

# Rhodes College Digital Archives - DLynx

## Linda Allen and Peggy Jemison, 1969

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Carolyn Yellin- This is February 24<sup>th</sup> 1969, the interview is with Mrs. Peggy Jemison and Mrs. Linda Allen. The place is the home of Mr. and Mrs. David Yellin 4241 Park avenue interviewees are Carolyn Yellin and Joan Beifuss. (Tape Break)

Carolyn Yellin- For the record the interviewees are Mrs. Frank Jemison and Mrs. Newton Allen.

Carolyn Yellin- I think we are now ready to go, Joan do you have any particular questions to start out with.

Joan Beifuss- I suppose just briefly were both of you born in Memphis and we get it set up geographically when you came to Memphis or if you were born here?

Peggy Jemison- I was born in Memphis and so was my husband.

Linda Allen- I am a native Mississippian, from Rosedale Ms. The heart of the delta.

Joan Beifuss- Where is Rosedale?

Linda Allen- Rosedale is halfway between Memphis and Vicksburg on the Mississippi river and my husband is a native Memphian of several generations, his family.

Joan Beifuss- The Allen family go back?

Linda Allen- Yes a long way the Allens and the Perkins.

Joan Beifuss- How far back do they go?

Linda Allen- Well they go back to the (muffled).

Peggy Jemison- And her husband brought her to Memphis so she..

Carolyn Yellin- Is the Perkins family for the Perkins whom Perkins St. up here is named?

Peggy Jemison- Yes, Yes, yes, Newton's father was, or Newton's grandfather his name is on the court house as one of the people who was responsible for the design of that court house. The Allens were in cotton in Memphis a long time ago.

Carolyn Yellin- And the Jemisons?

Peggy Jemison- The Jemison's are certainly southerners, their Jemison roots would come from Mississippi and Alabama and he moved here as a young man. All of his family has been here in real estate. And then my family the Boyces and the Boons, are also from Mississippi. So I would say that we are certainly from this area.

Joan Beifuss- (muffled) cotton.

Peggy Jemison- The Jemisons now are in real estate.

Joan Beifuss- Back then...

Peggy Jemison- Our home life quality on these tapes we know have the dog barking at the door, this give us a certain quality.

Joan Beifuss- We have a tape outside where a rooster crows during an audio clip.

Peggy Jemison- (Muffled) Mississippi delta for a long time. And my mother's family were originally cotton planters in the delta. My father was a doctor who came to Rosedale Mississippi as a young man. With our horse. SO we are southerners all the way.

Carolyn Yellin- I remember reading a piece by someone by Rosedale by someone who had gone back, an article in Harpers, do you know who you would be.

Peggy Jemison- We don't want to talk about that article.

Carolyn Yellin- Oh you don't.

Peggy Jemison- That upset, Rosedale very much. That was a young man who had a Rosedale Delta bride and he went to Rosedale and his reactions to Rosedale were considered by Rosedalians something top be desired.

Carolyn Yellin- Well of course I really think that people who do come here from other sections speaking as someone who did but has a little knowledge of it that they do tend to get, they don't get it all the same viewpoint that a person who has lived here and been through several changes of attitude and feeling would get and I am always concerned when I know people such as you who probably could review your own attitudes and think about how you felt. One thing you said Linda when I spoke with you on the phone that you thought until a year ago was like another century.

Linda Allen- Oh I think this is so I really do. Peggy and I talked about his today. We were trying to recall the times and the places where we were last year's events happened and I remember very specifically the day of the strike I was riding in the car on my way home and Henry Lobe came on the air and was very firm about the workers, he wasn't going to have a strike and they must return to work or they mustn't leave work and at the time I thought, bravo Henry you have to firm about municipal workers and strikes because we simply can't have a strike of municipal workers because there are too many services which they perform for the city which are vital. So this was my initial reaction. I remember about a week or 10 days later after the strike had started I saw Henry at the waffle shoppe at Calvary Church and I went and shook hands with him and commended his firm stand. My attitude subsequently changed drastically but this was my original reaction and do you recall Time magazine had an editorial about municipal workers and their rights and their grievances and their working relationships with city government and it came out I

guess at the time of the strike, the garbage strike maybe in New York, and there were threatened strikes of hospital employees at some hospital in Illinois and I remember reading it was right at this time, that the labor laws in relation to municipal employees were really archaic that this was going to be the big push last year that certain services...

Carolyn Yellin- And this was during at the time of our strike was in progress.

Linda Allen- Our strike yes.

Carolyn Yellin- The sanitation workers strike.

Linda Allen- Yes. And let's see. As I recall that editorial because it had a little influence on my thinking. There was certain levels of services that the city had to have performed by workers and dependent on the level of service some city workers should have the right to strike if their services weren't so essential and that there were obviously people like the firemen and the policemen and the hospital workers and the sanitation workers who shouldn't be allowed to strike but they needed protection on their jobs and it was at this time you began to hear about the death of the sanitation workers and there weren't any benefits for him, for his family.

Carolyn Yellin- That was in fact before the strike started, that was February 1<sup>st</sup>. The men were crushed?

Linda Allen- Yes, yes, I didn't hear that until after the strike did you Linda?

