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Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: But uh, usually when he would come to town these fellas would be, now they wouldn't go everywhere he went necessarily, and this bothered him a great deal, too. He didn't really want that. He wanted to move freely. He lived with it, and he didn't...

Unknown Man: Well now, after the speech then, if we can get back to that.

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: Alright, after the speech, he made this. He made this tremendous speech. I don't remember what he closed out with, whether it was "free at last," or what. But anyway, he didn't quote as much of it as he usually quotes, and he simply wheeled, just cut himself off, and went out.

Unknown Woman: Where were you sitting in there? Were you sitting on the platform?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: Yes, I was on the platform.

Unknown Man #2: Do you remember what the reaction of the crowd generally was, of the people assembled?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: Well, they were just, most of them were crying or either clapping, or just, they were just really carried away.

Unknown Man: Um hmm.

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: As I says, I saw ministers who ordinarily, you know, would keep their composure, just break down.

Unknown Man: Now what happened then after the speech? He went out? Did you see Dr. King again that night.

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: Let's see, where did I go Wednesday night? No, we had a strategy meeting. He went to the Lorraine Motel, we went to the minimum salary building, because when I came out, Vasco Smith and Maxine Smith drove up. They were late. There was another meeting they had gone to, a membership drive for NAACP. Vasco said, "How'd the meeting go?" I said, "Great." I said, "But you know, I'm worried." He said, "What's wrong?" I said, "I've never heard Martin..." I got something in his speech. Quinton said it at the meeting, I said it, different people said that we haven't heard him that way before. He says, "Well, I want to hear about it." I said, "Well, we're going to the meeting. It's raining. You know." I said, "Well, I'll see you over at the minimum salary." He said, "Yeah, I want to hear about it." While we were in the meeting at the minimum salary building, Dr. King's brother came in, A.D. And, A.D. said he just came up on an impulse. He wasn't supposed to be here until the March.

Unknown Man: Um hmm.

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: But, he had been down in Florida, something. Was on his way back to Louisville and stopped through. That Wednesday night.

Unknown Man: Now he came with some friends, didn't he?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: Yes, with some friends.

Unknown Man: And he stayed Wednesday night?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: That's right.

Unknown Man: Where did he stay?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: He was at the Lorraine Motel.

Unknown Man: Did he stay in the room with Dr. King?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: No, no. Dr. King and Dr. Abernathy stayed in the room. He had his own room. But, they got together that Wednesday night, and I think they called their father and talked with him, and chatted with him. And they had that, almost last visit together. That Wednesday night. And, he wasn't scheduled to come in.

Unknown Man: Now his brother came to the meeting at the, uh?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: At the minimum salary.

Unknown Man: Minimum salary? Then he left?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: Dr. King was not there.

Unknown Man: Yeah. He left the meeting and then went...

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: Went back to the motel.

Unknown Man #2: Did his brother attend the meeting where Dr. King gave his speech?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: No, I don't think they were in early enough.

Unknown Man: Yeah.

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: They came on over to the...

Unknown Man: Right.

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: They came on over to the minimum salary.

Unknown Man: So you didn't see Dr. King?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: We met until about 1:30 or so that morning, and I didn't see him any more until Thursday about 2:30.

Unknown Man: Now did you invite his brother to your house when you saw him then?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: I think Martin invited him. No, I didn't. I didn't say anything. As a matter of fact, I didn't speak. I just said, "Hi, hello," because we were in the meeting when he came in.

Unknown Woman: Uh, was his speech discussed at all in the meeting?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: No, not in the meeting. Different persons did. Like I got in the corner I told Vasco. You know, we were talking about it, but it wasn't discussed as a part of the total meeting.

Unknown Man: Um hmm.

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: I would like to say a few weeks, about 2 days or 3 days after the mini riot, Reverend Jordan, who was minister of First Baptist Beale, broke in on the meeting. I mean we were discussing some particular thing. Bevel was there, from SCLC. They had come to help organize the march. Jordan said, "Now I know," he said, "you all think I'm crazy, not saying I'm a fogie or something." He said, "But last night, I started not to say this, but I'm going to say it anyway." He says, "Last night I woke up three different times crying, and didn't know why." This was a few nights after the...

