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Gwen Awsumb, Memphis City Council, 1968

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David Yellin- May 8th Tape 2

Gwen Awsumb- There was a point at which Mr. Patterson proposed an ordinance which would institute a direct duties check-off. And it was about the 12th of March I believe that he first proposed it in an off-meeting. This is not a formal meeting it was a discussion of how we could...and he said that he was going to propose this and we all said that we would not go along with it. He had opposition to it, we talked about what became to be known Patterson's Ordinance, a number of times and this is the point at which his participation in the legislature began to interfere to this extent. He came in to the, I'm trying to get my dates right, the 12th is a council meeting. I believe it must have been on the 12th that this happened the first time. He often did not come into the council meeting at 2:30 say until quarter til 3 or 10ish to 3, he would fly back from Nashville and it would take him that long to get back in. He had talked about this resolution and we had shown him that he did not have sufficient votes to pass. This particular day he came in and we have a rule on the council that unless you have submitted any ordinance or resolution prior to or by Friday noon, you have to have an agreement by the rest of the council members to get it on the agenda after that time. One objection can keep you from putting something on an agenda. So he came in on Tuesday and said that he was going to put this on the agenda. That day also was probed with all the many do-gooders about Overton Park and the expressway who were putting the pressure on us so terribly and this March the 12th was the day in which we did introduce the path of resolution saying that we preferred the expressway to go to the north of the park which cause us all our difficulties. I must confess that I was taken with the position that I had been pushed into without my knowledge of being the only woman on the council, the ladies who were pushing so hard for the elimination of the expressway, seemed to assume that I was aesthetically minded because I was a woman, therefore I certainly would not want the expressway to go through Overton Park. I had never assigned a petition to this extent and I had lived right near the park for years and when they first started this ten years ago I did not participate in it at all and I always thought this was the only way for it to go, therefore, I must confess pride sort of took over and I thought well if they think I am the great white hero then I will go on and assume this and I don't think it will hurt anything because I know it's going to go through there anyway, but if this will make them feel better then we will do it this way. If we are going to do it let me introduce it so that I can assume this role. So I assumed that role, we had discussed it in the morning session, and I went downstairs into the lobby and Mr. Patterson had just arrived as we walked into the council chamber and he is channeling the part committee. I said I would like to ask a favor of you, we are going to introduce a resolution about the Overton Park expressway this afternoon and I would like the privilege of moving the resolution if I may. And he said I will be glad to have you do it if you will vote for my resolution.

Joan Beifuss- Huh.

Gwen Awsumb- And I said, and what is that.

Carol Yellin- Horse trading here.

Gwen Awsumb- He had it on a piece of paper, a legal piece of paper written in long hand. And I said is that your check off resolution. And he said, well I have changed it some, I will read it at the meeting and I would like to get it on the agenda. So we got to the...and I said well I'm sorry I cannot go with you on the check off, you know that. So the Overton Park thing came up on its regular place on the agenda and I asked for the privilege in the open meeting and Mr. Patterson was very very gracious to me in the meeting and of course made no such trade, but the upshot of it was he allowed me to make the resolution but he was prevented from putting his resolution on the agenda as of that day, and so he announced that he would have it on the agenda for the next meeting and that it would be written out, We did get a copy of the handwritten thing that had been run through a copier while we were in meeting someone went up and ran it through the copier...

Carol Yellin- Just from his....

Gwen Awsumb- Just from his handwritten thing. And it was passed out, and it was straight through check off. And I kept that, I think I still have it.

Carol Yellin- Now was this in his own hand writing?

Gwen Awsumb- Yes and it was not allowed on the thing. The next week he was late to the meeting it was on the agenda to be discussed there was no question of whether he could get it on or not.

Carol Yellin- Still just from his hand written, this was his official submission.

Gwen Awsumb- Right he came in with a typed written resolution ordinance, which he distributed. No, he came in with a type written resolution and we got down to that point on the agenda, he said that he is going to want us to present this resolution. And Mr. Prior said, we don't have a copy of it. And he said, Mr. Prior said, is it a section of the resolution you had last week. And he said essentially but there are a few changes in it in wording. Just smoothing it out. And Mr. Prior said, Mr. Vineyard, who is our legal advisor who sits right beside Mr. Prior, Mr. Vineyard go and check what Mr. Patterson has and front of him and be sure that it is the same as we had last time, because if it were any different, if it were a different resolution then we had to go through the whole process again. So Mr. Vineyard went and checked the thing, and I had in front of me the hand written thing from the week before. Mr. Vineyard came back and said it is essentially the same, and Mr. Patterson read it at the request of the chairman and read it quickly and we took a vote on it and it was voted down. And I was of course the first one to vote, I had to vote. And I listened carefully when he read it and I had the hand written one in front and it was not the same. There was nothing wrong with the resolution that he presented that day.

David Yellin- The second one?

Gwen Awsumb- The second one. It was not the same as the first. It had a spot in which the check off was, I can't remember the exact detail but there would have been no objection actually to that resolution had he been at the executive session and had we been able to discuss it and that sort of thing. But coming in and throwing it out like this and we assumed it was the same resolution that we had the week before. It was voted down and...

Carol Yellin- Now you say, were you prepared to vote yes had it been the exact same...

