

Interview with Bettie Allen
Tape 2, November 13, 2003
Interviewer: Cullom Davis

- Davis: This is an oral history interview on what? November 13th 2003, the interview with Bettie Allen, the interviewer Cullom Davis. Bettie, we had a great session last meeting. I'd like to pick up there. There were a few things, though, that I wanted to return to because we went through them a little rapidly. I'm curious what, if anything, as a child, from your neighbors or your family you ever heard, as a child now, about the terrible race riot in Springfield back in 1908. Did that subject ever come up that you recall?
- Allen: Yes, because – and I don't want to infer that it was a big deal –
- Davis: Right.
- Allen: My folks lived in Springfield.
- Davis: Yes.
- Allen: And I don't believe my mother and father were yet married.
- Davis: Mm-hmm.
- Allen: And so my Granddad used to talk about it as in the sense that he moved his family, took the family north of here to Monmouth, Illinois.
- Davis: Yes.
- Allen: Where his sister-in-law, my grandmother's sister lived, during the time of the riots.
- Davis: Interesting.
- Allen: And my father has spoken but just sparingly as well, and said that he was happy. At the time, he was living with his sister. You know, she lived on North 2nd.
- Davis: OK.
- Allen: So that part of the city was not really affected.
- Davis: Right, right.
- Allen: Where the bulk of the blacks lived, it was affected.

- Davis: Yes.
- Allen: Over in that area –
- Davis: Madison, or East Madison.
- Allen: Madison, Mason.
- Davis: Right, right. So – so that’s interesting. So your grandfather felt to protect the family they should leave town during the worst of the riot, which a lot of black families did of course.
- Allen: Yeah. And you know, he was a coal miner and sometime prior to the riot, and I’m not quite sure of the date, he was a coal miner down near Litchfield. If you remember Mother Jones?
- Davis: Oh, yeah.
- Allen: Mother Jones came and was trying to unionize that, and I never did quite understand if he was a strikebreaker or not. But he would mention some trouble with the coalmines.
- Davis: Right.
- Allen: So, and he said – he sort of connected the two. He didn’t want to have his family hurt as a result of stuff.
- Davis: Right. There had been some trouble, and as some of the mine companies had brought in black coal miners, often from the South.
- Allen: Uh-huh, mm-hmm.
- Davis: And what was – in Virden was one of the most famous cases where there was really kind of wide-open violence.
- Allen: Yeah.
- Davis: And you know, one of the background issues, allegedly, in the race riot was the competition for jobs in the coalmines. Did your grandfather talk about having difficulty on the job with, say, Italian or American or German coal miners?
- Allen: No, what I remember is that he said, “You know, we always got the worst jobs.”
- Davis: Right.

- Allen: And I guess in today's world we would say they would start exploring, they would do – the blacks would do the exploring without the benefit of all of the things for safety such as the beams and stuff.
- Davis: OK, no good timbers or [share of?] protection.
- Allen: Right, right, right.
- Davis: So they did the most dangerous work.
- Allen: They did the most dangerous work, uh-huh. And so he said, "You know, we always had the worst jobs in the coal mine," but he said, you know, it put bread on the table and so that –
- Davis: Right, right. OK.
- Allen: You know, that was an era when people did do what it took to ha– keep a job.
- Davis: Exactly. They did what they had to do.
- Allen: Mm-hmm.
- Davis: Right, OK, thank you. Now also, you know, we went – the nation went through a terrible depression in the 1930s when you were a young girl here in Springfield.
- Allen: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.
- Davis: Now I'm just kind of curious to what extent you were conscious that times were bad then, or were they bad anyway?
- Allen: Well, my perception of that time, and this comes from sort of a family viewpoint, both my father and my grandfather were good gardeners.
- Davis: Oh!
- Allen: My father also had family in Missouri, and they were farmers.
- Davis: Mm-hmm.
- Allen: And so that provided meat.
- Davis: Mm-hmm.
- Allen: So we never experienced hunger.

Davis: Hunger.

Allen: And I – and I have said this so many times to friends because I have known families that they were hungry.

Davis: Mm-hmm.

Allen: OK? The other kind of thing that happened is, far as I can tell, was that in my mother's family it was always the practice that kids ate first. Which means that before you set down to the table –

Davis: Right.

Allen: We would bless the food.

Davis: Yes.

Allen: And the kids would have their food portioned out. Now, there were families that the adults ate first. And if the male took more than his share, then the kids suffered from not having enough food. So there was – you know, we had plenty of food because everybody gardened and the women canned. We had that practice of feeding the kids first, and so I don't remember any hunger at all.

Davis: Interesting.

Allen: My mother was – I wouldn't call her a seamstress because my sister did learn that art and that trade, but my mother would work for white ladies and they would give her clothes. And she would always come home and rip them apart and always made us clothing, even if the overalls were too big for my brother, she would do something to the overalls. So we never were –

Davis: The clothing and food were satisfactory.

Allen: Yeah.

Davis: So you didn't –

Allen: I – I didn't really know that –

Davis: Yeah, right.

Allen: – there was a difference, I really didn't.

Davis: Right. Now it's interesting that in your family the children ate first, which is – what that tells me is that they really cared about their children's welfare,

even if it meant that the adults might go a little hungry, not really hungry, but at least – yeah.

Allen: Yeah, you know my grandfather, he had 13 kids.

Davis: Yeah.

Allen: At some point there was 13 kids coming up, so they had – they had that practice of just feeding the kids. And while it might have been beans, beans, beans, and potatoes, potatoes, potatoes, there was always plenty of that. Never – I mean, we – I never experienced hunger at all.

Davis: Interesting, interesting. Now you of course, right from childhood, had a nice job with Leon Stewart, but what about the job opportunities for your friends? Say, this would be in the late 1930s when you were a young teenager, or even the '40s. Were there many decent job opportunities for black children who were your friends?

Allen: Well, what I remember is that, you know, we could always – we were still the restaurant people.

Davis: Yes.

Allen: OK, where you – either cooks or dishwashers or cleaning up there.

Davis: Right.

Allen: And there were always, you know, a great number of restaurants in Springfield that would hire.

Davis: Mm-hmm.

Allen: Young people particularly because they didn't have to pay them that much. And you know, right at the beginning of the '40s, that's when the munition plants and whatnot started, and we had something out here to Illiopolis.

Davis: Right.

Allen: So the kids I was going to school with were a little bit older than I, and so they – when they finished school, they immediately went out to Illiopolis to work.

Davis: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

Allen: I don't know how many kids worked younger. I just happened to fall into that thing –

- Davis: Yeah, right. You were unusual.
- Allen: – that I wanted to do, yeah.
- Davis: Yeah, right, OK.
- Allen: And so I had – I looked for a job, I really didn't have to work. My dad always made sufficient money to take care of us. He may have worked on – during the Depression he may have worked on the WPA, think that's – let me see, I remember him working at Lake Springfield, I think that's when it was dug.
- Davis: Yes, OK.
- Allen: OK, so –
- Davis: And that was – that was a WPA project.
- Allen: That was – yeah, one of those projects. And then there was that thing out here on 6th Street, still probably –
- Davis: Oh, yeah. The Toronto Ordinance?
- Allen: Yeah, uh-huh.
- Davis: I think it was called Ordinance [Depot?].
- Allen: Yeah.
- Davis: Kind of like Illiopolis, but not as large obviously.
- Allen: Right, right. And so he – he always worked. Always worked. Always had a job, we always ate.
- Davis: So it was possible to get these federal jobs in the munitions factory.
- Allen: Mm-hmm.
- Davis: How about state jobs? Of course there weren't as many state jobs then as there are today, but could your friends or your relatives get –
- Allen: Yes, some of my friends did. Those who – those who – the fellows would get janitorial jobs and you had – of course, you had to know somebody to get a job.
- Davis: Right, right.

Allen: Politically. The girls who took secretarial classes such as typing and shorthand could – and filing, filing primarily, could get jobs. There were black women working in state jobs, black men working in jobs, but the lower –

Davis: Yeah.

Allen: Classification.

Davis: The lower level, yeah.

Allen: And again, that was all political.

Davis: Yeah.

Allen: Because that's the way people got jobs.

Davis: Right.

Allen: We understood that. They don't understand it today.

Davis: Right!

Allen: Yeah, if you're on the right party you should get a job, you know?

Davis: Yeah, and you had to kick in some money –

Allen: Yeah, sure!

Davis: And you had to campaign for people and so forth.

Allen: Mm-hmm, but I never got caught in that.

Davis: (laughter) OK. Now you also of course mentioned the – I think it was a brief period of time that you were able to go to Moody Bible Institute in Chicago, then you had to return home because your mother was ill.

Allen: Uh-huh.

Davis: Tell me whether you liked Moody. Did you like that experience, the brief time it was?

Allen: Well, first of all I was trying to adjust to the city (laughter).

Davis: Yeah. Big change.

- Allen: Yes, and but now, I mean if someone that hadn't been to the city and would go to Chicago now, it's probably more scarier than it was. But fortunately, even then there were not accommodations for students, black students, so I had to find someplace and they did recommend people to go –
- Davis: Rooming house sort of place?
- Allen: Yeah, mm-hmm.
- Davis: OK.
- Allen: Mm-hmm. And so it was – it was OK. I realized I really wanted to learn the Bible better, learn to help, and of course that created a desire to go to Africa. You know, that's where we thought all missionaries went.
- Davis: Right (laughter).
- Allen: (laughter) To – to work with the savages (laughter).
- Davis: So Moody would not provide housing for black students?
- Allen: Mm-mm, but they referred.
- Davis: And where – where was Moody? Now it's up on – near North Avenue, north of the Loop. Do you remember where –?
- Allen: I really can't.
- Davis: OK, that's fine.
- Allen: I don't think they really ever moved much.
- Davis: Probably so–
- Allen: I think they just grew.
- Davis: Yeah.
- Allen: I don't –
- Davis: It's some handsome old brick buildings that I've noticed up there, that – they may have moved, but maybe not. That's, after all, hmm, 60 some years ago.
- Allen: Right, yeah.

