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

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David Yellin: This is tape 2 with Rev. Richard C. Wells on September 1, 1972. He has just been joined by his wife, Dodie, and several children who possibly may be absent from this session.

David Yellin: We're going to pick up, Dick; you recall then and have resurrected some notes that you had on March 31, so please take on from there.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: This is the Sunday after the march was disrupted, but before King was assassinated, and these are just the notes that I have on that particular sermon.

David Yellin: Which, excuse me, I heard you were going to give to us to copy and/or keep.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: Yeah, one way or another you can have it.

David Yellin: So, this will act as the transaction. This tape we are now making. You are now doing it at your own...

Rev. Richard C. Wells: Did I agree to anything?

David Yellin: Yes, you are now doing it on your own free will, and I will take away the gun.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: I began by talking about the fact that we make many mistakes, and I make many mistakes, and the church makes many mistakes, but that the main mistake of church, the church's sin is silence at this time, and because I believe that, and in light of the past week, I will consider that silence would be my greatest sin today if I did not say what I need to say. I indicated that I seemed to have been misunderstood last Sunday when I spoke on giving, and used the means of the garbage man as an example. at that time I said nothing that the mayor has not already said, at least in the press, but I find that the more involved one becomes in this, the less he knows, and the less involved one is, the more he seems to know about it. So then my thrust this Sunday, which I have here is that Christians need to be agents of reconciliation, that we need to condemn violence in all its forms, and we need to condemn violence in the rice patties of Vietnam, as much as in the streets of Memphis, but sitting around condemning is not enough, and has never been a Christian attitude. Jesus' response to the woman taken in adultery was not to sit around simply and condemn her, but we must seek to understand, and then to treat the causes of violence. Violence is a response to frustration, humiliation, hostility, and the violence of white man. It is not widely known that the first race riot in Memphis, in fact, took place in 1866, and was precipitated by the Irish police. There was an article in *Tennessee Historical* magazine not too long ago on that. Are we really willing to hear this? I don't think so. Therefore, there will be more violence, and this is not a threat. This is mere old-fashioned prophecy. And then I have here a quote from Harry Emerson Fosdick who said, "Race prejudice is as thorough a denial of Christian

God as atheism, and a far more common form of apostasy.” And then I continued -- This is not intended for you to like what I have to say. The question is what are we to do as agents of reconciliation? Let us all call for the reopening of negotiations. The problem is stated in that song when an irresistible force meets an immovable object, something has to give. The Negro revolution, their strike is an irresistible force, and whatever else you can say about the mayor, he has been immovable, so we call for the force to be less irresistible and call for the mayor to be less immovable. We call for the city council to get off the sidelines, and we as Christians need to stop arguing for one side, and seeing only side as right. We don't need to get into these kinds of arguments, but ask how we can get this situation resolved. Neither side can have the victory. Neither side should have the victory. We should work for negotiations to end in compromise, and that is about it for that particular sermon.

Carol Lynn Yellin: Were you aware at that time, Dick, that your congregation had seen you?

Rev. Richard C. Wells: Yeah.

(muffled)

Rev. Richard C. Wells: That's right, they were fully aware at this point.

David Yellin: Okay, and I think this put in context with the rest of what you said, will fit in very nicely. Good, and now, you (muffled) at any time feel free, even though Dodie didn't interrupt you.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: She knows better than to interrupt my sermons.

David Yellin: But also you have kind of priority since you were here first, squatter's rights.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: Ok.

David Yellin: Where do you think you want to begin? I know this is rather harder.

Carol Lynn Yellin: Well, I want to ask Dodie to get into the record, I know that -- I think Dodie's background is very relevant, where you were born, and where you lived, and where you went to school your early years, and very interesting, too.

Dodie Wells: Well, I was born in Ahmednagar, India.

David Yellin: Would you please spell that?

Dodie Wells: A-H-M-E-D-N-A-G-A-R. This is the town in which both (muffled) and Gandhi were imprisoned during the second world war. There is a fort. My mother painted a picture of this fort. Of course none of us knew at the time that they were there,

but after World War II when the movement began for independence we found out that they were there. I went to school in southern India in a missionary school, very isolated, very American.

David Yellin: And what denomination?

Dodie Wells: My parents were United Church of Christ. The school was founded by, what was then of course the Congregationalists. By the time I went to school there it was interdenominational, primarily probably Congregational, Presbyterian, Lutheran, Methodist.

Carol Lynn Yellin: And were there primarily children of other missionaries?

Dodie Wells: Yes, almost exclusively until the post-World War II period when the United States started having a lot of oil activity in Arabia, and we got a lot of those people who were very different, and that was the beginning of my introduction to different people -- to the American business world. Anything else on that?

David Yellin: No. And then when did you leave India?

Dodie Wells: Okay, I left India when I finished high school, came back to the United States to go to college. I went to college in Pennsylvania, and to graduate school...

David Yellin: Where?

Dodie Wells: Allegheny College.

David Yellin: Allegheny College.

Dodie Wells: Pennsylvania.

Carol Lynn Yellin: Was this where your parents are from? Pennsylvania?

Dodie Wells: No, they were not. My father is from New York State. My mother's parents were missionaries. Her mother was from Pennsylvania (muffled).

David Yellin: Is Allegheny College a, a...?

Dodie Wells: It's a Methodist.

David Yellin: Methodist.

Carol Lynn Yellin: You're pretty interdenominational, aren't you?

Dodie Wells: We were very ecumenical. I didn't find out about the exclusiveness of denominations until I came to this country. I was not brought up on exclusive

denominationalism.

David Yellin: I mean without getting (muffled) about it and teary, how did you meet this guy?

Dodie Wells: Well, I went to Rice and did a Master's degree in Biology, and had science up to my ears and over, so after I got my degree I went to seminary to get a DCE degree, and I met him there.

David Yellin: What's a DCE?

