

Interview with Bettie Allen
Tape 6, December 2, 2003
Interviewer: Cullom Davis

Davis: [This is an oral history interview with] Bettie Allen on December 2nd, 2003. The interviewer is Cullom Davis. Bettie, let's take up some of your civic activities during the years that we've already covered in terms of your employment. I'm not sure where to begin but maybe I should start this way, "What has been your longest-lasting civic, volunteer effort, that is, the one that you've been in the longest? Can you think what that would be?"

Allen: The YWCA.

Davis: OK. All right. Because that you got involved in as a young lady.

Allen: As a young person and as a child, shall we say. And then when I arrived at the late teens and the 20s, I became involved as a member of the Phyllis Wheatley Club. At that particular time, the Y's activities included not only programs but units of club, a unit of club activities where there may have been as high as four or five different clubs representing different people. And at that time, also, there wasn't the, there wasn't an integration regardless of whether it was race or age because there were clubs that were more or less built around specific things. For instance, the Phyllis Wheatley was definitely a black club named after the poet. One of the other clubs was a group of women who had served in the Second World War.

Davis: Oh, OK. Veterans of World War II?

Allen: Yeah. And I have to think about what their name – Then there was just young adults. There were people who came together because they were professional women(overlapping dialogue; inaudible) and then there were people who came together because they were blue collar. And that was sort of a strata in the whole national YWCA picture because as we went to different conferences, we went to these various meetings which included our group, the blacks met, the business and professional women met, the blue collar workers met.

Davis: Did you have common interests, would that be a way to put it?

Allen: Yeah, yeah. We had common interests.

Davis: Right, OK.

Allen: And young adults had it – and Y Teens, there was a Y Teen –

Davis: Oh, Y Teen.

Allen: – a Y Teen’s Club.

Davis: Right

Allen: So, with my involvement in the Phyllis Wheatley Club after the YW had a fire and they were rebuilding on the national scene, the YWCA was saying, “Well, we have to integrate our clubs, we have to integrate the building. And at that time, before that time, the Phyllis Wheatley Club met at the Douglas Community Center which was our social building, the black social building. And so we came after the completion of the renovation, we came to, we came to the YWCA and began to meet there, which made you feel more a part of a bigger organization and your ideas were bigger. One of the beautiful things about the Phyllis Wheatley Club was that it developed leadership beyond the church, you know. Women could do certain things in the church but there were certain other things that they couldn’t do. So the Phyllis Wheatley Club gave people an opportunity to understand how organizations work with committees and –

Davis: Presiding at a meeting and that kind of experience –

Allen: Yeah, that’s right, and making reports.

Davis: Yes, OK.

Allen: And thinking about what is it that we want to be about, what is it that we want to go out to the community with because we would go to the regional and national conferences and we met others and that’s how we came to know that even, see Springfield being so small, in our region which did not include the region we were in. Yes, it did. It didn’t include Chicago, so that, they had their own thing. But we didn’t really see an opportunity as a young person, like a 20-year old, to become a YWCA director except if we went to the city.

Davis: I see. Right.

Allen: And all the cities had their own Black YW and so, later on, I became a board member.

Davis: Of the Springfield –

Allen: The Springfield Y. But I really enjoyed. It was, one of the wonderful things about the Y was that, you know – The “C” in our name stood for “Christian.”

Davis: Yes.

Allen: (laughter) OK. And when you attended any of these conferences or meetings, there was always the spiritual aspect because the triangle really meant that it was spiritual and physical and mental.

Davis: Physical, spiritual, mental. Right. OK.

Allen: And so, that was a focus and we opened every meeting at these conventions with that kind of a focus. And the leadership at the national conference was just fantastic because there were seminarians – women were seminarians – you know just all–

Davis: Oh, OK. So there were role models for women.

Allen: For every –

Davis: Right.

Allen: For every sort of way. And so, they gave me an inspiration to really work with my – I have a niece that's 15 years younger than I am and when she was a teenager, they gave me the inspiration to work with them, really more on a spiritual level than my church did.

Davis: Interesting.

Allen: See, it's because they created in me a hunger and a desire to understand the Word of God and to try to give it to younger people. So, I really enjoyed that. I stayed on the Board probably a duration of – One's term can go four years and eight years and then you have to come off it.

Davis: So would it have maybe in the 1960s –

Allen: '60s –

Davis: – '70s.

Allen: – '70s, something like that. '70s.

Davis: And at that point, the Y really was integrated.