- Davis: OK. And I wanted to clarify something. Did your father serve in World War II?
- Allen: No. In World War I.
- Davis: No, he was World War I, right.
- Allen: And my brothers – my oldest brother World War II, and my youngest brother would have been Vietnam.
- Davis: Ooh, boy, OK. Did you have any aspirations to serve in the Army in World War II?
- Allen: No, but I did join the – what was it called? Air Patrol or something like that which was a volunteer kind of organization and I did learn about what one does when you're in the Air Force.
- Davis: OK. So you'd say it was kind of an introduction to the Air Force and but it was strictly volunteer –
- Allen: Yes, right.
- Davis: You didn't turn any money for it.
- Allen: No, no, no.
- Davis: Right. It was your effort in the – your volunteer effort in the war.
- Allen: Mm-hmm.
- Davis: OK. Do you remember anything about those years as to the scarcity of things or anything? Did that affect your family particularly?
- Allen: [Race, you means?]?
- Davis: Yes.
- Allen: I didn't feel that it affected us, again, because we've always been gardeners. I'm still gardening today.
- Davis: Right, I know, yeah.
- Allen: (laughter) We've always been gardeners, and – and when it came to food, no.
- Davis: That wasn't a problem.

Allen: Mm-mm.

Davis: OK, good. Well, I –

Allen: But the one little thing –

Davis: Yes.

Allen: About those, the World War II years, was the – I was always wanting to do something and of course I had the brother and the cousins away at war, so I went to the blood bank.

Davis: Is that right? OK.

Allen: And I was a – people had always told me not to go because Bettie Jane, they will not take your blood. But they – they were very kind because what they did was take my blood. And I said, “Now, if they throw it away, that’s their service, not mine!”

Davis: That’s their problem, huh?

Allen: Yeah.

Davis: So they took your blood at least.

Allen: They took my blood.

Davis: You’re never sure – you’re not sure they used it, but.

Allen: That’s right. And even – but today, you know, we’re still going – we still go to the blood bank.

Davis: Yeah, yeah.

Allen: Yeah. So we, over the years, I’ve always given blood unless there’s been something going on. Ooh, it’s been sort of a little difficult to give blood now because of HIV and –

Davis: Exactly.

Allen: – and the different kinds of –

Davis: Right.

Allen: – other kinds, like SARS and all of that going.

- Davis: Right. You kind of think, “Well, now, is this going to be dangerous for me?”
- Allen: It’s what they think. I’m going to tell you, they – it’s what they think, the blood bank really checks you out, where you’ve been, what you’ve done.
- Davis: Right.
- Allen: And, you know, I go every six weeks, so you know, every six weeks I go through this thing about where you’ve been.
- Davis: Right.
- Allen: And they are smart enough to change the questions in that period of time so that they’re relevant to whatever’s going on –
- Davis: Whatever the current concerns.
- Allen: Current thing is that the –
- Davis: You know, you look back on that, I guess you’d call it superstition or bias that somehow Negro blood shouldn’t be mixed with white blood, it’s kind of almost amusing –
- Allen: But that’s –
- Davis: But you know, that was a common –
- Allen: But that – that’s ridiculous. Let me go back a little bit.
- Davis: OK.
- Allen: My brother, my oldest brother, was an alcoholic from almost – from the war on, but I mean, he was probably an alcoholic before that because my dad said, “I’m not going to have you going out and treating [her how?] many drinks you drink here at home and I hope that you can temper your need for it.” And so, but my brother drank all the time. My brother would go and give blood at the hospitals because there wasn’t any blood bank.
- Davis: Right.
- Allen: He and 100 other alcoholics, black, yellow, red, whatever, would give blood and nobody thought anything about it. It was when you went to the – the institution –
- Davis: Right.

- Allen: And they set up the barrier because they were the white folks in charge –
- Davis: Right.
- Allen: And they didn't have the need like, like back before we had a blood bank. So it does change with (laughter).
- Davis: Oh, I mean, the alcoholics, they didn't care.
- Allen: They didn't care. Didn't care. Didn't care, didn't care.
- Davis: Yeah. Isn't that something? That reminds me. Tell me, if you would, about whether you have any impression about whether – which of the two local hospitals was more welcoming to African-Americans. It used to be called the Old Springfield Hospital –
- Allen: Yeah, sure.
- Davis: Memorial, or St. John's.
- Allen: Mm-hmm. Actually because of – St. John's, in many minds, was considered the only hospital because it was the largest hospital.
- Davis: Right.
- Allen: I would say that St. John's was the least welcoming in the sense of integration. I remember when I had appendicitis and I went there, and that's when there was a separation of rooms. They never put – they never mixed the races in the room.
- Davis: Mm-hmm.
- Allen: I didn't know of anybody who was nursing. The people that I knew that were nurses were not in Springfield. I mean like, people in school with me.
- Davis: Right, right.
- Allen: They went off to the city –
- Davis: Somewhere else.
- Allen: Someplace else and took up nursing. Dr. Lee with – no, let me go back before that. There was – we have always had a black doctor in the community during my lifetime.
- Davis: Yes.

- Allen: It changed, OK.
- Davis: Right, right.
- Allen: I'm not sure whether the ones that I knew early had hospital privileges. You understand what I'm saying?
- Davis: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.
- Allen: I do remember the struggle Dr. Lee had for hospital privileges.
- Davis: Mm-hmm.
- Allen: Because what it really meant, before that time you always had to ref- the doctors always had to refer their black -
- Davis: That's right.
- Allen: - their patients to a white doctor in order to get them into the hospital and to have surgery going on, even though many of the doctors that I have known came out of the war, whether it was World War I or World War II, that's where they got their - did maybe their internship or whatever.
- Davis: Right, right.
- Allen: Right during the war, you know, and so.
- Davis: So you felt discrimination when you were a patient at St. John's.
- Allen: Mm-hmm.
- Davis: Separate ward.
- Allen: Mm-hmm.
- Davis: And when did you have this appendectomy? Was it when you were a teenager, or?
- Allen: Well, it was - it was late teens or early 20s.
- Davis: OK, OK.
- Allen: Mm-hmm.
- Davis: So this was in the '40s. Mid-'40s.

Allen: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

Davis: That's interesting. And of course then that hospital was up on North Grand I think.

Allen: The Springfield Hospital –

Davis: Yes. Yes, right.

Allen: And so that was even out of our territory.

Davis: Right, right (laughter).

Allen: We didn't go that far north (laughter).

Davis: Now there was one doctor, at least back in the '20s, named Ware, W-a-r-e.

Allen: Yes. I remember Dr. Ware not as a patient, but the name was –

Davis: Yes.

Allen: – the one.

Davis: Now there may have been other African-American physicians, but he was –

Allen: He was one.

Davis: At least one listed, right.

Allen: Mm-hmm. And I think he was – you know, it's like the dentist.

Davis: Right.

Allen: They were my dad's war buddies, you know what I mean?

Davis: (laughter) Yeah, right. Yeah.

Allen: Uh-huh, and so there was Dr. Webster, was – was a dentist.

Davis: OK.

Allen: And –

Davis: Was there a – and I don't mean to ask you to speak for all of the black community in Springfield, but at least you're my access to whatever feelings existed. Was there a feeling that you owed it to the black professionals in

town to use their services when you needed a lawyer or a dentist or a doctor?
Or that only – they were the only ones who really were accessible to you?

Allen: Well, I feel that we just knew we were not wanted.

Davis: Mm-hmm.

Allen: It's possible that you could have gone to them, but the standard practice was you go visit your own.

Davis: Right.

Allen: And actually, with someone being a part of the community like attending church and functioning with us on social – in social activities, you knew them. And I can say today I am – let me say I've always appreciated the black doctor who's come out of a black school.

Davis: Mm-hmm.

Allen: I honestly believe in my head that there's a difference in medicine taught because they're talking about the things that black people have –

Davis: Mm-hmm, like the sickle cell or something, or those kind of –

Allen: Yeah. And so today, when Dr. Lee died, I looked for a doctor [in soul?] because of my – my auntie, was then going to another doctor. I just used hers.

Davis: Mm-hmm.

Allen: And finally Dr. Gaines, opened a clin–

Davis: Dr. Gaines, that's right.

Allen: Yeah. Opened a clinic and he took on a young lady who I – I knew her mother and her grandmother, and I went to them.

Davis: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

Allen: And today I am back with her (laughter).

Davis: Oh, really?

Allen: Right.

Davis: Now – now who – could I ask who that might be?

