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Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: That they were breaking windows, it was still moving out. I was standing in the middle of Linden and Hernando, and they said they're breaking -- Floyd said, "Oh, they've started something." I said, "Oh what is it?" He said, "They're breaking windows." He said, "(muffled)." Anyway, we heard this voice ask for permission to break up the march, permission to break up the march. Never got it. They've started breaking out more windows. Well, before they asked for permission to break up the march, Jim and Jesse Turner and others has turned the march around. We had stopped the march before the police started beating people. They said this won't work. When they started breaking out windows, the leadership up front decided, let's go back and regroup. You know, and weed out, or do something. And they had turned the people around. They were trying to turn the people around before they had gotten permission to break up the march. Well, when we heard this, the people had left the church. They had gotten up. You know, the tail end was up to about where we were, but they had not gotten to Beale, so all the people in the street from Linden to Beale, we ran, Floyd and I ran ahead, and when we got to Beale, the guy had said, "permission granted," and we cut off all the people from Beale to Linden and said, "Go back to the church." You know, in the street. We turned those people around and sent them back to the church. Well, I remained standing in the middle of Beale and Hernando, and when I looked I could hear this rumbling, all these windows, glass (imitates sound), you know the glass was being, the windows being broken, and kids were throwing them and running, just break and run. And, I hollered at many of them, "Hey boy, put that stick down." And, I stood there and kept them from breaking out the liquor store right on the corner. They wanted to go in there. I stood there and guarded the liquor store myself. And Floyd said, (muffled).

Bill Thomas: This was on the corner of Beale and...?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: And Hernando.

Bill Thomas: And Hernando, yeah.

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: I guarded that myself. And they were throwing sticks and running. Well, it was after they would throw them and run, that others went in. Other youths went in and started looting, but no one really broke a window and went in -- I can't say no one, but from where I could see. But the thing that frightened me, all these people were turning and they were coming back. They were actually coming back. Some were running, and they started shooting tear gas. Well, tear gas guns make the same noise that a gun makes. And there were some people falling and tripping, and I said, "Oh God, they're shooting people." And I had a wife and three kids in this. Somewhere in that -- and it was the most horrible feeling I've ever had about something like this. I have been in demonstrations. I have never had any fear, but I was really scared, not for myself, but for my family that they were in this sea of people just coming, and the cops were just beating people unmercifully. For no reason, I mean they weren't beating the looters, now. They might have gotten a few, but they simply waded into the

crowd and started beating people who were coming back. You know, women and men just coming back. They had already turned around, they were coming back. And this was the horrible part. They were just beating; you know, not just looters, but when they got permission to break up the march they waded in to break it up. They were vicious.

Bill Thomas: Did you hear the permission granted.

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: Oh, yes.

Bill Thomas: They finally did get that.

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

Bill Thomas: Were the people running?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: When they started shooting tear gas they started running, but otherwise they turned around and they were walking. And then when they started shooting this tear gas, you know people thought they were shooting live ammunition so they started. They were actually coming back down Beale, then they started going all directions. And I think my wife lost my girls, and I was standing there trying to guard the liquor store, and asking the police, "Why are you beating people like that?" You know, how I didn't get hit, I don't know how in the world I didn't get hit. Maybe they knew me, or I don't know what. Jesse Turner didn't get hit. We were out there. I had that yellow thing on my arm, too. Maybe that was why, I don't know. But they just came down the street beating people. So, we finally got the people back to the church. And some of the youths -- the youths were mad by this time. They started throwing at police. They did throw missiles at the police, and they kept shooting tear gas. So, we got them to withdraw from the area. They wouldn't go all the way back. They drew back, and then we started letting the -- well it was just mass confusion inside the church first of all.

Bill Thomas: Do you know whether any tear gas was shot inside the church building?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: Very definitely.

Bill Thomas: It was?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: And inside the minimum salary. We called Holloman and said come out here and see it if you don't believe it. He said, "No, no gas has been shot in the church." I cried. I mean I had gas. They sprayed mace in my little girl's eye. First of all, what is the point in spraying -- we had gotten back to the church. I had finally got my family. I said, "You all go in the building and stay until I can get you home." By this time I am feeling terrible y'all. Before we could get inside the building Ralph locked the door. I said, "Open the door." He let us in, but my little girls saw the police coming running with sticks, and they ran on the side between Clayborn Temple and the building. I looked around and they were gone. I couldn't find them. My wife

had gone inside. They were frightened with the police coming, and they ran, and the police ran up in there and sprayed mace in her face, you know. But they finally got in the church.