Allen: Yeah. Because in 1971, the national convention made, adopted the one imperative to eliminate racism –

Davis: Right.

Allen: – wherever it exists and –

- Davis: And you worked hard to achieve that?
- Allen: Achieve that, yes.
- Davis: You had been a major (inaudible) –
- Allen: Yeah. I worked on that at the '70 or '71 convention in Houston, Texas. And that was the gist of it. And that, my involvement with the local Y also was the force that took me to Africa –
- Davis: Yes, right.
- Allen: – because I went to Florida (overlapping dialogue; inaudible)
- Davis: Exactly, the meeting where you met Jackie and you went from there.
- Allen: Yeah. So I've been continuing – I went back on the Board, oh – In that service, I also became one of the trustees. After I got off of the Board, I became one of the trustees. Served on every committee that was in there. I chaired a couple, I've never wanted a leadership role as chairs.
- Davis: You haven't wanted a leadership role?
- Allen: Never.
- Davis: Now, I'm puzzled by that.
- Allen: That's right. I just never have wanted it. I think – And, today, I really have an aversion to committees. I don't like to be on committees. Now, see, you ask me to do something and a specific something, I'll do it.
- Davis: But committees what, are a waste of time?
- Allen: I think they are a waste of time, people talk to each other or don't talk to one – talk over (laughter) one another. And the bulk of them never get anything done. And then you always got to take your committee report back to somebody else who then hammers away at this in the same fashion, so why should you have a committee? Why not start at that point and end at that point?
- Davis: But the resistance, the resistance to leadership puzzles me. Can you think about that a moment?(overlapping dialogue; inaudible)
- Allen: Let me say that I learned fairly early, leadership isn't a position that somebody elects you to or gives you or any of that. It's what you do.

- Davis: Ah.
- Allen: I mean, I've very seldom refused to do anything anyone asks me. But people are free to come and ask me and they do. So, that's leadership as well. When I worked with the Human Relations Community, Human Relations, yeah.
- Davis: Commission?
- Allen: Commission.
- Davis: Yes.
- Allen: – I needed someone to be able to talk to, the nitty-gritty people.
- Davis: Yes.
- Allen: And along comes Joe Wright.
- Davis: Yes?
- Allen: And I didn't want to talk to all those people who was fussin' and whatnot, but he had the demeanor to be able to listen to them, filter through all that crud that comes through that and come to me and say, "Here's what they're asking about. What do we do?" Because, see, I knew the door to Howard. I had a ear to Howard. He wanted me to use that door but I was doing my thing trying to learn how to open it without him because, you know, there's always a time when you don't, when you may need to know where the door is, you know – that kind of thing. But then I'd go and I'd get it. So people, I was criticized by my Board for hiring Joe. "Oh, he's uncouth," da-da-da-da. All that stuff. I said, "What, he's the people's representative," you know. What do you do with that? You use that. And, in fact, I think that's the best way to govern is to really get enough people who represent, then you can hear –
- (break in tape)
- Davis: So, I think what you're saying then is that you didn't need to be elected president of something or chairman of the committee because you were out there doing the work anyway. Is that –
- Allen: That's right.
- Davis: OK.
- Allen: That's right, because you know how chairs do?
- Davis: Yeah, (laughter)

- Allen: They delegate. People knew how to delegate before they knew what the word was.
- Davis: (laughter)
- Allen: That's for sure because they'd put it off on somebody else, you know.
- Davis: Now, the Phyllis Wheatley Club, I presume, then, it was disbanded after the integration?
- Allen: I believe the Phyllis Wheatley Club fell by the way because we had the Women's Movement and the Women's Movement opened up not only to blacks, it opened up to whites. But the other things that came along with that was an opportunity to go golfing, an opportunity to do all these other things that you – There was no way, there wasn't any way for blacks to do. So when those things open up, the interest was gone and they could become leaders in various other things.
- Davis: Sure. When the Club did exist, you'd meet maybe once a month or –
- Allen: I believe it was probably once a month for a regular business meeting and once a month for just a social. And, you know, that would be the time we would plan programs that were informational.
- Davis: Like get a speaker for something or –
- Allen: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.
- Davis: OK. Take a little trip maybe or –
- Allen: Yeah, and have what they call a "repast." (laughter)
- Davis: A little repast.
- Allen: (laughter) Always eating.
- Davis: Probably, a potluck, I'd guess.
- Allen: Yes. Well, we did that. We raised money also and used our money to benefit young black kids to come (inaudible) [fadeout].
- Davis: OK. Did you ever have an opportunity to become a full-time employee of the YWCA, either nationally or here?
- Allen: No, you know, I did, my stint overseas was as a volunteer –

