

# Rhodes College Digital Archives - DLynx

## Rev. Richard Moon, Chaplain at Memphis State University, 1968

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Reverend Richard Moon- But we didn't we really didn't know what was going to take place that night. Of course you listen to the police radio all through the night to see what was going to develop, and by 11 or 11:30 we realized Memphis was not going to blow up that night so we all pretty well fell into bed, we were all very tired. The next morning we got up and had breakfast together.

Joan Beifuss- What was the general feeling of the men there, was there tremendous sadness among the group or did you feel anything.

Reverend Richard Moon- I don't think we felt anything at that point. Not anything, we were all numb, That morning we talked about where all these different men were going to go because everything was blowing up. Washington was going, Chicago was going, all up in North Carolina. They decided to leave that afternoon, they didn't think Memphis was going to be the place to be. We decided however to cover the Memphis minister's association meeting that was being held that morning and I was told to go and find out what was happening and report back to the group. The meeting was being held at the Episcopal cathedral and I went up there and found all these ministers, Memphis Minister's Association, Memphis Minister Alliance which is a black ministerial group, all together in the sanctuary of the cathedral. Getting ready for a memorial service. I guess there were about 20 black people all the rest of them were white. It made me very angry and I was, my emotions had finally caught up to me at that point. Not only was I sad, but this made me angry because I felt at that point anyway, I felt that these men had no right to be in a memorial service. Why should they be memorializing someone they had not supported or someone they had blasted in their pulpits. I walked in there and I read a statement that they were going to vote on after the memorial service and I didn't feel that the statement was strong enough. And about 4 of my friends held me at the back of the sanctuary because I was going to go up into the chancel and tell them all off and tell them to get out of there. I was going to break up the service but the processional crossing already started down the central aisle. They held me back and calmed me down and I sat down in the back pew and lived through that service, I wasn't ready for a service at that point. I certainly wasn't ready for that service. So we then moved into the building next door and we were going to vote on this statement. Evidently some of the leaders of the Memphis minister's association took me quite seriously and realized that I was going to cause trouble if they didn't take care of me. So we had a very quick pow wow up front while the rest of the ministers were coming. They asked me what I thought was wrong with the statement and I told them and they changed one sentence in it to make it a little stronger, and they said are you willing to go along with this. I said, yes. We got up there and they read the statement and it was passed unanimously. Along with the statement passed unanimously that the ministers would march on city hall. Then we filed out in pairs and walked on the sidewalk with Dean Demic the dean with the cathedral leading the group with the processional cross. We went down Poplar to Main and down Main to the city hall and took that procession across right up to the front door. We

were issued into the building, taken into the mayor's office and at this point then the statement was read to the mayor.

Joan Beifuss- Now didn't rabbi Wax make some statements to Lobe?

Reverend Richard Moon- Yes, but this was after the statements were read. The statement was read first, then as I remember it rabbi Wax made the statement to the effect that not only were we saddened but we were angry. He wanted the mayor to know that we came in anger and we wanted this to stop and we want our city to come forth, get back to normal and put the hate to stop. He said this very emotionally after he made the statement then H. Ralph Jackson made his statement. His statement was a plea, in fact he almost cried asking the mayor please be reasonable, please stop this killing. The mayor responded then and he responded in a way that I guess we should have expected him to respond. You don't expect any kind of decision by city government to change just because a group of ministers go up there and demand that it be changed. It might change 3 or 4 days later if they really feel you are important. But certainly not at that point, the mayor stated that all of the flags would be lowered at half mast, and that the memorial march would be allowed to go on and so on so forth. Evidently he felt this would ease our consciences a bit. Then after he made his statement the ministers turned to leave and I felt, this is what it was, I felt that the ministers had done a very radical thing for white ministers, they had marched on city hall. This is fantastic. Now when you realize that you have some of the people you had in there. There was two Baptist ministers in that group, it is unheard of.

Joan Beifuss- Was Brooks Ramsey one of those?

Reverend Richard Moon- Brookes Ramsey was one.

Joan Beifuss- Do you know the other?

Reverend Richard Moon- The second Baptist minister, I don't recall his name but he is the minister of the Baptist church right across the street from Memphis state university.

Joan Beifuss- That's reverend Troutman.

Reverend Richard Moon- Troutman?

Joan Beifuss- Robert Troutman, at Prescott?

Reverend Richard Moon- At Prescott Memorial Baptist Church these two men.

Joan Beifuss- Some of the ministers I have talked to made quite a point to calling it a walk, was this ever discussed?