Gwen Awsumb- We did take caucus, we did take a caucus. We adjourned the, we recessed the meeting and went into our little caucus room, and I remember saying to Bob James, there is nothing wrong with that resolution if you listen to it, it is not the same as the one last week. And Bob James said you will be crucified if you vote for that. And I said well we ought to talk about it. At one point that day someone went upstairs during that meeting we had delayed it quite a bit and went up and talked to the mayor about it and came back down. There was great confusion. We voted against Mr. Patterson's resolution that day and then he made a great play on television when it came around to his time to vote. This happened week after week and he was very sharp with his remarks about the fact that he had attempted to solve the problem and there was no telling what would happen due to the fact that we had taken this action. And failed to raster our responsibilities as a council. And it was the very next day of the first indication of any mention of Martin Luther King. The next day there was a notice in the paper that said he had been asked to come.

David Yellin- And this was the first you heard of it?

Gwen Awsumb- That's the first that I had heard of it, the next day and he had been asked to come.

David Yellin- Now did you, when you heard of it did you make any attempt to find out what that meant, or did it mean anything, or did you wonder who did it?

Gwen Awsumb- No, in the first place, my initial reaction was well this is just propaganda, because I happened to have read in the paper that King was going to Africa and I thought he had already gone. So I thought they were just saying this because....

Carol Yellin- Using it as a threat.

Gwen Awsumb- Yeah using it as a threat.

David Yellin- That was a Tuesday saying he would come on a Friday. And that he was going to...

Gwen Awsumb- And that was also the week that Ruston Wilkins came, they came on the 15th.

Joan Beifuss- I want to just go back one of the things, do you think you still have that hand written thing that wasn't passed out in Mr. Patterson's? ...That would be a thing since we have been requested and are really going to have as much of this as we can collect if you did have it if you could pass that along for our collection.

David Yellin- Now then Ruston Wilkins.

Gwen Awsumb- Wilkins. And they if you will recall asked for peace...

Joan Beifuss- They spoke at one of the negro churches.

David Yellin- Now do you feel Mrs. Dawson, that because I think what you have said, may suggest to some or may imply something that or I think deserves to be cleared up. You said seemingly after Mr. Patterson was disappointed then the next day Dr. King was asked forth, do you think there was any relationship between the two?

Gwen Awsumb- Not that I know of.

David Yellin- And if there is it was an accidental thing.

Gwen Awsumb- Yes.

David Yellin- Okay.

Gwen Awsumb- I didn't mean to infer that he had anything to do with King being asked to come.

Carol Yellin- In the impression of events this is....

Gwen Awsumb- Right , but that's right.

Carol Yellin- Do you feel that perhaps had this Patterson thing being adopted by the council perhaps there would have been a change in subsequent events, had there been a yes vote and had you even as the first person to vote on this had you voted yes do you think that would have...I guess this is what I was getting at, were you prepared, you said you had this hand written resolution.

Gwen Awsumb- I was prepared to vote no because I...

Carol Yellin- You were prepared to vote no on the hand written?

Gwen Awsumb- Right.

Carol Yellin- And did you feel that the typed written one, you said there was nothing wrong with it, did you feel that it was an improvement to some extent.

Gwen Awsumb- It said a different thing. It said a different thing.

Carol Yellin- And it was more acceptable actually than the hand written.

Gwen Awsumb- My feeling was one of anger that Mr. Patterson had pulled a real smooth operation and put us in the position of publicly going against something that was notand he did it in a very smooth way and this was his intention.

Carol Yellin- And actually he had you voting no on something that had he presented it earlier and you had had time to analyze it you might well have voted yes. That clears that up fine.

Gwen Awsumb- This was obviously a candid thing. And I so informed him.

Carol Yellin- And you didn't have time in hearing it, looking at something in front of you, then hearing it go by and then having to vote immediately you didn't have time to make an assessment that you wanted to stand on the record forever. And even after the caucus you felt you hadn't had time really to...

David Yellin- What was his reaction to your...

Gwen Awsumb- He just smiled.

David Yellin- So you conclude from that that he was aware?

Gwen Awsumb- I went over to him after we had taken the vote and he still had it in front of him, and I said I would like to read that, and I had the hand written one in my hand and I looked at the new one and I looked at mine and I said, these are not the same. And he sort of smiled and I said I don't appreciate you pulling a deal like this one bit. Because we tried to cooperate and we tried to do the best thing for the community in a cooperative way among ourselves and this is our final straw, and he just smiled.

Carol Yellin- Had Mr. Davis voted yes on (Muffled)

Gwen Awsumb- So it made it to 10-3 vote. No I'm sorry but this time Mr. Blanchard is voting with him. Mr. Blanchard voted with him, he had established himself by this part in time.

David Yellin- So Dr. King's entry into this, brother King is so shadowy and he never sees.....

Carol Yellin- King first is a name never unreal

Gwen Awsumb- Right.

Carol Yellin- Not knowing he was supposed to be out of the country.

David Yellin- Now suppose he had come, would his coming have meant anything to you, was it something to be desired, feared, ignored?

Gwen Awsumb- I remember discussing when we saw that Wilkins and Ruston, the advanced notice that Wilkins and Ruston coming was very short. I was not aware that they were here until just the day they got here, something to this effect. And if

you will recall they left immediately after the meeting they did not even stay I don't believe until the morning.

Carol Yellin- They were both here the same day.