- Davis: Well, that's true.
- Allen: – as a volunteer but it was a year-long volunteer.
- Davis: And that never interested you to seek some sort of career with the YWCA?
- Allen: What that did, that trip to Africa, what it did, it took me out of the service station, that's what that did.
- Davis: (laughter)
- Allen: Because when I came back, the opportunity for leadership was the Human Relations Commission.
- Davis: Yes. OK. So that never crossed your mind particularly?
- Allen: No. And let me tell you what the dawning was. The dawning was, you know, you always have to do some little resume (laughter) and in putting together a resume for the Human Relations when I came back, I neglected to even put my volunteer stuff with the YWCA because, you know, I had been in the South with some, I went to Africa, and did some other things for them, and I didn't think of that as things you put on a resume. I really didn't think of that at all. And when Katherine Kniss, that's the other name I wanted to give you – Katherine Kniss someplace.
- Davis: Katherine Kniss, I'll look for that.
- Allen: You know, Glen Kniss?
- Davis: Oh, Glen, of course.
- Allen: Yes.
- Davis: I don't know that I knew – Was that his wife?
- Allen: Yeah, Katherine was the last wife that I know he had. He may have one now. I don't know.
- Davis: I must have met her, though I don't remember – I used to see him at –
- Allen: Yeah, she was the head of –
- Davis: – events.
- Allen: She was head of the Human Relations Commission, part-time, before – Or well, she probably was their first Director. (inaudible) Anyway, she helped me

put together a resume and I'm going to tell you that I really learned. That was a dawning that, all this stuff you do for free, is not only work but it's meaningful and it convinces other people what you can do. But I never thought of becoming a staff person.

Davis: OK.

Allen: You know, because, again, we've been programmed about qualifications and – So I knew I wasn't qualified by their standards in terms of having a college degree.

Davis: You had college experience and plenty of world experience but not that –

Allen: Yeah.

Davis: – union card, I guess you'd –

Allen: (laughter) That's right. That's exactly right. Mm-hmm, right.

Davis: But it didn't, it didn't prevent you from playing an important role with the Human Relations Commission or with the Capital Development Board but you felt that within the YWCA, it would have been a –

Allen: Everybody –

Davis: – an impediment.

Allen: Everybody I met was more or less with one or two degrees, and I've never really been, I never felt ostracized because of that. I could always hold my own in the company of those people. So –

Davis: OK.

Allen: But, you know, when you say how much education you have, I can now say, "I've got 70 years."

Davis: That's right (laughter). How true, how true. So, really, the Y which has been your longest-standing volunteer activity is an extension of your own religious life.

Allen: It was, right.

Davis: Are you still active at all in the Y?

Allen: Well, I have been. Let me say, I was on their Board until two years ago. I think I came off their Board, but I only went back for one thing and that – It

was very interesting. People asked me to come back to help them get rid of the Director at that time and they were too squeamish, as they are too squeamish today. They closed the YWCA.

Davis: It is a sad situation. So you did help get rid of that Director?

Allen: Yes. I talked with people, we planned it out. Babs [Barbara Dickerman] was sitting on the Board, and I was late that, I was late that time to the Board meeting – I don't know what in the world I was doing. I guess, I was working – and I was a little late getting to that Board meeting. And when I walked in, she was making the motion and just crying. Just, it was a beautiful thing, just a beautiful thing. And I just went and hugged her, because we had decided that would be my role because I could get up and –

Davis: So you spoke to that – She made the motion and you then –

Allen: Yes.

Davis: – argued for it?

Allen: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

Davis: Yeah. Well, it's not an easy thing to do.

Allen: No, and let me tell you, it was not an easy thing because we had some ladies on there that said, "Oh, no. She's kept us, she's kept us together." And it was, we only did it by one vote or two votes.

Davis: Wow. For the record, can you tell me who that was, the Director that you voted out of –

Allen: Mary, Mary Ann What? I'll have to –

Davis: Oh, that's OK. "Mary Ann" is enough.