- Allen: Well, she has an African name now because she married an African.
- Davis: OK.
- Allen: And her name is Ayorinde. It's A-r-a – I have to find you that spelling.
- Davis: Are– Ayorinde.
- Allen: Her name is – her initial is S, Sheila, and it's Ayorinde. And I have to find you out the spelling of that.
- Davis: OK. OK.
- Allen: But I'm back with her because our – and she went to Meharry.
- Davis: Oh, yeah, sure. Which is – which is where Dr. Lee trained, I think, too.
- Allen: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.
- Davis: So there was a time when African-Americans had little realistic choice but to go to black physicians –
- Allen: Mm-hmm, but we were (overlapping dialogue; inaudible)
- Davis: Now you're free to go to any doctor you want, but you have – you feel that they've – they are more familiar with the problems and the health status of African-Americans and so they're superior in that sense.
- Allen: Mm-hmm. And actually, they just take more time.
- Davis: Yeah.
- Allen: You know a part of what happens to us for instance in Dr. Lee's office, you never got an appointment. You'd come and take a (laughter) – get in the line, you know? And so you would sit – that was a nice social event. You would sit and talk –
- Davis: Sure, sure.
- Allen: – to one another, people you hadn't seen, all that.
- Davis: Right.
- Allen: And then when you left there, you had benefited from talking to friends, realizing that you weren't as bad as you thought you were, and then going into

the doctor's office, and I mean, he never – he never sat down, looked at his watch.

Davis: Right.

Allen: And started, ba-da-ba-da, he'd sit down and talk to you, and you know, and ask about your mother and father and all this good stuff, you know.

Davis: Right, yeah.

Allen: And then part – and then get to business and all that.

Davis: Right.

Allen: And say, "OK." I could – I could feel good if he said to me, "I think you're going to feel better from this," or "Go home and take a couple aspirins," and all of that because we didn't have health insurance. He knew he couldn't be prescribing all this high priced medicine, you know.

Davis: (laughter) Right.

Allen: You know, if it was something that he thought over-the-counter would do, you know, he'd go get it bar – he'd go get some – I remember I had an earache and it was [up there?] and he went and got some hand soap and maybe there was a little water, threw it in my ear and –

Davis: Swished it around a little bit, yeah.

Allen: – and then pushed my head down and popped me on the side of the head and all that junk came out. Just that simple. Not go and buy some drops, da, da, da, da, da, da, he just did it.

Davis: Right. Just kind of simple, not home remedy but at least the sort of thing that didn't cost you any extra money.

Allen: Mm-hmm. And the other thing that he did, and I would think – I would characterize this for all the doctors – Sheila even does it today. He would look into your mouth, you know, blacks never took care of their teeth.

Davis: No, right.

Allen: Teeth and feet are very important to the rest of your body health.

Davis: That's right.

- Allen: And I mean, (laughter) he'd look in there – how you feeling? You better go see Dr. Webster because you got something going on in that tooth. And like, just a mouth inspection, you don't get that now.
- Davis: No!
- Allen: You can't go to a doctor today –
- Davis: No, no!
- Allen: – and get ten things done.
- Davis: No.
- Allen: Or if you have three things done, you say, "I got an earache, I got da, da, da," they do one thing, next week you can get another appointment for the second thing and then next week you can get the next one (laughter). But I really enjoyed that because that – that's, you know, your well-being is in your head as much as in your body.
- Davis: Exactly, exactly. That's a wonderful description. And I knew Dr. Lee and admired him. Why don't you talk a little bit more about him? Was he kind of the outstanding citizen in the African-American community for some 20 or 30 years? Was he kind of numer– number one?
- Allen: Well, I think he was recognized by whites –
- Davis: Right.
- Allen: – more than anything else, which gave him a total community awareness.
- Davis: Mm-hmm.
- Allen: He probably was more limited in the black community because of the church that he attended, area where he lived, the cars that he drove.
- Davis: OK, so he was a bit above.
- Allen: Well, there are differences in black churches, I would hope you know that.
- Davis: Right. So what church did he attend?
- Allen: Zion Baptist.
- Davis: He attended Zion, OK.

- Allen: Uh-huh. And Zion Baptist, to some degree was known as the church of the professionals in the Baptist church.
- Davis: I see.
- Allen: And more – there were more professional people or people who worked for the state and stuff like that.
- Davis: Aha.
- Allen: Then – then some of the other churches. So – and he was very, very forthright in his conversation, you know. I mean, he didn't back off from anything, so.
- Davis: Right.
- Allen: If you were – if you were on your toes doing what you needed to do in the community, he was – he was an inspiration, I felt, for black people.
- Davis: Mm-hmm.
- Allen: Because he was our first doctor who had a building of his own.
- Davis: Right.
- Allen: And sort of like a clinic idea.
- Davis: It was a clinic really, wasn't it? Yeah.
- Allen: Yeah, because he had a foot doctor and some guy who did lab work, he had a lab guy, plus his own.
- Davis: Mm-hmm.
- Allen: And then he – his building served as a social place, his basement.
- Davis: Mm-hmm, right, right.
- Allen: And so it was – he – he really was together in – I mean, futuristic in his thinking.
- Davis: Right.
- Allen: And how things out to work out.
- Davis: And I think I remember correctly that he was one of the major founders of the People's Bank.

Allen: Yes.

Davis: Which was there liberally intended.

Allen: Sure.

Davis: Would be – to serve the east side of town.

Allen: And blacks.

Davis: And blacks.

Allen: Didn't I tell you that was the (laughter) – didn't always – didn't happen that way.

Davis: Nah.

Allen: And then we had to go out and sell. We had to go out and sell, you know, Mr. Leon Stewart was president after –

Davis: Yes.

Allen: Yeah, OK. We had to go out and sell people on the idea of take it – just buying one share or two shares, you know.

Davis: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

Allen: And shares was like \$25 or something like that. Because we wanted that balance.

Davis: Right.

Allen: And then the other part of the bank really came from the Jews. And that was –

Davis: Is that right? I didn't know that.

Allen: Yeah, oh, yeah. Weiner.

Davis: OK, the Weiner – the lawyers, Weiner?

Allen: Mm-hmm.

Davis: So they were major stockholders in it?

Allen: Yeah. Oh! Shoot, yes. They were (overlapping dialogue; inaudible) –

- Davis: Now of course they saw a good investment. But also –
- Allen: Yeah. But that's OK but they were –
- Davis: Their heart was in it too.
- Allen: Yeah, they were – you know, in order to be on the board – everybody who was on the board had to have had the maximum –
- Davis: Right.
- Allen: Shares [shocked?] for – for our board.
- Davis: Right.
- Allen: But they would (overlapping dialogue; inaudible).
- Davis: So you were active in helping get the – sell the shares.
- Allen: Well, listen. Mr. Stewart was there –
- Davis: That's right.
- Allen: And that was a part of what I did, you know, part of my job. But I mean, I saw it as a great thing. It just seemed to me because I knew in the South that there were black banks that had been there for years.
- Davis: Right.
- Allen: And they weren't savings and loan, you know, people – blacks were also high up into savings and loan, in fact, we probably have two savings and loans that started in churches that are still in churches.
- Davis: Really?
- Allen: That are still going on.
- Davis: Really?
- Allen: So – I think so. I think St. Paul's has something of –
- Davis: Is that right?
- Allen: Yeah. But I mean, that was a cool idea. I really enjoyed that. And then because –

- Davis: It was exciting, wasn't it?
- Allen: Yeah. Because – because they were in the bank, I could see where we could do some things with people. My – my participation in the People's Bank was I took a group of ten mothers who were on welfare –
- Davis: Mm-hmm.
- Allen: And I taught them banking.
- Davis: Did you?
- Allen: And I said, "Go and get you a credit card." I don't mean to make that "I" sound so big.
- Davis: No, I understand. But –
- Allen: But today, I would say five of those l- girls are really – have really made it.
- Davis: Isn't that wonderful?
- Allen: Really made it, you know, in terms of being able to say – raise their children, buy a house, or something.
- Davis: Establish a credit rating and all the things that they'd had no experience or education –
- Allen: And would never have had if anyone hadn't said, "We're going to take your money and manage it," (laughter). Because in part, you know, you really had to manage.
- Davis: Right.
- Allen: Their money at the beginning and taper off, and then do a little bit, taper off.
- Davis: Right, right.
- Allen: And do that. I went in to manage – money management program for the senior citizens. I can hang with that because they didn't want you really managing their –
- Davis: Why – oh.
- Allen: – their – their clients' money.
- Davis: Oh, OK, I see.

- Allen: You know what I mean? They –
- Davis: Yeah, right.
- Allen: You couldn't tell them –
- Davis: Yeah.
- Allen: You can't spend this money, you got to do this, you got to pay this, you got to pay that. They would – but that's way it works, it really works when you said, "I'm going to manage your money for three months, I'm going to taper off, [get out?], give you a little something to spend, then you're going to start writing checks," da, da, da, then it was on down the line. Then we'll get you a credit card, you can buy the washer/dryer.
- Davis: Right.
- Allen: That kind of thing, you know (laughter). And it was exciting. That was really one of the most exciting things I've ever done.
- Davis: How do you think People's Bank has worked out over the years? Course now it's got a different name.
- Allen: I think it's probably bigger – it's sort of bigger now than it –
- Davis: Yeah.
- Allen: Would have been, but in – you know, they also did a coup– another thing that I enjoyed, their first, I guess you'd call it manager whatever, not [Wenton Predley?], was also handicapped.
- Davis: Oh, OK.
- Allen: And he was good, he helped me learn investment, you know. I think I just became aware of what a bank is about.
- Davis: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.
- Allen: And I – I can remember arguing with the First National Bank. I wanted to buy [it for?] my house, you know what I mean, today.
- Davis: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.
- Allen: And at First National I had just purchased a car and they were financing the car. They had no problem financing the car. Now, this is at a time of course when –

Davis: I understand.

Allen: When cars were cheap –

Davis: Right.

Allen: And this was at a time when real estate was cheap.

Davis: Right.

Allen: And I bought a brand new house for 13,500, you know.

Davis: Right (laughter).