Dodie Wells: That's a Director of Christian Education. I was going to go into church work, and he was graduating in January, and it was sort of then or never, so I quit and got married.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: She had to grab me before I got gone.

Carol Lynn Yellin: Before you got away.

Dodie Wells: Right.

David Yellin: Okay, now.

Carol Lynn Yellin: And this was at Princeton?

Rev. Richard C. Wells: No, this was at Austin.

Dodie Wells: We went to seminary in Austin. We moved out to New Jersey when Dick went to do his Master's work at Princeton, and that was how we moved back.

David Yellin: Yeah, now we've traced your movements from there to Memphis in '67, and I -- there might be some relevancy because we'd like to share your views, too, about when you first came here. Maybe we ought to sort of be a little tricky and Machiavellian and don't tell her what you said.

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

David Yellin: And we could have a television show.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: Right. She's been in the isolation booth.

David Yellin: How did you feel when you first came to Memphis? Your reaction to it?

Dodie Wells: Well, I think my first reaction was shock that it was Mississippi southern and not the border state that I had expected. I thought of Tennessee of border state rather than southern really. I never really wanted to go into the southern society at all.

Carol Lynn Yellin: You hadn't realized that that meant the border ran right straight through the middle of Tennessee and that you were ending up on the other side of the border.

Dodie Wells: Other side, no I sure did not.

David Yellin: Now, this is interesting. I mean what you knew of Memphis was really...

Dodie Wells: Nothing.

David Yellin: ...nothing. You just geographically looked and said, it's a border state.

Dodie Wells: Right.

David Yellin: So you didn't come here with a preconceived notion given to you by someone, you just...?

Dodie Wells: No, right. We were looking for the job. We were not so much worrying about whether we could fit in or not, and I think at first it seemed like we were going to fit in. I joined Buntyn Church. My children went over there to Sunday School. Debbie went to Sherwood. We were much disappointed in the public school education.

David Yellin: Did you live in the same place you're living now?

Dodie Wells: No, no. We lived over near Sherwood.

Carol Lynn Yellin: So that would be (muffled).

David Yellin: Oh, Sherwood, excuse me.

Dodie Wells: It's fairly close to where -- you know that's why I went to Buntyn, that was the closest Presbyterian Church.

David Yellin: Yeah, right. The Robin Hood, and that kind of near there.

Dodie Wells: Right, it was right in there. We were renting. So that was where we met the Faquins later turned out.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: (muffled) story.

David Yellin: Now who are the Faquins -- no I know the Faquins.

Dodie Wells: Dr. Faquin, he was a general practitioner -- I guess he still a general practitioner.

David Yellin: And he went to Birmingham?

Carol Lynn Yellin: Tell us (muffled).

Dodie Wells: No, he's the other side of the picture. They were very conservative people.

Carol Lynn Yellin: Well, tell us the story that involves them then.

Dodie Wells: Okay. I was in the mother's circle at Buntyn, and it was like any other circle I guess for a time, and then when the strike started, and everybody felt that we needed to be doing something. So I had small children and couldn't do a lot of things other people were doing, so a group of people, Barbara (muffled)...

Carol Lynn Yellin: Yes, yes.

Dodie Wells: ...was in that group, went over to Parkway Gardens, and we went over without very much ado for some time. There were the Hurleys and Barbara (muffled), and myself. That was just about all I guess that went over.

Carol Lynn Yellin: Simply attending the church?

Dodie Wells: Just to the church services, right.

Carol Lynn Yellin: And now, let me just ask, was this after Ezekiel Bell had been active and speaking in the city council?

Dodie Wells: I suppose it was about the same time.

Carol Lynn Yellin: But you had heard of Ezekiel Bell before you went, started attending his church?

Dodie Wells: Well, yes I knew of...right.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: He was in the news.

Dodie Wells: He had not become quite as much of a figure as he did afterwards.

Carol Lynn Yellin: Had you met him through interden, I mean...?

Rev. Richard C. Wells: As a matter of fact, he was taking a course in Greek at the seminary, so I had met him at the seminary (muffled).

Dodie Wells: I had never met him. I had heard about him. So we went over there, but never reported back at all to Buntyn, and then what was the day Martin Luther King was

killed, Sunday night?

David Yellin: April 4, Thursday.

Carol Lynn Yellin: Thursday.

Dodie Wells: Thursday, (muffled). It seems to me it was the next day that we had our circle meeting, but the timing isn't right because those were Tuesdays that we had our meeting. Well, so it must have been the following Tuesday.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: The following Tuesday.

Dodie Wells: Right, and I was supposed to have the Bible study. What had transpired, I don't remember Monday, but anyway it was something.

Carol Lynn Yellin: Monday would have been the day of the memorial march.

Dodie Wells: March, that's right.

Carol Lynn Yellin: That you took part in we understand.

Dodie Wells: And so, it just didn't seem as if in the context of that one could just sit down and do the Bible study that had been assigned. Barbara (muffled) was chairman of the circle at that time, so we had talked about it, and we decided the thing to do instead was to report on what we had been doing. So she talked about her going down to the union hall -- or to the hall where they were meeting.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: Yeah, the union hall.

Dodie Wells: And I told a little bit about what we had done going over to Parkway Gardens. And everybody sort of sat there at the time. Nobody really said anything. But the next day I was called in by the minister, and told that this group, Carolyn Faquin being the...

Rev. Richard C. Wells: Ringleader.

Dodie Wells: ...ringleader of the group had complained about having this type of a circle, and having been brought into something she absolutely disagreed with, and somehow it was not the Christian thing to have done, not to have had a Bible reading or a Bible discussion in the circle when this was what came in the program. And that pretty much was my split with Buntyn. I never did go back.

Carol Lynn Yellin: Who was the minister there?

Dodie Wells: Ed Stock, and Ed Stock is a good fellow, but he was always trying to compromise the two sides.

Carol Lynn Yellin: Is he southern, of southern heritage?

Dodie Wells: He's (muffled).

