Gwen Awsumb, Memphis City Council, 1968

Carol Yellin- But now she said, do you remember he had just said, that that the men refused to leave the building this was at the public works meeting. And then there was a reception, and they decided to move over to the auditorium. What happened then?

Gwen Awsumb- The men had requested moving to the auditorium and we concurred and decided something needed to be done and so set, you know moved to the auditorium. They refused to go there. They decided they would stay right there until they got what they wanted. They wouldn't move at all it just was a roost, because the mayor had moved them to the auditorium the week before, and they didn't get what they wanted and so they decided that they would stay right there.

Carol Yellin- And then the police had to come in that night and clear them out.

Gwen Awsumb- Right. I left at noon.

Carol Yellin- Yes Maam. And that's when Mr. Smith and the others were taken off smiling.

Gwen Awsumb- No, that was not the day, but that was…it's not the day.

Carol Yellin- Oh alright then I misunderstood then.

Gwen Awsumb- And I was a little confused on the time sequence too. So I went through the scrapbook yesterday to get the time sequence down. That date of the (covers first chair) is February the 22nd.

Carol Yellin- And then what happened?

Gwen Awsumb- And then February the 22nd, after the police cleared them out, I went back down to the city hall about 6 o'clock and we had a gathering over what to do about this situation, how could we solve it, and how could we help to get this thing straightened out somewhat. We didn't decide anything that night. We stayed until about 7:30.

Carol Yellin- Was this the entire city council?

Gwen Awsumb- Yes. City Council. And this was the night that Mr. Prior and I were on WKNO Metro Program at 8 o'clock and we had to leave at 7:15 to get out to this place. And we got out and we anticipated of course a lot of questions about the (heat). We didn't get any questions. Yes, they were phoned in and we didn't get any.

Carol Yellin- What you ask about (muffled).

Gwen Awsumb- Over composite break way, and stupid things that didn't really make a difference that day.

Carol Yellin- And this was an indication to you then that (muffled) wasn't as concerned.

Gwen Awsumb- We were quite surprised because we talked on the way out about what we could say and how we could handle various questions. And we just didn't guess them. Some on the tax rate and some on the expressway and a couple others.

Carol Yellin- Did you…any of the questions that were phoned in, those that they wouldn't get around too asking around there, I don't know how many…(muffled)

Gwen Awsumb- What happened is they went over some questions with us that they had in reserve.

Carol Yellin- So they already knew.

Gwen Awsumb- Yeah. And we decided who would take what when it was asked.

Carol Yellin- Oh.

Gwen Awsumb- He was the one who did the breakfast thing. I been on at breakfast that morning. Of course that was strictly on education. They did ask some questions on education, and relationship to the education committee. But at the break, when they were making (muffled) they showed us some questions that come in. But after this we did not stay long enough to look at the questions.

David Yellin- Now may I in order to be certain….(tape cuts off)

Carol Yellin- Long day at the metro museum, what happened the next day.

Joan BeifussJust one moment, I think you mentioned the breakfast and let's get on the record, or on the tape, these were the breakfast meetings that Memphis State helped out, Political Science Department?

Carol Yellin- I think so.

Gwen Awsumb- It's in cooperation with the Economic (leehirsh?)

David Yellin- Yes. And it's a new councilman, one councilman each week.

Carol Yellin- And had this been arranged or this kind of thing as the new city council came into office.

Gwen Awsumb- Yes. This had no real relationship.

David Yellin- Exactly, it was supposed to be the other way around to help the city council get acquainted with problems.

Gwen Awsumb- Yes, and also to acquaint the public with how the cit y council works and this sort of thing. And actually that morning, Thursday morning, was the first of these sessions. See I get into it because my name begins with 'A'.

Carol Yellin- Oh.

Joan BeifussOh.

David Yellin- I see.

Gwen Awsumb- And I was the initial one asking and I didn't know exactly how that was going to work, but it worked real well.

David Yellin- That's like holly wood when they have 12 stars.

Gwen Awsumb- And that was the reason that night that we were two on, they wanted a chairman and the first…

Joan BeifussThat was the first of the metro meeting.

Gwen Awsumb- Yes that was the first metro meeting. There were many firsts that day.

Joan Beifuss- But both of these, did the metro meeting grow up as a result of the strike.

Gwen Awsumb- No.

David Yellin- No.

Carol Yellin- Both of them had been arranged and they turned out to be useful in.

Gwen Awsumb- I don't know that they were particularly useful as far as the strike is concerned. I am not real sure how many people see them. The breakfast were attended by from anywhere between 20 and 50 people. And a great many of them Memphis State professors and people who worked there at that time. But they are a start and the office continues.

David Yellin- WKNO's attempt to become involved in the community. Particularly, since it was anew form of city government and they wanted to help people defend it.

Carol Yellin- Then what happens after that.

Gwen Awsumb- Well the next morning was Friday the 23rd, and we had agreed the night before, before we went out to WKNO that we would come to no conclusion that evening. Actually you asked if they was a full council that Thursday evening and the full council was not there, because we could not get into touch with everybody. The majority was there but we could not get a hold of everybody by any means. And so we decided to meet at 9 o'clock the next morning, which we did. And we worked over what we might suppose as a suggestion, recommendation actually, to the mayor. And there because we got into our first real difficulty as far as, is it up to the council or just leave it in the hands of the mayor. We had the nine points that the community people had proposed and we went down them, the nine points. Guess what, we were willing to recommend to the mayor on those nine points. And

that was the point at which I had always felt from that point on as it turned out what was it, was the union could have accepted that what they expected at the end and avoided the whole situation. So I don't think that it's fair to say that the council did not accept at the beginning what the union wanted anymore than the union didn't accept what the council offered.

