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## Rev. Richard C. Wells, Professor at Memphis Theological Seminary, 1972

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David Yellin: This is September 1, 1972, and we're with Reverend Dick Wells who, by his own admission, is a teacher of church history at the Memphis Theological Seminary, and sometimes preacher, and sometimes something else, which I will not mention at this point, but it will all come out in the tape; at 4241 Park Avenue; Carol Lynn Yellin and David Yellin, and this is for the sanitation strike project.

David Yellin: As we always start, Dick, just essentially -- just tell us a little about your own background, born, so on.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: Well, we, my family moved here in September of 1967, which put us at newcomers the year of the great event. We moved here from Long Island, where we had been for one year. Prior to that I was in graduate school at Princeton in New Jersey. Prior to that, a church in Louisiana, seminary in Texas. Went through high school and college in New Orleans, and was born and halfway raised in Indiana. So, I've got halftime North and South.

David Yellin: Denomination so that we get that.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: United Presbyterian Church, and I have been --that's my denomination, although I work for the Cumberland Presbyterian denomination as a teacher.

Carol Lynn Yellin: Oh, do you?

Rev. Richard C. Wells: Yeah. The seminary is Cumberland Presbyterian.

Carol Lynn Yellin: Just out of curiosity, what's the difference between Cumberland and United? Is Cumberland just purely a regional body?

Rev. Richard C. Wells: It is, and it is an early 19<sup>th</sup> Century, frontier revivalistic (muffled).

Carol Lynn Yellin: I had never heard of it until we moved here, but I gather that it's quite -- is it sizable, or is it?

Rev. Richard C. Wells: No, it's very -- it used to be sizable at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but a good man -- there was a union and many of the Cumberlands rejoined the Presbyterian church. The present Cumberland church is those that refused to go into the union.

David Yellin: Well, if we could...

Carol Lynn Yellin: Well, picking up more or less where we left off, but I did want you to get in your hometown in Indiana. You said Indiana, but it was?

Rev. Richard C. Wells: Logansport.

Carol Lynn Yellin: And you went to your undergraduate work was?

Rev. Richard C. Wells: At Tulane University in New Orleans.

Carol Lynn Yellin: Oh, at Tulane, right, right.

David Yellin: Yeah, he sort of went backwards so. We'll have to turn the tape on...

Rev. Richard C. Wells: And run it backwards.

David Yellin: Good. Well then you came to Memphis in '67?

Rev. Richard C. Wells: Right.

David Yellin: Early '67?

Rev. Richard C. Wells: September.

David Yellin: September '67, and for what, to go to the seminary?

Rev. Richard C. Wells: Yeah, to go to the seminary to teach.

Carol Lynn Yellin: And one other thing just to finish up all this autobiographical stuff, you said your family. Now your family also includes how many children and...? Or at that point.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: Right then three children.

Carol Lynn Yellin: And the three children were what ages then in '68?

Rev. Richard C. Wells: Oh, you're gonna...

Carol Lynn Yellin: Well, what ages are they now?

Rev. Richard C. Wells: Yeah, now I can do that. They're 12, 9, and 6 now.

Carol Lynn Yellin: So they were...

Rev. Richard C. Wells: 1, 4, and 7, five years ago.

David Yellin: Right, very good. Now, just again, this is really finishing the biographical material. Your immediate family from which you sprung, your parents, what was your dad?

Rev. Richard C. Wells: My dad was a basketball coach in Indiana.

David Yellin: Oh, no.

Carol Lynn Yellin: Right where basketball got started.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: Oh, he, yeah.

David Yellin: In high school?

Rev. Richard C. Wells: He was a high school basketball coach for 29 years in Indiana, went to Tulane and was there 18 years, so he coached for 47 years.

David Yellin: Oh, really?

Rev. Richard C. Wells: Which is longer than Adolf Rupp or Hank Iba, or any of the other ones.

David Yellin: So, he was really one of the perennials of basketball?

Rev. Richard C. Wells: That's right. Yeah, as a matter of fact he is in the Indiana Hall of Fame, and in the National Hall of Fame.

David Yellin: And he played I would assume.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: Yeah, he played. Yeah, I could tell you some stories about that, too.

David Yellin: Well that's another...

Rev. Richard C. Wells: That's another story, right.

David Yellin: Yeah, you get yourself your own grant.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: Yeah.

Carol Lynn Yellin: (muffled) the athletic department.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: But he, he's sort of been in basketball from the beginning, and still is.

David Yellin: And you go to the basketball games at Memphis State?

Rev. Richard C. Wells: Whenever I can.

David Yellin: Very good. I just want to keep up. Oh, okay. Wonderful. Now we're ready to come to Memphis. So, maybe it's not a bad idea, and please do whatever you want, but it just occurs to me -- can you recall what your first impressions of Memphis were as you came?

Carol Lynn Yellin: In the summer of '67?

Rev. Richard C. Wells: Yeah, there is no doubt about the fact that we felt that we crashed a cultural barrier in moving from Long Island here, and it's very interesting. You know in September and October we talked about the fact that one of the most obvious indicators of the change in culture was the way the garbage was collected between Memphis and Long Island, because on Long Island I had to tote it out and put it on the curb, and the man came by with the truck, and dumped it in, and there was none of this pushing little carts into your back yard.

David Yellin: Or on your head.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: Or on your head. And, to me it was a much more rational system there, whereas this was the plantation system in operation.

Carol Lynn Yellin: Oddly enough, Dick, I remember when we came here from Westchester County in New York back in '64. The thing that struck us most was how beautifully manicured all of the lawns and how beautifully trimmed all of the shrubberies everywhere were. And we realized that this was because there was just an abundance of very cheap labor.

David Yellin: Yard boys.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: This is right, and this is what -- I think this is right and this is interesting.

Carol Lynn Yellin: And you have very mixed feelings about it. I love for my lawn to look beautiful, and I love to have this available, but I don't like what all the thought that it entails.

David Yellin: In other words, you're not giving this as an afterthought. You said that it immediately struck you.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: This was one of the things that my wife, Dodie, and I talked about even before this started. This was one of the indicators of this whole plantation life system.

David Yellin: Okay, can you recall other things?

Rev. Richard C. Wells: Well, one little incidence. You come into town and you go and buy new fuses and light bulbs and get this and that and the other started, so everybody

knows you've just come into town, and the question that we found from everybody, "Oh, how do you like Memphis? Isn't Memphis a wonderful city?" and so on, and after about ten of these, playing it off. I've been here for two days, how do I know whether I like the place or not? Finally, some lady asked me, and of course she didn't know that everybody else had, and I said, "Lady, you know, I moved here from New York City, and I feel like I've moved to a small town." When she was saying, "Isn't it a wonderful city?" I said, "Well, you know it looks to me like it's a pretty small town." So, she caught the brunt of all of this hostility that had built up into me.

David Yellin: Of course you would not probably get what we got, and that is the prime question was, "Did you find your church home, yet?" Or did you?

Rev. Richard C. Wells: No, I didn't get that, but we did have more preachers call on us in a shorter length of time than we'd ever had in our life trying to get us to come to their church, and we quickly got one, just to keep them away. And as soon as we got one, they all stopped coming.

David Yellin: You got your house ministers.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: Yeah, right. They seemed to lose interest in us very quickly.

David Yellin: Word got around that you were...

Rev. Richard C. Wells: Located, yeah.

Carol Lynn Yellin: Let me ask something about that summer -- that was the summer that there was the rumor one day that the militants were coming in from Chicago. Were you here when that happened, or do you recall that, Dick?

Rev. Richard C. Wells: No, that happened before we got here.

Carol Lynn Yellin: That was some time in June or July.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: That's right, and we didn't get here until September, but I do remember people were still talking about it in September.

David Yellin: What we're asking, I think, is to see if you can recall the climate in which you came here, so it would certainly (muffled)?