Rev. Richard C. Wells: Yeah, he's from New Orleans. (muffled)

David Yellin: Excuse me, is this Mrs. Faquin the judge's wife? Doctor's?

Rev. Richard C. Wells: No, no, doctor's wife.

Dodie Wells: No. That judge is her husband's uncle I believe. It's the same family.

David Yellin: Yes, ok.

Dodie Wells: Ok. Since then the Faquins have also left Buntyn. So both (muffled).

Rev. Richard C. Wells: Because it was too liberal. Dodie left because it was too conservative.

Carol Lynn Yellin: And the minister in that case pleased no one by trying to be in the middle.

Dodie Wells: That's right.

David Yellin: He compromised everybody out.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: If I could say too, this, it in the end as far as the church is concerned, Dodie and Barbara (muffled) and Mary Katherine Hurley each received a letter from commendation from the session, the governing body of the church, for their participation in going down to Parkway Gardens.

Carol Lynn Yellin: That's unusual.

Dodie Wells: We had the support of the session.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: So, this was the response to rather vicious attack.

Dodie Wells: Yes, and very vocal.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: By some of the women.

David Yellin: At the time or later? I mean (muffled).

Dodie Wells: That next day, right. It never -- they never approached me directly, no, but the cold finger was there. You know, people stop talking to you, and I know I

wasn't invited to ever participate in things.

Carol Lynn Yellin: May I ask, was Helen Nunn also a member that...

Dodie Wells: Helen Nunn, what did she do in that?

Rev. Richard C. Wells: I don't know, but I remember that name, yeah.

Carol Lynn Yellin: It seems to me we -- somewhere we heard, whether she or Barbara Loin were telling us about this, and I don't know whether Helen Nunn...she would not have been one who would have attacked you I know that, but she might not have been as active.

Dodie Wells: I can't remember.

Carol Lynn Yellin: Her husband's name is Bill Nun, and he works with the Cotton Council.

Dodie Wells: Right, and he lives right over there on...

Carol Lynn Yellin: Baron.

Dodie Wells: ...Baron, right which was right across the corner from where we lived, and I don't remember what her particular...

Carol Lynn Yellin: But she actually hadn't gone to Parkway Gardens?

Dodie Wells: No.

David Yellin: Was this the first, I wouldn't say confrontation, but the first articulation of your participation? Because now we're at the end of the strike, you know -- what happened back in February and so on when Dick got involved, and they knew he was involved? Did you get involved in any way?

Dodie Wells: Well, the beginning was our visits to Parkway Garden. This was really all I did on that.

David Yellin: Why did you go? I mean when you say visits, it's kind of interesting.

Dodie Wells: Well, I don't remember who instigated it, probably Barbara Loin, but it was a feeling that somehow we needed to open up channels of communication, and these people were willing at that time to open up channels of communication.

David Yellin: You went as a white person to a black church.

Dodie Wells: I went as a member of Buntyn to that.

David Yellin: Yes.

Carol Lynn Yellin: There was some exchange from Shady Grove Presbyterian Church, too, were there not a few couples?

Rev. Richard C. Wells: Shady Grove and Buntyn. People went, and this was an official kind of thing, and the recognition was there are no channels of communication between the white and black community, let's try and do something to get that going, so we're going to go down and participate in their service. And I don't know how this was ever officially sanctioned or what, but...

Carol Lynn Yellin: May I ask what was your reception at Parkway Garden during that period?

Dodie Wells: Very favorable.

Carol Lynn Yellin: It was good?

Dodie Wells: Right. They were very, very nice, as I never felt any hostility at that point from them at all.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: And this is where you met Maxine Smith, isn't that correct?

Dodie Wells: Right, right.

David Yellin: Is she a member of that?

Dodie Wells: Parkway Gardens, right. They both are.

Carol Lynn Yellin: Well, I did want to ask about your participation with the women who went to Mayor Loeb's office.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: Can I finish this story, on that because I hadn't thought about it until some time ago, but -- I hadn't thought about it until just now, but the Faquins lived just a few houses away from us, and that is sort of a little cove there. And, my appearance on television, and Dodie's activity, why we were aware of the fact that the community knew who we were and what we were doing. But, I guess what, about a year ago, I went to another doctor -- what was his name? Who was living on the street?

Dodie Wells: Oh, Tannenbaum.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: Yeah, Dr. Tannenbaum, who is a dermatologist. And I went in and he was looking, examining me, and, "Oh, didn't you used to live over there?" "Yes, that's me." He says, "My, you certainly were the talk of the community at that point weren't you?"

David Yellin: Oh, really?

Rev. Richard C. Wells: And that's all he said, and I didn't push him, you know, to find out what he meant one way or another, but this is several years later, and I was remembered as the guy in the community that everybody, or we were.

Carol Lynn Yellin: That caused all of the talk.

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

Dodie Wells: Now the other thing that I have gotten as a response to this, there's a Dr. Williams that teaches Chemistry at Memphis State, do you know him?

David Yellin: I don't know him, no.

Dodie Wells: He and his wife were in this same circle, and you might call them moderates I suppose for Buntyn, anyway, shortly after I started teaching out at Lausanne, I had to go down there and I wanted to borrow some films, and he found out that I was teaching at Lausanne after having participated in this activity during the strike, and his comments came out to the effect of, you know you're two-faced -- here you were pushing this, but you have taken your children and put them into a private school.

Carol Lynn Yellin: With no association of education.

Dodie Wells: No, that's right, but he was very hostile, and I did not borrow the films.

David Yellin: Oh, really? Well, you come to me, I'll lend you film.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: Get all you want.

Dodie Wells: Hostility still exists with the people at Buntyn. They still remember.

Carol Lynn Yellin: Well, this ties in with what we were saying earlier on the earlier tape, of Dick saying the -- any contact he's had with the people from the church where he was preaching (muffled).

David Yellin: Now can we get to the mayor's visit?

Dodie Wells: Ok, the mayor's visit.