David Yellin- There wasn't offer from the council then.

Carol Yellin- Yes. In the form of a recommendation

Gwen Awsumb- Yes. Form in the recommendation to the mayor but we had consulted with the mayor before we made this recommendation. We did not do it without his knowledge. In fact, he even offered to even come over with us to the meeting at which we present in the afternoon.

David Yellin- How was this transmitted to prior to this evening.

Gwen Awsumb- No we had pretty close communication that Friday morning we were in our conference room, like in our office on the fifth floor. At several points they discussed someone said do you think if we do this, the mayor will accept it? And the best way to find out is call him. And so he came up and listened to what we proposed. And at one point Mr. Prior went down to his office a little bit later and checked over another point. So that it was with his full knowledge that we did this. We did come up at the very end of the morning meeting and which we at that point had a total which even Mr. Patterson, felt…we wanted it to be a unanimous vote is what we want.

David Yellin- Which is why is that? To show strength?

Gwen Awsumb- To show strength, uh huh. In order to get something that Mr. Patterson, and Mr. Todd could both vote for (loud laughing).

Gwen Awsumb- So we thought we had Mr. Patterson.

David Yellin- Did you have Mr. Todd?

Gwen Awsumb- No, we did not have Mr. Todd, but we thought that Mr. Todd would be hesitant to be the one no vote. He was sort of on the fence, he couldn't say much as far as what he was going to do in the formal presentation of the resolution. And that particular day the mayor came up at the end of the morning and all of us were invited to a luncheon over at the (muffled) hunger shell, with our representatives, Mr. Kirken (muffled), Mr. Blanton, and Mr. Edwards. They were meeting with us to discuss ways of getting federal funds and this sort of thing an avenue that we should go about approaching them and where they could help and how they could help. So not only the members of the council were invited, but the directors were invited and also the mayor. So just before we went over for lunch the mayor came up to the conference room and we read him the final proposal that we were going to make at

2 o'clock at the auditorium. It did not sound good and the council (muffled) a number of people, and they accept that for the auditorium.

Carol Yellin- You had announced that they day before that you would reconvene in the auditorium.

Gwen Awsumb- Yes, Yes.

Carol Yellin- On Thursday.

Gwen Awsumb- The people who had remained with the group, which they did remain with them, Mr. Donelson remained all day in the council chamber with them until the thing was clear. And several of the others did, but like I told you I left at ten.

Joan Beifuss- (muffled) probably an incentive of someone inside.

Gwen Awsumb- Mr. Patterson is authorian on side.

Joan BeifussWhy? Not just able to Quinton Jones, but why do you think he so continually so opposed everything.

Gwen Awsumb- Mr. Patterson is the only person that I would say on council who is operating from a personal platform. The rest of the council be they diverse at times, are sincere in what they are trying to do. And have the acceptance of the community at heart. I don't think Mr. Patterson has the best interest of the community at heart, I think he does face it, and he is what one of the parent enrollment and he exhibits this Tuesday after Tuesday after Tuesday.

Carol Yellin- That's right he did not have the backing (muffled)

Gwen Awsumb- I don't know about that.

Carol Yellin- And they again tried to say he was a loner…and it happened (muffled)

Gwen Awsumb- Very intelligent. Very intelligent.

Joan Beifuss- Did you say one of the things…

Gwen Awsumb- He is not cooperative.

Joan Beifuss- Do you feel he as gotten into some sort of conflict of duties, I want to say interest, but a kind demand…(muffled)

Carol Yellin- You have seen the man he is fair and well. I would hate to think what the council would have been like had all the people who had run would have been elected. But we could manage. I will say, that when I say he is a loner, I say that Mr. Meadows and Mr. Vables both feel a responsibility to their people that's why they , the white community criticizes Mr. Davis and Mr. Meadows for participating in the march on the day that it broke up. And they rebutted because they felt that if there

was a difficulty they could be helpful as members of the council with their own people. Mr. Patterson was no where to be found. I would assume that Mr. Patterson was watching from some secluded window or something. But he was not there in the march.

Carol Yellin- This is the day of the mini riot?

Gwen Awsumb- Um Hmmm, um hmmm. And this was an interesting time because he was not participating with his people . And it wasn't that he was supposed to march, it's that he just not get down on that level. He sort of remained aloof in the long, but he was highly intelligent.

David Yellin- If it's personal participation by…the personal point of view and anything related to the (muffled) of negro. He sees it as one thing, and he sees it as a totally different thing, (muffled).

Gwen Awsumb- I don't believe so , I don't believe so. I can tell you one incident in which we all had our various growing up periods shall we say in the council. And as a southerner and what I would call moderate to liberal what I would call philosophically myself. All of us, all of the council had to come real well clean. A number of us on the council had known each other for years. Back into college for some of us, therefore we call each other by our first names, I have never seen…

David Yellin- Who did you college with?