Gwen Awsumb- That's right.

Carol Yellin- They both spoke at the same meeting.

Gwen Awsumb- I remember discussing with Mr. Donelson what do you think about the idea of talking to Wilkinson and Ruston? Do you think it would be of any help if we would get together. And he said I don't know but I will look into it. Then we both found out they were only going to be here a very short time and there was no attempt made. In between this if you will recall the...Tim spoke on the 18th and was to march on the 22nd. He was going to come back for this march on the 22nd.

David Yellin- April right?

Gwen Awsumb- No, no, this was March. And the 21st of, the 21st is that right? Yeah the 21st is March it was a regular council meeting and because of our situation we recess and did not adjourn the meeting, we recessed the meeting. In order to be ready to meet again for any action that might be necessary thinking id the strike got over at any time we might have to make some action and we met on a Thursday afternoon at 4 or 5, 5 o'clock I guess it was. Something in that afternoon. It was late in the afternoon that we had decided to meet from the recessed meeting of the Tuesday prior to that. This was the meeting at which was designed the resolution to ask for a mediation board headed by Frank Niles. This was to be a unanimous vote. Mr. Netters was in Chicago and we delayed the meeting after we got down there waiting for Mr. Netters to come in. This was when the snow started on Thursday night. We were all down in the city hall waiting for Mr. Netters in the snow storm. So its happening were as big as quarters I had never seen anything like it. We talked about the march which was to be the next day, that King was to march the next day. Mr. Davis said, as he looked out the window and the snowflakes were falling in great abundance and so big and everything was so white. It just shows you what white power can do. We were all very light-hearted about it, I don't think anyone was apprehensive particularly about the march. You know we had ...there was no at that time if you will recall there was no effort on the part of anyone on an injunction at that point.

David Yellin- There was no apprehension as you say about Martin Luther King coming here. So that when you first heard he was coming you felt that well he wasn't really coming because you knew about the trip to Africa.

Gwen Awsumb- Yeah, yeah.

David Yellin- Then indeed it was so, and then from Atlanta they said, as far as we know Martin Luther King is going to Africa and he has not accepted an invitation, but an invitation was delivered to him, but he subsequently came.

Gwen Awsumb- He came and he spoke on the night of the 18th, and then was to come back for this march on the 22nd.

David Yellin- Now was there anything as a result of his coming on the 18th that he said at the time.

Gwen Awsumb- No I don't recall being concerned by anything eh said then, but I was concerned about what he said the night before when he spoke the next time.

David Yellin- Can we go to that, or do you have any other events that intervene other than the snow storm and they didn't march. Then the march was then scheduled for the 28th the following Thursday instead of Friday. There was then any difficulty about whether the march should be held?

Gwen Awsumb- Yes there was. There was a....

Carol Yellin- Meanwhile the tops had bogged down, the mediation effort had been made during that week hadn't it?

Gwen Awsumb- The mediation effort went on and began the day after the big snow storm, on Saturday they started and they continued and they....

David Yellin- Did you approve of Mr. Miles or was that necessary, I mean did you officially approve?

Gwen Awsumb- Yes.

David Yellin- The council did?

Gwen Awsumb- Yes. This was an actual request of the council that this mediation be formed with certain members of the union and certain members representing the city. And be mediated by Mr. Miles who offered in the background.

David Yellin- How did his name.....

Gwen Awsumb- Mr. Prior can tell you, I wish you would ask Mr. Prior about this because Mr. Prior worked with Mr. Miles on this aspect of getting him through this.

David Yellin- Now so the first appearance of Dr. King and then the snow storm cancelling his march. Then another appearance and another speech or did he not come back then until the 20-...

Gwen Awsumb- He came back, let's see, I don't believe he made a...He did make a speech the night before he was killed.

Carol Yellin- I believe he made one the night before, that's what we call the mini riot.

Gwen Awsumb- No, that was Abernathy who came in advance and they made speeches...

David Yellin- He was late...

Carol Yellin- He was late arriving which....

Gwen Awsumb- And Abernathy came and I would like to say that on the late afternoon of the day that Abernathy made his talk...

Carol Yellin- It would be the 22nd?

Gwen Awsumb- Right. The 22nd. I was called by I hate to say this but an old college friend of mine who is now with the civil rights commission here, John Spantz is the second in command there. John had approached me prior to that as far as getting together with a group of people to see what we could do to stop all the unrest that looked like was coming. This was several weeks prior to this. And John was very concerned about it and I would not cooperate but I did suggest that he call Blanchard, which he did, and they did have some gatherings of David Kaywood, and Blanchard, and Edmund Orgill and some other people behind the scenes trying to work with the negro community and so forth in the areas in which they had contacted. Trying to see some solution to the problem. But John Spantz called me on the 27th about 5 o'clock and asked if I was going to the meeting that night at Mason Temple. And I said no, why would I go? And he said well you know Mr. Abernathy is quite a forceful speaker. And I said well that may be, but I don't see any reason for me to go down and hear what Mr. Abernathy has to say. And he said well I think it might be a good idea. And he said had you been to any of the meetings at noon at the union hall? And I said no. He said that he had been and taken there end and there were very interesting. I said well that may be but I really believe I get enough of it just sitting on the council chamber, I don't believe I need to go down to the union hall. But anyway I did say no that I would not go to Mason Temple that night to hear Abernathy. In the meantime, I fielded calls, when the team did come they had started the...there was still no question as far as an injunction to stop the march, it wasn't ethical to stop the march.