Carol Lynn Yellin: I'll just ask you this one other question. Had you participated in the Rearing Children of Goodwill workshop?

Dodie Wells: I did in the second one I think.

Carol Lynn Yellin: Because I understood that some of the women -- or some of the inception of that grew out of that workshop.

Dodie Wells: Right. In fact I was one of the discussion leaders (muffled).

Rev. Richard C. Wells: Is that when you were there (muffled)?

Dodie Wells: No, that was when -- I don't think that had anything to do with it.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: That was that year.

Dodie Wells: No, I went over to Lawson's church for that.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: Jim Lawson. You ended up going down to Grant School to teach...

Dodie Wells: Nutrition.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: ...nutrition to ghetto mothers.

Dodie Wells: That was my next attempt at (muffled).

Carol Lynn Yellin: That was one of the outgrowths of people of goodwill in the community wanted to do something.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: I think so, yeah this was a spin-off, and this came later.

Carol Lynn Yellin: After the crisis.

David Yellin: Excuse me, at Lausanne, do you teach anything special?

Dodie Wells: I teach sciences; Biology, Chemistry, Physics, and Physical Science -- not all at one time, various times.

David Yellin: Well, that would be a great feat.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: All in one class.

Dodie Wells: I taught Biology, Chemistry, and Physics all one year, and that was a feat.

Carol Lynn Yellin: But no Christian education?

Dodie Wells: No Christian education.

Carol Lynn Yellin: You gave that up at Rice.

Dodie Wells: Right. This is one nice thing about science. You can be completely, it's not objective.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: Detached.

Dodie Wells: Detached, right from that, which is -- although I can't completely because we get girls from Blytheville, and places like this who will bring up their hostility and the reasons for being there, so you find yourself drawn into these conversations anyway.

David Yellin: Ok, let's get to the mayor's visit.

Dodie Wells: Ok, mayor's visit. All right, but my visit down there was the second group that went down there. There was an earlier one, and so prior to this second one we got together and had a discussion about the type of things that might possibly come up.

David Yellin: Now, who are we?

Dodie Wells: The group that went down the second time. Who all was in that group? I could not.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: Well, Mary Katherine Hurley went down. Barbara Loin went down. Mary Dowdy.

Dodie Wells: No, she went in the first group.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: Right, she went in the first group, but she was one of the organizers for the second. She was the one leading.

Dodie Wells: Right, right. She was doing that.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: And Dick Moon's wife was in that meeting.

Carol Lynn Yellin: Glenda Moon.

Dodie Wells: Glenda went down the first time, right. We met in the home of the art professor from Southwestern, but I don't remember what their name was now.

David Yellin: Oh dear, what's his name? He's still here?

Dodie Wells: That I don't even know. I think they are.

Carol Lynn Yellin: Geri Viner in that group? She had been in the first group I guess.

Dodie Wells: I think that's right.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: She was in the first group, yeah.

Dodie Wells: They pulled on people that were not quite in that same circle, and they had to reach out further for that second group.

Carol Lynn Yellin: We need to indicate again (muffled).

David Yellin: (muffled).

Dodie Wells: That is the Dowdy, Moon, and these girls called on everybody that they knew who might be interested.

David Yellin: So this was an ad hoc organization?

Rev. Richard C. Wells: They were trying. Mary Dowdy had been down and was trying to get people to go. One of the -- well at the meeting the organized Save Our City, which thereby called the meeting to meet over at Southwestern.

Dodie Wells: That's where they got...

Rev. Richard C. Wells: Mary Dowdy said, "We're looking for women to go." And I said, "My wife will go." And I didn't know who she was, and she didn't know who I was.

Dodie Wells: Glenda Moon called me, and I didn't know who Glenda Moon was, but we met at Mary Dowdy's once beforehand, and then we met the second time just before going down at the house of that Southwestern professor.

David Yellin: Then you might have discovered you all had something in common, didn't you? All you three girls? You were all married to ministers.

Carol Lynn Yellin: This wasn't Gilliam, Patricia Gilliam?

Dodie Wells: It might have been. I think that is the name. I think that's right.

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

Carol Lynn Yellin: Pat Gilliam.

Dodie Wells: I don't even remember what size group that was, except those people have so separated since then, I guess they've gone all over the country, that I never really had too much more contact with that as a group. So we all went down. And I can't keep my mouth shut.

David Yellin: Did you remember what your purpose was before?

Dodie Wells: My purpose, or the group?

David Yellin: No, the purpose of the whole group, and what you...

Dodie Wells: I think the purpose was to show that there was a white Memphis, and particularly women of white East Memphis was the point that they kept making -- the East Memphis housewives.

Carol Lynn Yellin: White gloved ladies.

Dodie Wells: Right.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: Wear your Sunday best.

Dodie Wells: That's right. That was the word, wear your Sunday best. We all went down looking, East Memphis as we possibly could, and this was the impression we were trying to leave there. It wasn't just black Memphis that was all on one side, but there were white people.

David Yellin: Sort of indicate to the mayor, who had made these statements that everybody was behind him, but there were some people who wanted him to come a little bit on the other side.

Dodie Wells: Right.

David Yellin: Ok, so you went down, let's say 15 to 20 of you, would that be an approximate?

Dodie Wells: I would think probably -- probably closer to 20 in my recollection, because we had a full room, and the press was there.

David Yellin: Can you just kind of total recall? If you want to lie down.

Carol Lynn Yellin: Did you have a carpool to go down?

Dodie Wells: We went down in car. That is we got together and then four or five of us went down in each car together.

Carol Lynn Yellin: And then assembled where, in the lobby?

Dodie Wells: In the lobby, right. We had to wait for the cars to come in.

David Yellin: Just let her tell it (muffled).

Dodie Wells: I'm trying to remember. It all started out rather calmly with the mayor

determined, I think, to predominate the meeting.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: Dominate.

Dodie Wells: To dominate.