Gwen Awsumb- I went to college with Louie Johnson, and Phil Terrell. And I have known Jared Branson for about 20 years on the personal level. Tom Todd I have known a long time personally and socially. We go to the same church. All these inter-relationships you see because those of us who have known each other and have worked on other projects together through the years. And of course Bob Jenks republican-wise for about 10 to 12 years. For this reason it was natural for us to call each other by our first names. The men on the council call Mr. Meadows, Jim, and they call Mr. Patterson, J.O. And sometimes Pat. And they call Fred Davis, Fred. Mr. Davis to this day has never…and I call Mr. Davis, Fred. He is a nice person, he has been extremely nice to me. He is quite a bit younger than I am, and everybody there called him Fred because he is a very natural person. From the very beginning I called him Fred. Having worked in the church with ministers and the church for a number of years it had not occurred to me to call Mr. Meadows anything but Mr. Meadows. That's the reason that I call him Mr. Meadows. And I call Mr. Patterson, Mr. Patterson purely because he…what I am trying to point out is that they…no…I am trying to point out that the barrier is not the color of the skin, the barrier was putt here by Mr. Patterson.

Carol Yellin- That's What I was trying to get at , yes.

Gwen Awsumb- And the barrier in my mind as far as it matters was the church angle, not the color of the skin. It was a matter of sect shall we say.

Carol Yellin- Do each of the…does Mr. Davis call you by your first name?

Gwen Awsumb- Mr. Davis has never called me anything but Mrs. (Offum?). And none of the three had called me Linda Offum until one day in which the day of as you call it mini riot, that night Mr. Blanchard, and Mr. (muffled) and I were the first at the curfew and we were at my house because we live in walking distance of one another. And they came over greatly disturbed and trying to figure out what we may be able to offer in the morning that would get Mr. Todd and Mr. Patterson once again. We got to talking about J.O.'s angle because it was very prominent at that time. I have forgotten how it came up but I made mention of the fact that they kept referring to J.O. and of course Jim and so forth. And I said you know they have always called me Mrs. Offum, and I wonder if the day will come when somebody in the room says Gwynn and what my reaction will be. It will be interesting to see. So the very next morning when we had quite a tangle with Patterson and it was at that meeting that Mr. Patterson said to me, for now there is no reason for you to maintain your position on the strike other than for two reasons, and I would like to know which one is the basis for your stance. Either you have blind the (pulp?) of the mayor for no reason what so ever except that you have blind the (pulp?) that is there. Or you are anti-union. This is a closed session, closed to the press, and this is the session that you probably read about that the press was outside and they said there was much screaming back and forth. And at this point I screamed. And I said "J.O.!" And J.O. came back and Mr. Blanchard and Mr. Donelson was sitting right across form me and J.O. came back and said, "Gwynn, your not!" and nobody ever deny that.

Carol Yellin- You were communicating.

Gwen Awsumb- We're communicating. Now the day was fulfilled and Mr. Maddox said do not say Gwynn again.

David Yellin- How did he answer you?

Gwen Awsumb- I told Mr. Patterson that I had…

David Yellin- Or J.O.

Gwen Awsumb- J.O., I said "J.O. neither one of those is true because I have opposed the mayor on other things and I will oppose him again. It just so happens that we think alike on this particular situation. And I am not backing up the mayor. We just happen to agree on this particular thing. Because I feel so strongly about municipal employees, and the use.

Carol Yellin- This was a point I was coming back to….

Gwen Awsumb- not that I am not (muffled-talked over)

Carol Yellin- Wait one second…

David Yellin- We will come back to it…

Carol Yellin- How does the three other councilman address the men on the council?

Gwen Awsumb- By their first name. My answer to the answer of unions, was that unions are at a mythical level and private industries in my mind are two different forms and I would never answer (muffled). But that the ultimate destruction of country could come through municipal unions.

Carol Yellin- So this was one of the intentions I recall was made very clearly on the earlier interview, and I wanted…I remember you made that distinction there. And I remember that you also made the point that this is as far as a matter of 9 muffled) historically there will be a n assessment of this issue and the actions of the city council and the administration.

David Yellin- Could you amplify that aspect of it in relation to how did it felt this city had to take us in not only for the city.

Gwen Awsumb- Well yes I felt the distance and that was the statement I made to J.O. at the time. We were in an historical fight I felt like and it was time that somebody dug their heels in and said that this has gone far enough. If we could make this contribution to the whole aspect of this question across the country, that we would have made a great contribution to the country even if the ultimate end was to have to give in on the broader aspect, I don't mean Memphis, I meant if the whole country goes in that direction ultimately it means Memphis can be known for stopping it or delaying it or pointing out the dangers.

David Yellin- And the direction is unionization of municipal employees. How do you be sure that this point of view has been given full (muffled) I think that is the technical term in this matter, that is how do you envision a say a disruption of our system as a result of unionization? I mean what is the inevitable thing that you feel would happen?

Gwen Awsumb- Well I guess the fear of paralysis of the entire country. Afraid to come clear across the country, a strike…

David Yellin- They would be put in a position to do it, but they wouldn't necessarily do it.

Gwen Awsumb- That's right, but the victim we would be…

Carol Yellin- One of the things, again, I have just made a little note in remembering that I was so interesting earlier, you were talking about the changes of attitude and you had made the point and let me see if I am re-saying this correctly. That the negro councilmen at first, also resented the union trying to take advantage of the uninformed sanitation workers by demanding the four dollar dues check. Was that on the table?

David Yellin- No.

Gwen Awsumb- No.

Carol Yellin- And what you said that there was a meeting, a private meeting between you and the Greenman in which they said, this is all we want.

Gwen Awsumb- Right.

Carol Yellin- And I have a question here, What were the unions demands upstated. Was it after the first private meeting with the council?

Gwen Awsumb- Yes.

Carol Yellin- They had had some negotiations then?