Bill Thomas: How old is this girl?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: She was 10. She was 10 or 11. And, people were in the church crying, and you know, lost from their children. And they were out there. Now nobody was doing anything. The looting had stopped and everything else. The police could have withdrawn and we could have handled it, but they stayed there. I mean, once they mace you or tear-gas you, there is nothing, you are just completely helpless. There is no point in beating on you. So, finally I got my family inside, and I went over and tried to put other families together. They did spray -- the youths would throw at them, and then run back to the church.

Joan Beifuss: Inside the church or around it?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: Run back inside the church. So, that is when they shot tear gas in there.

Bill Thomas: So they thought that most of the reaction was coming from inside the church didn't they?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: Well, they knew the guys were going back in there, so they were going to clear the church out again, I guess.

Joan Beifuss: Did anyone inside the church try to keep the kids from coming back indoors?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: Yes. We had a man in the truck all the time. See, we could have handled it if the police had left the area period. You know, they just withdrew back to Linden, but they never left, and people had to go that way. Now, if they had gone back up and protected the stores and all that, which they could have done. You know, line up on the street and protect the stores, but we had to get the people out of the building, and people were frightened to go out because they had been beaten. All kinds of stories were coming, that a little girl had been shot and trampled, and you had the rumors to deal with.

Joan Beifuss: Was anyone in charge, or did anyone have the microphone in the church? Was anyone trying to ... ?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: We were trying to put it together at that point, and we were making announcements about trying to put people together. But, we had a man in the truck outside of the church the whole time, telling the youths to stop, and go in the church and wait; asking the police to pull back.

Bill Thomas: Who was this, now, Reverend Kyles?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: I have forgotten his name, but it was Crittenden's truck. We had a sign on the truck of our own.

Bill Thomas: Was this the pickup truck?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: Yeah, the pickup truck.

Bill Thomas: Did it have a flat tire? I heard that.

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: It might have had a flat tire, I don't know. It may have. But they shot tear gas in the minimum salary building also, and they claim they didn't because when I got ready to get my family to the car finally, I had to put a handkerchief over my face and I was crying for days, you know. So, I stayed around there I guess. But, it was just -- that was unbelievable.

Joan Beifuss: At that point was there anyone left in charge really of what was left of the march?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: Well, all the leaders were there. Nobody left. We were all there.

Joan Beifuss: I mean, was there any kind of control over the crowd in the church, though, or was it just (muffled).

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: Yes. We were dealing with the militants at the same time, and then we were trying to match families, get people back together because there were a lot of children, and we were reading and asking the people to be calm -- go home and wait until you hear from us further.

Joan Beifuss: I had heard also that some children had been left behind in the church when their parents marched. Was that, was there babysitting in the church while the parents marched?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: It may have been, I am not sure, it may have been. But, we had wounded people in the church. We had to get the ambulances in and out. Our telephone lines were tied up, we couldn't use the phone.

Bill Thomas: Did you hear that some of the ambulances didn't want to come in, into the area?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: No, I didn't. We only called Negro ambulances, so we had no problem getting them in there. As a matter of fact, we had three ambulances escorting the march.

Bill Thomas: On hand, I see, yes.

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: So, now we were not organized to the point of having medical people, or a medical team. My wife just sort of impromptu organized some people to take care of girls who had a reaction to the gas, to the mace and stuff. Several people were having convulsions, and we had some...

Bill Thomas: There were people that got sick from the gas (muffled).

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: Oh yeah, from the gas, and we had stretched them out in the church and we had to get them to the hospital. Then the report came that they were beating people all over town, and the looting was spreading, and that is when they imposed the curfew.

Joan Beifuss: Do you have any idea how long you stayed in Clayborn Temple?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: We were there until about 4:00 that evening.

Joan Beifuss: And there was still a crowd of people in there until about ...

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: Not, not, not, not, not necessarily a crowd, but there were people milling around. A lot of people were afraid to go out because of the police. Now, we said draw back and we will get the people home. They would draw back, and whatever the youths would do, if they would throw or say something, they would start beating at them, or throwing at them again, and like playing games with kids, and responsible grown people were trying to get home. And, we would go out and try to tell the youths, grab them, and -- so we finally got them under control and they went -- we got everybody out (muffled).