Rev. Richard C. Wells: I was going to respond to that by my -- you know as people talked about that in September, well there was a great sigh of relief that we had made it through the summer of '67, and in good typical fashion, you know, aren't we good. We made it.

David Yellin: Because incidentally that was the bad summer around the country.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: That's right.

David Yellin: Detroit.

Carol Lynn Yellin: And Newark.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: And Memphis made it, and everybody was just so pleased with their own righteousness because...

Carol Lynn Yellin: You got a sense of complacency, or?

Rev. Richard C. Wells: Yes.

Carol Lynn Yellin: Or a smugness almost.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: Yeah, there was a -- that's right. I think that's right. There was a hint of fear, it had almost touched us through this rumor, but it didn't come through, and then we were able to laugh at it as a rumor, and we just have such good relations we don't have to worry about this now.

David Yellin: The way we recall essentially our own reaction to coming here was what we told our friends. You know, either wrote them, or if you go back the next year or six months later, or did the friends come through -- what would you have said about Memphis after, you know, not the second day, but after a few months of being here? How would you have described it if you did to your friends?

Rev. Richard C. Wells: I think that my thought is this -- our realization that we had moved to a town that had much more of a small town mentality than we thought for the size of it, and we were sort of surprised, knowing the size of Memphis that it wouldn't be quite so small townish. We hoped that it wouldn't, and our reaction was, "Gee, we wished that it was more of an urban center than we find it."

David Yellin: Yeah, what are some of the characteristics?

Rev. Richard C. Wells: Well, and the thing that I -- from the very beginning we used to joke about is the fact that Memphis is the largest city in Mississippi. It's a Mississippi small town, but it's larger than any other place in Mississippi. So that the small townishness, the very cliquishness of everybody, the tremendous provincialism of people.

Carol Lynn Yellin: Did you find this true among clergymen?

Rev. Richard C. Wells: Ooh, yeah, yeah.

Carol Lynn Yellin: I mean, did you notice a difference between say northern or East Coast?

Rev. Richard C. Wells: Yeah. One of the cultural barriers, which come in social and otherwise, is a religious cultural barrier, which at that time I described as oppressive, just like the heat. The religious world of Memphis.

Carol Lynn Yellin: Almost a weight to it.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: Yes, you can feel it.

Carol Lynn Yellin: You can almost feel it.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: You can feel it. And working in that area, and it's sort of syrupy. And, we were not very happy or pleased with that.

David Yellin: Can you explain that a little bit more to me?

Rev. Richard C. Wells: Yeah.

David Yellin: I mean I think I know what you mean, but I'm not quite sure.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: I think it's part of the southern cultural expression of religion is deep pietistic, individualistic kind of religion that's centered on prayer and salvation and these kind of concepts, that everybody's running around, "Are you saved?" kind of questions.

David Yellin: And that enters into almost your daily routine?

Rev. Richard C. Wells: Yeah, oh yeah.

David Yellin: And not because you, who are connected with that area, but everybody.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: Yeah, I think so. This is, if I can tell a story that came much later. Langdon Gilkey was here last year. He's a professor of theology at Chicago Theological Seminary. He came down and spoke, and spoke at the seminary, and one of the things that he said was that Christendom has gone every place, except Sicily and the American South. And my wife said, "Why did he include Sicily?" She knew the South, but why Sicily.

David Yellin: I guess that's what was the thing that we noticed, "Have you found your church home yet?" Is that, doesn't everybody have a church home?

Rev. Richard C. Wells: Yeah, this is right, and this idea of Christendom.

Carol Lynn Yellin: The assumption that we all think alike, it's -- we found this, that it, there just was no way to assume that anyone would take exception to the established viewpoint.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: Yeah, this is right. And also the idea in this that religion does influence all areas of life. In good American separation of church and state, yeah, but religion influences civilization. Church and state are separate, but religion and civilization aren't. And, our civilization is a religious as a Christian civilization, so that in all aspects, all that you do, and I guess the area that bothers me most on this is you catch this in all areas, but as soon as somebody finds out that you're a clergyman, why you can see them go, click. And that changes the direction of the conversation, and changes their attitude and their approach to you.

David Yellin: Does it become more guarded, or more reverent?

Rev. Richard C. Wells: Well, there are certain kind of things that might have been said previously that aren't said any more.

David Yellin: Because you are a clergyman?

Rev. Richard C. Wells: That's right. Dirty words and such are now left out.

Carol Lynn Yellin: And not because they are not used otherwise, simply that you are there the representation of religion, which is supposed to not approve of this.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: Yeah, if you don't say this, then dirty stories are allowable, but if you say, "Hey, well now (muffled)." Why, that just cuts all of this off, and there is an attitude of deference and respect.

David Yellin: Now, this you say is particular to this area as far as you can tell?

Rev. Richard C. Wells: Well, I think it's true of the whole South pretty much, yeah. You certainly don't catch this in the North.

David Yellin: Is it a matter of degree.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: No, as a matter of fact, I went in to get a typewriter repaired on Long Island and said, "You know, this is from the church." And the guy got very mad and thought I was asking for a discount, so this kind of story. What you catch when you identify yourself as a clergyman is hostility, as opposed to, which that was fine with me. I can stand that. It's this deference that I can't take.

Carol Lynn Yellin: Yes, sir; please, sir; yes, yes. (muffled)

Rev. Richard C. Wells: Well, and especially when you can see the hypocrisy of it, you know, of what is general, and then as soon as you're identified.

David Yellin: With Dick Wells, it's all right, but Rev. Richard C. Wells we'd better watch out.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: That's right.

David Yellin: Well, what about your relationship with the congregation? Didn't you begin with a congregation fairly soon, or when did you?

Rev. Richard C. Wells: Yeah, in fact sooner than I had thought when I went back and checked it, and I had been started preaching in this church in October, and I had thought it was about January, but checking back I see that I had really been there for a good part of the school year.

David Yellin: Have you named the church?

Rev. Richard C. Wells: This is Trinity Presbyterian Church, which is United Presbyterian Church in Frasier. It's up on Overton Crossing. It's a small church. I guess they have, oh 40 or 50 members total.

Carol Lynn Yellin: This is not 40 or 50 families?

Rev. Richard C. Wells: No, no. This is members on their own. That includes husbands and wives. It does not include children.

Carol Lynn Yellin: Now, when you had a congregation like this, was this as part of your work with the seminary that a small congregation like that would call for help from the seminary?

Rev. Richard C. Wells: No, as a matter of fact, their minister had left and they were looking for somebody to fill in while they went and found somebody else.

David Yellin: Why would such a church exist of that size? Did they break away from another one?

Rev. Richard C. Wells: No, that was formed in effect as a mission church from our largest church in town. It was an attempt to extend the United Presbyterian Church into the Frasier area.

David Yellin: I see.

Carol Lynn Yellin: What would be your largest church in town?

Rev. Richard C. Wells: Lindsay Memorial.

Carol Lynn Yellin: Lindsay Memorial.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: Yeah.

Carol Lynn Yellin: This would be -- I want you to just say just a couple of words, too,

about the comparison of United Presbyterian with the Presbyterian -- the southern. Like we used to say the southern Presbyterians. That would be Presbyterian Church of USA, isn't it?

Rev. Richard C. Wells: No. I am a member of the United Presbyterian Church USA, which the southerners refer to as the Northern Presbyterian Church. The Presbyterian Church US is what is commonly referred to as the Southern Presbyterian Church.

David Yellin: And that's Second Presbyterian.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: Second Presbyterian Idlewild.

Carol Lynn Yellin: And Billy Graham? Billy Graham's father-in-law.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: Yeah, his father-in-law, right, is Southern Presbyterian.

Carol Lynn Yellin: Southern Presbyterian.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: That's right. In this particular area they are vastly larger than we are.

Carol Lynn Yellin: This is what I...well what I'm getting to I guess is in an area like Frasier, would there be a Southern Presbyterian Church there, as opposed to the United Presbyterian?