Gwen Awsumb- Yes, twice was on the 12th and the 14th of…

David Yellin- February.

Gwen Awsumb- February, which is confrontation with the union up in (Muffled) the morning after there difficulty with the mayor and council's violently to the mayor.

Joan Beifuss- That is on transcript I'm sorry. I listened to a recording of the tape two days ago.(muffled)

Carol Yellin- Well did this question of the beginning (muffled) fit in?

Joan Beifuss- Yes it does because…

Carol Yellin- And that they have began to entertain the point including Fred Davis …and then reporting alarm at what they felt was an attitude.

Gwen Awsumb- This alarm did not come until after, if you will recall we were talking about Friday the 23rd from our morning meeting when the mayor came up right at the noon hour when we were going over to the (Muffled). And we ran it to the nail what we were going to propose that afternoon. And the mayor made some further qualifying, this was about eh 3rd appearance for him since we had worked for him.

David Yellin- This is still February?

Gwen Awsumb- February the 23rd.

David Yellin- That's eleven days.

Gwen Awsumb- And the mayor made what I consider picky criticism as to the outline of the proposal that we had.

David Yellin- Was it about the election.

Joan Beifuss- May I interrupt one thing. These proposals had come from this committee studying the commons of vagrants…..

Gwen Awsumb- No, not really.

Joan Beifuss- It was really representing the consensus of the council

Gwen Awsumb- This is the point that we were going to have Mr. Patterson. We had Mr. Meadows and Mr. Bailey and this was the meeting at which Richard subjected to the (muffled) for the credit union to be used. And we left the meeting and when down to the consultant with the credit union asked of the workability of the scheme that we had.

Carol Yellin- How much was it?

Gwen Awsumb- And this was in our proposal that it be done true. The money was also mentioned but not in a definite amount. We discussed the money ourselves that morning but we did not include it in the recommendation in a set amount per hour. But it was truly for the..In order to get the men back to work so that we could then get down to the details of how much.

David Yellin- Did they already accept the credit union?

Gwen Awsumb- At that point yes. I forgotten just exactly what small little thing that he objected to. But we had had so much difficulty trying to hammering them out. It occurred to me that he was being unusually stubborn about it. Like he was trying to say ….

Carol Yellin- Was their advisors with him a that meeting…

Gwen Awsumb- Yes , Yes, Hal, and Mr. Denatti.

Carol Yellin- And they were advising him on the big goal the angle form the administration's point of view.

Gwen Awsumb- Yeah.

David Yellin- Alright now we are, have you gone to the lunch yet?

Gwen Awsumb- We went to the lunch after we went out into the home down an elevator. And I confronted the mayor at the elevator wit the fact that he was the stubbornest most hard headed man I had ever come in contact with in my life.

Carol Yellin- What you say?

Gwen Awsumb- My function on the council is to tell the mayor what the council feels like and I can get away with it and nobody else can.

David Yellin- I don't think that is fair or firm.

Gwen Awsumb- I do.

David Yellin- I don't think that is fair…

Joan Beifuss- Did you call him Henry or Mr. Mayor?

Gwen Awsumb- I call him Henry except when I am in a formal meeting and I call him Mr. Mayor.

David Yellin- And what did he say to that?

Gwen Awsumb- He said, 'I sure am hard headed and I am proud of it,' And I said, 'well I think that is a fault in your nature.' And when we are working so hard to try and help you get off the hook on this thing, you ought to be a little more cooperative and not so picky about everything we do. He thought that I was just…

David Yellin- Umm Hmmm

Gwen Awsumb- And we went down the elevator together. He said, 'You kidding aren't you?' And I said, 'I am not kidding one bit.' This seemed to bother him, and when he got to the luncheon the word had gone out about this meeting and Mr. Hallman was…protecting should be afforded because the last time a speaker was protected, and so we had security measure fully stationed in the auditorium. He left the luncheon a little earlier than others because of the situation, he had to be over there by 2 o'clock. He came by my chair and said, ' I don't want you to worry about anything (Mrs. Sexton?) You will be well protected.' It never occurred to me that really protection is necessary. It never had occurred to me.

Carol Yellin- Do you think Hallman? Is as good of an alum, this (muffled) at the luncheon.

Gwen Awsumb- No no no not at the luncheon. I'm sorry. This is the first time I was aware that the mayor had police protection. We walked across the street to the car that was holding him. There was two men walking behind us and I was walking with the mayor and these men were right behind us and I had never seen them before.

David Yellin- Can I just.because this could be so fascinating overall, like when you said the mayor thought you were kidding, and he …

Gwen Awsumb- After the luncheon, he came and apologized for that and explained further why.

David Yellin- He apologized for what?

Gwen Awsumb- I had said to him prior to that in the elevator, no I am not kidding I am perfectly serious back here. And so he came up after the luncheon and said I don't quite understand why you are mad. And I said he was being unduly.

David Yellin- At this time, or even as you look back at that time, or if you look back now. Was there any idea between the mayor and you that had in council, that it was a question of authority rather than the contents.

Gwen Awsumb- Yes, Yes, I think that he thought we were infringing on his authority.

David Yellin- So perhaps he was being picky in order to protect his tradition.

Gwen Awsumb- Protect his tradition. But we did go ahead to commune at the auditorium.

David Yellin- So the priority of the responsibility had something to do with the whole thing.

Carol Yellin- Again going back to it's a new form of government and there are so many un-established precedents, that would be establishing precedents, so…

David Yellin- Where you al aware that this was going on?