Bill Thomas: How about the sanitation men? What happened to them (muffled)?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: They were more or less just a part of the group at this point.

Bill Thomas: They got sort of lost in the crowd.

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: Yeah. We had some who served as marshals, and that tear gas and stuff, and the looting was really too much for -- and I hate to tell you, there was not a lot of looting. I saw fellas come out of Paul's with material, and I would holler at them, "Put that stuff down!" But, I don't think -- I don't know what the estimate was, maybe \$20,000. I don't, you know, you don't, when you talk about a million dollars, I don't think you're talking about too much. But, it would not have been that bad if it had not been for the overreaction of the police department just beating people, and that created a great deal of resentment. I mean they were just vicious. There was no need for that kind of thing. And, then we told Holloman they were shooting tear gas in our building. He says, "No, they're not doing that." And, the burn, I can take you right now and show you where the canister fell. I know it was in there.

Bill Thomas: In the church now, or the minimal salary?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: The minimum salary. They shot it in the lobby of the church, in the vestibule. They wouldn't go in the church, they were afraid. I think they did get to the vestibule once or twice. And, that's the worst they can do, invade -- this is the one place we feel is ours, and this happened, you remember some years ago. A Sheriff in Alabama somewhere went into a church with his hat on to get Martin, I think. And, that was the worst thing they could have ever done -- went in a church with his hat on, and bringing Martin out. But, you don't invade the black church. I mean this is our one sanctuary, and they broke that law. So, we left after we finally got things under control. I sent my family on home. John Spence, who works with the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, had a government car, and I got John's car and I got him to drive me over to Rivermont, where we went to talk to Martin. He was very upset.

Bill Thomas: Now, how did you know that Dr. King was there, at the Rivermont?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: Well, the word had gotten back to us, to meet there. And, this thing about him deserting, and the newspapers played that up. And, I wasn't reading the papers at that time. You sent some material to us, about a newspaper. Didn't you send some materials? Some newspaper copies?

Joan Beifuss: (muffled), yes.

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: I glanced through them the other night. But, I didn't know what they were saying at that point. His aides, you know, took him away. Because we thought the worst thing that could happen would be for Martin Luther King to get, something -- police to crack him on his head during the march.

Joan Beifuss: Was there any kind of, oh I'm sure there must have been, any kind of policy about getting Dr. King out of the march?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: It always is. The decision is never left to him, because he never goes into the march without two aides. If you'd leave it to him, he'd stay there. But, we recognize what would happen. So, they'll have to, in many cases, just pick him up literally and take him away from certain things. And, the Rivermont was chosen because we wanted a place -- now I heard two stories why the Rivermont was chosen, and I don't know which one is true.

Bill Thomas: What was? Well could you tell us?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: I don't know, one was because they wanted a place, sort of that we could meet later on secretively, well you know, sort of secretively I guess. And the other was that the Sheraton and all the other hotels, well it was obvious if you go back to the Lorraine everybody is going to be over there after the thing.

Bill Thomas: Also, wasn't it true that it would have been very difficult to have gotten back through that area?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: In that area at all, yeah, you had to get out of the area. Yeah.

Joan Beifuss: Did you ever find out exactly how he got to the Rivermont?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: In a car. I really didn't, you know, I heard stories about it, but I just didn't put any credit to them, and I didn't. To me, at that time that wasn't really important, and I didn't follow through. I don't know.

Joan Beifuss: Yeah, we have just never been able to find out whether it was just someone driving past, who they flagged down, or.

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: I just really don't remember, I don't know.

Bill Thomas: Do you know who, Reverend Kyles, who left the march with him?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: No, because I was with, like I said I was way in the back, and I haven't talked about that phase of it with anybody. I simply haven't.

Bill Thomas: What was the, what was the scene in Dr. King's quarters there at the Rivermont when you arrived?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: Well, he had a bedroom and a waiting room, a living area, and he and his aids were in trying to evaluate what happened. And, the leadership that we told -- we didn't want, we just wanted certain people like Reverend Starks, and Lawson, and myself, and others to meet to find out, you know, and we were in another room and we were waiting for some other people to come. And actually he had taken off his trousers and had his shirt and shorts on. He was under the cover, you know, covered with the spread, sitting in the bed like this. And, we were waiting for, I guess Jim at that time. So, we all finally came into that room, and (muffled).