Carol Yellin- There was simply a...

Gwen Awsumb- But the union, but the mediation, the union walked out of the mediation meeting in the afternoon prior, 5 o'clock prior to the day of the march.

Joan Beifuss- The 28th?

Gwen Awsumb- Yeah they walked out on the afternoon of the 27th. As I said there had been no legal maneuvering to prevent the march at this time. There had only been preparation to protect the march by Mr. Holland and the police department, but no legal maneuvering to stop it in anyway. Thursday morning of the day of the march we had a meeting with the public works department on a presentation on sewage disposal system. Which we will eventually have to have and is in the process of being designed. Not all council members were present, this was at 9 o'clock in the morning and not all council members were there but I would say probably 7 or 8 were there. The meeting broke up about 11:30. The call was

supposed to take place at 11, then it was pushed back until 12. We went downstairs to go home and as we got downstairs I was with Billy Niland, and Jerry Blanchard and we walked out of the lobby and there were quite a few police around and they had built a scaffold out in front and so forth and King was going to make a speech on the steps of City Hall. We talked about whether the police had these walkie talkie type of things where they could hear what was going on and they said the parade has been delayed and they would expect to be down here about 12 o'clock.

Carol Yellin- It was about 11:30?

Gwen Awsumb- Yes it was about 11:30. So we said let's hang around and see what Mr. King has to say. It will be interesting to see him. No though of any fear or any reason not to stay there. So we stood there and talked, and as I said the place had quite a few of secretaries and so forth had come out of their offices to see what was going on and I remember watching, fascinated, as a little country girl would be watching the television set up their cameras on top of the roof across the street by the crump building.

David Yellin- Yes, yes.

Gwen Awsumb- I thought gee, we are really getting big time, I will have to watch this at 6 o'clock you know. About that time there seemed to be much scurrying back and forth and one of the police came over and said the march has gotten out of hand. They are breaking windows all up and down Beale St. To the three of us they said, you should leave now, or be prepared to stay in city hall for sometime because we are going to lock all entrances and bar all entrances and exits to city hall and if you want to get out go now. So Billy Hammond and I decided we better go and Jerry took off in the direction of the march. He went right out the door and down main street. And Billy Hammond said I will go I got work to do I can't be up here all day. And the policeman said I would suggest that you go not home if you are going to be alone, I would suggest that you go to the house of a friend.

David Yellin- To you?

Gwen Awsumb- Mmmhmmm. By this time the reports were coming in of even worse nature over the radio. Apparently a full scale riot was breaking loose. So I found this a little hard to believe, so I went down and got my car and started out Poplar and turned on the radio and heard this young woman who works for channel 13 who is quite young Kay Pullins...

David Yellin- Kay Pullins she is a recent graduate of (Muffled)

Gwen Awsumb- Yeah and she in her high pitched exciting voice, apparently she was right in the middle of it, and she was telling in a very excited way what was happening. So I then realized things were getting a little out of hand. So at about that time cam further to Beale and saw the bishop's car and so I stopped. This is where I had worked for six or ten years and so I went in and to the bishop and I said to him, are you a friend or foe, I was told this was the home of a friend. So he said

what is the matter you look terrible. I said well there is a full scale riot going on downtown. And his initial reaction was oh my god no. He had been out to the airport that morning to meet a person from the national council of the Episcopal Church who was sent in here as a troubleshooter or something. He didn't want him to come but he thought that he could maybe avert his participation in the march by going out and meeting him.

Carol Yellin- Now is this the Tennessee Bishop Zan...

Gwen Awsumb- Zandross. And he went to meet him and he said King came in at the same time at the airport, and this man I knew, knew him and introduced me to him at the airport this morning. My reaction was, well jolly for him. Then I just...he said he could not, he was waiting to hear from this man. That he had gone to meet and he was to check back with the Bishop at noon, they were going to have lunch together, after the march. I never did find out what happened to the man. Anyways the Bishop was sitting inside waiting, and I stayed there for a little while. And as you will recall this was a Thursday and I went out to my Bible group again.

Carol Yellin- Now just to...

David Yellin- Yeah we will come back to that because I think that is one of the most fascinating...

Carol Yellin- The Bible group of 7 or 8 men who you had been meeting with for 15 years I believe. You had in the course of the strike you had been there just because they met on Thursdays?

Gwen Awsumb- It was Thursday.

Carol Yellin- So you hadn't always been there right after council meetings because they would be on Tuesdays but the subject had been discussed.

Gwen Awsumb- I was there right after the public works hearing.

Carol Yellin- Yes that was it.

Gwen Awsumb- And I was there this day after the riot. And then I was there the day Martin Luther King was killed.

Carol Yellin- So that you, this was a fascinating aspect of your own involvement and how personal relationships became involved in this and the feeling.

David Yellin- So is there anymore of that day that you want to talk about?

Carol Yellin- This wasn't the day that, it went directly to the Bible....

David Yellin- Can I just ask the few questions that just kind of fill in and then maybe if you could tell us about the Bible group and I think that might cover a lot of territory. At one time and this is completely changing the subject but just to kind of get your idea, at one time you had supposedly, or not supposedly, you had, it was

reported that you investigated a police brutality charge and found it was false? Can you tell us about that so that it is clear and put to rest?