Gwen Awsumb- Oh yes, yes.

David Yellin- And in your conferences did you speak it out?

Gwen Awsumb- Yes.

Carol Yellin- What would you say, at this stage far more attention was being given to that than any racial overcome that might have been had, but that your real concern are actual municipal matters of..

Gwen Awsumb- He was concerned with the strike alone and the type of (muffled) and how to handle it as far as administration of the legislative body.

David Yellin- So forum became important as far as contents go.

Gwen Awsumb- Yes, Yes.

Carol Yellin- What happened after the meeting?

Gwen Awsumb- Well we went to the meeting an we were sitting on the stage in this auditorium was full of the strikers and their sympathizers. And I can remember seeing, Mr., this is before Mr. Worseman was assistant. (Muffled)on the front row and Dr. (muffled) and various other people that I cannot remember. Others were not a prominent part of that picture there.

David Yellin- Professor Locie?

Gwen Awsumb- Mr. Lucie

David Yellin- Lucie! He's from Tennessee.

Gwen Awsumb- Quiet, he is from Nashville, so is Mr. Ucifer? But we had faith that outcome, because this meeting was not a hearing but it was a formal meeting of the council at which town a revolution would be presented and would be voted on, and the public would be there to listen but not participate in the meeting. It was clearly set out.

David Yellin- By Mr. Prior?

Gwen Awsumb- By Mr. Prior. And the revolution was real. And there were 9 points, and originally they were 9 points that were set forth by the union. So this was an answer really to the nine points. The checkoff was handled by the trajection of the credit union, although it was not formerly stated within the revolution. Actually the checkoff and the signed contract were omitted from the revolution.

David Yellin- in recognition of the union?

Gwen Awsumb- Five contracts with the union. It was recognized that the men should belong to a union period. We did not recognize them as a full bargaining agent. But we didn't say that in there we just omitted it, we omitted any mention of a signed contract and any mention of the credit union, because was had not worked out the details on how that could be possible. We had decide that the facts that we omitted was two things, so that we had a 7 point program instead of 9. The 7 points that they had requested along with the side pointers, like the (muffled), benefits and so forth. (muffled)As we voted on it several persons were going to explain the lessons I have mentioned) muffled) the idea of a credit union and we were working on it in hopes to get it. Mr. Waters comes down to vote it, and I voted first of course. And then Mr. Blanchard votes, then Mr. Chandler. And Mr. Davis was the 4th one to vote and it was …because he had these meetings the day before and all the hearing it was decided that he would mention what we hoped to do on the amount of money. When we voted, which we started to do, and at that time we made the offers, 5 cents an hour now, and 10 cents an hour additional on the surface when the budget allows for it. The bind in which we found ourselves in terms of the current budget, we had no control. He got most of it (muffled) and he was booed and hissed and screamed at. And then the vote went on down and the place got a little bit unruly. And by the time it got to Mr. Netters he had gotten un nerved to the point of forgetting about he credit union, so we did not mention the credit union. And then Patterson came on with his no vote. Of course I neglected to tell you of course Mrs. Davis voted for no. Netter voted no. And when it came to Mr. Patterson what we wanted was not so much a unanimous cote that day but we did not want a racial vote. We did not want a 10-3 vote. And this is what we were hoping to break. But Mr. Netters voted no, and then Mr. Patterson did make a statement at that time and said that he felt that there was not strong enough support for the mayor, therefore, he voted no, which came out as a 9 to 4 vote rather than a 10 to 3. Of course it was misunderstood that we had told him prior to the meeting when he indicated that he might vote no that he would be tagged in the same light in the 3 negros, and that no one would understand it. Which they didn't and the papers overlooked it (muffled), but by that time the crowd became quite unruly and demanded the floor and…

David Yellin- Did they applaud you or did they have any reaction?

Gwen Awsumb- Oh no they booed Mr. (Muffled), because he made mention it. That there was not strong enough support of the mayor, therefore he (go to the had?).

Carol Yellin- What's the naming…

Gwen Awsumb- No he offered him Congress, he told them he didn't want it.

David Yellin- How polite did he tell them?

Gwen Awsumb- I think they told him politely. The crowd began to get upon it's feet and we had to make sure that the Microphones had been removed from the lower level so that there were no microphones except up on there, and it was quite distance there across the orchestra pit to the stage itself. So we had made sure of this because we did not want it to turn into what had happened the day before because of what we are trying to convey. And All the demands being made (muffled). We got up and went out to the wing and when we got out towards the front, the entrance, the police were there and they said they had been instructed to take us back to our cars at city hall and that they were instructed to take us in a group and we needed to be together and where was Mr. Blanchard. Nobody could find Mr. Blanchard. We went back and here is Mr. Blanchard over the rail down with the people and we finally got him to come on. This is one of the first times, or the second instance where we began to wonder what happened to Mr. Blanchard because he was changing.

Carol Yellin- I remember your mentioning that this was the first indication that there was a response, and I thought this was so interesting, that there is a change in the negro councilman as you had been aware of, simply that, I suppose that, you could say more difficult to get cooperation…

Gwen Awsumb- Right, Right.

Carol Yellin- As to the body. The second thing was that Mr. Blanchard (storms away?) first indication of some sort of response on his part that takes him away from the consensus.

Gwen Awsumb- So then at that time, that was the day that they marched from there down main street where they rocked the police car and the mace was used

Carol Yellin- Was their a complaint about that made to city council?

Gwen Awsumb- Not a formal complaint.