Unknown Man: After the 28th?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: Yeah. He said, "And Dr. King was on my mind." He said, "Now here's where I would like to put him through." He said, "Let's not let him march all the way. Why don't we just have him at City Hall, and come up to the mike and speak." He said, "Because I have some kind of feeling." He said, "And I just woke up crying for no...nobody is home but me. My wife is an Atlanta." He said, "And I don't want..." He said, "You know we don't want anything to happen." So, Bevel said, "Now Reverend, I don't mean to take what you said lightly, or anything." He said, "But Dr. King lives with the fear of death. He lives with it." He said, "Now, in the first place, he wouldn't agree to it. He said, "And in the second place, there is no security against somebody getting him." He said, "We all know he is going to get it one day, but it probably will be one of the brothers hired by Mr. Charlie." That's what Bevel said. So, that's who you've got to watch. You know. He said, "I don't think..." And we went on.

Unknown Man: Hmm. Um hmm. Now, just to clarify. When Bevel said, “lives with the fear of death,” or...

Rev. S.B. “Billy” Kyles: He lives with...

Unknown Man: The imminence of earth.

Rev. S.B. “Billy” Kyles: Yes.

Unknown Man: Yeah, okay. Now.

Rev. S.B. “Billy” Kyles: I suspect that is what he...

Unknown Man: Yeah, um hmm.

Rev. S.B. “Billy” Kyles: I don’t remember the exact words, but he lives with it constantly. I don’t know if he would fear of death, or with...

Unknown Man: The potential or presence, yeah.

Rev. S.B. “Billy” Kyles: And, he wouldn’t agree to that in the second place, so let’s move on, and we moved on. But that Wednesday night afterwards, I mentioned to Vasco and Maxine, and I told them out in the street. I said isn’t that strange. And what brought it back to mind, is I had invited them to come over and help host Vasco and Maxine. I had reached (muffled). We didn’t want a formal dinner. He said, it was to be kept as quiet as possible, so we wouldn’t have newspaper people and all this, just be a relaxed afternoon. Uh, what brought it to mind was we were in, Vasco Smith, Maxine Smith and myself, were in Jackson, Mississippi. We went to speak at Medgar Evers’ rally the same night he was killed, the three of us. And, Maxine had asked Medgar if he thought that there was some real danger to his life. He said, “Oh definitely.” This was after the meeting. We had gone to a friend’s house for snacks. He said, “The police tried to run over me today, just today in fact. And, they keep Martin under constant surveillance,” he said. That’s a real threat, you know, here. She said, “You know, just be careful.” She kissed him on the cheek, and he went home, and like five minutes later we got the word he got shot.

Unknown Man: Had you and Maxine mentioned that that night?

Rev. S.B. “Billy” Kyles: Well, we mentioned it the day after that, after the Thursday because.

Unknown man: But you hadn’t mentioned it before, as you had recalled in any way the Medgar Evers incident, or the Medgar Evers situation? But now you mention it.

Rev. S.B. “Billy” Kyles: No, I think. You know we did. I take it back because you know she questioned him about were there any real dangers to his life, and sort of like

how much of this do we really have to go through?

Unknown man: But now we're back to April 3, the Wednesday night, but you didn't mention it that night, neither of you? Mrs. Smith or you?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: No, not about Medgar. No, we mentioned that afterwards. That we were together, and we would have been together to dinner.

Unknown man: Now comes Thursday I guess.

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: Now Thursday, I was popping around, doing several things, and I got to the Lorraine Motel about, I guess 3:00, past 3:00. The band from Chicago, Operation Breadbasket. They have a band, some 5 or 6 guys. They were upstairs singing with Jesse Jackson. Jesse is the director of Breadbasket. I heard this music up there. The staff had been meeting most of the morning. I wasn't in the staff meeting at Lorraine. I understand that meeting that, Hosea kept saying Dr. King had made up his mind at that point, and said Hosea or anybody on the staff of SCLC that was not committed to nonviolence would have to be off. We can't afford to have people paid by SCLC who was not committed to nonviolence as a technique, at least.

Unknown man #2: I wonder why he said that.

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: Because Cabbage at one point had been on, I think, or either considered, or had been on the payroll of the SCLC, and perhaps there were some others who had, across the country.

Unknown man #2: Maybe Cabbage should have asked him also for some financial support or something like that.

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: I am sure they did. But, he kept re-emphasizing the fact that we cannot have people on the staff that are not committed to nonviolence, working for SCLC, his staff, working for SCLC. And he sort of gave them a pep talk on some other things that Hosea had mentioned to me. So, we were upstairs getting some songs together, and I guess we must have stayed up there an hour. So, I was upstairs singing with them. So Jesse asked them, he said do you think it would be all right to have the band in there? Because we were in the temple of the Church of God in Christ, and he wasn't too sure whether or not it would be okay. I said sure it would be okay. As a matter of fact, I will sing with you. I will make sure it is okay.