Bill Thomas: In the bedroom?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: Yeah, when Jim got there. There were some other people there like John Spence, and we kept John on the phone to do certain things. So, we were seated around the room, and trying to backtrack to find out -- because he really didn't have any idea of what had happened, because they hadn't worked with us. He just came to lead the march. And, he was very disturbed. I sat on the bed, and he asked, we talked, and he asked me some questions, and he asked Jim some questions.

Joan Beifuss: Was he angry?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: No, he wasn't angry, not at all. He was just upset, you know. His aides were more angry than anything else, that we would bring him into a situation

like that, without really telling them that the possibility was there. Especially on the heels of having had the criticism about mass march days are over, nonviolent.

Bill Thomas: He was aware that some of the Negro youths had broken the windows, or did he really know what had happened?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: Yeah, I think the TV, he had the TV on, and looked at it.

Joan Beifuss: Had the local leadership expected anything like this at all? Had there even the remotest possibility?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: They kept telling us, but we just didn't believe it.

Joan Beifuss: Who kept talking?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: The militants kept saying that it can happen. You know, so. We thought black people were so together that nobody would do anything like that. And, you know. And they were mostly teenagers. We just didn't -- we thought that we had really come together, that nobody would do -- that you would be playing into Charlie's hands to do something like this. And, like I say, I think it was really more of a thing that they wanted to be recognized, and we didn't get -- you know, the preachers have always been the leaders and that sort of thing, and they had a definite contribution they wanted to make, and we didn't recognize them, and I think this is really what set them off. Of course we tried, we just didn't know how. We hadn't worked together with them. When I say, "we," I mean I have individually, but I am just one voice in COME, and there were many things that went on that I didn't agree with, because of my own experience, and there were a lot of new people working in COME, but if you are going to have a community organization, you've got to give and take. So, I gave on a lot of things. I gave on the security for Dr. King, because my thought when he came for the convention I called Commissioner Armour and said, "Alright, give me 2 soul brothers," and he put them at my disposal. If I said I wanted 10, Dr. King is going to be in town, "they're yours Reverend Kyles." And, many times they would beat me to the airport and pick Martin up. They loved him, too. The black policemen, and they would be right with him, you know. Of course, I don't think that any -- I don't see, I said this before, in my own mind any way of having prevented what went on. When a guy in America makes up his mind to get you, you're just got, you know. But, that was just an example of the kind of thing. I had the kind of relationship with the police department, as bad as the attitude is toward Negroes, I was not so hung up that I wouldn't call and ask for security for Martin King when he came to town.

Bill Thomas: Who is against security? Was it SCLC, or COME?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: No, COME primarily felt that to sneer at the police -- no, that's not, that to work with the police would have been defeating what -- we knew the police, we felt that the police were Loeb's men, and the fight was with Loeb, so it is with his police. My feeling was, that the police, was the fight was not with the police at this

point. Let's take the police on as a separate thing. You know, don't play games with the police, you know. You don't have to -- I mean he did not have to send spies into our meetings. There is nothing going on in our meetings that is so secretive we don't want them to know. Let them come on in there, but just come as uniformed policemen and stand around the walls if they wanted, but don't come sneaking. My feeling was, why play games? Why fight the police and city hall at the same time? Let's take it one by... if we need protection, you know send some black brothers. They'll protect Dr. King. I mean, we don't have any problems with them. And, if I needed traffic cops for the conventions, like if I need them for SCLC convention -- I needed them with Holloman. You know, I guess I'd get the same thing, but with Armour, anything we asked for Armour always tried to give it to us. I mean I say that, with all the other problems, we had the police because I recognized that if you're having one problem with the mayor and everybody else, there is no point in fighting the whole group at one time, especially if you're going to need them. You need them to direct traffic then I'm going to get them.

Joan Beifuss: Let me ask you something. During the earlier days of the strike, there was a great deal more cooperation with the police wasn't there in terms of, oh for instance when the march that was maced, there was talking between the leaders and the police at that time on how they would march down Main Street.

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

Joan Beifuss: Now, is it true that the police were never informed of the route of that first march?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: Well, maybe they were not informed officially. That is one of the things I mean. In my judgment, I would have given it to them.