Carol Yellin- Did the three week come to the council?

Gwen Awsumb- They complained to us and Mr. Davis, I told him one time, that if he mentioned it one more time because…

David Yellin- This is what incident?

Gwen Awsumb- The incident down where the mace was used. That he had gone down there and he…..no I'm sorry sorry, that was the day of the mini riot.

David Yellin- Now if you recall that is the (muffled), What is your reaction to the whole thing did you feel now thing where getting out of hand or that the minor…

Gwen Awsumb- Not really, I felt that it was handled quickly and brilliantly in a difficult situation, by the (muffled). I felt the irritation that …..

Carol Yellin- What was it? Is it the rocking of car, was it a police car ?

David Yellin- And went on to four men and pushed.

Carol Yellin- Because this is the incident where they immediately said the car had gone over a woman's foot?

Joan BeifussNot immediately, it was the next day a little bit later that that was said.

Gwen Awsumb- But at that meeting at the auditorium…

Carol Yellin- Is that the first time that mace was used?

Gwen Awsumb- Yes.

Carol Yellin- That you were aware of or you can definitely say that is officially…

Gwen Awsumb- That was the first time it was used. That was the first time it was used.

Joan Beifuss -Were you surprised that the churches did not resort to nonviolence? Where you surprised that they did not try to block this from happening. Because what has always puzzled me is why we had this period of calm even after the mace incident you still have a period of calm before the riot. Did this surprise you all? That these people who are out on strike and it has become a highly emotional issue and still remain as peaceful as they did.

Gwen Awsumb- Well we didn't contribute to the riot to the (muffled). This was a rival rising effort on the part of others.

David Yellin- Something else, I'm not quite sure, was this the time where they had alarms and so on.

Joan Beifuss -That's the day before.

David Yellin- Was this the time that I recall….

Joan Beifuss - No, no. (muffled)

Gwen Awsumb- Oh that, that was the day before the hearing in the council.

David Yellin- Now in relation to that…

Joan Beifuss- That was when you had left the council chambers you said earlier on, had you left that day at the suggestion of a police man or a someone who sensed you were the only woman that (muffled)

Gwen Awsumb- I asked the question of one of the other council members and I can't remember now, but I think it was Mr. Naris?. Asked him if he didn't think I ought to go.

Joan Beifuss- That was a ….

Gwen Awsumb- And I went out the side door, and the police did take me out.

Joan Beifuss- And was that the day that you went, you had mentioned on the…

Gwen Awsumb- No. No.

Joan Beifuss- Ok, that was later that you…much later.

David Yellin- Much Later.

Gwen Awsumb- Well I went to the bible class that day from there.

Carol Yellin- You were going regularly to those.

Gwen Awsumb- I went that day from there to the bible group, that is correct and that was the day at Fitzgerald. I didn't check back in and when I did I had to go back in city hall.

Joan Beifuss -Not being with the council.

David Yellin- Wasn't that also the time that somebody said, or did you, did somebody say to the council or a union official of minister, if we don't get what we want we are going to burn the town down.

Gwen Awsumb- Uhhhh

David Yellin- Or did that come later?

Gwen Awsumb- That was said that day, but it was also said the following Tuesday.

David Yellin- Was it said out loud.

Gwen Awsumb- Oh yeah.

David Yellin- Do you remember by whom?

Gwen Awsumb- (muffled)

Joan Beifuss- But he is in it…

Gwen Awsumb- He didn't say it that day. I do remember him saying it at the following Tuesday meeting.

David Yellin- Now were you remembering him saying this thinking that he was actually being serious or was it just a metaphor?

Joan Beifuss- Well we wouldn't come to that memory.

Gwen Awsumb- I remember my reaction was one of deep anger.

Joan Beifuss- Do you consider…(muffled)

Gwen Awsumb- Quite a bit. That was (muffled) we not, going to come to any good…

Joan Beifuss- In completing the chart…

Gwen Awsumb- We thought this was a failure on our part to have …not so much a failure on our part but a failure of being heard and did not listen to what was said.

Carol Yellin- You felt that immediately even before you heard of the later incident and they marched and the car incident.

Gwen Awsumb- And they wrecked (muffled) compare what was said that day and what the final acceptance was (Muffled) unless they changed what they wanted.

Joan Beifuss- Alright, there is some confusion the credit union never was proposed and had you been able to present it you would have.

Gwen Awsumb- Yes I would have. I would have.

David Yellin- So at this time then you would say the council then decided well we better stay out of it because we aren't doing any good.

Gwen Awsumb- This was the reaction that we had not been able to make any progress so therefore maybe we better back off.

David Yellin- Probably with the hopes that it would go and the other people would settle.

Gwen Awsumb- Right and it was, the call was on Friday the 23rd, and Monday the 26th, was a meeting that I had set up several weeks prior to that. To speak to people in Memphis just some guys in a community center and notices had been sent out, signs had been put up and so forth. Due to the unrest it had been suggested that perhaps I better not go alone to this meeting because it would be good to have another one of the council members and I chose Mr. Blanchard to go with me, and we went to this meeting together. But if I say this is, I had barely noticed Scott if he stayed behind, it is formulated particularly in my mind. I had been criticized, 'you had that Blanchard with you that night.' You know. Anyway we did go to that meeting and I did have enough, because of it's location, and because there were a lot of union people in that area I did call Mr. Hallum on Monday afternoon and told him that I was having this meeting and that I wanted him to know I was having it, because I didn't want any evidence of any police anywhere near but I wanted the patrol car in the area to know that this meeting was going on. He had asked us to let him know the particular situation that we felt. But he never offered police protection to individuals that confirmated their self.