Unknown man: Now this was about the meeting of that night.

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: Yes, the Thursday night meeting.

Unknown woman: Had the band just come down from Chicago?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: Yes, they had just gotten in. Well, they got in some time

during the day. They were there when I got there.

Unknown man: For what reason? Why did they did come?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: To play. They had come to play.

Unknown man: To play at that meeting?

Unknown woman: What kind of music did they do? Was that gospel singing?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: Yes. They were not gospel musicians as such, but Jesse Jackson had taken them and converted them to gospel. So we were upstairs singing, "Yield Not To Temptation," and, "I Am So Glad Trouble Don't Last Always," and "I've Been 'Buked, and I've Been Scorned." We were just going over a lot of numbers.

Unknown man: And where was Dr. King all during this? In his room, or? Can you recall?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: I am not sure. The staff meeting was over. He may have been visiting with the friends, or he may have been in A.D.'s room, or he may have been in his room. I just don't know. I was just going to be there to get them to my house by 5:30 or 6:00. I didn't go for any meetings at all. But, after we finished upstairs with the band, I stayed around the motel and I talked to some of the other folks, and I went into his room about 5:20. He was in there then. So he must have been in there because they had showered and shaved and everything. Ralph was dressed when I got in there, and Martin was still dressing, so they must have been in the room from about 5:00 at least I imaging, or earlier. No, earlier than that as slow as Ralph is. They must have been in the room from 4:30 on. So. And, I went. From about 5:20 to 6:00, the three of us were in the room, in 306. I had left the band.

Unknown man: And what did you do after that?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: Ralph said, "Alright now Billy, I don't want you to fool with me." He said, "Now are we going to have soul food?" He said, "Now if we go over there and get some filet mignon, T-bone." He said, "You're going to flunk." I said, "Where were youths all the time about, when you mess up you flunk?" He said, "You're going to flunk. Now if you come up there with some...we don't want no filet mignon." Martin said, "Yeah, we don't want you to be like that preacher's house we went to in Atlanta. That great big house, and we went over there for dinner."

Unknown man: This was right before.

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: "...and had some ham, and had a ham bone." Ralph said, "Yeah, there wasn't no meat on it." He said, "Yeah they had Kool-Aid, and it wasn't even sweet. Now if that is the kind of dinner we're going to, we'll stay here." I said, "Oh, you just get ready." I said, "You're late." He said, "Oh no, we're not late." I had

told them 5:00, and I told my wife 6:00. Well they had called Gwen, and said we're going to bring some extra folk. I guess that was A.D. and Chauncey Eskridge, our lawyer from Chicago, (muffled). I said, "No, man I told you dinner was at 5:00." He said, "Oh no, dinner is at 6:00, because we already talked to Gwen." I said, "Okay. Let's go, hurry up." And then we talked about, Ralph mentioned about a revival, he needed somebody to do his revival. He said, he spoke to me about doing it, and I told him I was going to be in Columbus, I think. But Bob said, "Wouldn't you rather come to Atlanta than going to Columbus?"

Unknown man: What revival is this, now?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: At Ralph's church.

Unknown man: That following, the next Sunday, or some other time?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: No, we were trying to schedule it. We talked about that. Ralph talked about it. He said, "You know I've got a good church." He said, "Man, I have a good church." He said, "I took an after offering of almost \$200." For some cause, you know after. He said, "And they love me, too." We just really talked preacher's talk really.

Unknown man: Well, as much as you can remember of this, Billy, it is just some little moments will come up that will be so good. Because nobody else will remember this.

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: On the dinner, we talked about the dinner mainly. Well not mainly, but as a part of the conversation. After they got to teasing me about that, "Well now what are you going to have?" I said, "My wife is going to have soul food." I said, "Isn't that what you want?" He said, "Yeah." I said, "There won't be a lot of folks there, just whoever you bring, and then the newspaper folks won't know we're there, and we'll just have..." Ralph said, "Yeah." Well, you know we started the, "You know your wife is real pretty." He said, "I'm going to put some cologne and stuff on." He said, "I re-shaved and everything else." And Martin said, "Yeah she is so pretty, can she really cook soul food?" And they went on like that. And they commented about my clothes. They said, "You know, you're a fashion plate." And, Ralph was dressed. And they started talking about his father. Martin spoke very kindly towards his father. Ralph said, "How old is dad?" Martin named the year he was born. He said, "Dad is not that old, but Dad tries to play like he is so old." Martin said, "Yeah, he sure does."