Allen: And I had just bought a car from them and they said, “Oh, no! You can’t – we can’t give you no house money, you just bought the car, you got to be free of debt.” And I said, “Well, then you take the car back, because I want this house!” And George Hoffmann –

Davis: Yeah.

Allen: Worked in my behalf to force them to take – to give me that.

Davis: Is that right? George Hoffmann the lawyer?

Allen: Yeah! Yeah.

Davis: So how did you know him?

Allen: Through Leon. He was in the bank too, or something, or he might have been the lawyer.

Davis: OK. He was a good – good man, wasn’t he?

Allen: And he was our – let me tell you, he was our customer, you know you had (overlapping dialogue; inaudible)

Davis: OK, course, yeah (laughter).

Allen: But –

Davis: So he went to bat for you.

Allen: Yeah, yeah. And I tell you – and I didn’t want – it was not as the cosigner, but he told them, “I’m not going to sign any paper because she don’t want the

paper like that, she will pay” – I mean, hey, my house payment was \$75 a month.

Davis: (laughter) Not that that was a small amount of money then, but still.

Allen: No. Still!

Davis: It was manageable.

Allen: Yeah, right, was manageable because Mr. Stewart had already told me to save money, hey, I’m not going to go out there on – and it was – it was just as I say, learning then what banks are supposed to provide all people, the People’s Bank had the correct idea –

Davis: Right.

Allen: To introduce blacks to – to a full service bank.

Davis: Right.

Allen: And work with them. The problem is, everybody that came up to the – came up to get a loan on a car or a house were bad risks, but that – that’s also their job is to –

Davis: Right, right.

Allen: So many of the bad, bad risk people. Now I never got to work on that end of it, but because I was at that time, I think, really involved with those girls. I worked with those welfare mamas for about five years.

Davis: Did you really? Helping them develop their own credit standing and good habits.

Allen: And – and think out – think out about – yeah, think about what you want.

Davis: Right.

Allen: What you really want, because you can’t buy what you want today. You got to plan for that sucker tomorrow.

Davis: Right, right. Was that through a particular organization that you worked with them?

Allen: No, no.

Davis: Just on your own? You just knew them.

- Allen: Just on my own and I said to the board, “I got to – we got to try to do this, this is what we’re” –
- Davis: Which board? The YWC–
- Allen: No, no, the –
- Davis: Oh, the bank board?
- Allen: The bank board. Yeah.
- Davis: OK.
- Allen: No, you got to try to do this, it’s what you claim. You want to be People’s, OK, People’s work with people.
- Davis: OK.
- Allen: And they try now.
- Davis: It is – of course now it’s called what? The Marine Bank, isn’t it, People’s?
- Allen: The one – no. Well, yeah, the original – yeah, that bank, yeah because –
- Davis: Yes. People’s is now called the Marine Bank.
- Allen: Right.
- Davis: Does it still serve the east side, do you think?
- Allen: Oh, they – they really have (sigh)
- Davis: Yeah, they’ve changed. And that’s my opinion – impression at least, that –
- Allen: They have really grown big, and believe it or not, I don’t use them. They are my bank.
- Davis: OK.
- Allen: They are my number one bank, but I don’t use them for buying cars.
- Davis: Oh, really?
- Allen: Uh-uh. I can do better. They’re not a really good finance person, but that’s what I was taught. You look for your best bargain.

- Davis: Look for the best deal, Leon taught you that (laughter).
- Allen: Yeah (laughter), the way your best deal. But I don't need any loans other than cars.
- Davis: Right.
- Allen: And I – you know, I have never even taken advantage of the things that the car manufacturer offers.
- Davis: Right, yeah.
- Allen: Not that – because I haven't qualified. So finally this year's – they sent me a letter and said I finally qualify, and I think they did that because they stopped making the car that I buy. That I've been buying.
- Davis: Right.
- Allen: And so they said, "We want you to move to – this car."
- Davis: Right. New model or whatever.
- Allen: Yeah. Because we don't make this. And I'm said, "I'm not interested. I really like this size, you don't make this size, you don't make this car that I'm driving so I'll just stay with it a few more years. But you have given me the freedom now, the license to go try somebody else's that makes this size."
- Davis: Sure.
- Allen: Because it's just in between the big and small.
- Davis: Were the – were all of the other downtown banks identical in terms of their not being very welcoming to African-Americans?
- Allen: I really don't know because Mr. Stewart introduced me to First National, that's where he banked.
- Davis: Right, so you dealt with them.
- Allen: My bank – or, dealt with them until I went to People's and I stayed.
- Davis: Right, right, OK. Well, that was a great – I remember when People's Bank started it was a great thing for the east side of town.
- Allen: Well, we sold all right. Need to put the end of the story to the shareholders.

- Davis: Oh, yes. Oh, yes.
- Allen: So we went out and sold, you know, 1,000 people 25 – like one share or something, in a year.
- Davis: Right.
- Allen: See, they were all backfill. Because there's no money.
- Davis: Oh, the shares, yeah, they needed to pay money –
- Allen: Yeah. There's no money.
- Davis: Yeah, right.
- Allen: And then people would have the \$25 share, they – I mean, you got what, 25 cents? Just – so they just would sell it back and then – then the balance of the power shifted because we didn't have all those people. And we had – and the first three or four years, they really would have people at the annual meetings, you know?
- Davis: Mm-hmm.
- Allen: But –
- Davis: That whole spirit kind of changed.
- Allen: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.
- Davis: Yeah. Well, at least all those shareholders, even if they bought only one share, also probably were customers. I mean, it was a good way to build your customers.
- Allen: Yeah. And we kept them. And we kept them.
- Davis: Sure, yeah, yeah.
- Allen: Besides that there was good for the neighborhood because Pepsi-Cola went with them –
- Davis: Right, right.
- Allen: And some other people out there.
- Davis: OK.

- Allen: Might have been Buick, when Buick came out there.
- Davis: Ah, OK.
- Allen: But – but it was a good – it was a good venture. It still is, I guess.
- Davis: OK.
- Allen: I don't know what banks are paying now because I – I don't have stock in People's at all. I do a little different type of investing.
- Davis: Right.
- Allen: Getting a better return on my money.
- Davis: As you look back on all of the businesses in Springfield, back in the post-war years, were there any businesses that were commonly viewed as either very welcoming or very hostile to the African-American community? That's a tough question I know.
- Allen: Yes, and it's tough from the standpoint that so my response to businesses was different –
- Davis: Yes.
- Allen: In the sense that if I knew back here you didn't want it – I don't trade with them, there –
- Davis: Right.
- Allen: There are places that are open today I wouldn't go eat. Because –
- Davis: Just because of the way they behaved.
- Allen: That's right, that's right, that's right.
- Davis: Sure, sure.
- Allen: I think like the downtown stores always had somebody –
- Davis: Mm-hmm.
- Allen: Employed either in a menial job or a good job.
- Davis: Mm-hmm.

- Allen: My sister became head seamstress at Myers Brothers downtown at one time.
- Davis: Oh, really? Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.
- Allen: And that's because there was somebody already in a slot like that and when she started working under that lady and that lady retired, she just moved in to that.
- Davis: So that was a good sign to you.
- Allen: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.
- Davis: So Myers was a good store to go to?
- Allen: Yeah, yeah.
- Davis: Because you'd get a fair treatment there.
- Allen: There was a couple women that worked at some of the other downtown stores –
- Davis: Mm-hmm.
- Allen: You just felt you could always go – go in and feel comfortable because they worked there.
- Davis: Mm-hmm.
- Allen: You didn't see them getting mistreated because generally the people that I saw in stores, the black people that I saw in stores, were good communicators anyway.
- Davis: Right.
- Allen: Friendly.
- Davis: Sure.
- Allen: And so, you know, people would say hello.
- Davis: Mm-hmm.
- Allen: Many of the ladies who went to work downtown also may have come out of those families that had – used to have maids and stuff.
- Davis: Ah, so they got a job through –

- Allen: Yeah.
- Davis: – that maybe.
- Allen: Yeah.
- Davis: OK.
- Allen: Yeah, the Myers had somebody –
- Davis: Sure, sure.
- Allen: All these people, Herndons –
- Davis: Had a maid, and yeah.
- Allen: Herndons and all of these.
- Davis: Yeah, OK. By the way, I ran across – back just for a moment to banking – I ran across mention of a savings and loan called the Frederick Douglass Savings and Loan, does that ring a bell to you?
- Allen: Doesn't ring a bell to me but I don't know – I think St. Paul's is a different name. St. Paul's AME church is a different name.
- Davis: OK. Fair enough, OK. Well, let's get to some – so we got to take a quick break here because we've run out of this side of the tape. So if you don't mind –

END OF TAPE 2, SIDE A

- Davis: OK, we are now going to turn to your interest in the YWCA, because I know that's been a very important part of your life. How did that start? And let's kind of cover the story.
- Allen: OK. Somebody's always – some organization has always had a program for – for poor people.
- Davis: Yeah.
- Allen: OK. And regardless of the fact that we are pa– we are a large number, great percentage of the poor.
- Davis: Right.