Gwen Awsumb- Well of course this was following the assassination, and I immediately following the assassination we had the charges brought to us by the negro community as fast as what had happened. In the meantime, this case that I looked into, this was a case that was to have happened on the night of the riots. The first go around. When we first put the curfew on. I was asked about it that weekend by my brother-in-law who asked me to investigate Wood Halloman? Because he felt that if this sort of thing was going on, and see this was before the assassination but if this sort of thing was going on that this was provocation enough to continue difficulties and unrest and those kind, if the police were being unfair and unjust. Well the week between the march and the assassination was such that I just put off thinking anything about this particular thing at that time. I just put it off.

Carol Yellin- But your brother-in-law mentioned this specific case.

Gwen Awsumb- Yes.

Carol Yellin- So he had heard of it and he was the first one who mentioned this specific case.

Gwen Awsumb- Well this young man worked for him on the weekends, and it was that weekend he heard about it and talked to me about it then. He was thoroughly convinced that this young man was telling him the truth and he wanted me to check it out. And as I say I did not check it out until after the assassination.

David Yellin- Because of the press of events or just.....

Gwen Awsumb- Press of events and we were in practically constant meetings during that week, also I felt Mr. Holman had his hands full and this was something that had already taken place and the board had already been in court and paid his fine, this was a report that I was going to get on this particular case. So I jotted down that date and would do it when things quieted down for a little bit. This wasn't the case of him sitting in jail until I did this. He was out and about his business so I didn't feel it would hurt anything for me to wait on it. Next weekend when King was assassinated, my brother-in-law and my sister-in-law both, and they are family, became very taken with guilt and all sorts of things, and they pressed me for why had I not done this.

Carol Yellin- Now is this your husband's ...

Gwen Awsumb- My husband's sister.

Carol Yellin- Husband's sister...

Gwen Awsumb- and her husband. He is the administrator for the New Mata center down on Pauline. So I still did not do anything until they came in. Well I did do it before they came in backing brutality charges. So I did write a letter to Mr.

Hallman? Exclaiming the situation. I did not criticize him in anyway for this incident I just asked him for a report on it. I told him the facts and the dates and so forth. And as they were related to me and to my brother-in-law that the young man had been walking along the street on Union Ave. in front of Forrest Statue at 10:30 at night on his way to the 11 to 7 shift of which he worked down at the Med?. A Lemoyne College student working his way through college and by 11 to 7 shift five days a week and that's an orderly at the medic center on the weekend. Quiet boy, my brother-in-law thought this deserving and this was the kind of thing the wanted the negroes to do working hard to get an education, therefore, don't slap them down if that's what they are trying to do. This was his attitude. With which I agree, but with which from his description of the police stopping him, because it was under curfew and asking him what he was doing. He said he was going to work, and they did not believe him, put him in the car took him down to jail. Kept him for 24 hours without letting him make a telephone call. Took him into Wineman's court and he was fined 51 dollars and released. Because people thought he was such a fine and deserving young man that the rest of the staff at the medi-center had taken up a purse to replace the 51 dollars that he lost because they felt this was both black and white help. They felt he had been treated unjustly and he needed the money to get through school. This initially made no sense to me but I followed it through and it turned out that he had not been arrested at that time but he had been arrested following the outbreak of the difficulty following the march. At 6:30 at the corner of Linden and Hernando, looting a store, caught in the act of looting. Had to be subdued when arrested by, they did not even have billy clubs there was never any question of brutality because...he had never charged brutality. But he had been chased out of the store, and because of the fact that they did not have billy clubs they had to wrestle him down to the ground. They took them in and I further had a letter from Holland Price who said he was not now nor had he never been a student at Lemoyne College.

Carol Yellin- He simply reported this to his co-workers or had posed as a Lemoyne student,...they actually at the medi-center they believed he was. So he had presented himself there.

Gwen Awsumb- Yeah.

David Yellin- Well you had followed through on it someone...ok, now just one other, because you did mention something as we went along, and we are finding out things. Do you feel that both sides in the dispute were given, I don't know what to say because I don't want to make any allegations, adequate news coverage, fair or reasonable.

Gwen Awsumb- I feel...

David Yellin- Mr. Todd, and Mr. Pesch, that kind of thing and the union and the mayors.

Gwen Awsumb- There was a point at which and particularly I checked the scrapbook yesterday, I said to several councilmen that came by while I was working on it, there is a, I wish I had the date of the that, I can get it. There is a headline in the Commercial Appeal which says, Mayor to offer compromise on strike. That's when we lost it, right down the drain. Right that living instant we could have ended it that day had they not used that word.

David Yellin- Now explain that.

Gwen Awsumb- Because this is a word that to our mayor whom I support but who I told to his face he is hard headed and stubborn this is a word as bad to him as nigger is to the negro. It's like waving a red flag.

Carol Yellin- That is a fascinating observation.

Gwen Awsumb- It's like waving a red flag. And he backed off, that was when we were going to do the check off through the credit union, and he had agreed to it. And when it came out that line like that.

Carol Yellin- I thought it was in February?

Gwen Awsumb- When it came out headlined like that, we could never get him back to that middle ground again.

David Yellin- So that somebody had been, or had been privy to the fact that the mayor was down talking to you and that he had agreed to certain things Mr. Prior...