Allen: And then I said I, then the building was really falling apart, so I stayed that term because I became the building Chair and we got the roof fixed and we stopped the leaking and – I mean, this woman was using her husband and children to, her husband and son to patch this and to patch that, instead of getting something, spending enough money to get it done properly. And we got one of these, we were able to finish the roofing thing, fixed up all the leaks, then we really hired an executive who was, who claimed to have the skills to manage property because, at that time, we needed to bring the property up which meant, even if it wasn't anything but the painting inside and whatnot. But she could not manage.

- Davis: Oh, really. So she was also a disappointment.
- Allen: Yeah, she couldn't manage people, basically. She just was, she thought she was managing the property, which included the people, and that was a bad]–
- Davis: She left also?
- Allen: Yeah, she left, and then we had the last, oh, we had the gal that was at Contact Ministries. And that was a pain as well because she was a sick woman. I was the only one who voted against her. I said, "Yeah, she's got the skills to do it but she is not well."
- Davis: That was Ethel –
- Allen: Ethel Butchek.
- Davis: Butchek. Yeah, that's right. Well, it's been a tough time for –
- Allen: Yeah, and I served on all of these search committees and I voted against the woman who had the property skills because we have people voting because she was a kindly lady and she was slick and we had fat women on that committee.
- Davis: (laughter)
- Allen: It makes a difference because – You know what one woman said?
- Davis: What?
- Allen: (laughter) "I have always wanted to be like her. Maybe she'll get a, get a class." And so the first class we had was a diet thing.
- Davis: Well, that's, you know, that's your self- – And she was –
- Allen: Oh, I'm telling you. It –
- Davis: Too bad.
- Allen: I said, well, you know, I thought about my participation in the women's group because I really, when I was in Africa, I saw it as a very difficult time because I was there to train these African ladies how to run the business of the YWCA, and they were bad news, too, because women – I don't know what's happening with us (laughter) – but anyway – I would never serve on another woman's thing, never, because it's just not worth it because they're not – The ones that are not ready, there's plenty of them. The ones who are ready get done in by the same thing, you know, because they don't know how to treat

people. They think they've got to have the male attitude and characteristics in getting things done. It's not that.

Davis: Right.

Allen: Yeah. You know, I had staff which I always had women on when I worked for CDB [Capital Development Board] and women done me in, you know, because they saw that I was, I would hear, listen to them, you know. They'd go out on a doggone job site and (laughter) be half-dressed and they'd call me up and tell me about what the guys on the job site said to them. Well, what do I care about that? What did you have on? (laughter)

Davis: They were just asking for trouble, you mean?

Allen: Yeah. I'd go ride with them in my jeans and they'd be dressed up. In high-heel shoes. They had roof jobs and all that other stuff. Well, what's, what's this all about? I had probably about four different women on my staff, you know, off and on, that were—they're just. I've really enjoyed sitting back and looking at women. Boy, it's been, it's been tough. And, you know, it's really the result of my being in between two boys in my family, just coming up, getting – My first good job was a male-dominated job and on up.

Davis: So you lived in a ma— really, you were, yeah, you've grown up very much in a male world –

Allen: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm. And I just –

Davis: – and learned how to succeed in that.

Allen: Yeah, yeah, yeah. And it wasn't – I had to be competitive. I want you to know because I wasn't asking for any favors.

Davis: Right.

Allen: I got out there and learned what I was supposed to do and attempted to do it whereas, you know, most women who are breaking into these new jobs, so they say, they're asking for favors – many of them. I'm not saying all of them –

Davis: Right, but some.

Allen: – because the people who have stayed in the service, the women who stayed in the service the longest have been hard and tough. I don't know how they're doing in a mixed –

Davis: Right.

- Allen: – a mixed environment but they were hard on the women and the women were tough. So –
- Davis: OK. I want to take you back now as to what you remember, if anything, about the Lincoln Colored Children’s Home. Was it in operation in your childhood?
- Allen: Well, I have to say to you, I am, I was always aware of the building because I lived no more than two blocks from that building. I lived at 12th and Adams and I believe it’s in between Monroe and Capitol –
- Davis: That sounds right.
- Allen: On 12th, OK. And I do remember boys and girls who were not, who lived in some sort of group setting. See, I, what I’m saying to you, I am not sure that I understood circumstances. Now in my late teens or early 20s, I became involved with the Service Bureau for Colored Children –
- Davis: Oh, OK.
- Allen: – which is the offshoot of that home because the –
- Davis: –the successor. It would have been, almost become the successor?
- Allen: Yeah. Because we had in this country a lot of children in orphanages, these group settings. And then there was a social movement to say, “Let’s put them in with families. Let’s take them out of that. Let them see a family setting instead of this group setting.” And so the Service Bureau, as I remember, took those children, put them in foster homes, and boarding schools, boarding schools –
- Davis: Around the country. Now –
- Allen: Yeah, yeah. I used to drive the kid, I used to drive to Tennessee.
- Davis: Oh, really?
- Allen: – (laughter) Knoxville, Tennessee. There was a very good one over there. It was a vocational school and you learned the trades, you know, cosmetology and all of that sort of stuff. So I became interested and – And my mentor at that time was the Executive Director of the Service Bureau for Colored Children, Docia Ashurst. Docia –
- Davis: Docia?
- Allen: D-O-C-I-A Ashurst. A-S-H-U-R-S-T.