Joan Beifuss: Yeah. Now, the point I was trying to get to, was there a change of feeling within the COME organization that there had been too much police cooperation earlier?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: Well, yes for this reason. I heard somebody mention, you know the marches are becoming ineffective now. The marches are walking along chatting with the police. Well, what's wrong with that? The argument is not with the police. If you want a confrontation, this is something different. If you're going to march for symbolic reasons, this is something different. This is what I'm saying. We had differences of opinion, I just didn't fight hard enough to get mine through, because I'd say somehow that the cause was so right I am sure it will win, so I didn't, I would never get so mad and say if you don't do it my way it's not going to be done. But, so what if you're walking along talking with the police? You know, I've always done it. I have talked to them when they've arrested me. You know? I don't transfer. So, well they would say, "Kyles, you weren't maced, you were in Miami." I would say, okay, you got me there. But when they mace me I don't know how I'm going to feel, I may not want to walk along and talk to them either, so I didn't. But, the only point I am trying to make is that it was not only on the Negroes part. Holloman, it seems to me was

playing games, playing little detective, or Dick Tracy or somebody by trying to infiltrate instead of calling up Jim or myself asking. What's wrong with that, you know. I mean if you really want to know, you don't have to sneak around trying to find out. We weren't trying to hide. "All right, Reverend Kyles, what's happening?" or "What's going to be the route of your march?" Now, Armour would have done that, but Holloman wouldn't, and maybe he felt why should he? He is the director of police. You're supposed to get permission. He says he was trying to cooperate in every way. So, I think that was lack of communications on both parts.

Bill Thomas: Maybe there you could comment on, or maybe you can't, either way. One of the things along this line that has kind of astonished me, is that the police took, that the city through it's police, took a militant stand right from the beginning when the strikers came down to city hall very early, well there were all the police. Do you know why was this? Why, you know why this might have been?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: Well, it would just be my feeling, but it would seem to me that the relations between the police and the Negro community have always been like this. I mean it wasn't anything new that this was what we expected, that, "the niggers are getting out of hand, and the only way to put them back in is to crack them across the skull," is to take that kind of attitude. So, it wasn't surprising to me at all.

Bill Thomas: I see. So, in the (muffled).

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: It was expected from the beginning, and it wouldn't have made a difference whether Enom was the mayor, or Loeb. I mean, they saw them as Loeb's men. I just saw them as the attitude that the police department in Memphis has had toward Negroes all the time, because I just didn't start working with them during the sanitation strike. I have been police/community relations chairman for NAACP for 8 years, and I have had this same thing.

Bill Thomas: Well, I was really surprised at that, because there were some men that were just going down to their city hall, you know, and all these police are there. And this was very early, before anything had happened.

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: And, on the other side of that, you have -- I had black policemen coming to me, telling me that you know when they talk about it in the squad car, and that very idea that the black policemen were siding with the sanitation workers, many of them got suspended and fired when their partners told them about it -- at least three.

Bill Thomas: Really?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: My partner's for the sanitation workers, and the immediate supervisor suspended him, and in some cases fired one; one quit. Came right in my office and told me.

Bill Thomas: Who?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: One came to my office and told me. His name is Edmondson. He works now for the (muffled). He would probably talk with you.

Joan Beifuss: Edmondson?

Bill Thomas: Do you have a first name?

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

Bill Thomas: We have a couple of people (muffled).

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: Three came in here to talk to me, you know it is a normally divided thing when you have problems like this, you know the police are going to side with the white people.

Bill Thomas: Okay. In Dr. King's room, was anything decided there? I know later that there was a press conference, and it was the decision to come back and march. Was that decision made in the room at that time? Was there any doubt that he would come back and march after the riot broke out?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: We tried to analyze what had happened, and I think in the room there was agreement. There was agreement that we must have another march. Now, he had problems convincing his staff whether he ought to lead it or what effect had the march already had on the Washington campaign. What effect would another one that didn't work, that wouldn't work. So, from that moment on he went through some agony, Ralph told me this -- he had some agonizing moments.

Bill Thomas: Sure.