David Yellin: Well both pre and post domination

Dodie Wells: Well, why did I make the statement has faded in my mind. My recollection was beforehand we were warned that he would say something about accents. So I had gone armed for the occasion. And I asked him some question, and he didn't answer my question, but he said, "Where are you from?" So I said, "Well I am a citizen of Memphis." And he said, "Yes, but where are you from?" And I said, "Well, I live here in Memphis, I am a citizen of Memphis." And I think I repeated it three times before he finally gave up and realized I was not going to make a statement of any other kind about where I was.

David Yellin: Did he call you any kind of endearing name, or little lady?

Dodie Wells: No. I don't recollect his calling me anything (muffled).

David Yellin: What he was thinking (muffled).

Dodie Wells: Right. That was what I was trying to get across to him was that I simply was not going to bend, or say anything else to him. That was my major contribution to the (muffled).

Carol Lynn Yellin: Was your name printed in the paper then?

Dodie Wells: I believe it was. I believe all the names were printed the next day.

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

Carol Lynn Yellin: Did you have any phone calls, or any reactions? Other than the Buntyn?

Dodie Wells: Yes, we did have some phone calls, but not like I might have expected. What did they say? I don't...

Rev. Richard C. Wells: I don't remember. There were some phone calls at home. Because I remember the major thrust of the phone calls came to the school.

Dodie Wells: (muffled), but I did answer some. It seems to me it was more of the sort of the thing where you'd answer the phone, and there was nobody there, rather than...

David Yellin: So, the phone calls were not from friends who were interested, or

inquiring, or anything?

Dodie Wells: I never got anybody that inquired.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: They were all harassment calls.

Carol Lynn Yellin: You were never commended?

Dodie Wells: No, no. The only commendation I got for anything I did was that one letter that we got from the station.

David Yellin: And there was no follow-up of the meeting, then?

Dodie Wells: No, that was the end.

David Yellin: What would be your interpretation, if -- as I am now going to ask you if you would describe this thing, or describe the mayor and his attitude about it? And you don't necessarily have to be an objective reporter.

Dodie Wells: My feeling?

David Yellin: Yeah.

Dodie Wells: I detested him.

Carol Lynn Yellin: That's subjective.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: That'll do.

Dodie Wells: Well, for one thing I think -- I like people that are reasonable and logical, and that will follow a conversation and answer the questions that are asked. He was bound and determined not to answer them in anything other than what had already been said, the pat answer kind of thing. He would take off and start talking this direction, that direction, rather than dealing with individuals, as if maybe we were important at all. I think he was trying to make us feel like we were unimportant. We really didn't represent East Memphis like we thought we were doing sitting in there.

Carol Lynn Yellin: Did you have a feeling he was -- were you aware of the press, and did you have a feeling he was aware of the press being there?

Dodie Wells: I suppose, I was not particularly aware of the press once I got in there. I am sure he was. It was definitely a Mayor Loeb (muffled), and I got the feeling that he figured that he was on top of it, and it really didn't matter.

David Yellin: What was your feeling, and also if you could, the other women involved, as to the result of this?

Dodie Wells: Now, I think we had to do something. This was the position we were put in, and maybe this gave us a chance to feel like we weren't simply sitting home doing nothing, but I think the whole feeling I got out of -- not just of that meeting, but everything I did was really rather useless.

Carol Lynn Yellin: It made no difference.

Dodie Wells: I had not accomplished anything really by going down to see him. Primarily my voice was wrong, and he knew, although I denied -- I didn't make any statement as to where I came from, he knew that I was not...

Carol Lynn Yellin: His folks.

Dodie Wells: His folks, right. So, I really didn't matter. He didn't need to appeal to me.

Carol Lynn Yellin: Which, perhaps was a sharing of the feeling that some of the people had spoken of -- that they felt that he -- since he had no votes in the black community...

Dodie Wells: It didn't matter.

Carol Lynn Yellin: ...he didn't have to cater to any votes in that direction. I wanted to ask. Everybody knows, and it's common knowledge that the mayor was served by armed guards throughout all his period.

Dodie Wells: Did you see about the clanking of his guns in the church pew?

Carol Lynn Yellin: No.

Dodie Wells: See that's a story that was told to me. I wasn't even an Episcopalian, and he kept whatever size gun in his hip pocket, so whenever he would sit down in the church pew...

Rev. Richard C. Wells: He would get up from kneeling at a bench, why the gun could clank against the pew.

Dodie Wells: The gun would bang on the pew.

Carol Lynn Yellin: Is that right?

Rev. Richard C. Wells: (muffled)

Carol Lynn Yellin: I'm glad to get it because, no I hadn't heard that.

Dodie Wells: I don't remember who told me that story.

Carol Lynn Yellin: So that he actually was carrying.

David Yellin: Oh he carried a gun.

Carol Lynn Yellin: He had a gun in his desk we understand.

David Yellin: No, he had one on his person all the time.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: Yeah, he had one on his person.

Carol Lynn Yellin: Didn't he have one -- had I not heard that he had either a shotgun or some kind of a gun under his desk, or at his desk?

Rev. Richard C. Wells: Well, that may be.

Carol Lynn Yellin: But there were police guards whose duty it was, and at his home and in his office, and I guess what I wanted to know was, were you aware, or was this an ominous kind of presence, or did you not even notice? If you have to think about it, you probably didn't even notice, they were in the background then.

Dodie Wells: I don't remember.

David Yellin: No, they could be very unobtrusive because they were plain-clothed.

Dodie Wells: Of course that was a gathering of women, and there were not that many men. I recall there were men.

David Yellin: Yeah, there were two men there. They never left the room, regardless of who was in there.

Dodie Wells: I think I was too scared about being there myself, to worry about what he was doing, and how frightened he was of what might happen.

Carol Lynn Yellin: I wanted to ask, this is getting into kind of a philosophical thing, but I think the tie-up of your having lived in the town that had some special meaning as far as Gandhi was concerned, and the association of Martin Luther King and his nonviolence, the fact that he had studied with Gandhi, and spend a year in India -- was any of this in your thoughts as you found yourself living in Memphis, Tennessee in 1968?