Rev. Richard C. Wells: Yeah, there is also a Southern church.

Carol Lynn Yellin: And would it be much larger in an area like Frasier?

Rev. Richard C. Wells: It's larger, but not that much.

Carol Lynn Yellin: The larger churches would be the Baptists and the Methodists.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: Right, and especially in an area like Frasier. Presbyterians are a little too high up on the social scale to have too many in Frasier.

Carol Lynn Yellin: Getting awful close to those Episcopalians.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: That's right, that's right.

David Yellin: And then I guess just for the record, even though it has been mentioned other places, the Frasier area is largely populated with migrants from Mississippi, wouldn't that be correct?

Rev. Richard C. Wells: I would imagine, yeah.

Carol Lynn Yellin: And an almost totally white area.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: Yes, the churches certainly are.

David Yellin: Ok, now your relationship then with the church.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: Yeah, well I started out preaching there on a Sunday to Sunday basis, and being in the same connection in all systems -- the same presbytery, I was called to preach there under the official title of what we call stated supply, which meant that I was hired for a six-month period.

David Yellin: I didn't get the name.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: Stated supply.

David Yellin: Stated supply, right.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: S-T-A-T-E-D. It's a legal ecclesiastical term.

David Yellin: Yeah.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: And, that began January 1, so I was there from January through June.

David Yellin: But you had been preaching there from October.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: But I had been preaching there earlier, that's right, but then I had this official presbytery approved relationship with them for the first six months of 1968, and what I had done from the very beginning there, being small, was to preach a variation of what I would call a dialogue sermon, which is I would talk for 10 minutes, and then for 10 minutes anybody could respond to anybody, so that there was open discussion on the topic for the day, and we had, depending on the topic, more or less discussion, and everybody seemed to be happy with this system. As we went along, the strain on the relationship came at the point that I was seen by members of the church on television, standing behind Rabbi Wax when he pounded on Mayor Loeb's desk.

David Yellin: Before we get to that...

Rev. Richard C. Wells: What I'm trying to get, you see, is that there is a very cordial relationship.

David Yellin: Yes, that's what I wanted to... Now, just again to complete my understanding anyway, your relationship with that church was as a visiting preacher each Sunday. You were not necessarily called on, or were you for spiritual guidance the rest of the week?

Rev. Richard C. Wells: No, I just went there on Sundays.

David Yellin: So that your relationship with the congregation was one of a dialogue, and everything they said to you they said almost in the open.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: Yes.

Carol Lynn Yellin: Did you do anything like funerals, or weddings, or that kind of thing?

Rev. Richard C. Wells: I would have, except that there were none of either.

Carol Lynn Yellin: It was such a small group.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: That's right. And they were a middle-aged group, so we had neither marriages nor funerals.

David Yellin: It was status.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: Yes.

Carol Lynn Yellin: Quo.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: It really was quo.

David Yellin: Okay, now that's a splendid.

Carol Lynn Yellin: I have one other question now to lead us back to the -- getting into Mayor Loeb and the sanitation strike. You were here during that campaign. Do you recall any thoughts as you saw the issues that were developed in the local mayor's campaign in the fall of 1967?

Rev. Richard C. Wells: Oh, gee. I don't remember.

Carol Lynn Yellin: When Mayor Loeb had the signs that said, "Be Proud Again," and Mayor Ingram's.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: Well, we were aware of the fact that we didn't think that was going to make Memphis proud, but that is coming into the midst of the campaign we were aware that Loeb was not our man.

Carol Lynn Yellin: You were?

David Yellin: Yeah, all right. Now, that's interesting. How come? Who told you what, or?

Rev. Richard C. Wells: Well, I think just from what he said, and I don't remember what he said, but the issues as they came out, which at this point I wouldn't have the foggiest what the issues of that campaign were today.

David Yellin: But you kind of remember the ambience of Loeb?

Rev. Richard C. Wells: Yeah. That certainly, in 1968 we couldn't vote because at that point you know we still had to be here for a year before we could vote. So, we were not voting then. But I don't even remember who all was running, but I think that we probably would have been Ingram people if we'd have gotten to vote.

Carol Lynn Yellin: If you'd have had to make a choice.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: If we'd gotten to vote, yeah.

Carol Lynn Yellin: Now, I want to go now, if you're ready, to go to the strike itself. And two things: do you recall your first knowledge that there was a sanitation strike? And I'll get to the second thing later.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: Yeah. I don't remember exactly when I heard, but I remember that right at the beginning of, I guess vaguely it begins to come back of the difficulty, and the difficulty over what the exact story was, but where I remember was that when the issue broke open they called for a mass meeting when the first negotiations broke down. I think people went to the mayor's office or something like this, and got nowhere and left and went back to Clayborn Temple and said we're going to call a mass meeting of people supporting this, and with that point is where I got -- put myself in the system.

Carol Lynn Yellin: Well, this was my second question. I was trying to recall if you had been involved as early as that first week in some of the things -- when Reverend James Jordan called a meeting at the Beale Street Baptist Church. That was the end of the first week. You didn't get into it that early did you?

Rev. Richard C. Wells: No, no. I didn't go to that.

David Yellin: That and the next thing was when the mayor met with the clergy in town. Were you there, Sunday night?

Rev. Richard C. Wells: No, no, now not that meeting,

David Yellin: That all night meeting.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: Yeah, that was with Memphis Minister's Association.

Carol Lynn Yellin: With Rabbi Wax.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: With Rabbi Wax, and I believe that Paul Tudor Jones was there.

David Yellin: Now are you not a member of the association, or were you not?

Rev. Richard C. Wells: I was at that point, but the ministers that were called into that were the top echelon.

Carol Lynn Yellin: Men with large congregations for the most part.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: That's right, yes.

David Yellin: So in a sense you were not invited.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: I was not invited, that's right.

Carol Lynn Yellin: Then really when you came into it, the formation of COME -- what was in essence the COME group, or was this more looking for white support to help out the COME group.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: Gee, now, I don't remember the exact chronology of where COME was formed, but.

Carol Lynn Yellin: Well now, COME was formed, let's see February...

David Yellin: After the 23<sup>rd</sup>, it was the 24<sup>th</sup> or so.

Carol Lynn Yellin: 22<sup>nd</sup>. February 22<sup>nd</sup> was the day that Fred Davis public works committee met in City Hall, and they ended up sitting in...

David Yellin: Then they called the meeting the next day.

Carol Lynn Yellin: ...and here they filled this. February 18 was the day of the St. Mary's where all of the Ministers Alliance met, and those talks broke down, and then the strikers and their sympathizers went to the city council for the public works committee hearing, and were promised that there would be a vote the next day, and they went the next day to the auditorium, and the city council announced that they were not voting, walked out, and they then marched, and that was the first disorder on main Street, and mace was used if you recall.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: Yeah, that's right. Yeah, yeah.

Carol Lynn Yellin: And that night people got together, and the next day was the really the formation of COME. Was that February 24?

Rev. Richard C. Wells: All right, that's right. And that was through the calling of this mass meeting, yeah. And that's where...

Carol Lynn Yellin: And that was mostly black ministers, though.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: Oh, yes.

Carol Lynn Yellin: So you really were, as a white minister, joining with mostly black ministers at that point?

Rev. Richard C. Wells: That's right. Yeah, as I remember, there were very few white ministers.

David Yellin: How were you called? How were you notified, or what happened?

Rev. Richard C. Wells: Well, I happen to know Henry Starks, and I don't know whether he spoke to me, or I spoke to him, you know, whether he said, "Hey, we're having a meeting, why don't you come?" or I said, "I understand you're having a meeting, where is it?" But either way I got the information from him, and so I went to the first mass meeting, and then went, I think to almost all of them if not.

David Yellin: Do you recall that first mass meeting? Any details about it? Anything stand in your?

Carol Lynn Yellin: Where was that?

