

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: He had, he had fallen when I got to him. And, you know I just, I looked at this tremendous wound. All this was just pouring out, from here, from the part of his chin here, up to his cheek and around the head. There was just a tremendous hole. It seems like the first time I saw him, he was trying to swallow, or trying to say something. His eyes moved. Well, I ran in the room, and as I went in, I think Ralph came out, or either Ralph was out there when I got there. I can't remember. I don't know if he was standing there when I got there. He couldn't have been standing there because I wouldn't have had such a clear view. I got right there, you know I didn't stop when I saw him. I went in the room and picked up the phone to get an ambulance. The switchboard is very slow there, and nobody answered. So, I came back out of the room. I think I was either beating the wall and saying something. And, Ralph said, "Oh Billy, don't do that." When he said that, I just got myself, and went back out, and I hollered to the police, who were coming, to get an ambulance, and they called the ambulance on the squad car. At that point they were coming asking where the shot come from. By that time Jesse had run upstairs, Jackson. Two of the other youths had run upstairs, and there was a fellow from the Justice Department in one of the other rooms. He had come out of his room, and you may have seen the picture where all those people are pointing. They are pointing that the shot came from over there. At that point Ralph was kneeling over and he was patting Martin on the face. He said, "Martin, this is Ralph. Can you hear me? Can you hear me?" And he looked up at him, he just looked at him.

Unknown man: He moved his head?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: No, no, he didn't move his head. He just looked. He was looking. Now, I don't know. I know when I first got to him that he was trying to talk or swallow, because I could see him. I mean, this picture comes in my mind so often. It was kind of a movement, either trying to swallow or talk, and his eyes moved. But he never did say anything, and after I couldn't get that line on the phone, I ran out and called. All this may have been within one minute, or if that long. And then I told the police to get an ambulance. At that point he wasn't stretched all the way, his feet were sort of -- if the railing hadn't been there he would have been stretched out, but his feet were sort of pushed up because of the railing and he had fallen back kitty-corner. There was a little jutting out of the balcony. It went straight and then it went this way a little bit, see. And he was standing about here, but he fell. Jesse said the bullet was so powerful it sort of lifted him. I didn't see that. I know it twisted him. And Jesse said he got it as he was raising up. We suspected the guy must have been aiming for here, and then as he raised up it caught him here. But anyway, this tremendous wound. And, I noticed the shirt and the necktie. The necktie, the knot was blown off, right here, just. We couldn't see it, but Ralph told me later that there was a larger wound here. It was a kind of bullet that explodes after it hits. So, it was a big wound here, and an even larger one beneath his shirt that we couldn't see. And we couldn't see, this wound was not bleeding that much, it was -- I had gotten there so, by being right there it had not started to bleed at the first time, and then it started bleeding, and the fellow from the Justice

Department brought a towel, and we have got pictures of him crawling. Everybody was trying to stay down, I guess Ralph and myself. And, he put the towel over his face. I went back in the room, and I kept saying, "Where is the ambulance?" It seemed like forever, but I guess the whole thing wasn't more than 7 minutes. And, I took the spreads off the bed and covered him, and I looked and I noticed that tie was (muffled) and I noticed his eyes, and I noticed that crushed cigarette in his hand.

Unknown man: Was is in his right hand?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: It was in his left hand. And, he never did. Ralph talked to him, and he never did say anything, and by that time police were swarming every place, and then when the ambulance finally came -- we tried to keep people off the balcony. When it finally came, I shouted some kind of orders. Anyway, they brought up the stretcher. And when we were trying to determine what hospital, I said either Baptist or St. Joseph's, whichever is closer.

Unknown man: And, who made the decision to take him to St. Joseph's? Do you remember?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: Probably Bernard Lee, or Andy. I had mentioned to Andy -- also I mentioned to Andy earlier that day, that very same day, I said, "Andy we need to change Martin's room, because they are advertising it. I heard it at three different times that they are advertising the room that Martin is staying in." Now, there are a couple of theories about that. There is no question in my mind, I know I heard it, and I talked to other people who heard it. They said, "Dr. Martin Luther King is back in town, and he is in room 306 at the Lorraine Motel." Now, that struck me as unusual. Now someone could have released that as a news item, so that fellow could have known where he was, or it could have been said inadvertently. One loose man could have said it, and others pick it up. But I heard it. I know it was on television, as well as on the radio.

Unknown man: We were getting all of those (muffled).

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: And I said, "Andy, we need to change Martin." He said, "Yeah, you're right." And we just went on. That was it.

Unknown man: But it never was?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: No, it never was. So, we tried to decide who would ride to the hospital with him. So, I decided I had better stay on the phone. I said, I'll stay here and man the phone. And, Hosea was there manning the phone. And I asked (muffled), I said, "Please get somebody on the switchboard and keep them on there." But I noticed his color had changed as they put him in the ambulance, which made it. And, when I saw the wound, I called Gwen about 15 minutes later and told her that Martin had been shot and it looked real serious. All this was just, from here to here, just shot away. It hadn't started to bleed when I looked at it. The blood was actually coming from the other wound.