Peggy Jemison- No I was not aware of it until later.

Linda Allen- Linda as you are speaking something comes to my mind. We were involved in this adult education course.

Carolyn Yellin- At Southwestern?

Linda Allen- AT Southwestern

Peggy Jemison- Ray Hill's course.

Linda Allen- Ray Hill's course.

Peggy Jemison- Well we were studying last year oriental heritage, oriental philosophy and religion and history.,

Joan Beifuss- That's right and that's the one Mattie (muffled).

Peggy Jemison- Yes that was the course of which we got to know Mattie.

Joan Beifuss- She said she wanted to take black philosophy but they weren't giving that so she thought she would just take oriental instead.

Peggy Jemison- Well I think actually wasn't this second year in this course or was it her first?

Linda Allen- No I believe she came into the course the oriental..

Peggy Jemison- I know that in the, in our discussion and we often discussed things other than oriental religion or philosophy we were a little disturbed that Ray was so discouraged about conditions in general and I think our thinking had been that he was being overly pessimistic. We said no Ray we are optimistic that things are going to work out. And I remember that it seemed a very short time until his point of view had been much clearer than the one that we had.

Linda Allen- That he had been really prophetic.

Peggy Jemison- He really was.

Carolyn Yellin- In the time the strike first started in the first two weeks or so in the strike was there much talking about it among friends.

Peggy Jemison- Oh yes, this is kind of interesting. My maid Jesse Paramoore's husband was a member of the sanitation department. It happens that the only political favor which I ever asked for and got was a job for Booker Paramoore on the sanitation department.

Joan Beifuss- Now let me just stop you there because someone on the tape told us that they said that the sanitation department was actually full of political appointees.

Peggy Jemison- Well I hadn't thought about it like that. The way I thought about it was that when Henry was commissioner and the sanitation department was under his jurisdiction Henry had used the sanitation department as a place where he placed people whose wages had been garnishing or had come from the county farm and couldn't get employed anywhere else. Now this was before he was mayor. The first time that he was in public service. And so my maid's husband's wages had been garnished and he could not get a job and I called Henry and asked him if he would place Booker in a job and he told me to tell him to go down and apply and several weeks later he was taken on the job and had been with them ever since. And when Henry ran for mayor my children asked Jesse for whom she was going to vote, and to my amazement she said for Mr. Lobe.

Carolyn Yellin- Are you talking about for this election?

Peggy Jemison- In the mayor, mayoralty election.

Carolyn Yellin- Up a year ago not the first time.

Peggy Jemison- Yes, yes, later you see her husband had worked for the sanitation department for a number of years and when she said this I had felt that her vote was sort of her private business and I didn't want to ask her what way she was going to

vote but my children asked. And she said that she was going to vote for Mayor Lobe. I said Jesse not me. I said negroes then now I would say black people. I said Jesse not many negroes are going to vote for Lobe and how do you happen to plan to vote for him. She said well he was the first persona that really made the sanitation department people feel like people. He made them be people instead of things with certain shades. And she said they got their first paid vacations, they got sick leave. She said he really improved the working conditions for the sanitation people remarkably when he was commissioner. So most of the people in the sanitation department are going to vote for him. And I thought this was very significant. So when the sanitation strike came and Booker Paramoore was on vacation at the time so for some days he was drawing vacation pay and he wasn't involved directly. He didn't stay off the job and he wanted to go back to work. And it was at this time that I got terribly exercised and concerned about the frustration among the black community among the sanitation workers that wanted to go back and they couldn't because of the goons who were trying to organize the strike.

Carolyn Yellin- And this did exist we kept hearing rumors of this at the time, that there were threats to workers.

Peggy Jemison- Oh terrible threats and Jesse was just really living in fear. One of her neighbors who had tried to go back to work and this was not in the newspapers either, who was a driver for the sanitation department, there were actually shot through the window where he was sleeping and his car was wrecked and there were a number of instances like this and Jesse said she dared not leave her garbage out at the curb to be picked up. And this was one of the things we were conscious of that in some of the white neighborhoods they were able to pick up the garbage, we would take it out and it would get picked up, but in the black neighborhoods it was accumulating. And for all the things that you heard and the trucks just weren't going through the black neighborhoods was one thing you heard and another thing that you heard was that the negroes were afraid to put their garbage on the streets for fear or reprisals.

Carolyn Yellin- It was my understanding that if a truck went into an area and there was any kind of trouble they pulled the truck back out immediately.

Peggy Jemison- I think that Linda is saying pretty much the way in which I reacted too, in that my original thought that was Henry was standing firm and should and there were things that naturally we should be improved and should be changed and I think this was generally felt among our friends, that we will empty the garbage and the little boys on the neighborhood were taking out the trucks, there was a community feeling like we will help each other and we will get this done and get through this.

Carolyn Yellin- Do you remember I am just interrupting because you remind me of something that I had almost forgotten myself and that was when the directions appeared for flattening tin cans, take off both ends and insert the, and then flatten them and you could get so many more.

Linda Allen- Like in the war.

Carolyn Yellin- Right.

Peggy Jemison- And people would carefully sorting their garbage and using their fireplace..