David Yellin: At Mason Temple I think.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: I don't remember where the first one was. The second one was held at St. Paul's Baptist Church. I think in that there was Bill Aldridge, and Julian White, and Dick Moon, and I remember Dick Moon was there because he borrowed \$5 from me to put in the collection plate, and never paid it back, Dick.

Carol Lynn Yellin: This is the kind of little detail that we want to preserve.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: And Colvin Baird, and myself, and Malcolm Blackburn, and I don't think there were any other whites there.

David Yellin: At this time, Bob Watson and what's the fellow who married Chuck, Walters.

Carol Lynn Yellin: Carl Walters.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: They were not there yet, no, not to my knowledge they were not.

Carol Lynn Yellin: Who is Julian White?

Rev. Richard C. Wells: Julian White was the pastor of St. Andrews Southern

Presbyterian Church down in Whitehaven.

Carol Lynn Yellin: Good heavens.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: He left at the end of the year.

Carol Lynn Yellin: By request?

Rev. Richard C. Wells: He was forced out, yeah. There is no doubt about that.

Carol Lynn Yellin: Do you know that that's a name that has completely escaped me, and it must be a story that we don't know about.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: Yeah, and Julian was on the Church and Society Committee of the Southern Presbyterian Church, of which Bill Aldridge was chairman.

David Yellin: I met him. He was the minister of Taylor...

Rev. Richard C. Wells: Blair's church, that's right.

David Yellin: And when we interviewed Taylor Blair he came in.

Carol Lynn Yellin: Is that right?

David Yellin: As a matter of fact, yes, right. I knew I had heard that name.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: Yeah, that's right. I had forgotten that Taylor Blair was in his congregation.

Carol Lynn Yellin: Well this is the kind of thing, the enumerable personal crises that were going on. It must have been a personal crisis for a man like that in Whitehaven.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: Yeah, I'll get back to it, but my (muffled) recollect on this -- if I had been pastor of this church in Frasier rather than been at the seminary, there would have been no doubt that I would have been out and gone also. So, I can...

David Yellin: Right. Do you remember your first confrontation about that?

Rev. Richard C. Wells: At the church? Yeah. I would say nothing at the church.

Carol Lynn Yellin: They were unaware that you were...

Rev. Richard C. Wells: I was doing anything. I was going to the mass meetings, which of course you know went on for some time.

David Yellin: Kit never came up during your dialogues, or you talked about other

things?

Rev. Richard C. Wells: That's right. At this point I was keeping this out of it. The first time it appeared was when they saw me on television, and somebody made a comment.

David Yellin: Then this was then after the assassination.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: No, no, no, no, no, no, because the ministers went down to the mayor's office before Martin Luther King came to down.

David Yellin: Oh, one other time. No, I don't recall that.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: Ok, I think now and I don't have this exactly straight, but there was that first meeting with the higher ups of the Memphis Ministers Association, which immediately broke down, or almost immediately, and then that sort of left it out. Now then I came and started dealing with the ministers associations, and you know, about 15 or 20 clergymen were showing up, and when this thing got started there were about 200 ministers. And we met at St. Mary's Episcopal Church to decide what we were going to do, and there were at least, must have been 200 ministers there. A large number of black ministers there as well.

David Yellin: Now, excuse me, when was this meeting we're talking about? Early on or later?

Rev. Richard C. Wells: Yeah, it was early on. Yeah, I'm sorry I can't give you a date on it. Because Frank McRae was there, and he says, "Look, I know Henry Loeb, I grew up with him." And Frank said, "Let's just go down and talk to Henry." Well, we got into a discussion of whether it was dignified for ministers to march or not, and so we decided we would not march to the mayor's office, and we couldn't even walk, and there was some discussion about whether we would stroll or not, and we finally decided to proceed by any means that you wanted to go.

David Yellin: But get to the mayor's office.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: But get to the mayor's office.

David Yellin: Now, not a committee, but a committee of the whole?

Rev. Richard C. Wells: Yeah, anybody who wanted to come, and Paul Tudor Jones stood over at the side shaking his head and says, "They're really not going to go are they? They're really not going to go."

Carol Lynn Yellin: Meaning he didn't want them to go?

Rev. Richard C. Wells: He did not want us to go, yes. He -- well, I don't know how

many went, but a goodly number, and that year of course Rabbi Wax was president of the minister's association, so he -- we went double file, and he led one, and Henry Starks led the other one. He's the president of the black minister's association. But going before them was good 'ole Dean Dimmick, carrying his church's cross, and he led the procession down the street. We weren't out of that church and turned and going down the street until there was a police car there. Now, I don't know who called, but somebody called, and we were accompanied by the police, but we proceeded from St. Mary's church down to the mayor's office, and it was to make a formal statement to the mayor, which Bill Aldridge...

David Yellin: Had written?

Rev. Richard C. Wells: ...had written and read. That did absolutely nothing, and I guess Rabbi Wax, seeing that...

David Yellin: Excuse me, this did happen after the assassination.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: Was that after the assassination? Okay.

David Yellin: Yes, yes. We have film on it.

Carol Lynn Yellin: I think the -- but also the discussion though. There was an earlier. I just -- Frank McRae's story that there was a discussion and inability to decide to march that afternoon, and so the march was postponed and it was scheduled for that Friday morning anyway, but in the interim you had met on Tuesday or Wednesday, and then postponed it because you weren't able to march.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: Right, that's right.

Carol Lynn Yellin: And then the assassination (muffled).

Rev. Richard C. Wells: That's right, that's right. Of course, you know, I have in my mind that everything culminated with the assassination, and I forget that the strike went on.

Carol Lynn Yellin: But you are quite right, that the real discussion -- the feeling that the ministers could have some effect to keep the second march from happening. This was in that week between the first march and the assassination, and the feeling that would the strike be settled, but then there would be no necessity for a second march, and that would be the best way to start settling it.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: This is right, and then it got postponed, and the assassination did happen, and I think that was probably one of the reasons that really led several men to go down that might not have gone anyway, and Bill read his statement, and Rabbi Wax had his words, and still nothing happened, and Dick Moon in the back of the room said, "This is the same old runaround we've gotten from the mayor from the beginning, and that

began his (muffled).

David Yellin: And if you're interested, you are on film, which we have as part of our collection.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: Yeah, well, if you've got that film that's right because...

David Yellin: Yes, we have that film. And I remember seeing you.

Carol Lynn Yellin: And that's what your congregation saw then, was just what we have.

David Yellin: You are in the back, but you are quite clear.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: That's right, but they saw me, I guess in the film clip then that was shown on the first march, because they knew about this before the assassination.

Carol Lynn Yellin: So you did...I was going to ask.

David Yellin: Did you march on the 28<sup>th</sup>?

Rev. Richard C. Wells: Yeah, I marched in both of the mass marches.

Carol Lynn Yellin: Well, now, let me go back further. You had not marched in any of the daily marches?

Rev. Richard C. Wells: I had not been in any of the daily marches, no.

Carol Lynn Yellin: And let me ask -- had, we have mentioned Dr. Colvin Baird.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: Baird.

David Yellin: Spelled?

Rev. Richard C. Wells: B-A-I-R-D. And now he was to have been here for this taping this afternoon, and we hope to get to him later, but did he enter into the events about the same time you did? Yeah, he and I agreed to go in to (muffled), go to the mass meetings as they started.

Carol Lynn Yellin: And his position, I just should...

Rev. Richard C. Wells: He is Professor of Sociology and Religion at the seminary.

Carol Lynn Yellin: At the seminary.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: And we're colleagues, and both like-minded and committed on this and go together and said hey, this is kind of thing to do.

Carol Lynn Yellin: So did he march on the 28<sup>th</sup>?

Rev. Richard C. Wells: He had marched on both marches, both times.

David Yellin: Now both marches being the 28<sup>th</sup> and April 8<sup>th</sup> after the assassination.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: Yeah.

Carol Lynn Yellin: Did your -- we're hoping that your wife will be able to joint us shortly, and we will get to her experiences, but I would like to know did she march in the March 28<sup>th</sup> march or the...