Davis: Right, OK.

Allen: OK. So, later, she, or the Committee, (laughter) put me on the Board because I was working with these kids. I would take her, she didn't drive, I would take her and the kids when she placed them in families in – I think we had about three counties.

Davis: Really?

Allen: Jacksonville, we's over at Taylorville, and Sangamon County. That we placed them, that's what we called "locally" and I would take them there and then when the school year was, started and the older ones, I'd take them down to Tennessee and pick 'em up.

Davis: OK. So you were an active volunteer with the Service Bureau?

Allen: Mm-hmm. I became a Board member and then later became the president that saw through the mergers of the Service Bureau into the – what's the other?

Davis: Child and Family Service?

Allen: Mm-hmm.

Davis: Yes, so there was, it was a white counterpart –

Allen: Mm-hmm.

Davis: – and the two of them merged, again, probably in the '60s or '70s to become the Child and Family Service –

Allen: Service.

Davis: – Center.

Allen: Mm-hmm. Center.

Davis: OK. Now that was located on –

Allen: Well, let me tell you, originally, it was the United, Community, United Community Way or U.S.O. Building but not (laughter) – whatever – was at 8th Street, 8th and Vine.

Davis: Right.

- Allen: OK. So they were in there and then they got enough money to build that building on 7th Street right around the corner.
- Davis: Right. OK.
- Allen: Somehow, in my mind, and I don't know how correct this is, that original building there, that they, Community Way was, the United Community Way, was in was owned by the white counterpart.
- Davis: Oh, OK. Was it?
- Allen: Mm-hmm. And then they moved out 'cause they'd start moving, you know, all of the agencies that we're in, they could put the little, the smaller agencies in that building and they needed more room. So that's how they built that thing.
- Davis: Now when the Service Bureau was still in business – did it operate out of the old Lincoln Colored Children's Home or somewhere else?
- Allen: No, no, no. It had –
- Davis: At the Douglas Center or –
- Allen: No. It was there in the now funeral home at 13th and Monroe.
- Davis: OK. So that was just headquarters.
- Allen: Mm-hmm.
- Davis: Now it didn't have any boarders there? There weren't children living there?
- Allen: No, no, no.
- Davis: Right.
- Allen: That was when they put everybody in foster homes.
- Davis: Right, right.
- Allen: And that was true around the country because I remember – Also, I didn't say "Bloomington." We used to have children up at Bloomington. There was a nice, a real nice one up at – It was much larger than the one here. So, part of that was instigated by the fact that when you're with the United Community Way or the Fund, you needed money and so, you know, again, it's better to merge because we can use these funds better and go farther.

- Davis: Right.
- Allen: And so, our merger happened because we could not get enough money to be on our own and so we merged with them.
- Davis: So it wasn't a lawsuit or anything that did that. It was just that they realized you really needed to get more efficient by serving –
- Allen: Let me tell you, this funding community in Springfield – that's the best I can say – had been a very tough group of people – and they were all money people. What happened to the YWCA really goes back to that, too – no funding which, you know, I didn't blame them because there wasn't anything going on. "You join with the YM," which is what I voted for (laughter).
- Davis: Oh, you supported that?
- Allen: Oh, yeah, because we just, we had that witch – and I'm not talking about Mary Anne – I'm talking about there was a witch before her – we had that witch who squandered our money. And from that moment on, we lost credibility with the community and the people who had money – what we called "old money" in Springfield – who were slowly dying off. The Service Bureau and the YWCA was generally funded by people with old money, the Robinsons, etc. etc. So when those people died off, what do you have? And there's a strange phenomenon. The young people want to have power but they don't have wealth. And, secondly, they don't have any compassion. And I think that's what's happening to a lot of community organizations today. They don't want to put in any money out there for that, you know. It's devotion to a, to one organization – not a bunch of them. And it's time and it's money, and young people don't have it. So they fall by the wayside very quickly because they see a powerlessness in the organization that they're in, and it's all dependent upon them; there's no energetic people, you know. You look at the YWCA and we had – For several years, we had a bunch of lawyers who –
- Davis: On the Board or –
- Allen: On the Board. They worked with state agencies. So, you know, you'd ask them what they did and they'd say to you, "Oh, I have a special program, da-da-da-da." OK? So, they never convinced their bosses that they had a responsibility to the YWCA and they needed some time, whether it was to phone – that was before they, you know, (laughter) started monitoring the phone and –
- Davis: Oh, (laughter) right, yeah.