Reverend Richard Moon- Well yes it was discussed. They called it a walk because they didn't want to stop traffic and they stayed on the sidewalks you see. But as it worked out the police picked us up right away and then they stopped traffic for us.

So maybe we called it a walk but it was a pretty good march. Anyway, turning to leave and I was afraid like they felt like their job was done. That was the reason I all of a sudden found myself with my mouth open and say to them, gentlemen we just heard the mayor say the same thing that we have been saying for the last 8 weeks, he has not changed his mind he is not going to change his mind. I for one am going to stay in his office until he changes his mind and the strike is over and I am going to stay without eating, whoever wants to join me can.

This was a nominal response to the situation. It wasn't so much a response to the mayor as it was a response to the ministers. Because we had a Memphis ministers association meeting the week before, and that was before King was killed, where this same sort of thing was suggested and they were almost ready to march and then they talked themselves out of it. I just felt now that they had talked themselves into it, this was going to be all they were going to do. I wanted their to be some kind of reminder now to the ministers that they had been there but also a reminder to the mayor that the ministers had been there. SO I reminded him daily with my presence.

Joan Beifuss- What was the reaction of the ministers when you made the statement?

Reverend Richard Moon- They were shocked. They didn't know what to say.

Joan Beifuss- Did anyone join you?

Reverend Richard Moon- Yes. Sister Adrian Marie who is the biology professor at...

Joan Beifuss- But she hadn't been in the group when you said that?

Reverend Richard Moon- She was in the mayor's office.

Joan Beifuss- She was.

Reverend Richard Moon- She was in the mayor's office. And all of a sudden out of nowhere came a towboat worker who was there in the office, I don't know how he got there. He was a former Memphis State student who was working on the boats and his parents are members of a Presbyterian church in the city...

Joan Beifuss- And he was in the...

Reverend Richard Moon- And he was in the office with the ministers, I don't know how he got there. He just followed us I guess. So these two join me...

Joan Beifuss- Did Sister Adrian make any kind of statement?

Reverend Richard Moon- She made statements to the press, to the press and to I think channel 13 covered. Anyway, we stayed there that afternoon.

Joan Beifuss- Well now so you were left standing in the mayor's office and everybody else filed out?

Reverend Richard Moon- Everybody else filed out.

Joan Beifuss- Did Henry Lobe leave immediately?

Reverend Richard Moon- No he stayed in the office, he had appointments.

Joan Beifuss- Oh, so he just carried on as if you weren't there?

Reverend Richard Moon- He carried on, he carried on. He came over, no I had asked one of the black ministers that if he wished we would be more than happy to stay out in his outer office so he could carry on the business of the city. That we didn't want to be in his way in anyway if he was going to have any kind of negotiations that was going to get the strike over. So he went up there and told the mayor and the mayor came over then and squatted down, I was sitting on a couch, he squatted down and told me Moon, this is your office, this is the city's office you are more than welcome to stay. While he was saying this all the press was around and the impression was left that by golly Moon is going to be able to stay. So we stayed all day until about 6:00 in the evening, after everything had been closed up.

Joan Beifuss- What did you do with yourself sitting in the mayor's office all day?

Reverend Richard Moon- We sat there wondering what was going to happen to us, we talked, and we had some southwestern students who came down and where going to join us, and then there was a Memphis state professor who came down and he was going to join me. A number of other people came by and what I was telling all of them, if you want to join us in a hunger strike, let's not give the mayor any more trouble. I think this is probably a bad strategy move on my part, let's not bother him anymore, we have three people here let's try to keep these three people here and you all go to a church some place and carry on the fast and get your friend to join you. So this is what they did except for the Memphis state professor and one other fellow, Memphis state student.

Joan Beifuss- Who were those?

Reverend Richard Moon- One was Jim Gates, he was the Memphis state student, and the professor, Richard Geller, who is the creative writing part of the English department. These two decided to stay. So then when it came time for the mayor to figure out something for us he tried to find some way of getting us out of city hall. He tried to negotiate with us, he wanted to arrange for us to stay at some Baptist church on poplar avenue so and so forth. I told him that I probably wasn't welcome at the first Presbyterian church but if he wanted to do it this way I would be more than happy to go to the Methodist church. I felt sure that the pastor at the Methodist church downtown would allow us to fast there but we would not do this unless we were allowed to ask all the southwestern students to join us there that night. By this time it was a quarter to 7, fifteen minutes before the curfew and he didn't like the idea of sending his police out not get all these students. So I said, well if you can't do that we are staying. Then they had a pow wow in their office and they came back out and the first man out was a inspector from the police department, and I don't remember his name, but he said, no Mr. Mayor, no. And he came storming out and he slammed the door in the mayor's face, it was beautiful they should have put it on