Rev. Richard C. Wells: The April 8<sup>th</sup> march.

Carol Lynn Yellin: She marched it?

Rev. Richard C. Wells: Yeah.

Carol Lynn Yellin: So, when you marched on March 28, just you -- did you and Dr. Baird march together, or did you join in another group?

Rev. Richard C. Wells: He and I and Fred Davis, and his pastor, Wesley Holmes, Beulah Baptist Church. And I do believe part of the way we walked with Reverend Dinkins, who was then the president of Owens College.

Carol Lynn Yellin: Charles Dinkins?

Rev. Richard C. Wells: Yes.

David Yellin: Yes, yes, yes. We have that film.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: And, we walked up the street and through the broken glass, and...

David Yellin: Do you recall your experience in that the 28<sup>th</sup>?

Rev. Richard C. Wells: Ooh, yeah, because I remember -- well, we were... What was the street we came out? Hernando?

Carol Lynn Yellin: Hernando from Clayborn Temple.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: That's right, and then on to Main, and down. And the glass breaking started on Hernando, and then continued down Main.

Carol Lynn Yellin: It had started before you ever went around Beale.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: Around the corner.

Carol Lynn Yellin: Let's see you went from Hernando to Beale, and then to Main Street. It started on Beale.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: No, it was on Beale. It started on Beale, that's right. And my recollection was in hearing the sound of these giant plate glass breaking and shattering, I says, "That's the sound of anarchy." That was my thought then, I remember.

Carol Lynn Yellin: How far back were you in the march?

Rev. Richard C. Wells: Oh, I guess we were about two blocks back from where King was leading the march.

Carol Lynn Yellin: Had you seen him arrive that morning?

Rev. Richard C. Wells: Yes, stood right on the corner and leaned on the cement corner marker as he came up in a car and got out. Of course everybody was screaming and shouting and jumping up and down, and trying to get to see him. And there really was pretty much total chaos at that point and nothing was organized, and of course...

David Yellin: Were you frightened any?

Rev. Richard C. Wells: Not there. I was at other times, and I can get to that, the points at which...

David Yellin: All right. We're ready to go again. Carol Lynn has left to do some carpooling. And we're on the 28<sup>th</sup> march.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: Right, and I'm marching, coming up Beale toward Main, and I think it came as a surprise to those of us who were not involved in it, that this really was going on, but we continued on the march and walked, oh it must have been four or five blocks on, up Hernando and onto Main where the march finally was stopped. But there were a good half-dozen blocks or more, in which windows were broken all along.

David Yellin: They had been broken, or were they also in the process of being broken?

Rev. Richard C. Wells: Well, they were being broken as we walked. They were falling on each side of us.

David Yellin: How were they broken? Did you see any of it?

Rev. Richard C. Wells: Yeah I think that one of the things that was being used the people were carrying picket signs, and they had torn off the wooden.

David Yellin: They took off the sign and kept the wood.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: That's right, and through that -- and that seemed to be the main tool in breaking the windows. I remember just stopping and watching and hear a window crashed, and several people piled into the store, and grabbed things (muffled) and came running out. I'm standing there watching. I almost got knocked down by these people coming out of this store, and turned around to find out the people that I was walking with, man they were long up the street. And I had to go and catch up with them.

David Yellin: Were you wearing your clerical garb, or?

Rev. Richard C. Wells: No, no, just regular everyday clothes. I don't even know if I -- I guess I had on a suit. We got up onto Main, and word came that the march had been stopped and everybody was being turned back, and to go back to Clayborn Temple. We were standing right in the middle of Main, and I said to Wesley (muffled), "You know, we ought to get out of the middle of the street." And he sort of looked at me and said, "Well, why?" And a gas canister hit and rolled past us and he didn't ask any more questions, and we got out of the middle of the street, and went over and jumped in a doorway, and filled it up, and the first line of police rushed past us as we stood in the doorway.

David Yellin: On foot?

Rev. Richard C. Wells: They were on foot, yeah. It was a (muffled) across the street with their hard hats and clubs.

David Yellin: Were they the sheriff, or the police, do you remember?

Rev. Richard C. Wells: I don't remember. I think it was the police, but I, you know I wouldn't swear to it. And then with that, and obviously that the march was finished, we just proceeded to walk up the rest the way up Main Street and walked up Taylor.

David Yellin: Away from the march?

Rev. Richard C. Wells: Yeah, and that's right. We walked on up Main Street, and of course Main Street was flooded with people who had poured out of the stores and buildings to look down Main Street, and it was interesting all of the rumors that you could hear going on, and everybody seemed to know exactly everything that had happened down the street from which we had come, and we didn't know everything that had happened, we couldn't figure out how possibly they could know a thing since they hadn't been down there. But they were all anyway saying they did.

David Yellin: Do you remember some of them? They seem rather obvious, but.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: Oh, you know, assassination reports, and fire, and arson, and looting, and...

David Yellin: Who was assassinated?

Rev. Richard C. Wells: I think that they were talking about King had been killed.

David Yellin: By his own people, I assume?

Rev. Richard C. Wells: Yeah, I would imagine. And so that sort of ended that march.

David Yellin: How did you get back to your home, or starting point? Did you have to...

Rev. Richard C. Wells: Took a bus from downtown up. I don't even remember how we got downtown to that. But I do remember just taking a bus back uptown.

David Yellin: Now then, if we can, and please feel free to, but I'm trying to stir your memory, and halt it. The 28<sup>th</sup> was a Thursday, 29<sup>th</sup> Friday, 30<sup>th</sup> Saturday, and the 1<sup>st</sup> of April -- no it would be the 31<sup>st</sup> of March was on Sunday. Now, you were scheduled to preach on the 31<sup>st</sup> at your church. What happened there?

Rev. Richard C. Wells: I guess that's probably right at the point where they really found out that I was involved in all of this, and there was no outward statement. There was a definite coolness.

David Yellin: Something you felt, nobody said a word.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: Yes. Nobody said a word, but there was a definite coolness whereas before I had always been quite welcome up to this point. I think if I can, just while my memory's got it come back on this, because the first march that was disrupted, Colvin Baird and I had been going to the mass meetings, and so there were not a great number of whites that had been going, and going frequently. Our appearance, we were recognized as people who were coming all the way through, and while we didn't always know a lot of people, the sanitation workers were able to recognize us, and there was always friendly exchange and greeting. And also there started to be meetings at the union hall, and we went to these. And I remember the day before the strike there was a meeting, and we went down and went to several of these.

David Yellin: The day before the march is what you...

Rev. Richard C. Wells: Yeah, the day before the march we went to the meeting. And I remember saying something. We always were invited up on the platform, always invited to speak, and I said I just came by to let you know that I got my walking shoes on, I'm going to be with you tomorrow, this kind of thing, which of course from them always brought great response. The march was disrupted, and Colvin and I went back and our feeling, and the general feeling was somehow of defeat. We had been defeated. And there was -- we got back (muffled) and I guess we got in his car and we just drove around

town, not going any place, not really talking to each other, but just...

David Yellin: That late morning and early afternoon.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: Yeah, that's right. It was in the afternoon, and we started talking, and, "Well, gee now where do we go from here?" And I said, "Well, the one thing that we do is we go back to the union hall tomorrow to the meeting." Which we did, and the people were using the Firestone Hall, and I tell this because to me this was one of the most moving experiences of the whole affair, to me. And, you come into the main entrance into the main hall, and you come in at the side, then you have to walk along the side up to the front platform. We'd done this several times, and as I say, the garbage men knew us, and we'd spoken to them many times before, but anyway on this, the day after the march was disrupted, we went back and came in and there was a feeling there as you came in of the feeling that we had, that we had been defeated the day before. But we came in the side, and just stood there a minute, and then slowly moved up the side, and as the garbage men saw us, they began standing in silence. And, just as we moved up, and they looked and would see us and stand, and somebody would turn to see what was going on. By the time we got to the front of the platform, every one of them was standing in silence. We had come back in the midst of their defeat, and we took it as our defeat also, which I say.