- Allen: OK. They never asked that. And when I went back on the Board of the Y, I was, it wasn't too long ago, often I said, "I've been asked to be on the Y, of the Board," and "Is it all right if I take some extra time for them, that I make some extra phone calls for them, on this time because I'm representing you, the Board? And I'll talk to you about what we do from time to time" and they said, "Yes."
- Davis: These other lawyers were too afraid to – do that?
- Allen: Yeah. And, you know, I mean, we had a – Half of the females that went through the State's Attorney's Office was on that Board, was on the Y Board.
- Davis: Right.
- Allen: Yeah. I mean, and all the sorts of freedom in that, you know – "I'm going out to work on a case," or there's nothing more, you know. I just, I have never understood. They had a group of young women and, see, that's another thing, they picked all young women. They didn't have a balance with some maturity over here that could help show them what they think. So, anyway –
- Davis: It could be that some of these State rules and regulations over using, you know, State time on charitable business could have begun to tighten that – I don't know. But, you know –
- Allen: Well, I know.
- Davis: Because it became, as you know, because it could turn in to helping political parties, you know, and, then, it got sticky.
- Allen: But the thing that I found was that when you discussed it with them. They could see the merit of having someone spend some time. It's like – Bill, for a great number of years, sent people out to do that volunteer work at the schools, helping kids to read –
- Davis: Yes.
- Allen: – and to learn how to add. That, that's what I'm saying is –
- Davis: It's what a good, it's how a corporation, or a state as in this instance –
- Allen: Yeah, the same, right. Mm-hmm.
- Davis: OK.

- Allen: Anyways, but the Service Bureau merged with that other Board and I served on that Board for a couple of years – not a couple of years but probably a couple of terms, whatever the term limit was. I didn't feel comfortable.
- Davis: Why?
- Allen: Well, again, I think it was big names.
- Davis: Oh, so you feel the movers and shakers–
- Allen: That Board, was really heavy with –
- Davis: Bankers –
- Allen: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.
- Davis: – and presidents and –
- Allen: Mm-hmm.
- Davis: – Huh.
- Allen: And, occasionally, some of them bankers would say, “Well we're going to have–We're going to meet at” – I remember when the guy was at Illinois National and they opened up (laughter) and one gal and that boy said, “Well, we're going to meet in my building,” and we met in the Board room and we served lunch. I mean, (laughter) had the people waiting. I said, “Hey, I'm big time!” (laughter)
- Davis: Well, I got my neighbors waiting on me.
- Allen: (laughter) Yeah, yeah. It uh--.
- Davis: So you were uncomfortable with that. It was kind of too fancy?
- Allen: I was just uncomfortable with that, with that, with that group. I never was comfortable there–
- Davis: You mentioned earlier that there was old money that would support even the Service Bureau –
- Allen: Mm-hmm.
- Davis: – and you mentioned the Robinsons. Were there ever old families that were kind of the angels of some of the Douglas Center, say, or of the Service Bureau or the other black volunteer efforts?