Unknown man: Talking about Mr. King?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: Yeah, King, Sr. Ralph said, "He tries to play like he is old, but he is not." He said, "Dad has got a lot of spark left in him." Martin said, "Yeah." He said, "You know Dad is really something." He said, "You know when he was courting momma, not only did Dad get the daughter..." I think Dr. King's mother's father either was a minister of the church or a deacon or something. I don't know how it goes, but he was courting, King, Sr., was courting the daughter. And Martin said,

“Yeah, he not only wound up with mother, but he got the church too.” Ralph said, “Yeah, Dad does try to act like he is old.” I said but down in Miami the other week he was telling a group of young preachers, now they were telling us, “Now we know you’re in Florida, but we’ve got a 5-day meeting, and we want you to be here for the meeting. We know you’re in America’s playground.” He was telling a group of us, he said, “Now y’all are going out tonight.” He said, “And you’ll probably be at the meeting in the morning.” He said, “But I’m going to my room.” He said, “When you get my age you’re not going to be going because you want to go, you’re going because you’re going to have to go.” He’s a great talker, you know? So he said, “Yeah, now Dad is modern on some things.” He said, “Yeah, Dad said he gave his maid a raise the other day. He said he raised her up to \$25.” I said, “Dad, what were you giving her if you raised her up to \$25? And when I told him I paid my maid \$100 a week, he couldn’t believe it.” He said, “I didn’t tell him (muffled) was really paying for it.”

Unknown man: But there was a real affection.

Rev. S.B. “Billy” Kyles: Just tremendous. He talked about it in such an affectionate way.

Unknown man: Was Dr. King kind of a ... what kind of joker was he? I mean, was he a (muffled) joker, kind of, I don’t know. To kind of get at it, does he start the teasing?

Rev. S.B. “Billy” Kyles: Oh yes, sure. When he’s relaxed, he’s relaxed. I hear many people say that they didn’t know that side of him, and I guess they wouldn’t. But, actually I guess they wouldn’t, but he was always in our group. I remember once we were in Atlanta to the NAACP convention when my wife carried our other child. He said, “Oh Billy.” He said, “Look now, you really take the Lord’s work literally there don’t you?” He said, “Not only are you carrying the word, but you’re helping to replenish the earth?” I said, “Uh huh, yeah.” And then the next time I saw him, his wife was pregnant with their last child. And I said, “Don’t you know there’s a population explosion going on? I didn’t know you were home that often.” We would tease in that sort of way. But, he was in a real good mood perhaps, Ralph said one of the best moods he had been in in a long time, because he was really depressed over the march breaking up.

Unknown man: Do you think he felt that he had made some kind of communication, or even reconciliation with the young people here, or was that part of it, or just generally he was in a good mood?

Rev. S.B. “Billy” Kyles: I don’t know why, it may have been from what they had accomplished in the staff meeting. The staff -- Ralph told me some background on that in Atlanta, what the staff had decided, and it was really an agonizing sort of thing. The staff didn’t want to come to Memphis in the first place. They said the Poor People’s Campaign was planned, and you have given too much time to Memphis, you can’t do this. And, some of his best friends were saying that you can’t have another big march nonviolently in America. That day is over. And, he was wrestling with all these things,

and it had made the staff ... the staff operates very loosely, and King was that stabilizing force. SCLC, that's the way they operate, it's a movement sort of thing all the time, and it may have been that they replaced themselves to handle Memphis. You know, we're going to handle Memphis and get Memphis out of the way, and then we're going on to Washington. And, but he was in a very good mood.

Unknown man #2: Reverend Kyles, could you tell us what Dr. Abernathy told you, you know about the staff meeting?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: Okay, I'll come to that. You'll have to remember he wasn't in the room when I was in there.

Unknown man: That was later in Atlanta. So you stayed in the room about then, 40 minutes or so, while Dr. King was dressing?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: Yes, dressing.

Unknown man: Did he put perfume?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: He put his shirt on, he couldn't find his tie. And, he thought that the staff was playing games with him.

Unknown man: Would they? I guess they would have if he though so.