Carolyn Yellin- And using your garbage disposal to get rid of all the..

Peggy Jemison- There was an element there of a real community spirit, pioneering.

Joan Beifuss- Little adventure.

Peggy Jemison- And there were really enterprising young men in the neighborhoods who would go and get a pickup truck and come around and pick up your garbage.

Joan Beifuss- I remember the boy scouts went around and picked up the garbage.

Carolyn Yellin- It was considered very, that was the boy scouts I remember seeing in the paper about this.

Peggy Jemison- I can't really remember now when it began to change. When you suddenly began to think that this is not going to work and we are perhaps closing our eyes to something that.

Carolyn Yellin- I wanted to ask something which today's date reminded me of, and we were saying a year ago seems a century, or another century. Yesterday was February 23<sup>rd</sup> and we have in talking with a number of people, February 23<sup>rd</sup> several people who were closely involved with this and who did change their thinking about it remembered this as a day that changed. This was the day of the first march downtown when there was the disturbance and the police, do you recall any of that and the mace was first used by the police, that was February 23<sup>rd</sup>.

Peggy Jemison- I unfortunately went out of town, we went to Puerto Rico and I missed the marches and so I am going to have to be quiet during this particular.

Joan Beifuss- When did you go to Puerto Rico was it that (Muffled)

Peggy Jemison- I went spring vacation, the day of the snow.

Linda Allen- No that was in March that was not until a month later.

Peggy Jemison- March 23<sup>rd</sup>?

Joan Beifuss- March 23<sup>rd</sup> I think yes.

Peggy Jemison- Yes because I had forgotten that the marches started so early. The thing that I recall was when they descended on the city council and ate bologna sandwiches.

Carolyn Yellin- Well that was the day before.

Peggy Jemison- And that really disturbed me.

Linda Allen- That offended me.

Joan Beifuss- Why, why.

Peggy Jemison- Well first of all the rudeness of it, the crudeness of it, the lack of propriety for the lack of respect for any property etc. All of those things were, and I was offended for Henry I was offended he was called names on television. I felt that these things were unnecessary.

Carolyn Yellin- And you were forming your opinion at that time from reading reports in the newspaper and were you getting any first hand reports at that time, were you husbands?

Peggy Jemison- Well Linda didn't you, from?

Linda Allen- Well I can't remember when I began to change. I was offended as you were by the action at city council. Gwynn Awsumb is in a Bible group I am in and we meet every Thursday and we were, I was getting much first hand information, our bible group didn't do much bible studying because Gwynn would walk in and we would pounce on her and have her tell us what was happening. And Gwynn was enormously concerned at this time that this was just the beginning, that they had mishandled, I am putting words in her mouth. This was my feeling that the thing had been it was being mishandled, they were in to it.

Joan Beifuss- Mishandled by whom?

Peggy Jemison- Everybody was sort of mishandling it you know. But that once they changed their position and settled the strike and recognized the union then this was letting down the bars for the hospital strike and the light gas and water strike and she was simply, I can't put words in Gwynn's mouth but my feeling was that Gwynn..

Linda Allen- She had been there the day.

Peggy Jemison- She had been watching and observing and I had respect for her opinion and she just did not feel it was legal for the city to recognize the union as such and this was her position.

Carolyn Yellin- Was there, in groups like this was there discussion back and forth?

Peggy Jemison- OH yes we were doing much discussion.

Carolyn Yellin- And were people in agreement or as it came up, it is hard to recall now but did you at this point begin to feel, to find that people were expressing surprising opinions, that you would have thought they felt one way and actually they felt another?

Peggy Jemison- No.



Carolyn Yellin- Or did you surprise yourself ?

Peggy Jemison- I, actually I remember now my first evening of hearing perhaps the other side of the story took place at a dinner party when a coupe had attended, I really don't know who conducted it but it was led by a person who told about the sanitation workers and some of the problems there and that there were grievances there that had not been met and that the strike perhaps could have been ended at one point and was not. This had a great bearing on my opinion. I then began to look a little bit further into it. I think it was obvious that the strike might have ended at one point and then the headlines came out the next day whether the headline of Henry compromising had anything to do with it or not but I remember that this was possibly the point I believe when it could have been successfully terminated.

Joan Beifuss- Do you know you were talking about..

Peggy Jemison- Someone who had a, yes.

Joan Beifuss- Specifically to talk about this or it just happened?

Peggy Jemison- No, no. She just, this couple just happened to be at the same dinner party and as Linda said this was the topic of conversation every place I went. But this particular evening this couple had attended a session led by one of the union men I believe.

Joan Beifuss- Yes because there were several of these meetings going on in people's homes.

Peggy Jemison- They had attended and when they started telling us some of the things he had said, it was the other side of the story. As I recall now, I had forgotten the union organizer who came to town who insulted Henry so.

Carolyn Yellin- Champa.

Peggy Jemison- P.J. Champa because this is one of the things that I felt was a really stumbling block although on the mind is your loyalty to your mayor to the (muffled) of mayor. Having a man as crude and rude to Henry really I think had many more people in a longer period of time in sympathy with Henry's position than they might have been than if someone with more tact and more manners come..