Unknown man: So you were really the first one to the body.

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: It would be between Ralph and myself, and I think I was. I mean I wouldn't debate it, because it is something I don't remember. But, I know when I came out of the room -- I think I ran and looked and came in the room. Either Ralph was out there, or he came out. That, I don't remember.

Unknown man: Just to, I have a few things that maybe you might clarify. Do you know who said, "Oh Lord, they've shot Martin?"

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: I don't know who it was, I just heard the voice. It was a girl's voice. It was a woman's voice. It may have been one of the young people who had driven up. I think Carlo had came up.

Unknown man: In the Life picture, there is a young girl standing up there.

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: They had just driven up.

Unknown man: Now, the Justice Department man, was he a white man?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: Yes, uh huh.

Unknown man: Do you know his name?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: Oh no, I forgot. I know him, but I have forgotten his name.

Unknown man: But he was staying at the hotel? Why was he there?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: Well, I think he was with some other people that had been in town, from the other march.

Unknown man: Oh I see.

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: They had been working with us, and talking to us.

Unknown man: Now when you say that Dr. King's eyes moved, did they move sideways, or up?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: Yeah, sideways.

Unknown man: Did they try to follow you, you think, or?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: Um, I don't know if they were trying to follow me, and I just don't -- it seems like this was in connection with his trying to either speak or swallow. And, the reason I sort of stuck a pin there, was that when they say his spinal cord was severed, I think the autopsy said, I just wondered if that had any control over. I was

trying to determine myself whether he was dead when he left. And, I, clinically dead when he left, or otherwise. Because I had, from the Dallas thing, and I know how eyewitnesses see things and don't see things. But I made a point to notice that his eyes were open. Now, you know, I understand that your eyes can be open and you can still be dead.

Unknown man: Now they were open when you came back also and put the cover on him, they still were?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: Yes, they were open.

Bill Thomas: You said that also, Reverend Kyles, that he looked at Reverend Abernathy, and I guess you mean he focused his eyes.

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: Yeah, that, it seems, I didn't -- he was looking up at Ralph when Ralph was saying, "Martin, can you hear me?" And he was looking at him, but he couldn't answer him, and he didn't answer. But, he gave him a sort of like a good firm look to me. I mean, this is how I interpreted it. And then we were trying to determine whether he had pain or not, you know? The hole was just tremendous, and I thought. Well, I said, I don't know if the undertakers -- you know it came to my mind whether we would have a closed or open casket.

Unknown man: Who went with him to the hospital?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: Ralph, Bernard Lee, who was his special assistant, and Andy Young. I think (muffled) at a point later.

Unknown man: And an ambulance attendant?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: Yeah, and the ambulance attendant.

Unknown man: That would be 4, and then Dr. King then.

Joan Beifuss: Did you go downstairs when they put him in the ambulance?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: No, I stayed upstairs, and I got that look, and when I saw them put Bobby Kennedy in the thing the other day, you know I just quit the whole day Thursday, I didn't do a thing. It just reminded me so much when I saw them lift him in the ambulance, I saw them lift King. And, to me, the significance of the color change was that when my father died, his color changed, and I remembered that. And so, I noticed that Dr. King's color had changed. And, from that moment, I think they took the spreads on to the hospital. I covered him with two spreads off the bed, and Jim, Jim is his name I think, the Justice Department guy, brought the towel. So that's maybe why (muffled), couldn't stop the bleeding. This wound wasn't bleeding that much. The blood was really coming from the other wound. But it was being photographed, and I was really thankful for that. Joe Low, whom I have met before, who had been in

Memphis on another assignment, had been arrested for something, and it may have been during that time. But he took -- he didn't take those horror pictures, he took panoramic scenes sort of. I was very impressed with his photographs. He had an opportunity to take the wound and everything, but he didn't. He took sort of like scenes, that was the only thing. He was the only photographer on the scene at the time. Then, when they finally let photographers in, they were just trying to hear everybody, was maybe picking up pieces, and I think they interviewed Jesse Jackson and myself, as eyewitnesses. Mr. Armour was there, and he tried to talk them into -- he had gotten sort of peeved with the photographers.

Unknown man: And why was that?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: He was trying to ask me questions, and then they were trying to ask me questions.

Unknown man: What did Mr. Armour want to know?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: He said, "Just tell me everything you know."

Unknown man: Because you were here.

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: He and I had worked very closely in the police thing, you know, there weren't many things that have come about that he would at least listen, I mean I could always talk to him, whether I got any results...

Unknown man: Who kind of took charge, as you recall?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: Police.

Unknown man: I mean about getting the body, and (muffled).