- Allen: I'd have to think about that. Let me go away and think about –
- Davis: OK, OK.
- Allen: – those things because I think I could dredge up maybe three or four other family names. You know, almost – I would say basically any of those groups were supported by the Jewish people because they had money. And I think it was wise for them to split themselves up, to split themselves up, you know, like Gingold went to the NAACP and some other; some of the other families went over here to another organization. But I remember Mrs. Robinson very well. The other people – oh, what's the lawyer's name? Wow.
- Davis: Stevens or –
- Allen: No, he's dead. He and his wife were lawyers.
- Davis: Oh, Hoffman.
- Allen: Yeah, strange people. (laughter)
- Davis: Yeah, they were a little bit. George and Inez Hoffman.
- Allen: Yeah, yeah.
- Davis: But they were good people.
- Allen: Yeah, definitely. They let me work on their car.
- Davis: Oh, is that right? (laughter)
- Allen: Yeah, and they'd tell everybody. "Hey, I'm going out there to Stewart's. Get your car repaired and (inaudible)."
- Davis: (laughter) Now, you mentioned the Jewish community as being supportive but with respect to the Y, were they really excluded from, by virtue of their faith? This was, after all, a Christian Association.
- Allen: No, no, they weren't, and, you know, the thing that has damaged the YWCA nationally was when the big "C" became the little "c". If you would look today at the National Board and its representatives of the YWCA, you would find a real mix of the Eastern countries like the Indians, etc. So we kind of backed off from the Christian as being necessary for membership, see "always ahead of the curve," is it? It's the saying?
- Davis: Yeah, right.

- Allen: If you're always ahead of the curve, you kind of get integrated and all of that, so you have people who come in and they're interested because many of the Asian-Indian women didn't have to work. That was not something that they did.
- Davis: Aaah, right.
- Allen: So they had time –
- Davis: They had time to help.
- Allen: Yeah. And they'd come in and we forget how much culture is involved in what happens and how things are done. So, as I say, when the big "C" became the little "c" and I think that nationally we have not been strong as a result of that.
- Davis: So that diluted some of the appeal?
- Allen: Yeah. You see, the national Y or the international Y was around the world and doing programs, and I think just like the United States is today around the world, people don't want programs that make them feel like they're "lesser than" and looked down upon it. And I think that that's OK to get them started with the beautiful, beautiful programs that they would have – helping the women around the world to farm – because in other countries that's what they do. They're out there in the fields. And the methods, better methods of that, picking better products that are nutritious because most of what they grow is what they eat instead of eating all of that other tuka tuka. But, at the same time, you know, when you go carry that kind of program, you carry some other bad stuff which is the birth control – all of that stuff – you carry with you. It's part of the baggage that goes. That gets you into trouble too, see, because you're experimenting upon some of the group – go back home and experiment on your own.
- Davis: Yes, right. That's tricky.
- Allen: Yeah.
- Davis: But, I mean, it strikes me that one of the dilemmas that the YW and the YMCA had is that, you're right, the word "Christian" in its name was a strong attraction and an important service but also it seemed exclusionary.
- Allen: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.
- Davis: And you were kind of on the horns of that dilemma.
- Allen: Yeah, you want to be inclusive (overlapping dialogue; inaudible).

- Davis: But you think, in the long run, the little “C” weakened the “YWCA.”
- Allen: Mm-hmm. Yeah. Money, people leaving money to the national, or leaving money to the local, yeah. It’s as if, I’ve always been amazed. I really have been amazed in the last 20 years how religion is such a, such a burr under most people’s skin.
- Davis: (laughter)
- Allen: You know what I mean? (laughter)
- Davis: Right.
- Allen: Because you’d think that’s what would draw them together but it really doesn’t.
- Davis: Oh, boy, you know, religious differences become really powerful. But you’re right. I want to return just once more to the Lincoln Colored Children’s Home. As you say, as a child, you knew where it was, you knew the building, but you didn’t associate it with a place where a lot of your neighbor and school acquaintances lived. Is that a fair way to put it?
- Allen: That’s a fair way to put it.
- Davis: So you never actually visited the building?
- Allen: No, mm-mmm.
- Davis: Although, obviously –
- Allen: I’ve been in it and, you know, I’ve been in it –
- Davis: Since –
- Allen: – since that time.
- Davis: That’s right, right. Right.
- Allen: But I –
- Davis: Not when it was operating?
- Allen: Mm-mmm,.
- Davis: And you also, although you wouldn’t have been able to identify them in a line, you knew that some of your friends in school obviously lived there.

Allen: Yeah.

Davis: Right. But that's the extent of your acquaintance with it?

Allen: That's right.

Davis: OK. Fair enough. What other volunteer activities have been important – you've been in scores of them – but have been really important in your life, would you say?

Allen: Well, I chose the NAACP over the Urban League.

Davis: Right.

Allen: And I –

Davis: Why?

Allen: My mentor, my surrogate Dad. And what they were doing. I had always heard about the NAACP and what they were doing, trying to get the vote, trying to get equality in, well, integration in public facilities, etc. And there were just, those were the big minds, those were the great minds –

Davis: Right.

Allen: – of the black people at that time and you'd just stand in awe –

Davis: Right.