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: Oh yeah, they would. But he did find it in the drawer. He put his shirt on and it was too tight. I said, "Oh doc, you're getting fat." He said, "Yeah, I'm doing that." He couldn't button it, and so he took it off. Ralph said, "Now Martin, you mean you're not going to wear that shirt after I washed it this morning and hung it up so it would be dry?" He said, "Well, man I can't wear it, it's too tight." He said, "Well all right, okay, don't wear it then." So he put another shirt on and tied, got his. In the meantime we were talking. He asked me, "So Billy, what do you think brought the negroes together in Memphis? Why do you think so many people got involved in the sanitation thing?" I said, "Well, I guess every negro kind of identifies with the sanitation workers, I suspect." And, that macing. We had never had macing in Memphis. Really, we had never had group police brutality in Memphis, it has always been individual. This was the first group, I mean since I've been here, that they (muffled) through a group because Mr. Armour made sure they treated us lightly. You know, they had verbally abused us to demonstrators in a group, but not, but they never swung a club, I don't think really during the sit-ins. You know, we talked. He said, "Well, this is like the old movement days isn't it?" He was really thrilled at that first speech, I don't remember what day it was.

Unknown man: The 18th.

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: The 18th. When he got there and saw all those people. We broke fire regulations and everything. There were so many people at Mason's temple

you couldn't get 2 more in there if you tried. Just, mobs. He said this is really the old movement spirit isn't that. I said, "Yeah, it's beautiful." We talked about why he thought, why I thought the community had come together so much, and that they really identified with the sanitation worker. We talked about the revival. So Martin said, "Well, I'll get somebody in Louisiana to do your revival, Ralph." Ralph was worried about his revival. We talked about his father, and then they asked me something else. I have been trying to remember what it was. I think it was probably how my church was going, or how the program was going for Miami, or something. And, just general conversation. Look, he was in a good mood, and then I said, "All right, shake a leg here."

Unknown man: Were there any calls in between?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: No, not one call.

Unknown man: Not one call?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: Not one call that whole time.

Unknown man: And nobody interrupted, knocked on the door?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: Nobody knocked on the door. When he finished, got his tie tied, and everything, and Ralph said, "I'd better put some more of this good smelling stuff on." So he went to Martin's case. It was open, sort of like this, up on the thing. He went to his case and took out, it was Aramis, like, it was cologne. He put some on, and he was in there fiddling with himself. Martin opened the ... I was in the chair, and he went out and was greeting people, hi, hey, hi, and they were talking. I said, "Well all right, load up, we're getting ready to go," and then he came back in the room. Ralph said, "Martin, tell Jesse we're not going to take that whole band to Billy's house, I know he ain't got enough food for all them folks. Tell Jesse don't invite the whole band now." So he went back out on the porch. He said, "Hey Jesse, don't take the whole band now, you're going." I said, "Well you can't leave Jesse out, Jesse was the instigator of this thing." He said, "I know, but we're not going to feed that whole band, my goodness. We'll feed them at the hotel." So, he went back out to tell Jesse that, and came back in the room. I think the fella had told him, someone had said it was getting cool, you ought to get your coat. So he came back in the room. At this point Ralph was still doing something, he is very slow. And, we went back out together.

Unknown man: The three of you?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: No, Dr. King and myself. We walked out of the room together. He walked, and we stood side by side, and I was greeting some people I had not seen. Like Chauncey, I said, "Hi, Chauncey. You going to my house for dinner?" He said, "Yeah." Ben Branch, who was the leader of the band, was down there. I said, "Hi, Ben." And, we stood there about 4 minutes. At this time it was maybe 6:00, or right close to it. And he was leaning over the rail. He leaned over a while and was

talking. Jesse said, "Hey doc, you remember Ben?" He said, "Hi, Ben." And I didn't hear the conversation about playing "Precious Lord" because he was leaning over, but after about 4 minutes, Ralph was still in the room, 3 or 4 minutes. Now I had talked to Chauncey and talked to some other people out. Then I said, "Well, I'm going." I said, "Wait, somebody can ride with me." They were loading up. I said, "I'll come down." I said, "Wait a minute, I'll be down." As I turned, and got maybe 5 steps, this shot. I didn't recognize it as a shot. It was almost as if the killer was waiting for me to move because we were standing right together. He was leaning over, and I was standing right beside him, waving and going on, and talking. And I think I told Ralph come on, for supper. I said, "I'll be in the car (muffled)," or something like that. So I got about, we were at 306, I got maybe to 305 or 304. I heard this noise, and I looked over the rail, because the noise sounded as if it came from in the courtyard. I looked over the rail, and I thought maybe somebody must be playing games. And, it took a few seconds for me to realize, when the people who looked up knew it. And what made me turn back around, or look this way, I didn't even look that way because I was looking over here to see. Somebody said, "Oh Lord, they shot Martin." And, I wheeled around and ran back to the spot. He had completed his fall. He had fallen back in this position, just like this. He had a crushed cigarette in his hand. He very seldom smoked in public, but recently had smoked more.