Dodie Wells: No, I don't really think it was, although of course having been brought up in a time when Gandhi was important in India, the nonviolent movement always seemed to me the right way to do things, and I think it's been very difficult for me to realize that since Martin Luther King, this no longer is a...

David Yellin: Along that line, have you ever spoken to James Lawson about this?

Dodie Wells: No I never have personally spoken to him.

David Yellin: Oh, really? He would be fascinated, because incidentally Carol Lynn, he was the one who was in India, not Dr. King.

Carol Lynn Yellin: No, yes, well he traveled to India because we talked with the man who went with him.

David Yellin: Yeah, he traveled to India, but Jim Lawson was there for two years.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: But King had studied the Gandhi philosophy.

David Yellin: And Jim Lawson was his main mentor as a matter of fact on it. And he would be quite fascinated, I think, by this. What was -- gee, I was going to ask you something in relation to that. How did you feel -- no, I'm not going to put out the question. I had one.

Carol Lynn Yellin: Well, let me ask, because I wanted to power through that -- you said that the feeling that since Martin Luther King has gone that this is gone. Do you feel that nonviolence in this country, or worldwide, do you feel that?

Dodie Wells: Worldwide I don't know, but I think in this country it's had it's day.

Carol Lynn Yellin: You feel it can never be resolved?

Dodie Wells: I don't know whether I would be willing to (muffled). Not in the present atmosphere. I just don't think you can get anywhere with it.

David Yellin: All right, could you describe nonviolence as you saw it in India? What was it really?

Dodie Wells: Of course I saw it more through the newspaper than in participation of it. But it was the same sort of thing where as Indian life -- they didn't value their own personal lives perhaps as much as we do, so that there were things like their lying down in front of trains before they would go, and the crowds were always tremendous. A crowd in India is a very different thing than a crowd in this country, because the masses of people. Of course you don't have people employed in an 8-5 job quite as much, so that when he did things he had masses of people. But my memory of course is toward the end of his life -- let's see 1948 I was junior high age, so that at his death, I was just entering into senior high, so that my recollection is more of him as the idol, rather than the days of nonviolence. You see him with the garland in all the pictures in everybody's house with the garland placed around the picture.

Carol Lynn Yellin: Well, one other thought that occurs to me just thinking about this is that in that country, the people that he was leading were the majority against a ruling

minority, and the employment here of it by a minority against a ruling majority, and a more powerful, may make some...

Dodie Wells: Some difference in how it can be applied.

David Yellin: Right, I think the situations are different. All the elements are (muffled).

Dodie Wells: Right, but you see the same thing happened in India. Gandhi's was a nonviolent situation, but looked what happened at the partition. It turned into tremendous violence. We have seen nothing of violence.

David Yellin: That's the question everybody asks -- how can you justify the nonviolence of India when what happened with the partition, and then lately and so on. I think it has to do with what you said, though, about the masses, and also the -- almost the unconcern if that's the word for the life on this earth. So that it's almost a contradiction. They are nonviolent, but life doesn't mean that much.

Dodie Wells: Yeah, individual life, but the total life means a great deal, and this is a little bit different than our concept. I think our individual life means an awful lot, I sometimes wonder whether we have any great concern in total?

David Yellin: I think that's why we're more violent.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: We have no concept.

David Yellin: We have no concept of the total life, so that when we end it, it's -- you know we almost have to end it violently somehow.

Dodie Wells: I don't know whether this has any relevance to it, but what I said, I had been brought up with the nonviolence -- my memory is violence, but it was always the wrong way of doing it.

David Yellin: How do you mean that, Dodie?

Dodie Wells: Violence was the wrong way to have gone about it.

David Yellin: Yeah, well what do you mean your memory is of violence? You saw violent things happen?

Dodie Wells: Not directly, that is I saw nobody killed. I heard the guns in the distance, and you know you were always aware the papers were full of what was going on in Bombay, and this sort of thing. We had no violence right in the town in which I lived, but this was the wrong way, and it was the wrong way that the Indians were going about it. But what I can't resolve when I came to Memphis was that not the Indians, but the Americans are the ones that can do things the wrong way, and I have had to resolve that. I am a member of a group that participates in the wrong way of going about things.

David Yellin: I see, over there you were kind of a spectator.

Dodie Wells: Right, I could say, they were bad out there, and all of a sudden I am there.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: We're missionaries, we're not.

David Yellin: But now they are you.

Dodie Wells: That's right. Right, and I have had to accept the fact that I am a part of an erring group of people, which has not been easy to do.

Carol Lynn Yellin: Your trip to the mayor's office was truly a testimonial that you really wanted to make, or at least it was a movement in which you could make some sort of statement, that I'm not part of this overall group that's doing it the bad way.

David Yellin: You didn't know this, but now you know it.

Dodie Wells: That's right.

Carol Lynn Yellin: I have one other question before, if we don't have anything else, but Joan Beifuss was wondering, knowing we were going to talk to you, and she was wondering if you knew any, or could recall having contact with any of the people that came in from the National Council of Churches, and marched in that March 28, or if you met with them if you had any, first of all names that you could just say were there? Because she is a little interested in this?

David Yellin: He did recall before.

Carol Lynn Yellin: Did I miss that?

David Yellin: No, I don't know whether you were here or not.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: No, I indicated my knowledge of their presence, but Colvin Baird met with them, and I went downtown to...

David Yellin: That's the day after the 28th.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: On the 29th I went downtown to the march, so Colvin would know -- would have more information than I do. I don't know that I met or shook hands or greeted a single person from the National Council.

Carol Lynn Yellin: Or anyone from National Presbyterian (muffled)?

Rev. Richard C. Wells: Yeah, that's right. None to my knowledge. There (muffled) people in town on that day, and really I wasn't too concerned to seek any of them out.