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: And it is an intimate story that he tells about what happened from that time on, up to the --

Bill Thomas: Could you tell us that story?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: I don't know if he would want me to, if Ralph would. It was told in private, so. But, he did make the decision with the staff, that we must have the Memphis march. And, we sort of categorized it like, or made the analogy between Christ agonizing in the garden, and then that Thursday being, you know, calvary, crucifixion, and that resurrection. See, that's how Resurrection City got the name, it wasn't going to be called Resurrection City. We had this minister's leadership training program -- we analyzed it, and the whole thing in Atlanta a few days after the assassination, and we came up -- we said between the other march, the march that broke up, and the march that was planned, and the memorial march, between that and the assassination was the garden of Gethsemane for Martin King, and that that Thursday was

the crucifixion, but that the memorial march and Resurrection City, and you know his wife coming, that was a resurrection. And, that is

Bill Thomas: And that is why it was called Resurrection City?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: Resurrection City.

Bill Thomas: Gee, I didn't know that.

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: Few people know that.

Bill Thomas: Well, what was it going to be called, or had the name been (muffled)?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: Tent City or something like this. I don't know (muffled), Poor People's Campaign. I don't know if they had a name for the city or not. It had another name, but it got Resurrection City from that analogy. But, we did decide that the staff would have to come in and work with the militants, and give us, you know, the support that we needed.

Bill Thomas: And, was there any disagreement from COME? Was there a feeling that the staff was taking over, or anything like this?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: Oh no, not at all. As a matter of fact, we wanted their help. I had some real reservation. I said I am not prepared to leave women and children, because of my feeling, seeing that crowd coming out into a group like that again, unless I am convinced that black people are together. Now, we had been talking about being together. Unless I am convinced that the militants and everybody else, mean for us to have a peaceful march -- if I am not convinced of that, I am not going to lead. I will be out there, but I will not have my wife and children out there, and I wasn't going to ask other wives and children to come. So, we had talked about the idea of just having a man's march. "I am a man" march.

Bill Thomas: Incidentally, do you know you came up with that slogan?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: No, I don't. We talked about it, just the men marching (muffled).

Joan Beifuss: Was there any thought that if Dr. King came back and led the second march that militants from other parts of the country would come in and try to stop it? Would try to put the final...?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: If so, I don't think it was expressed.

Joan Beifuss: Do you know whether they would pick Memphis as the ground to really stop the nonviolent movement?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: That may have come forward, but I don't recall.

Bill Thomas: Did COME believe that a nonviolent march could be held? Was that the feeling after the (muffled)?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: Yes. Now there was some feeling later on about Dr., for Dr. King's life because, you know we'd get on the (muffled) and White Citizens Counsel, and Kluxes. We'd get these hate sheets and things. And, just a few days before the second march (muffled). I got a call, a long distance person-to-person, some hate (muffled), after the first march broke out, saying it should have been Martin Luther King and me shot, rather than that boy, the police shot this boy.

Joan Beifuss: Was it a long distance call?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: I suspect it was from Arkansas or Mississippi. They call person-to-person. I was asleep, early in the morning. "Hello?", "Yeah, you're that so-and-so preacher. It should have been you and that Luther King shot than that boy. What are you and Luther King trying to do to Memphis over there." When he said, "over there," I said he's probably from Arkansas.

Joan Beifuss: Forrest City.

Bill Thomas: Forrest City is the big -- the hot bed of "right wingers" or something.

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: And, I just suspected that that is where it was from. So there was some concern about his life here.

Bill Thomas: Why, since Dr. King had so many friends here and everything, why would he not have stayed in somebody's house, under those conditions? There had been so many threats.

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: Well, Martin King wouldn't -- he lived with it you know. There were always threats, and he would never take any precaution... Well, I shouldn't say that. I mean, he just simply wouldn't allow threatening phone calls to restrict him. He wouldn't do it. Now the staff would do it, and the police would do it. But, I don't think if you said, if he got a letter that said, "you walk through that door, Martin King, at 6:03 we'll kill you," I mean he's not going to just walk out there without, you know, somebody checking it, but to say, "don't come out," or "don't go to Memphis," or "don't do this," he would never go any place. Because, like I said, Miami, 2 nights the Miami police just wouldn't let him out. I mean, he could have, you know, forced his way out, but here again he was a reasonable person.

Bill Thomas: I see, yes.

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: The police, when I say won't let him, they must have had something very definite, and they expressed this to him and the staff, and so he didn't go

out. I mean, he wasn't the kind just to play and flirt with death, because by the same token he wouldn't try to live secretly. Now, the dinner was kept quiet. I mean, I didn't tell anybody about that, not many people. The dinner was kept quiet, but just not because of any feelings about somebody killing him, but just he would have a little -- he wouldn't have to be stopping and shaking hands -- a normal evening, which he didn't get too often, except when he went to Atlanta. And, that was the reason for that, not trying to have secret meetings because of threats on his life.