David Yellin: Not a word, and did not applaud, or -- no applause or anything like that.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: Yeah, no, which was, as I say, probably in the hour of defeat was the most moving experience of all. Extremely, extremely emotional kind of experience.

David Yellin: Can you recall how you came out of it, or what...?

Rev. Richard C. Wells: I think that, well we were welcomed at the head platform immediately and brought up, and were asked to speak again. And I don't remember there exactly, but we are not done, we are not finished, and we are still with you, and we're going to be with you -- this kind of thing. And from that, then that broke up with -- they went back to the single-file on the sidewalk marches. They were not allowed to have a mass...

David Yellin: That very day.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: That very day. Going out, we had to figure out what we were going to do, and some people from the National Council of Churches had come in town. They were going to have a meeting. They had been in for the march the day before. And, so by design, Colvin went with them, and they went out to Westminster House, Dick Moon's residence, and Colvin said they closed the doors, and pulled the shutters, and (muffled) hid out at Memphis State while the march was going on down at Main Street. We were not very pleased with that. But he went with them, and I said it's necessary that there be a white face in the sidewalk march today. And so I went down,

and Taylor Blair was there and myself, and only two at the most three. There were not more than four or five whites in the whole march.

David Yellin: Had Taylor Blair been at the union meeting?

Rev. Richard C. Wells: Yes.

David Yellin: So you and he went down together?

Rev. Richard C. Wells: That's right, that's right. And this was the day that they brought in the reserve unit, and it patrolled the street and supposedly it was supposed to be protecting us, but it was the armored carriers, and the jeeps and the so on, and they all were equipped with machine guns, but the machine guns weren't pointing away from us, but were pointing toward us.

David Yellin: And the bayonets.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: Yeah, and there were the men lining the streets with the bayonets, and that was a point I imagine that I was most afraid.

David Yellin: You really were?

Rev. Richard C. Wells: Yeah. I was scared to death. I was in Korea, and I know what a machine gun can do. It's a very indiscriminate weapon. You don't just shoot it and hit who you shoot at, but you hit everybody.

David Yellin: There was some fear of something that indicated that they might fire upon your group?

Rev. Richard C. Wells: I figured if there was any kind of disruption that some trigger-happy redneck teenager might pull the trigger, which parenthetically Colvin and I talked about it then, and I would continue to say we were never afraid in the midst of the blacks. Our greatest fear was always in the presence of the military and the police, and we were afraid of them. At all points round and about that we were -- we were down at the Mason Temple in the midst of that black ghetto by ourselves at night, and were never afraid.

David Yellin: While you're at it, Dick, it would seem to me, suppose I asked you, which I am, to describe the sanitation workers?

Rev. Richard C. Wells: Oh my.

David Yellin: Even in this context of violence.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: Well, I guess my greatest feeling was not pity, and I don't mean this out of pity, but was their tremendous helplessness, and you run into these men who

are uneducated, and poor to a level that I can't imagine, and you look at them, and many of them had physical infirmities of one kind or another, really handicapped kind of people, and yet in meeting with them and going through these meetings and always trying to talk to them, they were just as friendly and appreciative of having a white person there, and it was -- there was some of the paternalism there, you know, here's the great white man who has come down. No doubt about that.

David Yellin: So that the whole role of paternalism was increased by their own concept of what -- you know, or the whole concept of paternalism was increased by their role in it.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: That is the -- there was paternalism on their side as well as on the opposition's side, and it was very difficult to try and overcome that.

David Yellin: I mean to try to act like an equal to them would be made exceedingly difficult.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: Yeah, there was just no way, and all you could do was to be with them and shake hands and my understanding, which may or may not be correct, because one of the things that we made sure we did was to shake their hands when we spoke to them.

David Yellin: Right, physically.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: That's right, physical contact, and it was our understanding that there were some of the black clergy who would not shake their hands.

David Yellin: Would you have a comment on this in the same regard relating to the police action that went back to the 23<sup>rd</sup>, for these men? I mean it occurs to me, and this is not being objective or neutral, but the police were acting as if these were any group of men, and I guess their premise is that any group becomes a mob, and any mob then becomes subject to violence. But would these men be capable of this kind of violence?

Rev. Richard C. Wells: They never gave that kind of appearance, and this is why I described them in terms of hopeless. They didn't seem even to be able to carry their own cause well.

David Yellin: They didn't have the energy for violence (muffled).

Rev. Richard C. Wells: Right, and I remember as that march started that there was a great influx of people around me, and that's where the window breaking took place.

David Yellin: You're talking about the 28<sup>th</sup>?

Rev. Richard C. Wells: The 28<sup>th</sup>, that's right, that these were not sanitation workers. Now who they were, I don't know.

David Yellin: Yeah, well that's been ascertained many ways, by many people that they were the outside influence, young people and so on.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: Yeah, they obviously were young.

David Yellin: Okay, if you want to go on. You went the next day, you went on the march, and you were -- that's when you said you were frightened by the guns pointing at you, but you went the whole way?

Rev. Richard C. Wells: Yes.

David Yellin: To City Hall?

Rev. Richard C. Wells: We went to City Hall and back. Now we didn't go in City Hall. We marched down the east side of Main Street, and crossed over at City Hall, and just came back.

David Yellin: And there were of course people on the sidewalk, and...

Rev. Richard C. Wells: Yeah. They sort of stood and watched.

David Yellin: And you could have been recognized there very easily.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: Yeah, that's right. I remember walking along, and I didn't see anybody, and I really hadn't said anything and on the way back the command jeep pulled up and just was smoothing along at walking pace where I was, and I spoke to the colonel in the jeep, and he looked at me, and I said what's your unit colonel and he turned to his driver and they drove on, and he never responded to me.

David Yellin: Oh, really? Could this be the same colonel that you meet later?

Rev. Richard C. Wells: I don't think so. It might have been, but I don't think so, which may be good to go to that point. Now that is Palm Sunday.

David Yellin: And that is the 31<sup>st</sup>?

Rev. Richard C. Wells: No, that's the day of National Mourning.

David Yellin: Yeah, so we're skipping a Sunday.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: Yeah.

David Yellin: Did anything happen the 31<sup>st</sup> when you say you first noticed the coolness.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: Yeah, now then at this point I think that we began some

discussion at the church. Now do you want me -- I can pick up there and go.

David Yellin: Yeah, please.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: And you can tell me how much of this material here you want me to use, but one incident that Sunday was in the dialogue and we were talking about this, and I think my theme was the necessity for reconciliation rather than taking either side -- the thing that we need to do is to get the garbage strike over.

David Yellin: Now, this is the 31<sup>st</sup> of March?

Rev. Richard C. Wells: This is the 31<sup>st</sup>, yeah. And so I made this point, and then there was some discussion. I don't remember exactly the discussion, but one lady who I found out later had a plaque in her living room wall that was given to her from Mayor Loeb for her contribution on helping to get him elected as mayor, said, "But you must realize that the mayor is praying about this, and trying to get the strike over." And I said, "I would believe that, but you have to realize that the Reverend H. Ralph Jackson is also praying about this." And she said, "Touche," and I never saw her again.

David Yellin: Really?

Rev. Richard C. Wells: She never came back, yeah.

David Yellin: She conceded your point.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: Yeah, she conceded my point, and that ended it.

David Yellin: At that point she conceded her departure, yes.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: Yeah.

David Yellin: Yeah, yeah. It's very interesting.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: And then...

David Yellin: Did anyone ask you though, Dick, at that time why are you involved? What's your position?

Rev. Richard C. Wells: No, no, no.

David Yellin: It was assumed that they were all against settling the strike. Would you say that?