My concern was to seek out and to be with the blacks that I knew. (muffled). I walked with Wesley Holmes and Fred Davis happened to be with Wesley, which is why I happened to be walking with Fred Davis that day. But, I was going this direction rather than trying to find who the (muffled) were or not.

Carol Lynn Yellin: It was the local and the fact that you would be continuing to live in this community.

David Yellin: Dodie, have you in any way changed your opinion or observation of Memphis? Has Memphis changed any?

Dodie Wells: Hmm.

David Yellin: From the Mississippi village that you.

Dodie Wells: Well, they're constructing lots of buildings, but as far as their mental attitude I think its rigidified. This has been my feeling in going out to Lausanne. Really the reason why I went out to Lausanne, maybe it's a rationalization, but I felt that going out there to teach the girls that will marry the leaders of this part of the country, that maybe I could contribute somehow to them, since the black community was saying no, your ministry is now to the white people. And, my contact with the teachers out there is that they have become very tight, very rigid people, and there really is no talking to them. Whereas maybe before they went through all of this, there wasn't quite that tension, that need to support, to back up what they are.

David Yellin: Well, just a little, and there might be some value in this. Were they as rigid immediately, and then soon after the assassination and the strike was over, or has this come about as a result of...

Dodie Wells: Continued conversations.

David Yellin: And now the school thing.

Dodie Wells: Well, the school thing certainly has not helped.

David Yellin: But were they immediately rigid?

Carol Lynn Yellin: By the school thing.

David Yellin: Yeah the bus.

Carol Lynn Yellin: By the school thing you would mean the fact that many new students are enrolling?

David Yellin: Well, the whole busing situation.

Dodie Wells: The busing.

Carol Lynn Yellin: Public education.

David Yellin: But I mean, what I'm trying to say is that immediately after the assassination, which we will use as marking point -- did the rigidity become more rigid or less so, do you recall? I mean was there any time at which there was.

Dodie Wells: Well, I wasn't teaching out at Lausanne at that point, so I am talking about two different groups of people, which probably is not the best. There was a different kind of tension I think immediately after -- they disliked me, which gave them something to do. But as time has gone on, I think it's become more a part and parcel of a personality. They no longer dislike me per say, but they dislike what I stand for.

Carol Lynn Yellin: You mean the people at Lausanne?

Dodie Wells: Well, I'm talking about the Memphis white people that I meet.

Carol Lynn Yellin: Well, this brings one other question that I didn't get to ask, and perhaps you covered, but during this period of crisis you were still fairly new to Memphis. Who did -- did you have anyone to turn to, besides each other?

David Yellin: Did you have a chaplain to go to?

Carol Lynn Yellin: Or did you have a...

Dodie Wells: No, they were all coming to us, what do you do?

Rev. Richard C. Wells: Everybody stood there with their card waiting to be punched, and nobody had a punch.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: I don't think that we really had...

Dodie Wells: I didn't feel the need at that time. You know you were doing something, you were participating. You almost felt good because here was something you could do, and you were the good guys at that point, you know.

Carol Lynn Yellin: And you had hope.

Dodie Wells: It's been since then.

Carol Lynn Yellin: You had hope then.

Dodie Wells: Yeah, well I don't think I had any realization of what living in that kind of -- in the community after having done that was going to be.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: I don't know whether there was any hope there. There was a

situation that arose that needed a particular response, and I -- this is what I saw and the things that I did. I don't know whether you were here when I indicated that the first sidewalk march after the disrupted march and I went back and had to walk on the sidewalks again -- I indicated there has to be a white person in there. I didn't know whether anybody was going to be there, so I will. There ended up there were about four or five whites, but and no stop to ask, you know this is something that needs to be done, somebody has to do it, so you went and did it. And I don't know that, this was the kind of thing that we were doing, both of us you know were doing these kind of things, and not -- at that point I don't think that we were really looking for anybody to talk to.

David Yellin: Seek solace from?

Rev. Richard C. Wells: That's right. I think, and I imagine you have found from the people that you have talked to, that one of the great frustrations in this was the lack of organization to pull people together and have some kind of thing.

Dodie Wells: People did pull together a bit at that point, with a new organization, but there were a lot of things doing, and we were contacting a lot of people

Rev. Richard C. Wells: A pocket here, and a pocket there, and one of the things I mentioned before we turned the tape on, was that those of us in religion were sort of doing our own thing, and we sort of thought we were in the middle of it, and I guess the city council thought they were in the middle of it, and maybe neither of us were in the middle of it. But, there were all sorts of these little pockets, and you knew somebody was over there, but you didn't know who it was, and there was no coordination. Save Our City was originally intended to attempt to pull things through, and one of my great disappointments was that that was handled the way it was, because it would have been good to have made an organization out of that.

Carol Lynn Yellin: You mean that it was allowed to peter out?

Rev. Richard C. Wells: Yeah.

David Yellin: Yeah. Well, as you recall, and you were at the meeting and we had talked about that, but we might add, again that Save Our City is sort of the original progenitor of why you're here.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: Yeah.

David Yellin: Out of that grew our committee, which grew this project.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: Yeah, and some other things.

David Yellin: That had nothing to do with what you're talking about.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: And the religious people got together and developed the

Metropolitan Interfaith Association.

Carol Lynn Yellin: Which does still continue.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: Which still does continue, so there are some things. Of course that's another story, you know, which may or may not be related.

Carol Lynn Yellin: Oh, it started in the midst of this I believe.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: Started through the Downtown Churches Association wanting to do something, and the need to get together, and one of the reasons my interpretation of why MIFA really has not been any more than it has, in my assessment at that point, and I was on the committee to find a director, was that people and their fear of becoming too radical. I said, "What's going to happen is we're going to make this innocuously liberal kind of a group, and that's going to kill it." And I think that's what's happened to it. And there were those of us, Ted Johnson who was principal of Lester, what grade school -- a black was on this, and on the program committee and brought in a program, which some of us said "great" to, and we got voted out. And Ted Johnson never came back. And the rest of us sort of petered out because it really didn't go over.

