But Lawson didn't, I really don't know what kind of organizer Lawson is, he is a good speaker. He is a good theorist but I still don't know what kind of practitioner he is and sometimes there is a real gap between these two areas. There are some people who is not the kind of, don't have the kind of emotional appeal, the kind of crowd appeal, that Jim Lawson does. Is not the theorist that Jim Lawson is but really has a kind of command appeal and say listen buster you get in there and come to it and then hop to it...There is Ruston.

F. Jack Curley- I was thinking about Jim Bevel.

Fred Davis- Right, has this kind of command. I just didn't see anybody on the Memphis scene who had the (muffled) or the command appeal to tell all of the elements in there to hop to it and they felt obliged to do it.

F. Jack Curley- Now when this first thing fell apart..

Joan Beifuss- Where were you marching were you right up in the front?

Fred Davis- I started out in the front with the ministers and as we started down the street there was such pushing and shoving. Vasco Smith and I pulled out of the march line and cut across Handy Park across 3rd and 2nd street and came up around Gayoso and met the march just as they were turning on Main. So I saw what happened as far as the march coming one way because the police were right in front of me and (muffled) what actually happened.

F. Jack Curley- Did you see any over reaction by the police?

Fred Davis- At that point, no, I really didn't. What happened was when the march, as I understand it they had been breaking the windows all the way up even before they got to Main. But when they got to Main St. and they turned the corner and stopped to realign themselves, to get the proper distance to get so many people abreast to present a real front. Windows start breaking all hell broke loose at that point.

Joan Beifuss- That is when Dr. King left.

Fred Davis- Yeah, but I was watching both I was watching the police that were directly in front of me and I was watching the crowd who were on the other end. This went on for several minutes before the police even made a move. Then they started in and the crowd surged, and the first time they just put on a gas mask and then started in. They didn't shoot the mace at that point, they came back and they called for help and then motorcycle people showed up because everything then started to come down with them and they started, and then they went back there again and went down and at this point that's when they started turning them around and the mace came out. But there were some kids who broke out of that crowd and I was standing inside the vestibule (muffled) in the little archway there with sticks beating him with sticks and they had some special sticks, as I was told they got them from a truck behind the labor temple. Some sticks that were bigger and heavier than the signs were on because the sticks that the signs were on weren't heavy enough to break a window. They were going down Main St. gang of them., trying to break every window they could and sometimes it was about the second or third kid that eventually broke through Loeinsteins window. The first one didn't do it and then another one came down with a whacking.

F. Jack Curley- How old were these kids?

Fred Davis- Oh 17 or 18 years old.

Joan Beifuss- Now could you see when Dr. King left the march?

F. Jack Curley- It was just a (muffled) by that time.

Fred Davis- Yeah by that time there such a crowd I didn't see when he left, I didn't see how he left, I didn't see anything.

F. Jack Curley- When this happened did you feel that he would have to come back and march again.

Fred Davis- No I really hoped that he wouldn't.

F. Jack Curley- You hoped he would just leave it at that.

Fred Davis- Yeah because I feel that this would, if anything, if he came back and something really uncontrollable happened this next time around this would really kill the hopes of Washington.

Joan Beifuss- You didn't feel that the, happening the first time hurt Washington.

Fred Davis- NO but I thin that if it had blown, now there was some thinking that he had to come back and prove he could do it in Memphis in order to establish his credentials for Washington.

F. Jack Curley- But you didn't feel that, you thought he has already established his credentials.

Fred Davis- I think he had established them and I think they had been tarnished some by this thing that happened in Memphis but I didn't think it was tarnished enough to really hurt him that bad. There is a lot of difference (muffled) and this is just mine.

F. Jack Curley- Well that is what we re looking for.

Joan Beifuss- Did you go back onto Beal St. then?

Fred Davis- No what I did, the mace was coming so strong I didn't go back towards the march I went back around Gayoso and I, the police had gotten pretty firm and I went to Gayoso and 3rd and I as trying to get the ids to move on so the police wouldn't beat them and hit them on the head. A sheriff came up and threw a stick at me. I told him I was Fred Davis and I was a councilmen, and there, he asked me if I wasn't going to move on and I really got mad and I stood up and he pushed me inside a couple times with the stick just pushed me and he encouraged me to move on. So I started off and by that time I had gotten too mad for my own good and this time a city police man pokes me with one of these riot sticks about yay long, at me. He was looking pretty mean and I didn't have anything, so I started to cross the street...

F. Jack Curley- Did you get that policemen's badge number?

Fred Davis- No, I was just, it was almost...

Joan Beifuss- At that point it is...

Fred Davis- I crossed the street and there was an inspector. I told him, I said look, I am councilmen Fred Davis and one of those officers threw a stick at me. And I told him who I was. He said well councilmen these people are excited they really don't know if they can trust everybody. He knows me, every policemen in town knows Fred Davis. I mean if they don't they all learn quick. So the officer saw me over there talking tot eh inspector and they(muffled). Anyway I followed him all the way to 3rd and Beal St. and I stood on the corner of 3rd and Beale, 2nd it was not 3rd it was 2nd is what had happened. 2nd and Beale to try and get the kids to move on and follow the police's directions to keep them from shooting that mace anymore and I marched in

front of the police all the way from 2nd and Beale to Beale and more, getting people to move out of the way, preventing them from being hit or beat by the police. Between Hernando and Polk I was the one who went into each one of the cafes one by one (muffled) all the way down the line getting people to come out of those cafes and get them going and tell them who I was and tell them I had no authority other than to plead with them and ask them to come out and the police wouldn't shoot tear gas in there.