Rev. Richard C. Wells: Oh, yes. I don't think that I have anybody arguing my cause, or on my side of the issue at all. And this was true to some extent at school, except that there were some black students there, but in the midst of all this also, and I can't give you

specific dates and so on, this obviously became a topic of discussion in the classroom, and I had students who got so mad about it that they got up and walked out of class on me.

David Yellin: Really?

Rev. Richard C. Wells: And I became known from that point as the radical professor at school because of my stand here.

David Yellin: What stance did the black students take, if any?

Rev. Richard C. Wells: To my knowledge, every one of the black students participated in some of the mass meetings, some of the marches.

David Yellin: I mean in your class discussions.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: They would articulate their position. As a matter of fact, in class I would attempt to allow them to articulate rather than me, so that it became a student dialogue, rather than the students having to argue against a professor, because I was trying to use the thing as a learning experience and not just sitting here knocking loggerheads over the issue, and trying to allow them, everybody the chance to see that the other side had some position.

David Yellin: Well now, if you could, I mean please tell it your way. It's not necessary we go chronologically, but now we have left Sunday the 31<sup>st</sup> -- the rest of the week did you just spend as all of us did?

Rev. Richard C. Wells: I think so. I don't remember from that week, and of course that's the week of the second march, as I remember.

David Yellin: Well, that's the week of the attempt, or when Dr. King came into town, and then.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: That's right, and he was -- and he was...

David Yellin: He came in the 3<sup>rd</sup>, which was Wednesday, and then he was killed on the 4<sup>th</sup>.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: Right, and Colvin Baird called me at suppertime and...

David Yellin: That's how you found out?

Rev. Richard C. Wells: That's how I found out.

David Yellin: He called you at suppertime, excuse me, go ahead.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: And I said, "Gee, you know, we were supposed to go down to Mason Temple for a strategy meeting, and what are we going to do?" We decided to go ahead and go, even though there was a curfew called. And so he and I went down to Mason Temple. There was no meeting, it had been called off, but we went all the way down.

David Yellin: At what time would this be, about 7?

Rev. Richard C. Wells: About 7, yes. The thing that I remember about that is driving down, although there were not a lot of cars on the street. There was a great deal of tension about being on the road, and you would stop at a stop light and a car would pull up beside you and both of you would look to see who the other one was, and especially now as we got further down.

David Yellin: Were you ever stopped?

Rev. Richard C. Wells: No, and right at the corner of Crump where you turn onto Mason there were two police cars that were picking some black young men up and jamming them in the police cars, and we had turned the corner and were just right behind them, and they never came over to our car at all, and they drove on, and we drove on and went on down to Mason Temple, found out there was no meeting, and so we went home.

David Yellin: And then the next day the 5<sup>th</sup> is when you went down to the church and then marched as you had described earlier.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: Yeah, that's right, and that was the memorial march.

David Yellin: No that was when the ministers went down to the mayor's office.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: Yeah, okay, that's right. All right, because I don't remember these dates, or you know which time I marched first. That's right.

David Yellin: Well you went down, and that's when Rabbi Wax spoke (muffled). And then when it broke up, did you go anywhere or?

Rev. Richard C. Wells: I think that we walked back up to St. Mary's because that's where everybody had parked their cars, and we just came on back.

David Yellin: Maybe you might help clarify something that I remember we heard from a couple sources, John Aldridge, and Frank McRea and so on about the note or a resolution that Bob (muffled) and Walters and a couple others. Were you involved in that at all?

Rev. Richard C. Wells: I don't remember that. I mean vaguely I remember it, but I couldn't...

David Yellin: We're still trying to trace somebody who has a copy of it, and we can't. Ok, well why don't you go to your famous Palm Sunday.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: Event. Yeah, this is going to church to preach on Palm Sunday.

David Yellin: Just for the record, that's April 7<sup>th</sup>.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: Right. I drove up the length of Hollywood to get up to Frasier, so I came by Coca-Cola Company, by the National Guard Armory, and stopped at the stop light, and whichever came first, I saw that the flags were at full mast at the national armory. This is the day of national mourning by presidential proclamation. Jeep pulls out, and the colonel in the jeep with driver, and I rolled my window down and he anticipated me with a cheery, "good morning." And I didn't even say, "good morning." I said, "Colonel, why aren't your flags at half-mast?" His attitude and tone changed very abruptly, and, "Well, why? What makes the difference?" And so I explained the day of national mourning, (muffled). He says, "Well, I thought that was yesterday." I said, "No, it's today." The light changed and he huffed and puffed and drove off. Well, I drove up Hollywood to Union Extended, and just down the block is the seminary. So I drove down to the seminary and went inside, and called the police on the telephone. The first man I get to I tell him my story, leaving out the colonel, just that I'd been by the armory and that the flags are at full mast, and today is a day of national mourning and they're supposed to be at half mast, and I always got a very hostile, "Well, so what." And so my response was, "Well, I'm simply trying to avoid an incident in Memphis." And, "Oh, well yes. We're all concerned about that." And he referred me to somebody else.

David Yellin: Again, you had announced who you were.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: That's right. I told him who I was, and where I was going, in was on my way to church and I was going to preach, and I just happened to be driving by. I was referred to five different people, and the fifth one finally was the Army Captain who was liaison with the police, and I told him...

David Yellin: Army Captain, or National Guard Captain.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: Well, he was National Guard Captain, but as opposed to a police captain.

David Yellin: Yes, sir.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: I gave him the same story that I gave everybody else, and I was getting tired of the ritual by this time, but anyway, and he said, you know, "What do you want me to do about it." "Well, I'm trying to avoid an incident." "Well, let me see what I can do." And again I said, "That's all I can ask." So, this being the last person I am referred to I hang up and get back in my car and drive up to church and have service and come back, and coming back by the flags at the National Guard Armory were at

half-mast, which I take as my one personal achievement in the sanitation strike.

David Yellin: You're a flag dropper.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: Right. I rally around the flag with the boys.

David Yellin: Yeah, I'd like to hear what the boys had to say.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: I would like to know what those who went out to lower the flag had to say about that preacher that called up.

Carol Lynn Yellin: What kind of preacher was that? I'm back, and I'm glad I got back to hear the end of that because that's a wonderful story.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: Well, let me say, I went on up to church, and while I'm thinking about this, and started the service, and got to the point of the sermon, and just began by announcing that this was a day of national mourning by presidential proclamation, and as soon as I said that I had people get up and walk out.

Carol Lynn Yellin: Very many?

Rev. Richard C. Wells: No, and as a matter of fact, you know, just I let them get up and moving, and I said, "Nobody has to stay if you don't want to." Which sort of meant the rest of them couldn't get up and go. They really were stuck. So, how many would have gone, I don't know. And of course with this, why there was not any dialogue in the sermon that Sunday.

David Yellin: There wasn't?

Rev. Richard C. Wells: No, and there really wasn't thereafter.

David Yellin: Now, you attempted dialogue, but it didn't happen?

Rev. Richard C. Wells: I think yeah, that I -- yeah, I gave people a chance to respond, and nobody said anything.

David Yellin: You have notes there?

Rev. Richard C. Wells: Yeah, I have notes on the -- I don't know how much you want me to (muffled).

David Yellin: Well, whatever you (muffled).

Carol Lynn Yellin: Was this that -- you have notes on what you said that particular Sunday?

Rev. Richard C. Wells: Yeah, I sure do.

Carol Lynn Yellin: Well, I'd love to hear it.

David Yellin: Please do.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: Well, let me do that, and then I'll go on. The next Sunday is Easter Sunday, and I will comment on that. Let's see now, these are just off my notes, and let me see how far we want to go with this. Indicated, began by announcing it was Palm Sunday, which was the time in which the church recognized the death of Jesus, where as Easter we recognize the resurrection. Just by accident this year, by presidential proclamation, Palm Sunday is also a day of national mourning. It is not for a Negro leader but for a national leader.

David Yellin: Ah ha. That's when they walked out, would you say?

Rev. Richard C. Wells: Yeah, well I think as soon as I started though they were on the road.