- Allen: So as a child, I attended the YWCA for a program called Saturday's Children, and what it was was a feeding program with some activities.
- Davis: Mm-hmm.
- Allen: And I got a nice stew, whatever it was because they did have facilities for fixing meals.
- Davis: Sure.
- Allen: And so I became involved with that as a child. I didn't participate in their school program because by the time that I got to that age, and by that I mean there was always some sort of Y-teen program there.
- Davis: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.
- Allen: I was working.
- Davis: Yes.
- Allen: So I never participated in that program. But by the time – when I reached – when I finished school, there was a program that was a part of a larger program that the Y had which was clubs.
- Davis: Mm-hmm.
- Allen: For women.
- Davis: Mm-hmm.
- Allen: And one of the clubs was the Phyllis Wheatley club.
- Davis: Oh, sure.
- Allen: That was the black club.
- Davis: Mm-hmm.
- Allen: And then there were others, but I joined the Phyllis Wheatley club and participated in that club for probably ten or more years.
- Davis: What was its purpose? Self-improvement or book discussions, or?
- Allen: Well, let me just say that, you know, our – the blacks' social activity was basically in the church.

- Davis: Right.
- Allen: So this was one of the first steps away from the church's social activities. It was a leadership development.
- Davis: Ah, OK.
- Allen: In the Y at the time that – early, the Y had probably three classifications for these types club. There were the professional women –
- Davis: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.
- Allen: There were the blue-collar workers.
- Davis: Mm-hmm.
- Allen: And then there were the blacks.
- Davis: Ah. So it was segregated –
- Allen: Oh, let me tell you. The Phyllis Wheatley club did not meet at the building.
- Davis: (laughter) No, really?
- Allen: They did not meet at the Y building until the building burned down, and then when they came back, the national YWCA was trying to get all – everybody meeting and integration of – of staff and stuff like that. But the blacks met out at the Douglass Community Center which was our social –
- Davis: Right.
- Allen: – place. Big place.
- Davis: Right. Hmm. So that was a useful activity for you.
- Allen: Yeah.
- Davis: There were other young women like you who were African-American and – and had ambitions.
- Allen: Yeah, mm-hmm.
- Davis: OK.
- Allen: And actually they weren't all young, because I mean the age was kind of really going. But what I'm saying, you had an opportunity for leadership, and

you know in the black churches it was hard for women to get leadership except in like, the missionary societies. But this was, you know, you become president, secretary, treasurer.

Davis: Mm-hmm.

Allen: Then you could be activities director, you know, program planning and all of that.

Davis: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

Allen: And you didn't just stick right there because there was the nice, new YWCA that had regional meetings.

Davis: Oh!

Allen: Sectional meetings, and then the national meetings. So even within those three groups that I told you, they had all that leadership possibility, so.

Davis: Sure, sure.

Allen: And that was – that was exciting –

Davis: Sure.

Allen: – to get the leadership possibilities.

Davis: Did you ever attend any regional or national meetings?

Allen: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. Yeah, I used to – it was very interesting that one of the things that happened, to save money, the YWCA would have these meetings and then you stayed with somebody in the –

Davis: Sure.

Allen: In the town where –

Davis: Right.

Allen: – the meeting was held. We weren't going to hotels.

Davis: Right.

Allen: And then finally, when the whites went to the hotels, that's when the – well, as they say – the shit hit the fan, and they began to press for hotels. If you took our convention –

- Davis: You got to take our –
- Allen: You got to take our people out there.
- Davis: Interesting, yeah.
- Allen: So there was a lot of stuff going on there.
- Davis: Right.
- Allen: And that began –
- Davis: It took a while, I'm sure.
- Allen: Right, right, right. And then they began to – the convention began to blend together where we weren't having those three separate meetings within the convention, we began to blend together.
- Davis: Mm-hmm.
- Allen: And I was on the committee in '71, at the '71 convention, that pressed for the one imperative to eliminate racism at all costs.
- Davis: Mm-hmm.
- Allen: Anywhere in the United – in the YWCA, which meant that we would no longer look at that dividing thing of having the black club. We would always look for convention sites that were our staff.
- Davis: Mm-hmm.
- Allen: You see in the cities, there were black YWCAs and white YWCAs.
- Davis: Oh, I didn't know that. Figures, yeah.
- Allen: Yeah. So then the staff then became integrated and – and our black staff could apply for a job and [diddy y diddy?] and be eligible or whatever.
- Davis: Right.
- Allen: To – to take the job. And it really did improve all of that racism. It improved it, but –
- Davis: It must have taken some years to accomplish that.

- Allen: Actually, it – it took about ten years to do the – to reach its peak, but then something else happened in the YWCA. We were a Christian organization.
- Davis: Right.
- Allen: And we decided we'd be open to everybody.
- Davis: Right.
- Allen: Kind of took out our stuff that was unique Christian.
- Davis: Right.
- Allen: Except the [fame?], and boy.
- Davis: That was an issue too.
- Allen: Well, the indents – Asian indents came and it was (laughter) downhill.
- Davis: It went downhill, really? Oh, it hurt the Y?
- Allen: Nationally, oh, nationally, yes.
- Davis: Is that right?
- Allen: Oh, yes. We haven't been strong.
- Davis: So in a way, that effort to reach out came back and stung you.
- Allen: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm. Well, and there were other kind of mitigating factors, OK.
- Davis: Mm-hmm.
- Allen: Just like the blacks was looking at leadership possibilities in the Y, whites within were too and then all of a sudden there was a proliferation of women's organizations for this, that, and the other thing.
- Davis: Mm-hmm.
- Allen: Golfing became available, you know.
- Davis: Right, sure.

- Allen: So – so your scope of activities widened so much that the YWCA was no longer the single provider. You know, they were doing – passing laws and all that other kind of stuff.
- Davis: Right.
- Allen: To open up things for women.
- Davis: So let me make sure I understand, that in your experience it was the opening up to non-Christian women that ultimately undermined the YWCA?
- Allen: I believe that.
- Davis: Yes, sure, that's fine, yeah.
- Allen: I believe that, and because we didn't have the same – it's just like (laughter), what is it? ACLU or ACUL whatever –
- Davis: ACLU.
- Allen: OK, it – it's just what they do.
- Davis: Right.
- Allen: You see, I don't give to them because I see them undermining the Christian influence of this country.
- Davis: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.
- Allen: OK. And that's my thing.
- Davis: Mm-hmm.
- Allen: OK. If others can't be subjected to Christian influence, I don't want to be subjected to all this other – their influence.
- Davis: That's fine, that's fair enough, sure.
- Allen: So.
- Davis: I had the impression, and this was naïve of an outsider, that at least locally, the YWCA didn't thrive because so many women got interested in athletic things that – that the YMCA offered and that it – the YMCA kind of siphoned off a lot of people who would have otherwise been active at the YW. I guess that's wrong, huh?

- Allen: Well, that's – my take is this – this is what happened. We got an executive – I say – I've served on their board.
- Davis: Yes.
- Allen: OK. We got – we hired an executive whom we did not fire for 20 years.
- Davis: Ah, ouch, yeah.
- Allen: She was a dictator.
- Davis: Mm-hmm.
- Allen: We did not do enough program – we could have done the same thing that the YM did. We did not do enough programs. We did not do enough outreach.
- Davis: Mm-hmm.
- Allen: We didn't do anything but have staff because we were in fact funded by gifts.
- Davis: Right, right.
- Allen: OK. Then when we needed to have help, it was the trend that YMs and YWs join together around the country. (inaudible)
- Davis: Right, right.
- Allen: We decided we would struggle with that.
- Davis: Oh.
- Allen: You see, I saw the opportunity for us to have the YMs and the YWs come together but not necessarily share the same building.
- Davis: Sure.
- Allen: That we would parcel –
- Davis: Yeah.
- Allen: – the stuff.
- Davis: Common membership or something like that, yeah.
- Allen: Right. And –

- Davis: And this director just didn't go for that?
- Allen: Oh, no. Those of us who believed like that, we got put off the board, we were not –
- Davis: Really.
- Allen: – re-elected.
- Davis: So during 20 critical – critically important years, the local YW just kind of sat there.
- Allen: And then for another 20 (laughter). Maybe it was only ten, the last one was only ten.
- Davis: It seemed like 20 (laughter).
- Allen: We had another bad one.
- Davis: Oh, really?
- Allen: Because she became a protégé –
- Davis: Sure.
- Allen: – of the first one.
- Davis: Yeah. That's too bad.
- Allen: Yeah. We had two bad, two real bad.
- Davis: It's just, you know, when I moved here in 1970, my impression then was that the YWCA was a very active place. If I – if I went in for some reason, there were a lot of people and it, you know – you go in now and it just strikes me as it's kind of a backwater, kind of not much going on.
- Allen: Oh, it's dead. It's absolutely dead and I wished – I had wished that this year they would make the decision that they'd give it up. Actually, when I – the last time I was (laughter) on the board, I said, "We need to get rid of this building, we need to go someplace where there is some sort of program, help them do program, you know."
- Davis: Mm-hmm.
- Allen: Some like my church pantry, go there.

- Davis: Mm-hmm.
- Allen: Give them – you know, spend your money with a paid staff person there.
- Davis: Mm-hmm.
- Allen: Da, da, da, da, you know. There was a lot of stuff that we could do, but no peop– they wanted to hang out the building. But, the other thing, Cullom, is that once we decided not to – and I wasn't on the board at that time, not to go with the YM – once that was decided, the money people in this town said, "We will not support them on anything." We have been unable –
- Davis: Yeah.
- Allen: – to get any, you know, and it [waste stuff?].
- Davis: Oh, is that right? You don't – oh, OK.
- Allen: Now we can because people say we – we've talked to enough people who say, "I want my money to go to the Y."
- Davis: OK. But you've got to say that or it doesn't – you know.
- Allen: That's right. Well, we don't have any program anyway, but (laughter). So that's the best way to do it.
- Davis: It is too bad.
- Allen: Oh, yeah.
- Davis: Yeah.
- Allen: It hurts my heart. Let me tell you, that's been –
- Davis: Because that was – that's been a very important part of your life.
- Allen: Yeah.
- Davis: You were spending a lot of time in YWCA activities.
- Allen: Mm-hmm.
- Davis: Made a lot of friends there, got a lot of experience.
- Allen: Mm-hmm. And actually spent a lot of time in – you know, on the board.