Bill Thomas: Let me ask you another thing on the -- after the mini-riot on Thursday, and they put the curfew in, were there problems in continuing to hold COME meetings and this sort of thing?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: No, we moved -- the executive board moved rather freely. They sent us passes. We didn't ask for them. (muffled) Brown went and got them, you know, which was an insult to me.

Bill Thomas: But there were no problems.

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: No, we had...National Guard people at the place and all.

Bill Thomas: Were the sanitation men able to move around? Were they able to attend meetings?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: Well, we didn't have night meetings for the people. The planners met, we met nights, we continued to meet.

Bill Thomas: But there were no mass rallies, or anything?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: We had no mass rallies. We were not prepared to expose the people, because what happened, you know, so many people -- complaints were coming in so much about how they were stopping Negroes and beating them, that we didn't want to expose -- even churches. I didn't have night service at all, evening services.

Bill Thomas: I see. Did most of the Negro churches...?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: They stopped, because you just didn't want to expose. You know he said if you had a legitimate reason, but they'd bust the hell out of you before you had a chance to say what you were doing or what your reason was.

Bill Thomas: What your reason was, right.

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: And here again, I was never stopped.

Joan Beifuss: Why were you insulted that (muffled) got police passes? You didn't think you should have to get police passes?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: That human beings, you know I am a first-class citizen in the United States of America, and I have got to have a police pass to walk around in my own city. It was degrading to me. I kept it. I am going to keep it for my grandchildren to show them, 1968 in America I have to have a police pass to walk around in Memphis. Not because I have done anything, but because I am black. Now, that's the only reason. No white people were stopped, or beaten, or frisked (muffled). But, the fact is, I was never -- and I attribute that to the Lord just didn't want me to be stopped because the mood I was in and everything else. You know, it was a just a good thing I didn't because they would have probably killed me, you know, because I wasn't going to take anything. Don't be calling me names and all this, in Memphis. Now in Mississippi, you call me boy I won't say a word, because I'm not proving a thing, you know, by getting killed out on the street in Mississippi. But in Memphis, where I live and pay taxes, and breathe, and eat, and sleep, and go to the bathroom, I am not going to take a penny's worth of nothing off when I am not doing anything. So, just go on and kill me and be done with it, and I was prepared. I didn't care. But, you know, and to see these people come in, I mean white nurses being escorted home by policemen, black nurses getting home the best way they could, and when their husbands go to pick them up they are stopped and harassed. You know.

Bill Thomas: Oh really?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: When they bring in wounded people to John Gaskin Hospital the white nurses cheer, "Yay!" You know. George Spencer and Jack Wilborn and I went out that night. We went from hospital to hospital. We were trying to trace some of these rumors down about people being killed, and they got policemen with guns on the hospital step. We went to the jail to see Holloman, policemen -- we had to stop at the bottom of the steps while he holds a shotgun just so, and one of us come up to identify ourselves, to show our identification before we can get in, and all this kind of stuff.

Bill Thomas: And, I am sorry now, what was happening at the hospitals?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: The nurses cheered when they brought a Negro in who was beaten in the riot. This was from a reliable source, from the Negro nurses. White nurses cheered when they brought them in, "Another one's coming in, hey!" You know. But, that was -- I guess I was out all night, but I was never stopped. Well, the first night I was a government car, with John Spence's car. I went to the airport and picked up Wilborn, and went to his house, and then came back. We just drove around to see what was going on. And, I told Holloman I would be out, I'd be around. I said I don't -- call it in -- I said I don't want to be cracked on my head either. I don't expect to be. But, I am sure the word didn't seep down to everybody, it was just one of those things they didn't stop me.

Bill Thomas: Okay.

Joan Beifuss: Let me ask one more thing. Have you heard any stories about anyone seeing James Earl Ray at Mason Temple the night that King made that last speech?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: No, I never heard that. I never heard it. My own suspicion would be that he probably wasn't. I mean, there would be no reason to. I don't see -- I don't there's a person who wouldn't know Dr. King from photos and everything else.

Joan Beifuss: Yeah, I was going to say I don't see much reason for him being there.

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: I wouldn't see any reason for him to expose himself to that extent.