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: To the hospital and that sort of thing?

Unknown man: After the...

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: It was staff, Andy, and Bernard.

Unknown man: I mean who took charge of getting the body down, was it the policemen there?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: Oh no, the police didn't. I was giving instructions more than anybody else. You know, I just, I told firemen to be careful bringing the thing, and you know. I was just giving other instructions, but the firemen were just moving. They knew what they were doing I guess. We were trying to determine -- so many people wanted to go to the hospital. The staff determined.

Unknown man: Did anybody follow in a car? Do you recall?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: That I don't recall, because immediately I got on the phone and I made several calls.

Joan Beifuss: Reverend Kyles, down in the courtyard, did you have any kind of a sort of a panoramic view of the courtyard, did you get any impressions from the courtyard?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: Before or after?

Joan Beifuss: After, what people did when everything...

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: One thing that came to my mind about the courtyard was that the top people of SCLC were all exposed. It could have been more than one guy. Ralph was exposed because the door was open. Bevel, because he was standing down in the yard. Andy Young was standing in the yard. Chauncey Eskridge was in the yard. Jesse Jackson, who is a brilliant young fellow, was in the yard. So I mean, if they had gotten off several shots, they could have picked off the top administration of the SCLC. So, it was just confusion. The police were asking questions, and getting everybody inside, and letting nobody out. You know, nobody could get outside. I don't think a car followed, because they had sealed off the area, as far as anybody coming in.

Joan Beifuss: Was there any screaming or crying in the courtyard?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: Oh yes, very much so.

Unknown man: You say Reverend Bevel ducked down?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: Yes, he ducked, yes.

Unknown man: Even instinctively.

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: Yes, because he heard a shot.

Unknown man: And the young people came up in the car.

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: They were getting out about the same time, and may have gotten out. But we were trying to keep it quiet where we were going to dinner. Solomon, Solomon Jones, the driver was saying, "Where do you live?" I said, "Man, I'm not telling you where. You follow me." I said, "No, don't follow me, we don't want a caravan. We'll all go."

Unknown man: Did you say this from above, or as you...?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: No, I had told him this before, but we were trying to keep it -- well I don't know how quiet it was kept. But, we were trying to keep it quiet. Anyway,

people were crying.

Unknown man: Where was A.D. King at this?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: A.D. was in his room at that time.

Unknown man: In the hotel?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: Yes, he was getting ready, I guess, also to go to dinner, and he did not come out until, I guess. He didn't come up the stairs, let me say. I didn't go down at all. See, I stayed up. I guess I was up until 7:00.

Unknown man: And his room was below.

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: Yes, he was on the first level, so. The police, I don't think, would let anybody up. The people who first came up were up there.

Unknown man: He probably just stayed then.

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: I have a handkerchief now at home that is covered with blood, that we were, you know, from handling, being around that spot, and of course the police wouldn't let them take the blood up either right away. And they sealed off the area, but I started to talking to reporters, and that is when it got on the wire that he was going to my house for dinner. So, every reporter coming to town was wanting to interview me and talk to me about it. Those next few minutes were just really, "That was unbelievable." You know, I guess I moved on instinct. I mean I did everything that was right, I guess. I came very close to cracking. I think, it seems to Ralph grabbed me or put his hand on me or something, and said, "Oh now Billy, don't do that."

Unknown man: Now this was in the room. So he must have come in the room, too.

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: Yes, I was waiting for that call, I was trying to get that phone. We have always have trouble with that Lorraine Motel. They won't keep people full time on the switchboard, and I think they were all out in the yard, or something.

Bill Thomas: Oh, you don't know whether there was anybody on the switchboard at the time?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: Yes, but sometimes it just takes -- they may run to do an errand or something, and when they hear the thing they'll run to it. But rather than just, saying a full time. I think he now has one assigned full time. And so, while I was waiting for the phone I was either hitting the phone against the wall, or my fist against the wall, or something. And he said, just calm down.

Unknown man: Well now, I just wondered if we can kind of stop here. Do you want to take a little rest? Is there anything, Bill?

Bill Thomas: Yeah, I've got 2 or 3 little questions there. I was wondering. Everything seems, gosh that's really clear, vivid. The light was good at that time of day?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: Oh yes, it was it was 5:40, 6:00, 5:30 to 6:00.

Unknown man: At 6:01 it was supposed to have been.

Bill Thomas: Do you remember whether the sun was shining, or anything like this? Was it really bright, or was it beginning, was the sun going down, or can you remember?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: It seems there was a fair amount of light, it was a bright day really. The time we were exchanging greetings in the yard, which may have been right at 6:00, it wasn't, it didn't even seem to me hazy. You know, it was a bright day.

Bill Thomas: Do you know what kind of cigarette?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: No, he probably got -- I don't know if he got it out of his briefcase, or if it was laying on the thing, or what, on the dresser. But he never did light it, you know he just had it in his hand.