- Davis: Mm-hmm.
- Allen: Committees.
- Davis: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.
- Allen: And it's just – it was just bad news.
- Davis: Mm-hmm.
- Allen: I – I can say truly that at the beginning of that downward trend, I didn't have as much finesse to – to be effective.
- Davis: Mm-hmm.
- Allen: I realized about halfway through that debacle that I could have persuaded some of the board members that were giving – you know, we had a bunch of white women that had money.
- Davis: Major money, right.
- Allen: Major money.
- Davis: Right.
- Allen: Yeah. And they have all died off, because I would call in shifts when we needed – when in my second [step?] was, you know. You got to learn that political thing, that political –
- Davis: So if you'd been a little more sophisticated –
- Allen: Right.
- Davis: – and suave, you might have been able to help without being quite as strident or whatever, yeah.
- Allen: Yeah. There – and this may not be the right way to introduce it, but you know, in the '60s (laughter) – and this goes – put this in it real quick.
- Davis: OK (laughter).
- Allen: But in the '60s, you know, when we were doing the Civil Rights Movement, everything – you called attention by being loud.
- Davis: Right, right.

Allen: OK.

Davis: Yeah.

Allen: And so Velma Carey and I went to a nice, new transportation –

Davis: Right.

Allen: – committee that Bill Sweeney (sp?) shared.

Davis: Oh!

Allen: Because you know, he had to have occasionally input from the board, the black, and everybody else. So we was his black participation. And Bill said to both of us, “Now, I’ll tell you what. If you have something meaningful to say, don’t be loud about it. Use a soft voice, make them sit forward to hear what you got to say (laughter), and we’ll consider it.”

Davis: Interesting.

Allen: “We are tired of hearing your loud voices.” I mean, that guy was –

Davis: He was right, I guess, in a way.

Allen: He was right, but, you know, he was arrogant about it too, you know.

Davis: Oh, I know. Yeah. Don’t get us on that subject (laughter).

Allen: But I got the message.

Davis: Right.

Allen: He said, “Get rid of your anger.” When you get rid of your anger you can talk about anything, and – and I – I have learned that – I was able to do my job and state work when I was doing affirmative action.

Davis: Mm-hmm.

Allen: Because I would just talk very softly.

Davis: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

Allen: They had to ask you, “What did you say? Do I understand you correctly?”

Davis: So it was good advice.

- Allen: It was!
- Davis: Yeah, yeah.
- Allen: Excellent, excellent, excellent. You got to be able to hear, you know, if you haven't got your ears open, you can't hear all the good things that will be helpful.
- Davis: And he's that way himself. You know, when you think about it, he's really very soft spoken.
- Allen: Mm-hmm. He's pretty –
- Davis: But he's got clout.
- Allen: Yeah. Mm-hmm.
- Davis: What else about the YWCA should we cover? Were there any other initiatives it took for – in which you played a major role over the years?
- Allen: Well, the one initiative I need to explain to you, and that – that is that in '71, the Y said, "We've really got to go at this racism."
- Davis: Mm-hmm.
- Allen: OK.
- Davis: Right.
- Allen: "We'll do it in several ways." My first protest was with the national YWCA in Cleveland, the national convention, and (laughter) we walked – 3,000 women walked probably five blocks –
- Davis: Mm-hmm.
- Allen: – in traffic, downtown Cleveland, to protest a job site, construction job site, that didn't have any blacks or women on it.
- Davis: Wow.
- Allen: Now we had to be quiet.
- Davis: Right.
- Allen: We could not open our mouths. We had to go through all these stoplights, and we – we're, you know, you had to realize the stoplight changed so you

were over here, you stayed there, and you'd go on. Man, I learned that! I learned how to do protest!

Davis: You obeyed the law, but you made a demonstration.

Allen: Went and stood around that construction site, got on our knees and prayed –

Davis: Mm-hmm.

Allen: Got up off our knees and returned. Most exciting. Most exciting.

Davis: It was – of course it was. Was that your first large protest activity?

Allen: Demonstration, yeah. And I had been – I had been –

Davis: And you were a ringleader.

Allen: I had been in the South, but –

Davis: Yeah.

Allen: This – this was really just fantastic.

Davis: That's a powerful feeling, isn't it? When you can get people to peacefully demonstrate.

Allen: Mm-hmm. And – and nobody bothered us. I mean, the policemen – we – of course, they knew we were –

Davis: Yes, right.

Allen: – going to do this, they helped us through the lights and they – and they didn't – but even the construction people did not do anything.

Davis: Really?

Allen: They just stood for – and observed. I saw one white man cry, he couldn't believe that 3,000 women could be silent (laughter). You know.

Davis: (laughter) Yeah, yeah.

Allen: Big deal. But anyway, that wasn't in '70. I don't want to confuse that with something.

Davis: No, I understand.

Allen: That was – that was back in the ‘60s.

Davis: In the ‘60s.

Allen: Yeah.

Davis: OK.

Allen: But the one of – going at racism, the Y saw that they really had to do something –

Davis: Mm-hmm.

Allen: – to make this happen.

Davis: Mm-hmm.

Allen: They had a very influential lady, gosh, I can’t get her name. Dorothy Height, H-e-i-g-h-t.

Davis: OK.

Allen: Who was head of the National Consul of Negro Women. It was a national program and it was women’s clubs, OK.

Davis: Mm-hmm, OK.

Allen: She is still being a leader.

Davis: Wow!

Allen: Every now and then you’ll see her on the TVs.

Davis: Wow.

Allen: She just recently, she was awarded some sort of – given some sort of award. But anyway, she said to the Y, and she went out and got the money, to bring 500 black women from around the country to Houston – was it Houston? Yeah, Houston, Texas.

Davis: Mm-hmm.

Allen: Three days before the National Convention.

Davis: Aha.

- Allen: Nothing but black women.
- Davis: Mm-hmm.
- Allen: We came together and we all were professionals. Either professionals, blue collar workers, or just the regulars.
- Davis: Mm-hmm.
- Allen: OK. With – and her process was that every time we saw one another during these three days, we would look at each other and touch each other and say, “I see the me in thee.”
- Davis: The me in thee? The me in thee?
- Allen: In – in thee.
- Davis: Oh, I see. I see the me in thee, OK.
- Allen: Acknowledging that –
- Davis: Yes.
- Allen: – we were sisters.
- Davis: Right.
- Allen: Because you know, when we got to be professionals we kind of didn’t look back, you know.
- Davis: Right, right.
- Allen: And all of that.
- Davis: So that built some comradeship.
- Allen: Yeah, sisterhood.
- Davis: Right.
- Allen: Sisterhood. We went from being professionals and blue collar workers (laughter) to being kind of one. We went from having our hair all fixed up to wearing natural. We went (laughter) from eating in the hotel to a black neighborhood and eating soul food.
- Davis: Right.

- Allen: We went from dressing like Ms. Ann to wearing – I never – I didn't realize so many women had African (laughter) – African dresses.
- Davis: Oh, dashikis and so forth?
- Allen: Yeah!
- Davis: Yeah, sure.
- Allen: It was – it was – it was fantastic!
- Davis: So this was a real experience.
- Allen: That's right. That's right. The hard thing was when we got – when we joined the convention with all the rest of the folks, too many remembered that they were professionals (laughter).
- Davis: Oh, OK. And they went back into being –
- Allen: But I had the honor – I really had the honor of being one of five people who helped Dorothy Height to keep that thing together.
- Davis: Good for you.
- Allen: But it worked – and I'm saying, it worked me to death.
- Davis: Mm-hmm. Congratulations though, that's really a great story.
- Allen: It takes – it takes time and innovating to –
- Davis: Yeah.
- Allen: – position someone to make the resolutions –
- Davis: Mm-hmm.
- Allen: – to position someone to be in all these groups –
- Davis: Mm-hmm.
- Allen: – to say to their group, "We're going to go," it's just, you know. It really – and they still have that one imperative. But it – it was really – it was a really fun three days. The hard work was convincing the twel– five more days.
- Davis: Sure.

- Allen: Keeping it out there.
- Davis: Because you were still struggling to get the national YWCA to essentially integrate.
- Allen: Mm-hmm. In that – themselves.
- Davis: Right.
- Allen: But also, wherever you were in your own local YWCA you'd be doing the same thing.
- Davis: Right, exactly.
- Allen: And you'd be doing the same thing in your community.
- Davis: Right.
- Allen: So it's – it was just a fantastic – you know, when you get into these things you know you don't get 100% of what you go for –
- Davis: Right.
- Allen: But boy, the 80 or the 90 is super. It gets you –
- Davis: A real payoff.
- Allen: That's right.
- Davis: That's right. Now were you involved in civil rights activity outside of your YWCA?
- Allen: Oh, yeah, I'd spend my summers in the South.
- Davis: Tell me about that. What all – when and what were some of your early experiences with that?
- Allen: My first experience with civil rights was with the YWCA.
- Davis: Yeah.
- Allen: They had a nice, new program that was for college students.
- Davis: Mm-hmm.
- Allen: Jackie Wilkes –

Davis: Mm-hmm.

Allen: – was at that time one of the college student –

Davis: Oh!

Allen: – workers for the YWCA, the national YWCA.

Davis: Oh!

Allen: So she directed that program.

Davis: Is that how you met her?

Allen: Yeah.