Carolyn Yellin- Now this was fairly early.

Peggy Jemison- That was the early situation that was so offensive to so many. And as I said they rallied behind his point of view and perhaps gave him a feeling of rightness in his position that dissolved.

Joan Beifuss- Many people did as you did, either wrote to him or spoke approval of his course at that time.

Peggy Jemison- I can't remember when I changed my position absolutely but I do remember calling Jerry Blanchard and Louie Donelson at home and their stand on the city council was to try to get the strike settled.

Joan Beifuss- This was after they had already changed there, Jerry Blanchard had already switched his opinion.

Peggy Jemison- And I called them to support them and let them know that I stood behind them 100%. Walter Armstrong and Tom Pruitt those are two of my husbands law partners and they were advising Henry and they are far more conservative than I guess I am.

Joan Beifuss- As it turns out.

Peggy Jemison- So, though I fancy I am a conservative. So I told Newton one evening, I said Newton Henry's advice are all from people like Tom and Walter and we will have to use initials, and I really wish you would speak your mind. And I remember Newton after a day or two, he really thought about this and he was concerned too and he went to Henry's office very early one morning, to speak to Henry and tell him there was another strong opinion moving in this city and several days ago I was cleaning out my desk and I was amazed that I found a letter which I had written to Henry. Would you like for me to put it into the record.

Carolyn Yellin- We would love to, we would even love to I see it is written by hand and I must tell you that we collect exactly this kind of thing, we do have memos and we have some hand written memos for instance John T. Fisher has given this sort of thing.

Joan Beifuss- We have piles.

Carolyn Yellin- We have quite a few things that people have given us that is exactly the sort of thing we don't want to get lost.

Peggy Jemison- Well I (muffled) 100 years from now, I was absolutely astonished that I didn't throw this away. I remembered it.

Joan Beifuss- Read it now.

Carolyn Yellin- I would love to hear it.

Peggy Jemison- This says, Dear Henry.

Joan Beifuss- Is there a date on it?

Peggy Jemison- No but it would have been in March. My maid has not dared to leave her garbage on the curb for fear of reprisals by goons in the neighborhood. There is dear in our city, fear between negro and negro, fear between negro and white. The garbage strike has turned loose a Pandora's box. Each day it goes on the goodwill between the races in Memphis continue to deteriorate. Urge the city council to pass an

ordinance that gets the men back to work and then move fast to mediate and head off additional strikes by additional city employees so that Memphis can become a model in its labor relations with all its employees. Your firm stand at the beginning of the strike was loudly applauded, I applauded it myself but now the time has come to move. Please settle the strike Henry. And I later sent him a telegram.

Carolyn Yellin- Did you receive answers to these?

Linda Allen- No I didn't.

Carolyn Yellin- You did not?

Linda Allen- No and I am...

Peggy Jemison- You didn't send this letter did you? This is the rough copy.

Linda Allen- This is my rough copy of my letter, and I usually don't make a rough copy but I did this and this seemed so long ago but I can tell from the letter that I was influenced by that editorial in Time where I ask him to make a model labor policy for the city because no city seemed to have model labor policies for the city employees.

Carolyn Yellin- In fact, they still don't.

Carolyn Yellin- In fact coming back to our course which somehow Ray's remarks do enter the picture when he was staying with that, that America is victimized by our waste. And this is happening all over the country in that what to do with our waste. And I think this is an interesting point of view that doesn't really bear on this but it's interesting that garbage and waste is being the place where so much unrest, it's the vehicle.

Carolyn Yellin- In affluent society.

Peggy Jemison- Peggy Jemison- Exactly.

Carolyn Yellin- It is fascinating that this real crisis in the city caused this kind of real deep thinking and I think that just what you are talking about people really had to look at themselves and really examine their thinking about a lot of different things, not just race relations, not just labor, but the whole social set up. You found you had to think about it because many people for the first time I think.

Peggy Jemison- Well shall we move on because we are both watching the clock.

Carolyn Yellin- Yes we all have schoolchildren that will eventually be descending. When did you become, let me ask this. Can you now say how you felt about Martin Luther King before the strike crisis. Can you re-create a specifically about Martin Luther King. Were you an admirer, were you neutral, or were you and leaving aside how you feel now. Selma, Montgomery and Selma back to that period and thinking

where he had arrived into his own career with the Vietnam War entering into his all of his public discussions and all that.

Peggy Jemison- This cooled me off towards Martin Luther King.

Carolyn Yellin- Originally had you admired him at the time of Montgomery.

Peggy Jemison- I realized only after his death that I had known really little about him but he had been the maverick that was doing a very necessary thing it seemed to me and I was all for his integrating the busses and the department stores, this just seemed fantastic really that we should have to go through what he had to do to make this in the south. Integrate these things. I had been always very pleased with the way in which Memphis had operated because the newspapers had cooperated in our school integration and our integration of the libraries and our integration of the busses, by not making a big thing about it, it was announced quietly in the papers in small print so that most people learned after the fact. So the rabble rousers couldn't really have an opportunity to participate. So I really had felt that Memphis was far ahead many southern cities because we had been on of the few cities that had not had tremendous trouble.