Carol Lynn Yellin: They were halfway up the aisle by the time you got to that, yeah.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: I think so, yeah. And then I quoted Eric Sevareid, who had Friday night, I guess, commented that here was a man who had done more to change American society than any other man in recent times. And, the proclamation of national mourning, Eric Sevareid indicated it was doubtful that this had ever been accorded to a private citizen before. Well, these are my comments, you know quoting from Eric Sevareid. Then I went on and said, now this is not going to be a funeral or a memorial sermon because King had preached his own funeral sermon at the airport. That was when he had made his speech about I have been to the mountain and I have seen the other side. And I said, Martin Luther King has already overcome, the question is whether we will be able to overcome or not. And I continued to indicate that here was a man who spoke to the white man, and the white man's response was that they spit upon him, they beat him, they jailed him, and they finally killed him. So here was a man who was willing to give his wife, as Jesus had indicated, no greater love than this has any man that he lay down his life for his friends, and here is a man who gave his life even for his enemies. And I have some other scripture quotes, and of course I tried to do this particularly.

David Yellin: Please quote.

Carol Lynn Yellin: Yeah, which scriptures?

Rev. Richard C. Wells: Well, I have that one, and then I have this one out of Romans, "Why, one will hardly for a righteous man, though perhaps for a good man one will even dare to die." And then I read John Donne's poem, "No Man is an Island." And I said this is -- I'm reading from my notes here, if I can read them. This is true of any man

when he dies, that no man is an island. This is even more true of a national figure, one who's fighting for justice and equality. This meant he was fighting for justice and equality for all of America, both black and white. Those who are not able to -- I made some comment about those who are not able to see this, and went on. These are my notes, and I articulated this. I had this in my mind, you know, and what I wanted to say then. I just scribbled ideas. If you are not willing to give justice to another, if you are not willing to fight for justice for another, you cannot have the right to expect it for yourself. We, at this point, are past expecting love. There are people -- and I made some comment about being discouraged and pessimistic. We may not expect love, but we can still expect justice. And, then I referred to a comment that (muffled), which I don't have cited here about we refused to take a man seriously until he dies and then it's too late, and now then it's time to take King seriously. Then I said now that these are hard words, but this is a time of crisis. Even though some people may not be aware of it, having going about business as usual -- and I say, I'm just sort of giving the notes here, and not what all I had in mind. Jesus said to his disciples, "Seeing they do not see; and hearing they do not hear." People are not aware of the crisis.

Carol Lynn Yellin: Did you make that reference specifically to Memphis, or were you just speaking in general of all of America then?

Rev. Richard C. Wells: I did not apply it specifically to Memphis.

Carol Lynn Yellin: Specifically, you just kept it general.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: "But blessed are your eyes, for they see; and your ears, for they hear. Then let each of us ask God that he may open our eyes that we may hear, repent, and believe the gospel." And then I asked for any comments, of which I got none.

Carol Lynn Yellin: How did you feel when you got none?

Rev. Richard C. Wells: Oh, by that point I didn't (muffled) get any, and I didn't wait very long -- you know, I gave them time to respond, but I was sure I wouldn't. So that the next Sunday -- if I go right on to next Sunday is because this follows, the next Sunday is Easter, and before the sermon I indicated very briefly the need for reconciliation, and I don't have it here, but I have 2 Corinthians chapter 5, in which Paul has the phrase about, "Be you reconciled to God," this kind of thought. And put in a story that came out of the Missionary Conference in Madras in 1938, and I put it in context, you know right immediately before the outbreak of World War II, here are Christians around the world meeting, and one of the things that came out of the meeting was in the height of world crisis that more unites us in Christ than all else in the world that divides us. Now if that's true then, you see, why this is true for us also. We are, as Christians we are united in Christ, and we all listen, or should be listening to the word of God, so I do not expect you to listen to me. It was obvious last Sunday that people did not like what I had to say; therefore, today Easter Sunday, there will be no sermon. I will read you instead the 12<sup>th</sup> of chapter of Romans, and let God speak to you. I read the 12<sup>th</sup> chapter of Romans and sat down. So I was pretty nasty up there. You know, I let them have it I think.

David Yellin: Then what happened when you stood?

Rev. Richard C. Wells: Well, this is in April.

David Yellin: It's now April 14, then.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: Right. My time with them finished the last Sunday of May, whatever Sunday that was. And, attendance was down, but people continued to come. Everybody knew, of course, this was my last Sunday because that was the time agreement, and I was not being invited to come back. And, of course you know, being just as innocent as I could be, I just blithely went out for that Sunday.

Carol Lynn Yellin: This would be the last Sunday.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: The last Sunday that I was to be there, and I had made sure that my sermon was going to be one that would not be rub raw wounds, but would try and be off of this kind of topic, and I don't remember what my sermon for that Sunday was. But anyway, went out and absolutely nobody came from the church. We had one family who were visitors who came.

David Yellin: And they sat there?

Rev. Richard C. Wells: And they sat there, and I conducted service as if it were normal, and I didn't say a thing, or say, "Well, gee, nobody's not here, you know, let's not have church." I just put the church members en bloc boycotted the service.

Carol Lynn Yellin: Was your wife, was Dodie there?

Rev. Richard C. Wells: Oh, gee, you'll have to ask her that, I don't remember. She didn't always go with me, and I don't remember whether she went then or not.

Carol Lynn Yellin: What did you do about music, or that kind of thing?

Rev. Richard C. Wells: The pianist that Sunday was a visiting pianist, and she came and brought her husband and child, and there was one visiting family of four, so there were seven people there besides me, and my recollection is that was it, and that Dodie did not come that Sunday. And I really, you know, I have never let it be known that I noticed at all.

Carol Lynn Yellin: Have you had any contact with any of the people from that church since then, Dick?

Rev. Richard C. Wells: I have had contact with some of the laymen who are officers in the presbytery, and it's -- there was one woman there who at presbytery now indicates that she was happy that I -- well, this is never mentioned you know.

David Yellin: She was happy that you were there?

Rev. Richard C. Wells: She is happy that I had served them, and as indicated that we are working for the same things on a presbytery level, but with her or with none of the others have we ever talked about the time that I was there at all. That's not mentioned.

Carol Lynn Yellin: Do you have a feeling that their opinion, say of Martin Luther King, remains unchanged to this day?

Rev. Richard C. Wells: Oh, I would be certain, yeah. You know, I have no contact, but I would see no reason why they would be any different.

Carol Lynn Yellin: It's interesting, just before you came I was doing some clipping of newspapers, which we still do, and I was clipping the story of the salute to Martin Luther King held for the benefit of the Southern Christian Leadership, and the memorial fund in Atlanta, held, when last Sunday, August 20 -- whatever it was, the last Sunday in August in 1972, and someone had rented the coliseum to raise money, and 150 people came, mostly on complimentary tickets.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: I saw that.

Carol Lynn Yellin: And that would fit the man is still not a prophet with honor in this city I don't believe.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: I would...

David Yellin: Now, may I just be a little bit practical. We are coming sort of to the end of the tape, but that doesn't hold us back. Anything else you want to say that kind of recollects?

Rev. Richard C. Wells: I think that I have gotten my main thoughts, and the main kind of stories that I wanted to talk about. I think, just add one thing. I indicated that from the time that this all took place with the students that I became the radical professor, which is...

Carol Lynn Yellin: Is that right?

Rev. Richard C. Wells: Yeah.

David Yellin: You missed that part, you weren't here.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: And this is how I was introduced to family and friends of students, "This is our radical professor." Which is very interesting in the light of the fact that when I left Long Island the man who was in charge of the youth work, which was my principal assignment, and is a vice president of IBM, said, "Gee, we hate to see you

leave, because you're such a middle-of-the-roader."

Carol Lynn Yellin: Oh, my.

David Yellin: Well, I guess it has to do with the placement of the sun.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: I think it does, yeah.

**END OF RECORDING**