Davis: Oh! Interesting, OK.

Allen: A gal by the name of Mary Fitz was a program director –

Davis: Uh-huh.

Allen: – at the Y here, and she said, “Bettie, you just need to go out and get your – get your feet wet and go to Florida.”

Davis: Mm-hmm.

Allen: And – Jacksonville, Florida, “Go to Florida and get on this program.” So I read the – I rode – read the brochure, and I said, “Oh, this is not for me at all. I’m 40+ years old,” you know, “Not for me. This is for college students.” She says, “Oh, I’ve called the Y, national Y, and they think, well, it would be good for this woman, Jackie Wilkes, to have another –”

Davis: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

Allen: – “Senior program – senior person.”

Davis: Mm-hmm.

Allen: So I went to Florida, drove to Florida. Had a brand new car that year, drove to Florida and got all my windows busted out and everything else.

Davis: Oh.

Allen: But it was a school desegregation program, and it was a real wonderful program. We got chased (laughter) by the Ku Klux Klan, but I think the most

exciting part of that program was that we spent two days in the presence – no, one week in the presence of a Florida judge who really gave us some insight on desegregation. And I learned the meaning of the words “desegregation” and “integration.”

Davis: Mm-hmm.

Allen: You know, they’re different.

Davis: They’re very different, right.

Allen: And – and we end – started talking about affirmative action, but he was a future looking guy. Old guy too, I couldn’t believe it.

Davis: Hmm. He wasn’t from Florida, I think?

Allen: Yes, he was from Florida.

Davis: He was? And he was African-American?

Allen: The time had come – no!

Davis: No, OK.

Allen: No, white.

Davis: OK, OK.

Allen: The time had come for him [anyone?].

Davis: OK, so he –

Allen: He knew it, he knew it. And he was trying to prepare people –

Davis: What a great man.

Allen: Yeah! I can’t remember that judge’s name. I asked Jackie the other day what his name was and she couldn’t remember. But anyway, he really helped us. You know you have to do some things up front and then you go out and you –

Davis: Right.

Allen: – try to register.

Davis: Right.

- Allen: Get people to apply to be moved.
- Davis: Mm-hmm.
- Allen: He explained the law. He was – he was super. He really was super. You know, because you – when you can understand what's – what – the law, you can understand what can happen and then you're prepared for what can happen.
- Davis: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.
- Allen: And as I say, I wasn't prepared for all my windows to get.
- Davis: Hmm. So – so you were involved, there were some demonstrations there –
- Allen: Mm-hmm.
- Davis: And counter-demonstrators –
- Allen: Mm-hmm.
- Davis: – knocked the windows out.
- Allen: Yeah.
- Davis: So you were –
- Allen: Well, I never – we weren't – we weren't there when it happened.
- Davis: Happened.
- Allen: But it did happen at night, so.
- Davis: Yeah, right, interesting.
- Allen: But it was – and – and I was the only black – let's see, was I the only black person? There was one other black person in that program, that – college students. Most of the college students were white.
- Davis: Were white, huh. But you were able to stay at the same hotel?
- Allen: No, we stayed on the college campus.
- Davis: Oh, sure, that's – yeah.
- Allen: We stayed on a black college campus.

Davis: Right.

Allen: Kind of gave me an insight on some of the college's do –

Davis: Right, of course it does.

Allen: You know there was – (laughter) they call it a college, but you know. You learn.

Davis: And Jackie then was a college organizer for this.

Allen: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

Davis: OK, that's great. So what other civil rights activities did you?

Allen: OK, then I went to – in the summer of '64 I went to Mississippi for that big project.

Davis: Oh, yeah. That – that wasn't the voter –

Allen: Yeah, voter registration.

Davis: OK, voter – OK.

Allen: Voter registration.

Davis: OK. You didn't march on Selma?

Allen: That's the one thing I missed. Did you know that? I missed Selma.

Davis: Uh-huh. Well, you can't do it all. You had a job after all (laughter).

Allen: But you know, again, if I hadn't been where I was on that job with Stewart, I wouldn't have been able to do all of that. That's that freedom.

Davis: Right.

Allen: That's that freedom.

Davis: Right.

Allen: And I spent the summer down there.

Davis: The whole summer on the voter reg– did you?

- Allen: Mm-hmm. I don't know whether Martha Tranquille was in Springfield or not at that time.
- Davis: I don't know that name.
- Allen: It's tran and quille.
- Davis: Oh, OK.
- Allen: Tranquil, yeah.
- Davis: Oh.
- Allen: Tranquille.
- Davis: Tranquille, that's her name?
- Allen: Mm-hmm.
- Davis: Interesting.
- Allen: Mm-hmm, yeah. Italian name. She married an Italian, (laughter) yeah. She was a nurse here in –
- Davis: Oh!
- Allen: – in Springfield at a hospital and she said, “Bettie, come go with me down here and we'll see what we can do with voter registration.”
- Davis: Lived with a local black family, did you?
- Allen: Yes.
- Davis: Mm-hmm.
- Allen: Mm-hmm. And so we spent the summer and she decided that that was for her. She was going to quit her job –
- Davis: Mm-hmm.
- Allen: Go back to Mississippi and work on it.
- Davis: That's real dedication.
- Allen: What she did was to integrate a black hospital to get [federal funds?].

- Davis: That's terrific. Yeah, that was a great achievement.
- Allen: Yeah, uh-huh.
- Davis: Was your life threatened while you were down there?
- Allen: Yeah. Because we didn't have any cars. So when we came back in August, or late August when we came back, we raised money to buy a car and to buy chairs because in Mississippi in some of the rural homes there were no chairs.
- Davis: Right.
- Allen: And you know, would have been nice to be able to – after walking, to sit comfortably and not have to sit on a bench.
- Davis: Right.
- Allen: All on the porch –
- Davis: Right.
- Allen: – or something. So we organized and got a lot of used chairs and had them – Boston Ritchie –
- Davis: Oh, sure.
- Allen: – was the, you know, he had moving chairs –
- Davis: Moving company, sure.
- Allen: Uh-huh, and he was from Mississippi. So he donated the transportation down there to take those chairs down. He had a whole –
- Davis: He was a character, I knew him.
- Allen: Yeah, yes.
- Davis: I – I liked him.
- Allen: Yeah.
- Davis: So he got involved a little bit in the civil rights movement.
- Allen: In his – yeah, because it was down in his old state. I don't know what else he did, but he –

Davis: Yeah.

Allen: – gave us – he sent his truck full of chairs down there to be distributed. I'm – and I think he did it in the county where we were based.

Davis: OK.

Allen: Because that was a – that was a statewide kind of thing.

Davis: Right, right. What county was – you may not remember the county.

Allen: OK, yes, I do. I remember the county that Ole Mississippi – the old – the state –

Davis: Ole Miss University up in Oxford?

Allen: Yeah. We were right across the road from there in another little place.

Davis: OK.

Allen: But it was in that county. I can't dredge it up at the moment.

Davis: Oh, maybe, yeah. Some of those are long names from rivers down there.

Allen: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

Davis: So you were near Oxford?

Allen: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm, mm-hmm. And what's that other place? Met Fannie Lou Hamer and –

Davis: Oh, sure, sure.

Allen: All that. I know they got a NAACP guy down there at – down west of where I was located.

Davis: You didn't meet Meredith, did you? James Meredith?

Allen: No.

Davis: No.

Allen: Mm-mm.

Davis: So your job was to go talk to African-Americans and persuade them to seek to register?

- Allen: Register to vote.
- Davis: Right.
- Allen: And we would take them with – if they wanted. And see, we were without cars, we would be taken down and dropped off and picked up, but that's a danger situation.
- Davis: Course it is.
- Allen: Walking.
- Davis: And you met with all kinds of obstruction I know, all the literacy tests and all that stuff, but.
- Allen: Oh, yeah. Yeah. But mostly the dusty roads, you know, they could always tell when the blacks was meeting because of the – the roads would be dusty and I remember – I had returned about three times just to see what's happened –
- Davis: Mm-hmm.
- Allen: – and now they've got nice, black [belt loop?]
- Davis: Oh, of course, imagine that, yeah.
- Allen: And they used to – hey, you could just see this cloud of dust where we were going to whatever church, and I tell you what was more scary was being – being in a church and then the police or the sheriffs would come in and walk through the church, through your meeting, during your meeting.
- Davis: Mm-hmm.
- Allen: And then everybody had a shotgun in their pickup trucks, you know and all that. So it was a scary time. We were arrested and down at Jackson – when we went into Mississippi we went down to Jackson because that's where the program headquarters was going to be, and we demonstrated once in Jackson. The whole, to kind of show our strength, and they put us all in the jail but took us out to the county – county... gosh, agriculture. You know what I'm talking about?
- Davis: OK. At the fair? Like the County fairgrounds?
- Allen: Fair, right. Gave us some matches and that was it, slept out there. Couple nights it rained on it. And I'm not even sure to this day whether the people who posted our bond has ever got the bond money back.

Davis: Really?

Allen: I know that at least ten years ago they had –

Davis: They hadn't gotten their money back.

Allen: Mm-mm.

Davis: What a dreadful state that was.

Allen: But you know, they'd tie up all that money.

Davis: Oh, of course, sure.

Allen: If you had – you know, both organizations were raising bond money because they knew that these people who got arrested had to get out of jail.

Davis: Which reminds me, wasn't that the same summer that those three –

Allen: Yes, mm-hmm.

Davis: – people were killed.

Allen: Amen.

Davis: They were Cheney and –

Allen: Cheney.

Davis: Yeah, yeah. Boy, that was a –

Allen: The summer of '64.