Carolyn Yellin- Then following that up then were you surprised at the march of the evident depth of hostility in the negro community.

Peggy Jemison- I think this was a tremendous shout to me, because I had, and I still do feel that there has been goodwill and there is goodwill, but it was a blow to me because I had taken I must say some pride in the fact that we had done things before we were forced to and that most people had accepted it with good grace and this was a terrible blow to me that so much ill will and hostility and bitterness was there.

Carolyn Yellin- Why was it there?

Peggy Jemison- Well I am sure it was there, often it doesn't come out until they feel some hope of changing it and this I think was the time and the place when the black community was free to let some of the injustice come forward. You asked about King. I had felt he was the man in the black community of America who had really done the most to improve traditions for his race. But when he began to have the Vietnam War enter the picture I cooled off to him considerably because I did not feel that was his (muffled).

Carolyn Yellin- Well you recall at the time he was involved in planning this poor people's campaign. So the announcement that he was coming he was almost interrupting to take part in this sanitation workers. Do you recall your feelings? Were you apprehensive, or did you feel this was, did you have any different feelings then?

Linda Allen- Peggy was in Puerto Rico.

Peggy Jemison- You see this is when I was in Puerto Rico and we were considering at the time about leaving we were taking our children with us but we were going to send them home by our very loving and faithful made of many many years and she was going to care for them while we stayed an extra week at a convention. SO we were apprehensive, we were a bit thankful when the snow came that day and ended the opportunity to march and thought oh well maybe this will pass.

Carolyn Yellin- You were in Puerto Rico for the snow?

Peggy Jemison- We left the morning of the snow.

Carolyn Yellin- Oh did you.

Peggy Jemison- We got out that day, our two children and our son who is in college met us in San Juan for a week. We were apart from the actual happening at that time and we called home to check and yes we were apprehensive. We worried.

Carolyn Yellin- Did you feel hostile towards King at that time. You don't have to answer any of these questions but just as honestly as you remember. Because I was of mixed feelings myself at that time though I will say that I admired Martin Luther King but I had shared much of this thing as a newcomer to Memphis that it was astounding to me that it had gone as far as it had being so near little rock and Birmingham. I felt some of this but I am just wondering how you as a native Memphian.

Peggy Jemison- Well I must say that I was very sorry that he was coming because I felt that though he himself wanted it to be nonviolent it would be very difficult for it not to produce violence. And so just from this point of view I was extremely sorry he was coming and at the moment thankful he was prevented that day and was hoping he would be prevented again.

Joan Beifuss- How long did you stay in Puerto Rico?

Peggy Jemison- We were there two weeks, well we were to stay through the following Friday but when Martin Luther was assassinated we came on home the following day.

Carolyn Yellin- Did you, had you sent the children back?

Peggy Jemison- We had sent the children back yes, and they had been met and we had called and checked on that. We were attending a party at this YPO convention.

Carolyn Yellin- What is YPO?

=It is young presidents organization. And they have a university for presidents on an annual basis. We were there for that, and when we heard the announcement...

Carolyn Yellin- These are presidents of civic organizations?

Peggy Jemison- No businesses, my husband is the member. It is a very interesting meeting with all sorts of subject matter covered.

Joan Beifuss- Excuse me but were the newspapers in Puerto Rico getting any information about Memphis in the Puerto Rican newspapers?

Joan Beifuss- Then you were in Puerto Rico March 28<sup>th</sup> that broke into the mini riot.

Peggy Jemison- Yes.

Carolyn Yellin- When Martin Luther King left the march and then it was followed by the curfew.

Joan Beifuss- Can you recall at all, it is kind of interesting you were in Puerto Rico can you recall at all what your impression of that day in Memphis was. Did it sound like from their news reports that the whole city was going up?

Peggy Jemison- Let me see if I can recall, it sounded, yes it did, it sounded like there was great unrest and disturbance here. Although it was clearly stated that this was a small group of people who had caused the disturbance and Martin Luther King was dissatisfied with it, it was reported in that manner.

Joan Beifuss- So then when he was actually assassinated you were at a dinner party of some sort?

Peggy Jemison- Yes.

Joan Beifuss- How was it announced?

Peggy Jemison- It happened that we were seated at the table with the man that was in charge of the dinner party. Interestingly enough, we were in the process of talking about some of the things we had been hearing at this meeting, Walter Kaupffman from Princeton had been speaking to us and various other people talking about the unrest of the cities. Some how in the conversation with the other woman I had just said you know I am totally shocked over what is happening in my city of Memphis and it grieves me to think that these things have existed. With that the matradee came over and spoke to the man in charge of the party and said I think you should know that Martin Luther King was killed in Memphis. Well Frank and I just couldn't believe it. We stood up and I had the feeling I wanted to swim off the island all I wanted to do was get home. So we headed back and this is just a personal thing, Kimmons Wilson happened to be at the same meeting and several other Memphians. We headed back to our room to call home and start getting our reservations back the next day. The news stations, there was only one English speaking station, and we could get very little news. We simply knew he had been killed, he had been fired on while standing on a balcony in Memphis, at a motel. We immediately looked for Kimmons to tell him this and we sent word and of course it spread all throughout

the convention, In the meantime all the Memphians started coming to our room and we started trying to call home, and we couldn't get any lines into Memphis...