Bill Thomas: Oh, oh I see.

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: It wasn't lit, it was in his hand. And, I noticed because it was crushed, it wasn't a lighted cigarette, it was in his hand, which means that he figured Ralph was going to be longer, or he was going to smoke it in the car, one or the other, or as he got in the car.

Unknown man: Just curiously, do you remember what he smoked?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: No, I don't. I really don't.

Bill Thomas: Reverend Kyles, do you remember what kind of suit did Dr. King put on that night? You know, color, or?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: That day, it was black.

Bill Thomas: A black suit.

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: It was a black, and there was a brown and black floral design, I think, tie, or some designs.

Bill Thomas: The one he finally found.

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: Yeah, he found his tie.

Unknown man: Now, did he, he went back to get his coat, or a top coat was it?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: No, he didn't go back to get it. He was standing there.

Unknown man: Oh, he was about to go get it.

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: I don't know if he was going to get his coat or get in the car at that time. Solomon had mentioned that the coat, "You ought to get your coat." I don't know if Ralph was going to bring it out or what, but.

Bill Thomas: Did he have his suit coat on?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: Oh yes, he had his suit coat. Solomon, the driver, mentioned that you need your top coat, it would probably be chilly when we come from -- because we were going from my house to the -- and it was rather chilly, I remember that, because I had to put my coat on later. I was standing out there talking to the newsman, and I got chilly, so I went and got my coat out of the back of the car. It had been warm that day, but the older the day got, the more colder it became, the chillier it became.

Bill Thomas: I know time is probably fuzzy in there, but did it seem to you like it took a long time or a short time for the ambulance to arrive?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: It seemed like a heck of a long time to me, because I kept asking the police to check on it, and they said they're on their way. And, it just occurred to me that I said that the firehouse was there, but I understand an ambulance is not situated at that particular house, so I don't know what, where it came from.

Unknown man: Oh, it's not from across the street?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: That was my understanding. Someone said it only took 7 minutes, 5 to 7 minutes, but it seemed -- it must not have been much longer than that, it just seemed so long, you know, to me. I don't know if there is an ambulance stationed at that firehouse. They don't have them at every firehouse. Whether one was there or not, I don't know, but it just seemed like it took too long, but it really wasn't from somebody else. Now Chauncey Eskridge was the only one, his lawyer instinct, I guess, that went out to see what he could see outside of the courtyard. Now Solomon Jones had mentioned that he saw, this was...

Unknown man: Was it business of the brother?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: The driver, he said he saw somebody drop a package or something.

Unknown man: Saw somebody down below.

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: No, outside in the street, but Chauncey said he ran out. I

haven't talked to him, so I don't know what he saw, but he did, I don't know if he saw a car or what. He ran out. Most everybody came upstairs, or tried to come upstairs, and when they were coming this way, he was going that way, going out to the street. Because they have this fence around there, you can't see. On that level you can't see, except at the entrances. So, it seemed to me. I don't know how Solomon could have seen. Solomon said he saw a man doing, a package or something, but I never get the straight of it. I just read some accounts, and from that level, I, you just couldn't see in the street. You couldn't see through the entrance. There is an entrance over here, but around all of here, you, it is fenced in.

Joan Beifuss: Did you think he was dead at this time?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: That was, when I saw the color change, I said, "Oh." I was praying and hoping and everything else that he wasn't, and from the size of the wound I was quite fearful.

Unknown man: When you called Gwen, did you call from the hotel, or a phone booth?

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

Unknown man: You got through to the ...

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: Oh yeah, you know, it just takes a little while, but I kept the phone, you know, I made several calls. Hosea called Mrs. King, and I stayed there to mainly answer the phone. I called maybe a couple of other people in town.

Unknown man: Do you remember who you called?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: I called Maxine, because she was supposed to go to dinner, too, with us. After I called her ...

Bill Thomas: Hosea called Mrs. King from that room, or?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: No, he was in another room. They had a whole section of rooms, and just on one bill. But, I stayed in 306. I manned the phone there. I went down and talked to reporters, because the police wouldn't let them up.

Unknown man: Billie, do you have an official position with the organization?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: Well, as of February, I used to work very close with SCLC, and other -- you know, I was never a member of the board. I said I wouldn't mind being a board member, but I was so involved with so many other groups, I couldn't give the kind of time. I was an affiliate, our church was an affiliate of SCLC. But, in the Miami meeting, I was elected, or appointed as city convener for a minister's leadership training program sponsored by SCLC, so that gave me staff status with SCLC.

Unknown man: City convener in Memphis.

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

Unknown man: Now what, did you have a position before then?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: No, I didn't, no.

Unknown man: But you are now a city convener.

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

Unknown man: And how long does that last, for a year?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: Yes, until September.