Joan Beifuss- This is interesting to me, again in matter of feelings about the issue, the fact that you are concerned what the (muffled) in an area where there where unions that you were far more concerned, or you were more concerned with the union aspect then any racial.

Gwen Awsumb- Of course.

Joan Beifuss- Had you have gone into a negro neighborhood would have made the same..

Gwen Awsumb- No, I have been in the negro neighborhood many times and it never occurred to me. But the union was what, and the approach that this particular union had shown us to that point we made in the early years of the industrial unions and how they operated. I felt that , I mean I had business to think maybe somebody would come into the meeting and breaking it up, that sort of thing. Not that I would have any secrets to harm, I just did not want hecklers in the back, have the union send somebody to the meeting and somebody start heckling and break up the meeting. I wanted somebody near by.

David Yellin- Now if we are going chronologically, and that meeting it went off fairly well?

Gwen Awsumb- Yes.

David Yellin- And what did Mr. Blanchard say when he came to the meeting.

Gwen Awsumb- No, in fact we did not discuss that night particularly. I had sent a letter out in advance to this meeting to a number of people politically that worked for me and I had a file on. I had said to them in my campaign that we would have gatherings so that people could express their views and hear first hand repoire. And this was the first of such meeting and I want to know how you feel about such things as and I listed the (muffled). Such things as…

David Yellin- Do you have a copy of this?

Gwen Awsumb- I do at home. Yeah.

David Yellin- Because incidentally I should have shown you, we have a request from the new conference that they archive. They would like to have any and again I will talk to later about some of the things.

Gwen Awsumb- But it had something, it had about three or four things as I recall, and the garbage strike was last. How do you fell about…well the main thing on the minds of everybody right then, was (muffled) boundary was here and it was to be held the next night, Tuesday night they were going to have our council meeting and instead of having it in the afternoon we were going to schedule it for 7:30 at night so that more people could come to the hearing. That was one of the things I had there. I can't remember now what the instances were there was about 4 things I listed.

David Yellin- You were saying that the people at that point February 26, had still two weeks had gone by but it still wasn't very common for anybody to (muffled).

Gwen Awsumb- I remember when Mark and them overtook the meeting that we were now beyond the New York garbage strike in time. Surely they assumed it can't go on much longer, but at that time it never occurred to me that it can go on for time.

David Yellin- What's the next thing that you can recall.

Gwen Awsumb- The next day was, that night I was informed by a news media who were there that the liquor hearing had been postponed due to the situation. The local unrest, that they decided not to have the liquor hearing the net night,

David Yellin- Was this because somebody felt or did you feel that the liquor hearing would cross the boundaries, but in its way it's associated too.

Gwen Awsumb- Yes, so they did not have it. Actually, I don't think it was so much the negro association as to those who gathered in large crowds that is the thing, Because we went on ahead and had our meeting at the regular time the next day. And at that time we, it was the day in which they asked for a raise. The council chamber was full to overflowing before we ever got down there, and it only holds 470 people. And Mr. Prior was unable to clear them, from the chamber.

David Yellin- Now this is February 27th.

Gwen Awsumb- Yes. And he was unable to clear it. No, this was March 5th, I'm sorry it was not the next day. March 5th was the day that they came and Mr. Prior was unable to get them to clear the aisles. And the police were there.

David Yellin- Were you there during that time or you had left?

Gwen Awsumb- No, no, I was there. No I was there. We had had a full house on the 27th also. They left the people peacefully that day, Mr. Prior was able to say that they had to clear the aisles so they left. But the following week they came back. Due to the intervening marches and the difficulty of the day that the mace was used and so forth and the threats that had been made the council chamber was well guarded that day.

Joan Beifuss- The threats that had been made in previous meetings?

Gwen Awsumb- Yes of tearing down the….

David Yellin- Burning down…

Gwen Awsumb- All that kind of thing. There were plenty of employees that day.

David Yellin- Do you know why there is an objection to the (muffled)

Gwen Awsumb- Because it had the steamboat on it and a cotton board, and to the negro this was a symbol of the slavery days.

Joan Beifuss- Good grief.

Gwen Awsumb- That's what they told them. You know the insignia? (muffled chatter) This was the day which they asked to speak, we conjured how much time to give them and if they would do it in an orderly way, we would hear what they had to say. So they concluded to have 5 people speak. 30 minutes or an hour or whatever we gave them, we did insist that our agenda had to be finished before anybody from the public could bring anything up because that was the schedule that we follow.

Joan Beifuss- This is the March 5th meeting?

Gwen Awsumb- Yes. And our agenda that day was fairly long and included in it a number of things that we felt if they had listened to would have indicated that we were trying to do something that would be of benefit in the total situation as far as the negro community was concerned. We had voted to (muffled) in North Memphis, and Hyde Park Area, what they call the code enforcement project. Which was the method by which we could grant loans without interest to people who are unable to fix up their property, it was government consolation. It was a thing we had talked about previously but we kept putting it off because we didn't want to indicate that we were trying to doing something in one area…

David Yellin- To mollify…

Gwen Awsumb- Yeah, to make up for another area. And something else I had forgotten was that there were two different forums. It was pointed out, I remember Mr. Harmon was pointing out, (muffled). So Mr. Harmon broke in when we were going over the Hyde Park program, and said now this is the type of program that you al might be interested in using. And at another point Mr. (muffled) said a point about this and gave more details than he ordinarily would have. But when we did have the speakers this included, as I recall there were 5 speakers, and it included only one white. And this is not personal. (muffled).