Bill Thomas: We went through the day already with you, but you knew Dr. King was coming back, and then he did indeed come back on Wednesday. Was there any advanced notice of that, or how was that...had that already been set up, or?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: Yeah, we knew he was coming in because we set up a meeting with the ministers for him. I think I put that on the other tape, at Jim Lawson's church. That Wednesday.

Bill Thomas: I didn't know that that meeting had been set up for him, though.

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: Well, we set it up to his convenience when he could get back. See, he had some speaking engagements in New York and Washington and other places.

Joan Beifuss: I know one thing I wanted to ask you. Do you know anything about, I think it was Father (muffled) that mentioned it. There was a meeting of the white and black ministers that Wednesday afternoon, before Dr. King was shot.

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

Joan Beifuss: And then the following morning there was another...

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: I went by there.

Joan Beifuss: Thursday morning when you went by?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: No, Wednesday morning. Thursday morning, yes.

Joan Beifuss: Thursday morning. Can you tell me about that?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: I didn't stay, I just went by. It was at (muffled) church.

Joan Beifuss: Yeah.

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: I just went in to see who was there, and then...

Joan Beifuss: Because at that time Father (muffled) said that some of the ministers had

been told that Dr. King would appear for a few moments at (muffled) church that morning.

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: Yes, that's right.

Joan Beifuss: Did he?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: No he didn't.

Joan Beifuss: But he was scheduled to?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: No, not really. It was something -- I think the black ministers, most of them had said we didn't want to meet with the white guys because it was just wasting time. They wanted to meet to get some kind of resolution together, and we thought that the white preachers should have (muffled), and that's why I didn't go. You know, that they had to come together to meet to get something to agree to meet, to agree to do something. You know, it was stupid to me, so I didn't go. We had called a meeting for later on in the afternoon. Now, I'm confused. No, we had had the meeting the following day. This was Thursday morning they had that meeting I believe.

Joan Beifuss: Yeah, there was a big meeting at St. Mary's Wednesday afternoon, and then there was a smaller committee that was going to draw up a statement that met Thursday morning.

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: That's right, draw up a statement, they had to meet, so I didn't go.

Joan Beifuss: I wonder if Dr. King even knew about that.

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: I doubt it. Because Jim mentioned it to him, but we didn't -- the Wednesday he came in we met with the black clergy at Jim Lawson's church.

Joan Beifuss: Yes, yeah, Wednesday morning, yeah.

Bill Thomas: Who picked Dr. King up on Wednesday morning when he got in? Do you know?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: Whose car did he come in, I think he came in with one of the union officials, and Mrs. Matthews, I think, in a Buick, Wednesday.

Bill Thomas: Mrs. Matthews?

Rev. S.B. "Billy" Kyles: (Muffled) I think picked him up.

Joan Beifuss: (Muffled)?

Rev. S.B. “Billy” Kyles: That’s who brought him to the church, and I think they came straight from the airport. Now, they may have come from the hotel.

Joan Beifuss: Is Mrs. Matthews the other lady, with Cornelia Crenshaw, that was kind of...

Rev. S.B. “Billy” Kyles: Yes, she is the other half of the Crenshaw...

Joan Beifuss: What is her first name, do you know?

Rev. S.B. “Billy” Kyles: I really don’t know. She is a barber.

Joan Beifuss: She is a barber?

Rev. S.B. “Billy” Kyles: Yeah. Out in the Orange Mound area I think. It would be on some of the common material.

Bill Thomas: Yeah, it is.

Rev. S.B. “Billy” Kyles: I think they used her car to pick him up.

Bill Thomas: The only other thing I have is, it is a rather nice church, and I remember you telling me that...

Rev. S.B. “Billy” Kyles: Thanks.

Bill Thomas: That when you came down here, the congregation really didn’t have a church, and you started in the funeral home, the old funeral home or something.

Rev. S.B. “Billy” Kyles: Yeah, that’s right.

Bill Thomas: This obviously is not the old funeral home.

Rev. S.B. “Billy” Kyles: No.

(All laughing.)

Bill Thomas: So, things have picked up (muffled). How large is the congregation?

Rev. S.B. “Billy” Kyles: About 500. It’s been a lot of work, I tell you that. That’s my family. Those are my brothers, and myself.

Bill Thomas: In a younger day.

Rev. S.B. “Billy” Kyles: Oh that’s just 2 years.

END OF RECORDING