Carol Lynn Yellin: Well, let me ask you something, and I will refer to an unrestricted comment on another tape that we don't often do, but I just was working with this, and this is Frank McRae, who has left the city now, has he not?

Rev. Richard C. Wells: Yes, he's in Louisville.

Carol Lynn Yellin: As head of...

Rev. Richard C. Wells: He's a pastor.

David Yellin: He went back to the church?

Carol Lynn Yellin: (muffled)

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

Carol Lynn Yellin: To a congregation from being in the supervisory.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: That's right, but this is appointment by the bishop, so he's in good standing.

Carol Lynn Yellin: Well, after talking about all of his conflicting emotions, and his vision of what he saw happening, and his feeling as a native of the city, and really loving the city, and a lot of conflicting emotions, but at one point he said in a very eloquent way that if nothing else that we ministers or we clergymen learned what Memphis really thought of the clergy, and that is that we were good for football games, giving the

invocation at football games, but that all of the talk about this being a Bible Belt religious dominated city, that for him this evidently was quite a terrible experience.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: Yeah, I think this is true. I think you see the thing is that we have -- we as Americans generally assume when you say religious you mean Christian, and Christian as an adjective and religious as an adjective are not the same words. And Memphis is a religious community, it just isn't Christian, or anything else, but it's a southern culture religion is what it is.

Carol Lynn Yellin: Most Memphis, I bet, would say it the other way around -- that it may not be so religious, but it certainly is Christian.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: Oh, that's right, I'm sure. Coming back to, if I may, to Save Our City, which you may or may not have, at this meeting at Westminster House, which was to organize, get Save Our City going; Mary Dowdy was there, and Pat Gilliam, and, Pat and Darrel Dowdy were named as the co-chairman to start. I don't know if you have this kind of information?

David Yellin: Well, we might with Darrell, and I have forgotten.

Carol Lynn Yellin: No, we don't, not this specific.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: Ok, and at that point.

David Yellin: Who called the meeting originally? (muffled)?

Rev. Richard C. Wells: Oooh, gee, I think so, I think so. Yeah I think Dick Moon called it. And see, Darrel was not even at the meeting, but Mary was, but Mary said my husband will be willing to help. So he and...

David Yellin: Since he wasn't here to defend himself, he was going to be made chairman.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: They were made co-chairman, but what happened in the development of this through Darrel, and I was at meetings at the Gilliams' house, in a small group, where the strategy was being devised as to what to do with Save Our City. The reason that it was handled the way it was, and it was not allowed to become an organization, was because Darrel Dowdy said he would not allow it to be, and he would not allow it to be because he had future plans for it to be a political organization.

Carol Lynn Yellin: Well no, we didn't get that.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: Well no, that one of the...

David Yellin: Darrel didn't tell us that.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: Yeah, that's one of the inner, inner meeting kind of things.
(Muffled)

Carol Lynn Yellin: Well, Darrel...

Rev. Richard C. Wells: But that's what happened to Save Our City.

Carol Lynn Yellin: He had been involved in that Willis campaign, had he not?

Dodie Wells: Yes. So was Mary.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: And what they were trying to do you see, was to build a political base of (muffled) liberals in the white community that they can attach to their political base in the black community for future political elections, and Save Our City was simply going to be a mailing list.

David Yellin: Which it was.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: Yeah, but it was going to be a mailing list for political purposes.

Carol Lynn Yellin: Of course, oddly enough it was an effective mailing list. It really filled a need.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: At that time.

Carol Lynn Yellin: During that period where so many people were trying, as the weeks wore on in that, and toward the end people were becoming alarmed and saying, something's got to be done, and what can I do, and this kind of information was very useful.

Rev. Richard C. Wells: Yeah, I think right at that point, you know the kind of information that was put out was very helpful. But that still could have been done, you see, and still been organized.

David Yellin: And answered what you said, Dodie, about the fact, and this is what interested us, that when we formed this committee in this very room we were amazed that there were 23 other people who felt as we did. You know 23 in a city of 600,000. And then when we discovered there were possibly 80 at the next meeting, you know (muffled).

Dodie Wells: I think what's discouraging is when you realize 79 leaves and then 78 leaves, and..

Carol Lynn Yellin: Well this, yes.

David Yellin: And I guess that's a part of the reason they were interested -- they knew

they were transient anyway.

Carol Lynn Yellin: I suppose that just for the record we should say what's been delightful this summer is that after four years that we find the Wells.

Dodie Wells: We're still here.

Carol Lynn Yellin: And we really (muffled).

David Yellin: What would have happened if you wouldn't liked this place?

Rev. Richard C. Wells: You see, it is possible to crawl into the woodwork.

Carol Lynn Yellin: Well, we're still here, and you're still here, and even in all this period.

David Yellin: That's what I wanted to ask you, and this is putting a great big burden on you, since you were from India -- do you find that whatever we would call it, that is present and current in Memphis, that racial prejudice, whatever kind of prejudice that prevents people from looking at this thing from a Christian point of view, or from a tolerant point of view, do you find this is peculiar to America, to this place, or was it true all over?

Dodie Wells: No, it's, I think it's worldwide, and this is the hard thing to realize, is that we as Christians are no better than the Hindus, as Hindus. Because what the cast Hindu felt for the outcast Hindu is exactly the same thing, and they even have a color variant. The outcast is a darker person than the cast person, but the feeling is very much the same -- the separate bathrooms, the back of the bus, all of these things. And then to realize again, you know that we call ourself Christian, and you can still do the same thing that my parents and grandparents went to a foreign country to do away with. It's been a real disillusion, but maybe it's a good thing then.

David Yellin: Well then, on that hopeful note.

Carol Lynn Yellin: Shall we all adjourn to Northern Ireland?

Rev. Richard C. Wells: Where everybody loves everybody?

David Yellin: The only place you can find a pocket is Australia.

END OF RECORDING