Carol Yellin- Do you recall who the other speakers that day?

Gwen Awsumb- Ezekiel Bell was one.

Carol Yellin- By this time the union leaders were not allowed to participate in any negotiations?

Gwen Awsumb- This really wasn't a negotiation , this was the public wanting to be heard.

Carol Yellin- Did you actually have them (muffled).

Gwen Awsumb- No, no.

Carol Yellin- Last time we talked you said (talking over each other)

Gwen Awsumb- They were there but they didn't hear. Ezekiel Bell (unrecognizable names)

David Yellin- Three men up there so we assume by now the ministers are in the (muffled)

Gwen Awsumb- I can't recall the names, maybe Cowell and Jackson. I think there were more than five.

Carol Yellin- You had been aware of the negro ministers the first time much earlier into that point, Ezekiel Bell had threatened to tear down the roof.

Gwen Awsumb- I didn't even know who he was when he came….

Carol Yellin- After that time you had not been conscious or aware of ministers coming into as public spokesman.

Gwen Awsumb- No, no.

Carol Yellin- But by this time it was clearly established because on all of these at the March 5th meeting the one where ministers discussed.

Gwen Awsumb- Right. And this is the meeting in which to me the most (muffled) part of this meeting was the part taken by (muffled). In which he did not make a personal appeal from his own brain but read to us from the Bible. And the passage was in Jeremiah where the people are trying to get their leaders to do something, whatever it was at that time and the end of the long passing had something to do with the leaders did that and did not hear and the people said we will burn this city down, and he slammed the bible closed and he turned on his (muffled). I walked away from the room and I was just horrified that in his position in the instances was so clear in this , for hi to participate to this extent was a problem to me, Mr. Bell? Was (jump break) That was day of which he said he did not like blacks, he didn't like white ones or black ones.

Joan Beifuss- And that was insulting to the council?

Gwen Awsumb- Yes, he said I do no like blacks, white ones or black ones…

Joan Beifuss- Directly at the council?

Gwen Awsumb- And I want you to know that if you do not listen to us, I hope that all the men in this council can go straight to hell.

Carol Yellin- (muffled)

Gwen Awsumb- Well that was more inflammatory charges…the reaction was that this went on for some time until we got to this point and Mr. Donelson after all had worked with the public and he was the author of several of the resolutions that were most beneficial to the negro community as a whole. And he was a sound member of the council, and he (muffled), if a Presbyterian minister attached to the Presbyterian

church of which Mr. Donelson was a member and he knew it from past association of (muffled then skips). Working in conjunction with this type of person helps build it and helps with problems and this sort of thing and it's a cooperative effort. (muffled)He cannot speak to the council with respect we will not sit here and listen, we have been patrons long enough and if he cannot treat us with respect we will not listen. It got out of hand and we did adjourn the meeting.

David Yellin- So the other speakers didn't speak or…

Gwen Awsumb- Oh no that took place at the end, we had taken a much of this already. And this was building up to a fever pitch. And we did adjourn it, and this was the day that they were all arrested and walked across the street. They refused to leave and we left. Everybody left but Blanchard.

Joan Beifuss- Well if it's the day they brought in…

Gwen Awsumb- No no that was because of work fearing. This was the day, I will say that we had been informed that, that I will say this, we had a briefing that morning by Mr. Hollins on what to anticipate and say something about them being in alignment. He has good information from good people who are in plain clothes who had been in the union meetings had heard what they planned to do and they give the information to him in order for him to make means how to handles these situations. (Talking over each other)

David Yellin- What did he brief you that morning?

Gwen Awsumb- He briefed us that morning that these people wanted to be arrested and they would not leave until they were arrested, and when that point came he instructed us to leave out the side door, and not try and go through the crowd and so this is what we did. And the only person who stayed was a free negro member he stayed but the rest of us left and went down stairs to get in our cars and the whole basement was just teeming with police. I have never seen so many police in my life, and they had a paddy wagon down there, see they expected all this. But instead of being taken they requested to walk across the street, so in the accompaniment of the police they did walk across the street.

Joan Beifuss- Why did they want to do that?

Gwen Awsumb- I don't know. I don't know.

Carol Yellin- You made the request that they walk…

Gwen Awsumb- I was not present at the time they made this request to Mr. Lockberg? Who was handling this/

David Yellin- So the result of this what was the temper of the council members among, they feel further now than perhaps…

Gwen Awsumb- Always tends to polarize people who have been in the middle of the road.

David Yellin- um hmm and this is on the council members? And who would that be, who do you think might have been open or if its anything that you can….

Gwen Awsumb- I would say definitely all the people on the council at the beginning of this was of a mind to separating from the (muffled) situation, and when we started off the 1st of January maybe even prior to that when we meat at the meal November-December, of all the things we were going to do and wanted to do.

Joan Beifuss- This was the time of tour of the forum.

Gwen Awsumb- Yeah and all the things that we wanted to do. People like Mr. Todd, and Mr. Jay?-two most conservative people on there and they changed. Our most conservative members of the council. They were considered sore with the effort they intended to make but when these things occurred they ducked further, pulled away from the center of the road, as far as the race is concerned. No matter what you did you felt like, to heck with it. If that is the reaction you are trying for….you can't have that reaction, you have to keep trying. But I could go on and on further.