Gwen Awsumb- Most of our meetings were open to the press except for one two hour session that I mentioned.

David Yellin- So all of this traffic and communication resulted in well now he is going to compromise.

Gwen Awsumb- And they used that unfortunate word.

Carol Yellin- in this thing I remember one thing that I...

Gwen Awsumb- Well may I say I do not blame the mayor as such for this. I am just saying that

Carol Yellin- It was a situation in which...

Gwen Awsumb- It was a situation in which this.....

Carol Yellin- Had to happen.

Gwen Awsumb- Right.

Carol Yellin- I wanted to ask again because you had mentioned it and I think this is jumping a little ahead in the story. There was a time and perhaps it was during this

week between the mini riot and the return of Dr. King and his death. When you were quoted in the paper as saying that you were tired of backing Henry Load, there was some sort of statement. And I believe that you said that you became involved in explaining this, that there it wasn't an accurate...or that it involved an explanations to constituents that called you. And I thought that was something I wanted to ask further, what was, what had you said and what was reported, and how do believe you having to explain things.

Gwen Awsumb- It was reported on Tuesday afternoon as a result of our executive session in the morning in which the press center reporter telephones in information which as you have noticed that it comes out in our afternoon session that we don't do that at all. He has gotten himself in jams, but sometimes we change our minds too.

Carol Yellin- His press is on deadline that's his call.

Gwen Awsumb- Yes, his press of deadline.

David Yellin- April 2nd.

Gwen Awsumb- Yes. He calls in and gives the information and someone else writes it at the desk, he does not write it himself. The discussion last morning, I can't recall exactly how they...once again came up, which constantly came up, well what does the mayor think about it? Can we get this past the mayor? This was of course why all the talks were not going on you see they had broken off before the first march and they were not taking up again, and we were discussing that morning where do we go from here I guess. I can't remember now.

Carol Yellin- An injunction was...at this point they were considering an injunction to stop the...

Gwen Awsumb- A restraining order.

Carol Yellin- A restraining order to stop the march.

Gwen Awsumb- But there was discussion as to any steps that might be taken at this point and I made the statement that I was getting a tremendous amount of mail and telephone calls in which people were saying I want you to support the mayor, please support the mayor. I said I am sick and tired of people calling and saying support the mayor. I do support the mayor, same thing I had said to Patterson weeks before. I do support him because I believe the way he does, in fact I am even more strongly in this area than he has been because I did not approve of him giving the food stamps, I did not approve of several of the steps that he has taken and I would have laid down and ultimatum long ago had I had anything to do with it. But nevertheless, it's not that I don't support the mayor I am just sick and tired of people feeling, after all this was not why I was elected. I wasn't elected to support the mayor, I was elected to vote the way I see things, call the shot and represent a district. Now I do maintain that 85 %to 90% of my district supports the mayor. So

you are right, but not because he is the mayor but because he (muffled). Came out in the paper that I was so sick and tired of supporting the mayor. And I got the newspaper at 5 o'clock in the afternoon because I went up into the conference room away from the formal meeting of the council to get some mail or something and the newspaper was up on the desk and this just popped out at me. Before I went back to the council I went roaring into the mayor's office with the newspaper in my hand. Went right in and he was talking to a young man. I said I am sorry to interrupt but I just can't go home until I, have you seen this? He said yes I have seen it, don't get so exercised over such a thing. Because I know that you would have not said that. But I was pretty upset that it had said that. I knew what would happen even though I called immediately that night.

Carol Yellin- The omission, actually the omission was that they hadn't included your statement, I do support the mayor. The had just...

Gwen Awsumb- No, they combined the two sentences, I am sick and tired of supporting the mayor.

David Yellin- What happened was I was sick and tired of people telling me to support the mayor. I either support him or I won't that 's not the point don't keep bugging me.

Carol Yellin- Because you were elected to do your duties as council.

David Yellin- And so then on Thursday...

Gwen Awsumb- Yeah, so at that time I got the mail on Thursday. That resulted from that night.

Carol Yellin- As you...I wonder if we, you mentioned that you really got a few anonymous calls in fact, or did you...

Gwen Awsumb- Yeah.

Carol Yellin- I remember the one that you assumed was (muffled).

Gwen Awsumb- Did I tell you that? Where she called me names?

David Yellin- Yes, Yes you did.

Carol Yellin- Because I think...I will tell you why. I think this is significant that the fact that this kind of pressure is important, and I say pressure but it was coming on all sides.

Gwen Awsumb- Well my reaction to that telephone call was one of great disheartening effect on me because the whole tone of the aftermath of the assassination seemed to me to be one of how did we get in this situation of hate? We must turn around and do something about it. Everyone tried in their own way to do something about it to the extent that almost in my opinion, almost being

marveling about the whole thing initially. Except that everyone in their own way was trying to re-establish themselves and there whole situation. I thought well here is an opportunity to really get down to the nitty gritty of the situation and get on the road of understanding and cooperation between the two communities until I realized how far from this some individuals were and due to the fact that we met the day after the assassination and did several things which were very little of themselves, but were attempts of the thirteen of us in some way to open the door, extend the hand, do something. Maybe fro our own guilt, I don't know.

Carol Yellin- Well hindsight is always the most...