Carolyn Yellin- Excuse me. Was there any question that it might have been the (muffled)..

Peggy Jemison- This was definitely, Kimmons, came to our room and he said I am sure this must be the Rivermont this is where he had stayed and I can't think of another motel in Memphis with a balcony. So then the Peppers, (muffled) and John Pepper were there, mayor Lobe's sister was there and she was terribly concerned she and her husband came to our room.

Carolyn Yellin- What is her name?

Peggy Jemison- Francis Peters Mile, and they live in Bronxville New York. So we all rather gathered and it was a disturbed group, and that far away from your home you can hardly stand not to have more up to date information. We couldn't get anything so Kimmon stared calling the Holiday Inn and wanted to use the Holidex machine to get some more information and about 30 minutes later we did hear it was at a motel named the Lorraine and then we all started trying to get home and we couldn't get out until the next morning and so we flew in that next day.

Carolyn Yellin- Did you come in the next morning?

Peggy Jemison- Yes. We, well I think by the time we arrived it was early afternoon.

Joan Beifuss- Had Dr. King's body already gone from the airport?

Peggy Jemison- It was just, it had left.

Joan Beifuss- Were there still crowds of people?

Peggy Jemison- No. But we were aware that the news media was arriving on this same place from Atlanta. 3 or 4 people with huge cameras and obviously I think it seemed to me that one man was even a Frenchman speaking English and he was seated just across from us. So that quickly they were headed into Memphis.

Joan Beifuss- In fact they had come in the night before.

Peggy Jemison- Had they.

Carolyn Yellin- Linda do you recall the moment, I guess the two things, the moment or how you felt at the time of the march that broke up, was that a moment of drama for you personally?

Linda Allen- Well I went to Florida the day of the big snow and took three of my children and a friend and like Peggy I was trying to recall as she spoke my feeling and my feeling was that if King came into town there was going to be trouble and I was delighted when it snowed and the march was cancelled. Then I was sitting by a swimming pool in Destin when someone came and said there are riots in Memphis.

Joan Beifuss- May I just, I hate to interrupt but I did want to ask something earlier. I will remember where, at the time that the snow cancelled the march did you have any feeling that now they will have a chance to settle the strike or has it the feeling, was there a feeling among people that you spoke with or do you recall?

Linda Allen- Well I didn't really speak with people you see because that snow came very suddenly in the night and we were making a decision about whether I was going to drive to Florida through that snow with 4 children.

Joan Beifuss- Did you drive that next Friday morning?

Peggy Jemison- Well it was, I didn't it was Friday afternoon right after lunch I left, but we were very busy getting ready to go. My husband got to the office and called me and said the highways are clear now and by morning they will be frozen over again so go if you are going. But anyway so I went. But the day of the riot when I heard riots in Memphis I immediately ran to a telephone and called Newton's office and got word that the switchboard was closed and I was very relieved because that meant, I thought that the office had closed.

Joan Beifuss- What is the name of the law firm?

Peggy Jemison- It is Armstrong, McCadden, Allen, and Armstrong. Armstrong, Allen, Braden, Goodman, McBride, and Pruitt. The name has changed after Mr. McCadden's death and I said it the other way for more years than I have said it the new way.

I then called home and to my great delight Jesse Paramoore answered the telephone and said Mr. Allen is walking in the door. So I knew that Newton was removed from downtown and he assured me that it wasn't, that Memphis wasn't going up in smoke and it wasn't nearly as large of a disturbance as he was sure I had been led to believe. So that was my feeling the day of the riot. Then I remember the day of the assassination. I can't remember whether we heard his over...

Carolyn Yellin- You were still in Florida?

Peggy Jemison- No, no, I had come home from Florida.

Carolyn Yellin- Now when you came home and you found the city during that week the curfew had been imposed and did you have a different feeling about the atmosphere in the city after the riot when you arrived home?

Linda Allen- Oh yes, we were very conscious of the fact that there was a quietness.

Carolyn Yellin- The national guard was here by that time.

Linda Allen- I remember seeing the national guard in several shopping centers and my children went and spoke to them and one of our shopping centers and you really it was a very eerie scary feeling that this could really have happened in Memphis. It was just unbelievable that there would be a curfew and the national guard here.



Carolyn Yellin- Ice Hockey games that our boys and they were still having them during the day and you would go in and since it was right there at the armory the place would be crowded with spectators watching the pee wee ice hockey and they were all national guardsmen, I would look and they were just so visible, I was wondering coming in from Florida it must have seemed more unreal.

Linda Allen- It really did.

Joan Beifuss- So that night Dr. King was killed?

Peggy Jemison- The night Dr. King was killed. I can't remember that we had first heard he had been shot over the radio, over television or whether someone heard it in the neighborhood. It seems to me that someone had heard it in our neighborhood and it was early enough in the evening that one of our children, I believe John our oldest child came in and told me this. And I can remember thinking oh no it can't be true and I hope it is not serious,. Then we heard that he had died and I can remember one of my children making, isn't that great was the remark my oldest child made. And because his feeling had been that King had come to town and stirred this thing up.