some Memphis stage or something for the speech and drama department. He comes out and he says alright you two you come with me. We said, alright where are we going? He says you are going outside. About that time we walked out the door of the outer office, the mayor came out of his office then and they had two detectives who was closing the outer door in the mayor's face. The mayor was saying wait a minute, wait a minute, wait a minute. They took us off with the mayor pleading with the police department. So then they took us downstairs and they ushered us out of the building and there were frost warnings out for the night. So we stood out there for about 30 minutes talking sister Adrian Marie into leaving. By 8:00 they opened the doors and let us back in. This was all done right in the police department. SO we spent the night in the city hall that night.

Joan Beifuss- In where?

Reverend Richard Moon- No in the front hallway there, and there are long benches there where we got some sleep. We had two detectives with us all the way too.

Joan Beifuss- Sister Adrian went back to Sienna?

Reverend Richard Moon- She went back to Sienna and was very angry with us all for leaving because she felt she could have stayed and got back into city hall. We spent the night, spent the whole day, the city hall was closed, spent the whole day inside city hall. Different people from all over the country were coming to interview us and they would interview in between the crack in the front doors of city hall. It was so comically fantastic. That night then I began feeling the first indications of a hunger strike. Starting getting sick headache. You know sometimes when you just miss a noon meal you know you eat breakfast and you don't eat lunch and about midafternoon you start getting a headache. Well when you cut off completely it takes about 24 to 36 hours before you get this kind of headache. So I laid down about 8:00 that evening, went to sleep and at 10:30 this wonderful inspector came by again, and said you are going out. So we got pushed out again that night. By that time then we had our sleeping bags and all the things we needed, the first night we didn't have a thing. Then we had our sleeping bags and everything so we just camped out in front of city hall for the next 7 days.

Joan Beifuss- Well now in the day time you were in the mayor's outer office?

Reverend Richard Moon- No we just stayed out then, we just stayed out front. Each morning we would go to the back of city hall and welcome the mayor as he would drive in. Then we would station ourselves out in front again and it was a rather wild week. I remember the memorial march was on a Monday. On Sunday night the park commission came in and built a wooden platform about 3 feet high. Barrett Ruston and Jim Lawson came by and some of the others and said, this isn't tall enough. So at 12:30 in the morning we were all asleep and all of a sudden this army moved in and people were laughing and tearing up things and I was afraid to open my eyes I thought they were coming to get us. I opened my eyes and there was about 20 men and they were all tearing apart this platform, madly. In about 30 minutes they had it

torn down and then trucks moved in with all kinds of equipment and they put up this big super structure. Needless to say they worked all through the night and didn't finish it until about 3 pm that next afternoon. Then the march camera on, and we were involved in that. We didn't march we just stayed right there on the scene. The next day city hall was closed and Wednesday, Thursday, Friday it was open so we had restroom facilities from 8:00 in the morning to 5:00 pm at night. We used the hotel across the street restroom facilities at other times. Finally had to rent a room to use the restroom facilities and to take a bath. We weren't filthy, we took a bath everyday. That next Saturday then we decided that we better go on home, mainly because the professor had to go to school and teach and I had to be at work on Monday and the student had to be in class so we broke it up and all went on our merry ways. I continues to fast until the strike was over.

Joan Beifuss- Did you get any reaction from the ministers from the fast?

Reverend Richard Moon- No.

Joan Beifuss- How much weight did you lose?

Reverend Richard Moon- 22 pounds.

Joan Beifuss- Good grief.

Reverend Richard Moon- I put it back on,

Joan Beifuss- What were you eating then? Water, and vitamins and...

Reverend Richard Moon- No, all we had was water. 3 of us had water for 8 days then I had water for 8 days and when I went home I went on a liquid fast, had soup just liquid soup.

Joan Beifuss- Did you talk to the mayor at all once you had started fasting?

Reverend Richard Moon- Only to say good morning to the mayor when he drove in and to say hello to him and to the negotiating team they would go over to the hotel or some back to city hall. We had a number of conversation whoever with a number of various councilmen. We talked to Jerry Blanchard, we talked with Gwynn Awsumb, with Fred Davis, with Neders, with Patterson, never got a chance to talk to Bob James, Bob James wouldn't look our way and Mr. Todd wouldn't look our way. Whose the man who sit son the left hand side of Fred Davis, a lawyer here in town.