Gwen Awsumb- But whatever it was we did it, and we did it because we too felt how did we get to a point that this such a thing would happen and that night after it had been reported a woman called. And she definitely was a white woman. I was going to say I have had anonymous calls from negro women prior to this, with very ugly talk about the fact that I would not go along with what they considered a racial situation. Which I stated earlier I never considered it a racial situation. And just because I would not vote to end the strike on just any terms whatsoever. I mean on just give it to them, this was implying in the negro community that I was anti-negro. So it was disheartening to me that having gone along on all of the things that I felt would open the door for a negro, for a white woman to call and say, I voted for you and now you are down there doing things for those niggers. You are nothing but a cigarette smoking bitch. And hung up. And then it sickened me to think that there were people that had such a viewpoint of the whole situation. To me it was unbelievable, particularly in the atmosphere which had been created by the assassination, by the attempt of people with Memphis cares and all of this to get together and try and come up with some kind of, at least approach to the problem. At least people realized we had a problem. A lot of people hadn't realized we had a problem and the impact of it and then to realize that she could be so far off in some remote corner.

Carol Yellin- Well to me the significant thing here, and I am glad you mentioned the calls from the other....being criticized from both sides. I this is a significant thing, and also the indication as you said the over worked word, polarization. But you certainly , you were personally aware of t his through this kind of abuse that you were subjected to from both sides, I hadn't realized this actually came after the assassination. I wanted to ask one other thing because I think this too bore...you stated so clearly and I don't remember which tape it was but you mentioned again the matter at various ways that you believe the strike may have been settled. This business of Henry Loads, he was the one who volunteered the (muffled). Which in our view...

Gwen Awsumb- Well that is an administrative line, I had prefect right to do it.

Carol Yellin- But you wouldn't have done it the same way?

Gwen Awsumb- No, I wouldn't have done it at all.

I was told after that too, that I sound awful hard hearted and cruel. I didn't mean to be but I see no reason why union couldn't have taken care of feeding the striking employees. They were off on strike on this union bit and this has certainly been taken care of in the past the union takes care of employees who are on strike.

Carol Yellin- And this was actually an unusual move for someone who was...

Gwen Awsumb- I have never heard of subsidizing striking employees.

Carol Yellin- And the city in essence being the employer.

Gwen Awsumb- Right. This is the point that got me.

Carol Yellin- I think that is clearly stated.

David Yellin- Would you go over the Thursday meeting.

Carol Yellin- You have been so kind to give us this extra time, would you like to take a break?

Gwen Awsumb- No, no.

David Yellin- Well if you could go ahead, you can call me Mr. Yellow. If you could I just so what as we remember, it was just so fascinating and we want to try and remember fascinating, that Thursday, that day of the assassination when you left the council meeting.

Gwen Awsumb- Uh uh. That was the day of the riot.

Carol Yellin- That was the day of the riot and when you stopped by the bishop.

Gwen Awsumb- No I went to the ...

David Yellin- I don't mean to skip but I say that the day of the assassination you left Thursday and joined your bible group but you didn't come to lunch.

Carol Yellin- The assassination was at 6 o'clock in the evening.

Gwen Awsumb- On a Thursday.

David Yellin- I know.

Carol Yellin- Oh excuse me I see.

David Yellin- I know.

David Yellin- But that Thursday before the assassination, when there was much.

Gwen Awsumb- I spoke that morning at St. Mary's School as the alumni day speaker and I explained my position on the strike that day. And received word while at that meeting that a previously scheduled meeting for that afternoon, which again was a

recessed meeting from Tuesday in order to meet with Mr. Birdgewell from Washington on the Overton Park Expressway, and we had been out Wednesday night to meet with him and talk with him. Then we were to make our...

David Yellin- That was the tornado night.

Gwen Awsumb- That was the night of the tornadoes. Then Thursday we were to meet at 4 o'clock. I got word that they had set the meeting up at 3 o'clock. So I went from St. Mary's to (muffled) who was a member of our group who was having a luncheon on the day instead of the bible group we had a lunch which we do not have ordinarily but one of our group was going to Europe and so we were...she was leaving that was Thursday and she was leaving Tuesday. There is an interesting thing here that I neglected to tell you before which might be of interest to you and that was the fact that this person who is going to Europe is the wife of one of the federal judges here. And the injunction and so forth had been handled not by him because he was called to do it but he was out of town and the other judge, Judge Brown is the one who handled it. Thursday night after the assassination due to the fact that the federal judges had been involved the marshals decided that they needed some protection and a police car was sent to the home of the McRays and sat in the driveway, and my friend Lou felt very concerned about these people sitting out in her driveway all night. She thought this was awful silly but there wasn't anything she could do about it. But about midnight she decided that at least she could fix them some coffee. So she went down to the kitchen and fixed a pot of coffee and then timorously went out the backdoor and making lots of noise for fear she might get shot before she even got to the car. In the dark tapped on the windows and said won't you come in for coffee. They rolled down the windows and poked their heads outside all smiles and they were both black. Lou didn't bat an eyelash and in they came. I thought this was great and she had them come in and the judge came down in his pajamas and they sat around and they had some coffee.

David Yellin- They weren't the McRays that were going to Europe?

Gwen Awsumb- Mrs. McRay yes, the following Tuesday but this is Thursday night of the assassination after we had been at lunch that day.

Carol Yellin- It is most interesting that the mass protection that they did send.