Joan Beifuss: Did you talk to Mrs. Smith?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: No, I didn't reach her that day. And I guess we were down there, after that I stayed there, I stayed around the motel all night really. I didn't leave between answering the phone and giving the police.

Unknown man: Again, were you in Dr. King's room?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: Yes, I was in there the whole time.

Unknown man: You were answering the phone in there all the time.

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: Uh huh, I stayed in there the whole time.

Joan Beifuss: Was there a television set on in there?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: I turned it on, yes.

Joan Beifuss: Was that where you heard that he had ...

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: Yes, I had it on 5, and I heard. I think Dave Patterson came on. He didn't have any details, but he said Dr. King has been shot. By that time the reporters were converging on the place. I guess I heard about maybe 6:15, or so. That's why I said I don't think -- I mean he had gone to the hospital by that time, so it couldn't have been very long for the ambulance.

Joan Beifuss: Did you hear that he was dead over the television?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: No, uh, the first I -- there was a UPI man on a public phone. I had gone over to the motel, to tell that girl where to transfer the calls to, and I heard him

say, "Is that official?" And they called a time, and he said, "Did you know Dr. King had died? We just got it official." And I still didn't, that's the first I heard about it. I didn't -- when they questioned me, and asked me had I heard, I said no more than -- I hadn't heard from the staff people yet, or from the hospital. And, since I was on national television answering questions, of course my family called, and friends started calling the house and just jamming the lines, and all the lines in Memphis were jammed, I guess that one night. So then we had to start thinking, putting our thoughts together with staff people and this sort of thing. Everybody was just so numb, you know? So, I guess about 7:30 or 8:00, I don't know, time just escapes me, but whether to cancel the -- somebody called me asking whether we should cancel the program or not. I said you have to, cancel it, because they slapped the curfew on.

Unknown man: Did those who went in the ambulance, did they return?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: Rather late, I don't know where they went from -- they may have gone on, may have went on to the city hospital where they performed the autopsy. I don't know. Ben Hooks and Jim Lawson came.

Unknown man: To the Lorraine?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: Yes, and we got together, trying to make some decisions, and it was Ben's thought that we should go on television, asking the people to remain calm and not to do anything violent.

Unknown man: Now, did he contact someone? Who did he contact, or did they contact?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: They sent the call to the station, and I don't know who they worked with on that, I am not sure. Anyway, they gave them all the time they wanted. They made tapes. I don't know when they played them. I didn't go. I said, "No, I think I better stay here." So, Jim and Ben, and I think one of the staff people from SCLC went to the radio station and made tapes, and after they left, we were trying to keep A.D. away from news media. I mean, we didn't want to expose him to stupid questions that they can ask at times, like, "How do you feel?" and stuff like this. So, we were with him. He was in 209, I think, at this time.

Unknown man: Did you go down to him?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: Yes, I was down. He said, "Well Billy, they got my brother, they got him. They got my brother." He just kept saying that.

Unknown man: That's all he kept saying?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: He said, "I knew it was going to happen, but I didn't think it would be in Memphis. They got my brother." And, he was quite upset. Eventually I took him out to my house. And, newsmen tried to get to him, but we wouldn't let them.

Unknown man: Did he have any suspicions about who it might be, or anything of that, who it might be?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: No, that wasn't discussed. We were trying to decide -- after we were going to the airport to meet Coretta, until she got the word that he was dead, that she didn't come. His parents were going to come, too at first, and then they decided not to. And, so we said, "A.D., you've got to pull yourself together now." You know, we talked with him, and finally took him up out of the place.

Unknown man: Did he stay there that night?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: No, he stayed a few hours.

Unknown man: How did you do in the curfew?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: I always had a pass, so it didn't -- I never used it, but. The route that I would take, didn't lend.

Unknown man: Were you stopped at all, to your house?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: No.

Unknown man: Did you drive him back?

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

Unknown man: And still not stopped?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: Judge Hooks, and Hosea Williams went with us. No, I wasn't stopped. Of course, I went out Union Avenue. You wouldn't be stopped more than likely. It was just in the heart of the ghetto right there where they were mostly stopped. Well, we were up all night that night. We got A.D. straight, and then Ralph came back, and we had a staff meeting in 306.

Unknown man: That night?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: That night, yeah.

Unknown man: About what time?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: This must have been close to 3:00. Judge Hooks, Jim Lawson, Bevel; Jesse Jackson had returned to Chicago, because he knew Chicago was going to break out. He thought he'd do more good there; Jim Orange, and Andy Young. What the staff did literally was to pledge themselves to Dr. Abernathy.

Unknown man: Right that night?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: Right that very night.