Davis: Yeah, huh.

Allen: So.

Davis: What other experiences in civil rights?

Allen: Then I went to Arkansas.

Davis: Yeah.

Allen: This was a hiring, employment thing.

Davis: OK.

Allen: You know, they had – they had put the people off the plantations that picked the cotton –

Davis: Right.

Allen: – and had bought a lot of the pick – cotton picking machines.

Davis: Mm-hmm.

Allen: And so people didn't – were unemployed. You know, the owners, the plantation owners, would set the blacks out and then burn the house even before they could get their stuff. So the government – you know, this was – I'm not sure, can't remember – but anyway, the government was job training.

Davis: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

Allen: And so the people would go in to these places and put up plants. Small [porch stuff?].

Davis: Mm-hmm.

Allen: And they had to employ so many blacks. And so the first phase of the summer was recruiting people.

Davis: Mm-hmm.

Allen: And the second phase was monitoring.

Davis: Mm-hmm.

Allen: Because you know what? They'd hire and then they'd fire them.

Davis: Fire them right away.

Allen: And then they – we – I think that – at the end of that program we probably left about 50% cases – 50% of the people having cases against –

Davis: Against the state or whatever –

Allen: No, against the –

Davis: Against the company.

Allen: Mm-hmm.

Davis: Yeah.

Allen: Because they would fire them.

Davis: Because it was an unjustified –

Allen: But they – but you see, they got the money to do the job training and then they could show that they hired them.

Davis: Right. Yeah.

Allen: And so we had to really –

Davis: You had to keep an eye on them because they were cheating and all that.

Allen: Yeah, yeah.

Davis: Now where was that? Near Little Rock, or?

Allen: No. It was near Memphis, and I can't remember –

Davis: Oh, yeah. OK. Like West Memphis there.

Allen: Yeah, yeah.

Davis: OK. That's poor country down there. That – that delta.

Allen: I came through there just a week ago and I'm telling you, I was surprised at the cotton. The cotton didn't look good at all.

Davis: Really?

Allen: Mm-mm. Mm-mm. It wasn't nice, high, and it wasn't real nice, big bulbs.

Davis: Yeah. Huh.

Allen: And they hadn't – they hadn't picked.

Davis: Right. Huh. Wow. So you've spent a lot of time.

Allen: I had about three, maybe four summers in the South. I was not – I was someplace in Alabama but not Selma, and I didn't stay for long.

Davis: Right, OK.

Allen: I only stayed like, a month because I – what I did that summer was to go to different parts of the state helping people to keep books. Because you know, the government was spending money for different programs –

- Davis: Right.
- Allen: – and black organizations wasn't keeping good track of how it was being spent, so I did some auditing and bookkeeping stuff.
- Davis: OK.
- Allen: – for that program. I really wasn't bothered with that when –
- Davis: I understand.
- Allen: That was easy. You know, you went and you set up their – I tried to get there to set up books but if it didn't, we set up books and then we developed a report for them and stuff like that so that we could – so that they could keep the money coming in.
- Davis: You obviously derived some satisfaction from that volunteer effort, which was risky on your part and cost you some money, but there must have been some intrinsic satisfaction for you.
- Allen: Well, I – you know, I guess for me it was like you have to give up something to get something.
- Davis: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.
- Allen: And while basically, you know, I kind of saw myself as not needing anything, I had a job.
- Davis: Yeah (laughter).
- Allen: (laughter) You needed to make a way for the next generation.
- Davis: Right.
- Allen: And looking back on that, I – I think the thing that needed to have been done – no, that's when the – really the welfare cycle came in. And that was bad news, I think, for blacks.
- Davis: The welfare strike?
- Allen: Cycle.
- Davis: Oh, cycle! Yes. Oh, it was. Right.
- Allen: Yeah. Because I don't remember welfare, OK.

- Davis: Mm-hmm.
- Allen: My dad worked.
- Davis: Yeah! Right.
- Allen: So I don't know when it really began, but then it – it seemed like girls – I can – let me say when I was a teenager, it was really a bad thing to get pregnant without –
- Davis: Sure.
- Allen: – getting married. And you know, you got put out of the church.
- Davis: Right. Put out of the family.
- Allen: (laughter) Put out of the family. So I don't know when this thing started where – I mean, this thing jumped from maybe half a percent to –
- Davis: Right.
- Allen: – 30% of – of teenage girls were getting pregnant and not with just one or two. Yesterday, just yesterday in my life, at the Food Pantry there was a woman who had seven of her own children. Three of the girls had already began to have babies.
- Davis: Oh, gosh. It's a cycle, you're right.
- Allen: So she was caring for ten. For ten.
- Davis: And no visible fathers before it all.
- Allen: No husbands, no – yeah. So I don't know when – you know, I don't know when that happened.
- Davis: Well, you know, the critics used to say that there was that cycle of poverty and of the aid to dependent children from there.
- Allen: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm, mm-hmm.
- Davis: Which they said, was it kind of encouraged people not to work but to have babies and not to have a man around the house because if there was then they wouldn't get the ADC.
- Allen: Well, they say that even comes from the – from slavery.

- Davis: Right.
- Allen: But the thing is I know – I do know – that it’s probably in fourth, fifth generation, and that’s a habit that is damn hard to break.
- Davis: Of course it is.
- Allen: And I don’t know – anyway, when it happened and where it happened. I think it happened more in the industrial part of the country, the North, than it did in the South.
- Davis: Right, yeah.
- Allen: But wow! It’s been bad.
- Davis: I mean, county relief is one thing. I mean, where it’s modest amounts of money to help people when they’ve –
- Allen: Mm-hmm.
- Davis: – had a rough break of luck, and unemployment compensation is another thing. But – but the welfare really did began to have a –
- Allen: Yeah.
- Davis: – undermining effect.
- Allen: You know, I bought in to this idea of not paying the re– of not making people pay the rent, give the people the money and make them pay the – I bought into that.
- Davis: Mm-hmm.
- Allen: Because you know, I had those welfare mamas, but.
- Davis: Sure.
- Allen: It was a bad deal. Because they would not do that (laughter).
- Davis: Right, right.
- Allen: Would not do that. And so now, you know, we just have – we’re still not giving that money to agencies such as the Food Pantry to have enough food –
- Davis: Right.

- Allen: To put through – take care because we use the farmers’ welfare program to supply the food. It’s –
- Davis: Crazy. Crazy world.
- Allen: Mm-hmm, crazy system but I think it’s – you know, I do believe in the conspiracy (laughter). I think this is – I think it’s planned to keep a slave group –
- Davis: Uh-huh.
- Allen: Enslaved and another slave group to do menial work.
- Davis: Mm-hmm.
- Allen: For nothing. Not do menial work, but to do work for nothing.
- Davis: Mmm. But that is a deliberate –
- Allen: I think it’s deliberate.
- Davis: – capitalistic plot.
- Allen: Mm-hmm. I do. I do think that.
- Davis: Certainly it’s in the interest of a lot of those capitalists, whether they’re good enough at deliberately creating that, I don’t know. But I would kind of agree with you.
- Allen: Well, it’s deliberate when you can look at what’s happening now. We go to – over to Indonesia, we go to China –
- Davis: Right.
- Allen: We go to all these places that don’t pay anybody anything and have a slave system of their own, you know, going on.
- Davis: Right, right.
- Allen: So there’s –
- Davis: That’s true.
- Allen: To me it’s very deliberate, but anyway.

- Davis: OK. We've got time to take up at least one other topic, and it kind of depends on you, what you think would next logically follow. We could take up your church, your continuing church activity, we could take up Africa, missionary activity. What do you want to talk about next?
- Allen: Hmm, probably church.
- Davis: OK. That's kind of what I was thinking. Because that – your church, your faith and your church work, has been a very important part of your life, obviously. Now you grew up in the Union Baptist.
- Allen: Right.
- Davis: Trace things from there on.
- Allen: OK. Union is my – was my grandfather's church.
- Davis: Yes.
- Allen: And as long as he was a strong deacon, you know –
- Davis: Mm-hmm.
- Allen: I would never have left that church because I wanted to honor and respect him.
- Davis: Yes.
- Allen: But then he became blind and certainly got old because my grandfather died when he was 88 in 19– late 1950s.
- Davis: Mm-hmm.
- Allen: And so I didn't really have that kind of attraction because again, going back to that church, I had really experienced some negatives. One was we had this thing of sitting on the mourner's bench until you joined church.
- Davis: Oh, really? Kind of like you were a probationary –
- Allen: No, they was pointing out that you did not belong to church and making you feel insecure –
- Davis: Oh, brother.
- Allen: – so you would join church.

- Davis: Oh, OK.
- Allen: OK (laughter).
- Davis: Ugh, that's really –
- Allen: And so I refused to – to really do that.
- Davis: Mm-hmm.
- Allen: OK. I just went on up there and sat and so finally I said, “Well, this is silly. I'm not going to do that anymore, so I'll just join the church.” And I joined Union Church and was baptized December the 7th, is it? Or November the 7–December the 7th. December 7th, Pearl Harbor day.
- Davis: Oh, really? That very day you joined.
- Allen: That very day.
- Davis: That was a Sunday, yeah.
- Allen: Yeah.
- Davis: Wow.
- Allen: I was baptized that day and got off the mourner's bench (laughter).
- Davis: (laughter) So you stayed in that church –
- Allen: And I stayed in that church until my sister was put out of the church because she liked some other women, were – had gone to a dance.
- Davis: Oh, OK.
- Allen: And this was one of those things Baptists –

End - Bettie Allen interview Tape 2