Gwen Awsumb- This was not hollowman who did this, this was the head of marshals.

David Yellin- Now these were not policeman were they?

Gwen Awsumb- They were federal marshals.

Carol Yellin- We are getting a little bit of an echo there.

Gwen Awsumb- But anyway back to the luncheon that we had that day ended up in a violent argument over the strike and the approach of these people that felt no

matter what it took it should be ended and I still maintain my stand that, the saying developed as events took place that the threat of violence and the actual violence that took place and the wake of stark tragedy in our community never changed or turned around on the strike.

David Yellin- And the issue was the municipal unionization, and the contrusion of the racial situation was not something that you ever encountered?

Gwen Awsumb- No, I knew it existed and it had been thrust into it but in my mind I kept it completely separate.

David Yellin- You say that 1 of this group or two as a matter of fact changed, was this the first time they indicated the change.

Gwen Awsumb- No, this has been developing a long time.

David Yellin- Developing. Not completely, but now that it happened you weren't that surprised or completely surprised.

Gwen Awsumb- Oh no. Every time I came with them, they said I know you are tired of talking about it , you hearing about it 24 hours a day but we want to start a little to do.

David Yellin- This time they thus and so...

Gwen Awsumb- We weren't actually meeting in study group this was our relaxing day anyway as far as the luncheon was concerned, so it was a more social occasion than anything else, therefore the conversation did go in this direction. But they did feel that something had to be done, they felt things were just ready to pop open.

David Yellin- Why did they feel that, that day?

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

David Yellin- Any special intuition that you didn't have?

Gwen Awsumb- No.

David Yellin- So that now you were supposed to leave there and go to the meeting at 3 o'clock.

Gwen Awsumb- Yes and I did. Then I left the meeting at City Hall after we voted on the expressway and walked out and though at least we have that problem out of the way now we can work on the other. And it was then that when I got home after several telephone calls.

David Yellin- What was that at that time as I recall you said you were in a way sort of had battle fatigue, an it was about 4 o'clock and you just had to escape somewhere. Do you recall?

Gwen Awsumb- I think what you are referring to there, is the day of the riot.

David Yellin- Oh.

Gwen Awsumb- When I left and I went to Mrs. McRay's and the bible had enough people that could meet that day. Mrs. McRay and another member and I sat in the backyard in the sunshine without benefit of radio or anything else and visited. I kept putting off leaving, we talked about everything else but the difficulty. They knew that it had happened and I knew that it had happened, the break up of the march. But we just did not discuss it, and when I left and turned on the radio and heard about the boy being killed and realized. And then I went to Goldsmith's and I did everything else except to go home.

David Yellin- Oddly enough we do have some part of the tape that remains...we do have the telephone calls that you made and then when your daughter, when you spoke with your daughter and your realization. I would say that for sure.

Gwen Awsumb- Pick my brain.

David Yellin- Well let's say history did, everything I have here you sort of have answered.

Carol Yellin- All of the...including the questions that weren't on the...

Gwen Awsumb- Well there was one question..

David Yellin- I have one but go ahead.

Carol Yellin- Go ahead.

David Yellin- Can you from your point of view and since you have, I don't even know how to technify it since you have such what I call a delightful aspect of the mayor. Anybody in the sense who can swear at somebody and still be friends, there is a real big feeling in between them. Why do you think that the mayor decided to yield, that's not the word, I don't want to put up a red flag and say compromise. Why would you say that the two acquiesce to agree to what in essence were the union's demands. That he said that he would not, or do you feel like it did not come out that way. In other words was he agreeing to settling I guess is a better way to say it.

Gwen Awsumb- Well I think mainly because he had agreed fairly well to listen to this mediation for and their recommendation. After the assassination one of the things he did was to move that they go back into meeting immediately which they did, and it took them about 10 days or maybe two weeks. It went right along.

David Yellin- was the inclusion of Mr. Reynolds in the effort, was this an asset or...

Gwen Awsumb- This was an asset. I had thought it would be a detriment. I was horrified when they brought the Federal Government into it, because I thought what would result would be complete capitulation and we would be forced by the Federal

Government to give in to the union. But Mr. Miles and (muffled) who sat in on the talks proved to be very helpful.

Carol Yellin- and it was exactly that? It did turn out to be mediation.

Gwen Awsumb- It was mediation.

Carol Yellin- Not arbitration.

Gwen Awsumb- That's right not arbitration and I think that the mayor actually accepted it mainly on the basis, I have never discussed this aspect with him, but I would assume that, I have made the statement and I made it a minute ago about never changing my stand on things to him and he felt that strongly and I think that he continued to feel that way. The fact that the mediation committee recommended a solution which did not give a direct dues check off, and did not give a signed contract which were the two things that the mayor had said he would never do. The rest of it he didn't like the money aspect of it but the council had been willing on the money 10 now and 5 later. Where as we had said 5 now and 10 later. Pretty well amounts to the same thing. I think these were the two reasons not because of the bylaws and not because of economic pressure of the community.

Carol Yellin- The boycotts.

David Yellin- Economic pressure by business leaders?

Gwen Awsumb- I mean people calling from businesses and saying you have got to do something we can't stand it another day.

David Yellin- Ok fine, so selfish.....

Gwen Awsumb- One thing I wanted.....(Tape cuts off)