Unknown man: You remember how that happened?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: Well, Bevel more or less got it started, but now we -- as sorry as we are, I mean all of us are at that time, we can't be -- he sort of coined the phrase, "stand in the graveyard," that Martin is dead, and we've got to deal with that, and we know that means a lot of things. That means SCLC, we don't have Martin Luther King to go out and raise a lot of money for us. That means the staff is going to have to stop bullshitting, if you'll excuse the expression. Those were his words, and we've got to get on the case. He says now you can't let him down by standing in the graveyard. Everything that we've planned has got to go on. Abernathy is our leader now, and we have got to do some thinking and do some real working now. Hosea backed him up and Andy Young. Ralph said, "Well, I wouldn't ask any more of you than I gave to Martin," which was a beautiful statement I thought, because he just gave Martin tremendous support.

Unknown man: Was Bernard Lee there, too?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: Yes, Bernard was there. Bernard was still sort of dazed, and he couldn't say too much. And, he had tried to pack, to start packing some of Martin's case for the last time. We had a lot of interruptions that night trying to meet, even though it was 3:00. So, Ben and I decided that we would request from the police body guards for Ralph for the time that he was to remain in Memphis. They sent very two very nice policemen, white -- but they were very nice (muffled).

Unknown man: Now, who called whom?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: I think Ben called.

Unknown man: You think he called Mr. Holloman?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: Yes, I am sure he did. He would have told somebody who was in charge, I think Inspector Gagliano, or somebody was in charge. He may have just told them that we wanted somebody. He may have not have called Holloman, though. But, the meeting lasted about an hour. So, we were trying to help make some decisions on the funeral and the march, trying to anticipate some things. Ralph said, "I think Coretta will cooperate with me anyway we can." So, we suggested a private service for SCLC and Ebenezer members, and then a public service at the ballpark or someplace else. We were skeptical of the ballpark with his father -- we didn't think he would approve, and he would really want it to be at the church. So, Morehouse was more of a compromise.

Unknown man: Did that happen while you were here, at that meeting?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: Well, those were our suggestions, and then Ralph straightened them out -- we decided that we would try to give him some direction, and then he would take them on to Atlanta, and then he would have it from there. But, at this point we called the undertaker, which was about 4:30, who was R.S. Lewis. R.S. Lewis always provided Dr. King with a car -- it was his car and the driver that drove Dr. King around in Memphis.

Unknown man: And, did he meet him at the airport when Dr. King?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: Solomon Jones was the driver.

Bill Thomas: Solomon Jones (muffled).

Unknown man: And he is here now?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: He lives in Washington now (muffled).

Unknown man: So he would be coming back here, you think?

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

Joan Beifuss: (Muffled) kind of crack, or were they able to go through the motions (muffled)?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: Yeah, they were able to go through the motions (muffled). I think everybody cried, but there was no outburst of, you know, emotions, or bitterness, or anything of that sort. It was something you'd expect, but when it comes you think you are prepared for it, but you're never prepared for it. We decided to go ahead and pick out a casket about 4:30. We called Lewis, and we told him we were coming over, and to see if they would have him ready for -- I guess it was very late when the coroner released the body. So, we went from the Lorraine over to the R.S. Lewis Funeral Home. We had 2 cars over there.

Unknown man: Oh, almost the whole group, right?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: Almost the whole group that was in the room, about 2 car loads. Then some more people from Chicago came down, staff folk. (Muffled) they met us at the -- they drove into the Lorraine as we were driving out, so we just said just follow us.

Joan Beifuss: Had they flown down?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: I think they did fly down (muffled). I am sure they had to fly, they didn't drive that fast. When they got the word, they just got to the airport (muffled). Some other people had come in, T.Y. Rogers, who is Director of Affiliates,

was changing planes in Birmingham, and he just turned right around and caught the next flight out to Memphis after he heard that he was shot, and he said they announced it in flight that Dr. King had died, but there was no -- people kept talking -- there was no comment one way or another on the flight from Birmingham. They just kept on doing what they were doing. So, when we got to the undertaker's that morning, they went in to see the body. I wouldn't go. They were working on the body at that point. The man did a tremendous job, you know, making him up. So, Lewis said, if Mrs. King is not pleased with the casket -- get any casket you want, and just all the cost will be -- the cost of having it redone, don't worry about that. He was very nice (muffled). And, I guess we left there about 5 or so, and went back to the hotel. Ralph wanted the blood cleaned up, and put in a jar. He was going to take it to Atlanta and try to have it preserved, because it was quite a pool of it, and we got it up.

Unknown man: (Muffled).

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: Yeah.

Unknown man: Is it still there?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: Yeah. We scooped it up and put it in a jar.

Unknown man: Who did? You did?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: Yeah, and one of the fellas from the motel.

Bill Thomas: How was that done?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: We just got a piece of cardboard and a jar and scooped it up.

Unknown man: And (muffled).