Joan Beifuss- How old is your oldest child?

Peggy Jemison- 16. And I can remember just being horrified that he should say something like this just spontaneously and so we had much conversation about you know what a dreadful tragedy this was. And then my husband was at the office again, and I knew he wouldn't know this and what was going to happen in Memphis. So then I immediately began to try and get the switchboard to try and tell Newton to come home. And there were three, this was income tax time and the two tax men one of whom is a very large and brawny man. McBride, and Johnny (muffled) and Newton were all at the office and the wives all called each other because we couldn't get the switchboard to answer and we all kept calling because the switchboard is two or three lines that are left on and the men where in there working don't want to answer the phone so you have to let it ring for a long time. And so we finally got them and they promised us that they would all leave together and go from car to car because the cars were parked in 3 different lots. We really didn't want any man alone. I was amazed that they agreed with the fact that they would all 3 stay together until they each got in their separate cars.

Joan Beifuss- They had not heard at the office?

Peggy Jemison- No, no, and so he came on home and of course it felt as if the world had come to an end. I think somehow last spring was just a nightmare and you thought this can't be happening and I can't be feeling the way that I am and there was a lethargy and then I think gradually you begin to come out and see where you can go and what you can do.

Carolyn Yellin- Well this is what I do think if we can get onto that, because I know that you had both been active in a good many community things before this with junior league and I don't know what else you had done that had been sort of related to the kind of work you go into after this. Before had you been much involved or was there a change?

Peggy Jemison- Well actually in my case I was more involved because I had finished this league job which was a big one and then I haven't done as much this past year just for personal reasons and so forth but I have been involved in the community working in a very realistic way with the black community and the white in SON and various things like this. It has been my experience has been in a civic, of a civic nature.

Joan Beifuss- this is over a long period of time?

Peggy Jemison- Over a long period of time so there hasn't been any great change in what I have been able to do. Linda has certainly moved into some other projects. I will say that my thinking has changed enormously about where I will work and what can be done.

Joan Beifuss- What can be.

Peggy Jemison- Well that is a very interesting question and I think we will start first of all with the Memphis Cares program as we recall our ride back in time for that. I think that...

Carolyn Yellin- That was the Sunday after..

Peggy Jemison- That was the Sunday after the assassination.

Carolyn Yellin- And before the memorial march?

Peggy Jemison- Exactly. Of course that was a spontaneous thing I think and it was attended by people I think who were genuinely sorry that the man Martin Luther King a father and a husband was slain.

Joan Beifuss- Without, excuse me, but without any giving implication of the Memphis strike? The point I was trying to make was that it was possible to go to Memphis Cares thing and be sorry that Dr. King was dead without following Dr. King's tie in to the labor situation here.

Peggy Jemison- Yes I think so.

Joan Beifuss- In other words you could have gone to Memphis Cares and still have wanted Henry to win the strike, was that at all possible?

Peggy Jemison- I am sure that is possible. I don't know that would be the case in most of the people there wanted a settlement, an honorable settlement. But I think

you could go and express the sympathy of a man whose certainly been a very responsible person and is now dead.

Linda Allen- I don't know Peggy that anybody that was there would have been there just for that reason.

Peggy Jemison- Just for that reason.

Linda Allen- It took courage to go to that as far as I was concerned. Newton and I went. We were called on Saturday evening and told about it as I recall. Well I don't know whether John Q. Fisher or Fred Beesing or somebody in our church called.

Joan Beifuss- What church is that?

Linda Allen- The church of the holy communion, the Episcopal church of the holy communion but there were many telephone calls being made.

Carolyn Yellin- It was a huge committee making calls.

Linda Allen- Several people called us to ask us if we were going. The telephone was busy that evening I recall, I believe it was Saturday night. Newton's first reaction was am certainly going but when I said I was going he said that he didn't think that both of us should go because there might be trouble and I told him that I felt it was important that this was one time when you could now stand up and be counted and it was important that we both go and we had to take a little risk that was involved and so we went. I looked around and knew many of the people that were there and I felt that most of them had the same feeling by this time that I had. So I question whether there was many people there that still wanted Henry to win the strike.

Joan Beifuss- I was just wondering if the charge was made about that Memphis (Muffled) made especially in the black community that really what it was, was an attempt to save Memphis' image you know publicity wise for the rest of the nation.

Peggy Jemison- I read that Joan and I was telling Linda that I said you know that to me is just as an unfortunate attitude as the other attitude of being so closed mind over the fact that their were grievances. And I think we all felt that when the town article came out and then I read several other articles later chuckling at the fact that this was simply to boost Memphis' image. I frankly don't think there was enough time in the planning to really have considered it from the public relations standpoint I think it was a spontaneous gesture to say we care.

Carolyn Yellin- In a way almost a catharsis for so many people who had been silent for so long.

Peggy Jemison- Exactly.

Carolyn Yellin- They thought here at last is something I can and must do.

Peggy Jemison- Exactly, and I think it was a genuine attempt not a perfect one but genuine one. But I do think that to simply and I know this did happen to credit it with that is just looking back and saying you know not considering anyone's motives good motives. But we can move on from that, that was the beginning perhaps and then I think....