Joan Beifuss- Mick Adams?

Reverend Richard Moon- No. Chandler. Wyatt Chandler, we talked with Wyatt Chandler. The most tremendous conversation we had was with Blanchard. I said, Blanchard, when I saw you on television I wasn't going to vote for you, you didn't convince. I said, if you run for any other office I will vote for you. He said, well it is good to know that I have one vote in town. And he said, but you know, it doesn't make any difference anymore. He said, for the first time in my life I have stood up

like a man. That meant everything to me, that was tremendous. The other conversations were debates mostly, except for the black member of the city council, Gwynn Awsumb. Did any of the COME ministers drop by to see you?

Reverend Richard Moon- Yes, we had a number of COME ministers that came by, colleagues from campus ministry came by and the chairman of my board was by every day.

Joan Beifuss- What did the board, what kind of action did the board take? That you were doing it on your own as an individual?

Reverend Richard Moon- 4 out of 15 members of the board were very upset and would have done everything to find me another job somewhere. The rest of them stood by and felt that any ministry today whether it is parish ministry or campus ministry has to involve itself in the city and has to be dealing with the problems of the city. This was my style and this was my decision, and the least they could do was to stand by.

Joan Beifuss- Now what about your house being bombed?

Reverend Richard Moon- We knew this kind of thing was possible, I think we just kind of accepted it intellectually we never talked about the realities of the thing seriously. When it happened it was kind of a surprise, I didn't know anything about it until 8:30 the next morning when friends of ours called and said hey guess what, and told us about it.

Joan Beifuss- How can you explain that? It was your old house?

Reverend Richard Moon- Yes when we first moved to Memphis in 1964 we moved into a house that the church had found for us, this was 1595 Netherwood, this is the Glennview area, which is all totally negro now except for a few white families still living there. We lived there for two years and wanted to continue to live there but the owner of the home, we were renting. The owner of the home, said that he was going to sell that he wanted us out. So then we took up residence at 2669 Milton, when I started working at Memphis state. We lived there for one year and then purchased a home up in parkway village and lived there practically for a year before this bombing took place. So we hadn't lived there for 2 years. The only thing was that because at the time that we moved, the address was carried in the telephone book in last year's telephone book, that old address. So evidently whoever did it was too drunk to find the new telephone book or wanted to kill two birds with one stone, intimidate me and intimidate the negro community.

Joan Beifuss- They never found out who did it?

Reverend Richard Moon- They picked up 4 men, questioned them and had to release them because of insufficient evidence.

Joan Beifuss- Well it is getting pretty late, can you say, can you make any kind of sense out of the last 3 months at all? You are going to stay in Memphis I take it?

Reverend Richard Moon- As long as I can. To tell you the truth I am like a lot of other people I just as soon pick up and go someplace else and find some more peaceful way of living, but when you get down to the realities of the situation no matter where you go nowadays and I mean all over the world, you are going to be faced with this kind of conflict and these kinds of human problems, so you might as well stay where you are and fight the battle where you are. I can't see much sense out of what has happened in the past few months, especially since the strike was over. Evidently what has happened was instead of a victory uniting people the victory has killed off the enemy for the black community and it feels like the job has been done. The majority of the blacks and I don't mean the leaders, the leaders evidently are still thinking of themselves as charismatic leaders with their 250 to 300 followers and they are all going off in their own directions to build their own kingdom. I don't think that it is hopeless, I think there is still a possibility of COME developing again and perhaps even developing a new crisis. If the mayor won't develop it they can develop it. There are plenty of issues that could be approached and attacked in Memphis. So it is not a total impossibility but what does concern me is that a number of community organizers have been in the city for the last 6 to 8 weeks. They have looked at the situation, they have talked with the people who are leading the black community and they have all come to the decision after maybe 3 to 5 days of talking that it is hopeless right now to talk in terms of community organization in Memphis. Still we need some more filtering out and something else to happen. So I don't know what direction it is going to take. It seems the only organization that is moving in any positive way is BACH, the black organizing project and they are tied down because of the lack of funds, but they are the people doing the community organizing right now, in the black community. They are doing an effective job but they could do a much more effective job if they had more money. There are different organizations in the country who are looking at them and saying should we give them money. Because it seems right now they are the only ones who are going to be able to organize.

Joan Beifuss- Well thank you so much for....(Tape End)