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: Yes, as a matter of fact, one of the policeman in Atlanta took it when we got there Friday morning, and took it to the police lab, and they were going to try to take it to the laboratory and preserve some way or another (muffled). Ben Hooks and I decided that we would accompany from Memphis the body. We had gotten calls from Kennedy and Rockefeller that they would send planes. (Muffled) their personal plane of Robert Kennedy, I think, and it only seated 17 people though. They were going to bring Mrs. King and her party over, and we didn't think there would be enough room, so Ben called A.W. Willis, and Willis called John Hooker in Nashville about using his plane. John Hooker sent his plane over Friday morning. Ben and I went home and changed clothes. I dropped him off and I went and changed, took a shower and put on some fresh clothes, and he did the same thing, and we went to the airport. I went back and picked him up and went to the airport. No -- I picked him up and went back to the Lorraine Motel that morning. We were having a news conference. We had the first news conference after his death at the Lorraine. At the news conference we got the car caravan from the Lorraine to the R.S. Lewis Funeral Home, and people were in line and

out there in large numbers. So, when we got to the funeral home the body was -- people had been passing through. The body was -- he was lying in state, and the police were there to escort us and all. So we went in, staff members, and those of us who had been there. We went in, and just sort of impromptu we had a service. Ralph quoted some scripture, and I offered prayer. He called on me to offer prayer. This was in the funeral home. People had stopped marching, cameramen all over everywhere, newspaper, news (muffled) every place, and they were taking pictures. And, at that point many of the staff people left, if they had not broken down, they broke down then, but in a quiet sort of way. And some touched him and looked at him. And at that point I made the announcement to the people outside that I was very sorry that we couldn't let them all come by, but Mrs. King was due to arrive at the airport in 10 minutes, and it just wouldn't be fair to her to have her waiting on his body, and they understood. It was tremendous.

Joan Beifuss: Was that an impromptu thing, when the body was lying in state at the funeral home (muffled)?

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

Joan Beifuss: It had not been planned?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: It wasn't planned, no.

Joan Beifuss: Do you know what scriptures Dr. Abernathy was using?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: He quoted some Psalms, perhaps the 90th and the 27th. I am sure he quoted the 27th Psalm, and perhaps the 90th Psalm. He quoted rather long, those two (muffled) scriptures.

Joan Beifuss: What are the first lines from those Psalms?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: Uh, now you're catching me off guard. The 90th ...

Joan Beifuss: You caught me off guard.

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: The 27th, "The Lord is my light and my salvation, whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid? When the wicked, even mine enemies and my foes, come upon me to eat up my flesh, they stumbled and fell." That's 27; 90 (muffled), I'd have to look it up. But he quoted that, and then he, Ralph was in school with a fellow called Walter Kyles, and when he calls all my name, he calls me Walter about as much as he calls me Billy, and he said now, "Reverend Walter Kyles will bring the prayer." Uh, and I knew he was talking to me. He calls me Walter as much as he calls me Billy. And, so he calls the pastor (muffled) the undertaker (muffled). Then I made the announcement that we were very sorry they had waited, and they had waited a long time, but that it wouldn't be fair to Mrs. King to make her wait, and they understood. So, we took him out.

Joan Beifuss: Reverend Kyles, was there no bitterness in all this? None of his people were bitter?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: It hadn't come through at that point, no. It was shock and dismay more or less more than anything else.

Unknown man: And there was no sort of who killed him, at this point?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: I don't think it was even discussed that night. People outside of our group (muffled) did. Inside the group, in the staff meeting it was never even mentioned. So, we went on to the airport. They had special places for us to go and park.

Unknown man: Now how come, that was when Mrs. King came in, and nobody officially from the city was (muffled).

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: We don't know. See, the fact is, Kennedy did not send his plane, it was a charter, an American Airlines, which seated more people than we thought, and by this time we had this plane from Hooker, so we did not actually go on the plane with the body. As a matter of fact, we beat the plane there. They had some problem, I understand, with the lift and all this other. There was almost some problem about releasing his body out of the state. I think they worked that out with some question about the police had not released him or something. (muffled) I think they had this kind of thing in Dallas, or something. I don't know. But he got that straight right away.

Bill Thomas: So, really there was no delay.

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: No delay on the part of the (muffled).

Unknown man: But there was nobody from the city, though, to greet Mrs. King?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: Not really. The men who had been (muffled) went there. Anyway, I don't know who would have -- you know Patterson would have probably been the only acceptable person in the city government, and the National Guard. Now why they had the National Guard out there I don't know. Out there with bayonets provoking people. And somebody, I don't know who said it, said just get them out of here. You know, we don't need them.

Bill Thomas: Yeah, I think there was some (muffled) that complained that they went out at that time (muffled).

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: And bayonets and all that. So, we went to the other field, and we went on. I don't know exactly who was on the plane with me (muffled).

Unknown man: Yeah.

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: I had a real feeling when we got to Atlanta, we got there early, and I greeted certain people, talked with certain people, and the mayor was there, ministers had lined up. The person who would take everybody off the plane and all this, you will be detained about another 20 minutes, and there was just reluctance on my part.