Joan Beifuss- Let me say one more thing about Memphis Cares, do you recall at the point when the people in the audience started to leave, I think when reverend Lawson spoke some people got up and walked out and then when Tom O'Bryan spoke some black people got up and walked out. At least it was my impression that things were getting tense and tense.

Peggy Jemison- Yeah it had a very tense moment.

Carolyn Yellin- There was a moment when the police came up, do you recall that they were at the side, we were at that meeting too and there was a moment when there were sirens and police came up and I have forgotten at what moment that was but there...

Linda Allen- Lawson and Brown both caused much tension in the room.

Peggy Jemison- Well and I think it is interesting how you feel in a crowd I had never had fear in a crowd particularly but I think momentarily you sensed...

Carolyn Yellin- Well you felt you were living in, at least I felt we were living in a time of madness. I mean if this assassination could happen who knew what else could happen.

Peggy Jemison- Exactly, exactly there was one comment made and this started me thinking too. We were seated by a man who said you know, I am real interested and I wonder where is the voice of Russell Sugarman and A.W. Willis. And this I pondered and realized of course that for probably varied reasons neither black man was speaking at all or making himself felt one perhaps because of personal reasons, he was no longer in a position too, and one obviously not speaking for the black community and many white people that he did represent them. So this was another eye opener to me.

Carolyn Yellin- That the former acknowledged leaders were no..

Peggy Jemison- No where in evidence.

Carolyn Yellin- Had no affect in this anymore as far as being able..

Linda Allen- Well now (muffled) spoke at that meeting didn't he?

Carolyn Yellin- Yes.

Peggy Jemison- I really felt at that time it was Hooks that I hoped was representing the community of.

Carolyn Yellin- And Mary Collier spoke.

Carolyn Yellin- Oh Mary Collier did great, she was the star.

(Muffled)

Peggy Jemison- I think this was the way we ended up we want to know this woman and we want to find out about her and it has been my happy pleasure to see her on several pleasant occasions. She has something very much to offer I think to all of us. I think we should probably move on.

Linda Allen- I have got to leave in 5 minutes and we haven't talked about this year.

(Muffled)

Carolyn Yellin- Linda we can do another tape.

Peggy Jemison- Linda and I were perhaps the next thing that did come that we were able to participate in if you would like to talk about that a little bit is that we did work on the head start program and because we had heard that Memphis might lose the head start program for the summer if white children in the various neighborhoods were not enrolled, at least 10%. So we were able to just call on various neighborhoods a bit, I don't think we need to dwell on that.

Joan Beifuss- Did you go out door to door?

Peggy Jemison- Yes, we went door to door.

Carolyn Yellin- And Diana Crump worked with you on that?

Peggy Jemison- Yes and Margaret Metts, Linda and Diana were a team and Margaret and I were a team. Margaret and I went, Peggy I beg your pardon her daughter is Margaret. Peggy Metts and I did the Sherwood school district.

Joan Beifuss- Would you have worked so hard had it not been for the..

Peggy Jemison- No this was, a crash program , Francis Cove let us know that unless they had 10% white then they would not have the head start program so we sort of did this on a moment's notice.

Joan Beifuss- Could you, well there is only 5 minutes left but could you, what kind of response did you get in the Sherwood school district overall I mean.

Peggy Jemison- On the whole very good. I would say that we were able to call on enough people who were interested in the program and who knew about the program and who were willing for their children to go and it was primarily because of the principal of Sherwood school who was so grand and knew the department people who could be in the program and should be. I think we only encountered one woman who felt that this program was beneath her family and he wouldn't enter. Then I don't think in answer to her question, I don't think I would have done it either, door to door calling, I wouldn't have done it if it hadn't been..

Carolyn Yellin- It wasn't exactly your style. Really but you felt you had to do this.

Linda Allen- She had limited her door to door calling to the republican party.

Peggy Jemison- But it was certainly and I know many of our neighbors did that, Emily Hazelett did and we all came back with a new appreciation for what should be done. The other thing I was called upon to do was to sit on an additional committee of SON and decide if funds could be used for a summer program. I think in the Spring we were all very anxious to see that the summer didn't explode and everywhere that a program could be developed that would be beneficial and that it should be done and could be done. I think that SON did allocate an extra amount of money to start several programs for the summer time.

Carolyn Yellin- Have you found out things since that would surprise you for instance the fund for needy school children, had you been aware of the need for just this kind of thing? Did this expose you to new knowledge?

Peggy Jemison- Yes it did, yes definitely I think it did.

Linda Allen- Well I had known about Meyer (muffled) fund for needy children and early in during that last year Mary Clayton Saunders had called me and said I need some money or some time for getting a child to school this upcoming week and she told me she was working in the funds for needy children and I said I will give you 10 dollars to get the child by taxi to school next week because I certainly cannot drive a child to school at school time when I had my own to get off but this was sort of my introduction to the fund of needy children, you know I will give you some money but not my time right now. I really think it is important that we talk about our feeling after King died.

Carolyn Yellin- May I change tapes and we can get just another ten minutes? Or...  
(Tape End)