Joan Beifuss- Where were you trying to get them to go back to Clayborne Temple?

Fred Davis- I was just trying to clear the area, they were trying to clear the area and I was trying to get them to clear the area.

F. Jack Curley- Well were most of them cooperative?

Fred Davis- Most of them were I run into a few people who weren't listening and then I went back on (muffled) Meanwhile I saw Maxine and I think Vasco and some other people were standing in front of me at the NAACP offices...

F. Jack Curley- What were they doing I wanted to ask that.

Fred Davis- Well eventually they went upstairs in the NAACP offices and watched it out the window as I understand, I never went back in. I went down to Hernando and Linden and I confronted a, I was (muffled) all the way down to help them from getting shot with that mace and I was confronted with a bunch of teenagers and some of them (muffled) and I asked them to move on whatever direction they wanted to go, because the police were coming through clearing the area and I didn't want them to get shot with mace and they said what are telling us to do cooperate with the man, the man who pushes all around all these year sand you are telling us to do what he says to do. I couldn't talk to them and they were insistent.

F. Jack Curley- These sound like real black power people.

Fred Davis- Yeah the most vocal one incidentally was a girl. I felt that i wasn't making any headway with them and I decided I was tired by then because I had walked all the way down and I started down, and I didn't have my car because it was back at the college where my wife was to pick up my car so I could come home.

F. Jack Curley- Was this Owen.

Fred Davis- Yeah. They followed, when I started back they followed the police back down Hernando where they had just been pushed back from and when I looked around and I heard the shot and I knew it was the mace.

F. Jack Curley- Oh does it make a loud noise?

Fred Davis- Well you can hear it I mean if you are close enough when he shoots it, it is a canister and here come these brave teenager and this girl shouting that they weren't going to run from the man back around the corner just running you know and mad. Eyes full of it. The same people who just a few minutes just told me they

weren't going to get back for the man, and after I explained to them that they had that mace and there was nothing that they could do about it and if they marched on they own they was going to shoot them with it just as sure as they marched and sure enough they marched and sure enough they did and back around the corner they came. This just doesn't make sense to me, this is not the way that I prove points.

Joan Beifuss- So you didn't go into Clayborne Temple at all.

Fred Davis- No, I didn't go in Clayborne Temple at all.

F. Jack Curley- Well the aftermath to this, but I am afraid we are not going to have time to do it today we are just about out of tape and I am just about out of time. I have got to go give an exam. Maybe at some later time if you have the time, we certainly appreciate you giving us two hours and 10 minutes.

Joan Beifuss- Is that how long. I want to hear your reactions to Dr. King's death though.

Fred Davis- Well of all places, at the time of Dr, King's got killed. Downing Pryor, Jim Neders, Jerry Blanchard I believe and I don't remember, just a few of us was in a hotel room with the chief negotiator for the union. (muffled) Trying to see if we could talk about what could be done, what could the council could do. Just what the situation we were giving a briefing and giving our reaction at the time we got shot we were in a meeting with the union, with the chief negotiator.

F. Jack Curley- Ironic.

Fred Davis- It was a sort of a secret meeting that nobody was supposed to know about a number of the council didn't know, and I presume they don't to this day that we were over there with him trying to figure out a way to settle the strike. That disturbed me because at the point when things like this needed to be done, the kind of braun work, the kind of (muffled) stuff that helps to give a real basis to a strike settlement.

F. Jack Curley- No and then he got shot. What was the reaction.

Fred Davis- I was saying G.O Patterson was never around for that kind of stuff but this is the guy who comes...

Joan Beifuss- Well did someone come into the meeting and tell you that Dr. King had been shot?

F. Jack Curley- How did you learn?

+We turned on the TV....no somebody called.

F. Jack Curley- And then you turned on the TV.

Fred Davis- So then we turned on the TV and we didn't believe it. We just couldn't believe it so that broke up the meeting. And we went over to Henry Lobe's office all of us. And then we listened to the police reports.

F. Jack Curley- In his office?

Fred Davis- In his office.

F. Jack Curley- Was he there.

Fred Davis- He was there.

F. Jack Curley- What did he think.

Fred Davis- He was just stunned.

F. Jack Curley- He couldn't believe it had happened in Memphis.

Fred Davis- He was....and we tried to talk a lot in the first part I kept myself together pretty good and we talked very calmly and then I was just...well Lobe asked reverend Neders to pray and when he asked Neders to pray I don't know what happened, I just went to pieces.

F. Jack Curley- You just couldn't take it.

Fred Davis- I just started crying uncontrollably. I went out of the room out of the office to sit down and try to get myself together so I could just get my self together and at that time Neders broke down. He never got to pray either.

F. Jack Curley- Yeah, what was your feeling was there a coalition of sympathy here or did people sort of fall apart at this point. What was the effect of this on the group that you were meeting with? Did you seem to draw closer together or further apart.

Fred Davis- There was people who, I was crying and I couldn't stop and at the same time I was trying to stop, I just didn't want to do that there. And Lobe and Downing and Jerry you know. I was really honestly and truly trying to stop crying and I just couldn't. I just told them to just leave me alone and I will go out into the annual room and (muffled) try to get myself together and I did. I stayed there and (muffled).

F. Jack Curley- Ok we are going to have to stop there.

Fred Davis- These things almost nobody knows except my wife.

F. Jack Curley- Oh sure...(Tape End)