_____ We went in a caravan from the airport after they took everybody off (muffled) staff and staff, people, just people. We went to the funeral home, and not but about a block or two from SCLC's headquarters in Atlanta, very small, and just swarms of people out there. Ralph made an impromptu speech to them, and then he went in and had (muffled). It was hard for anybody to get in (muffled) because it was so small, but I finally got in, and I didn't go into the service. I looked at Coretta, but in fact I didn't speak to her until she came back from Memphis for the laying of the stone. I just didn't know what to say, and the fact that he was coming to my house for dinner and all that, and it was, I couldn't find anything to say. I didn't say anything to her until the (muffled) came for the march. Oh yes, (muffled) came to the march in Memphis, but in Atlanta I didn't say anything to her. I did decide to come back after the meeting over there at the church, at Ralph's church that Friday, (muffled). They had scheduled it for Monday, but since we were going on with the march Monday, we put the funeral off until Tuesday. There was the march, but we didn't advertise that she was going to lead the march (muffled). It was too much to ask her to do, since she had not been too long had surgery.

Unknown man: Yes, yes.

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: It was tremendous that she came.

Unknown man: Yes, yes it was.

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: In Atlanta, the merchants, stores, that next day, when we went down to the funeral. Well wait, I'm getting too far ahead. You may want to have something to do with the funeral. It was marvelous how the city had buses, they just turned over buses to the SCLC, because our party went back in a private plane, and we had a bus that (muffled). The bus took us back. The city really turned out (muffled) city officials, administration did all they could. I'm not saying that because (muffled).

Unknown man: You know what I'd like to get now, of course this has been just kind of remarkable and this is such an ...

Joan Beifuss: Could I throw one thing in before you...? Was there any contact with city officials here? (Muffled) or receive any kind of official condolences or anything that (muffled) ?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: I don't know. I know a group went to Atlanta, (muffled).

Unknown man: The mayor (muffled).

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: But I don't know if there was any (muffled).

Joan Beifuss: That's what I'm saying, official contact with them, prior to (muffled).

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: I doubt it seriously. That we would have known about. We were up there all day and all night. I doubt if there was any contact.

Joan Beifuss: Any contact between the mayor of Atlanta and the (muffled).

Bill Thomas: I believe this (muffled) one of the impressions I get since your meeting, (muffled) support was given to Ralph Abernathy, and some plans were made in Memphis (muffled) the march in the hands of Dr. King (muffled). Was that talked about at that time?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: Well, not directly, only in relationship to what we said about all the plans would be carried out as if he were here. We didn't specify the march. It came up again when we said if the funeral was scheduled for Monday, then it would be easier, well I shouldn't say easier. The decision of whether to change the march, you couldn't have the funeral and the march the same day.

Unknown man: And also, if the...

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: Since the funeral hadn't been set, it would be more logical to move the funeral than to move the march.

Unknown man: Well, what I'd like to ask now, is that would it be possible, with your intervention, to somehow for us to get consent of the people in the Southern Conference, Mr. Abernathy, and Bevel, and even those that will be coming here, that we would even still just get an opportunity to talk with them, about, and we want to be real clear, in a sense our story sort of stops with the assassination, but all the events in which they were involved that led up to the march and so and such.

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: Yeah, I'm sure it will be.

Unknown man: Is it any way that, I mean, pardon?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: After the 19th, after the march up there.

Unknown man: Right, so that if Bill could go to Atlanta, you know, and just have access to them. Because we think that with what you've given us, we sure are getting the Memphis story, and we are concerned that their part is in the Memphis story. You know, even though we know that Mrs. King is writing a book and so on. I don't think any way we conflict.

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: I think what you're doing is very good. That is why I took the time out.

Unknown man: This is wonderful. You know, I tell you for one, I am fatigued. But, I don't know how you're ...

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: Yeah, we're going to have to work another session in.

Unknown man: Yeah, I don't know how you're holding up, but we have this whole thing here, but I really, I mean.

Bill Thomas: The details.

Unknown man: Yeah, my, I mean this has been, when I say hard, you know it has been so absorbing that I just feel it is not fair to you, let alone us, unless you two feel strong enough.

Joan Beifuss: Oh, I think we need we agree.

Bill Thomas: What do you think?

Unknown man: We sure want to talk with you about your other functions, and you do so much.

Bill Thomas: I want to know also how you became acquainted with Dr. King, and how you (muffled) this relationship.

Unknown man: Could we have another session?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: Yeah, I think we can work another session in.

Unknown man: Yeah, because where we said that when we came to this point we're tired, now you see, had you come now to that last day -- so if we could, we will call on you again, and maybe between then we'll listen and see if there are a few points that we come across that maybe need some answering, too.

Bill Thomas: Well, I think Reverend Kyles this has just been great.

END OF RECORDING