Allen: – that they not only had minds, they had the guts and the courage to stand up to the system.

Davis: Right.

END OF TAPE 6, SIDE A

Davis: This is continuing an oral history with Bettie Allen on December 2nd, [2003]. We were talking about the NAACP, that it had more inspiring leaders; oh, people like Thurgood Marshall and others who were really people, they were great champions of civil rights.

Allen: Civil rights, right.

Davis: Whereas the Urban League was a little safer, do you think? Or lacked that kind of energy?

Allen: I guess, I have always seen the Urban League as maybe more in the field of employment –

Davis: Right.

Allen: – and in jobs.

Davis: Right.

Allen: And more controlled because you have to give up something to get something. But with the NAACP, you know, you fought all the time to get and so whatever you received, you did what you could with it but you knew that you had put some effort into it.

Davis: Right.

Allen: In other words, you weren't handed something and told to do –

Davis: And, therefore, owed something to – Yeah, you weren't controlled by people who eventually helped you.

Allen: Mm-hmm. Have you read Thurgood Marshall's –

Davis: Met him?

Allen: Have, no, have you read –

Davis: No, I haven't.

Allen: Oh, let me find my book and –

Davis: Oh, I'll get it at the library. It's a good book, and I simply admire him a lot.

Allen: Oh, God, the one that – There are several out there.

Davis: Right.

Allen: But the one that I read, oh, I sat crying.

Davis: Oh, it's a great story.

Allen: Isn't it?

- Davis: It's a great story.
- Allen: It is, yeah.
- Davis: Were you involved at all in the school desegregation effort here?
- Allen: No.
- Davis: You weren't?
- Allen: Mm-mmm.
- Davis: OK. Were you involved in any other desegregation efforts that the NAACP promoted here such as the downtown businesses and restaurants or anything—
- Allen: No.
- Davis: So you didn't protest or demonstrate?
- Allen: Not here. You know, I—
- Davis: But down in the South you did.
- Allen: Yeah, I spent my summers, but I never did—
- Davis: OK. Do you think that the NAACP here is still a strong, vital organization?
- Allen: Well, you know, there's— I think they have continued to be a meaningful organization in the community. I believe that there is not the attention given to what's going on except, you know— I was always surprised how Carl Madison became, first of all, president of the group and his ability to put the NAACP in the spotlight. He did that. I guess there are people like myself who no longer really attend the meetings, just give money. I think they— But they don't know exactly what happened. It's a little cloudy. But I think he did keep the name alive—
- Davis: He sure did.
- Allen:— in the community. But, again, it's the backbone of people like Gingold and Dickerman. I'm not sure whether Larry's a part of that now or not.
- Davis: Larry—
- Allen: University.
- Davis:—Golden?

- Allen: Yeah.
- Davis: OK.
- Allen: I'm not sure he is now. But I mean, it's those people who continue to attend all the meetings and continue to say, "We'll monitor this thing" and "We'll monitor that thing," which, you know, again, is not black. They are not black now.
- Davis: Right.
- Allen: When I was president, it was a –
- Davis: Of the NAACP?
- Allen: Mm-hmm.
- Davis: Yes, OK.
- Allen: I only took the presidency because I wanted to, remember I'm not a leader (laughter). When I was president, I had a role to play and that's what I did which was, I had the window of a two-year or a two-year presidency. I never went beyond the two-year presidency, and that was to hold it together, to hold the organization together until they could overcome the difficulty between the Jews and the blacks because the Jews dominated the membership. They dominated the Board and I certainly was angry.
- Davis: Well, that was a sensitive matter, wasn't it?
- Allen: Very sensitive and I could understand my role, my mentor helped me to see that role –
- Davis: And who was that? Docia?
- Allen: Docia.
- Davis: OK.
- Allen: Uh, huh. And at that time, there were, the names of the blacks were big names in the community. So, they didn't have time either, you know. They were either dealing with their jobs or their business; you know, it's either one or the other. So, and I can't remember what year that years –
- Davis: That you were president?
- Allen: Mm-hmm.

Davis: Pretty long ago, maybe –

Allen: '60s.

Davis: In the '60s? OK.

Allen: I think it was the '60s. Yeah.

Davis: OK.

Allen: But that was my role and I did that. You could just, you know, for years; you could hear the names, Kenneth Barton, Bettie Allen, Leon Stewart, Agnes Huston.

Davis: Oh, yes.

Allen: And then I think a long – Agnes didn't come right behind me. There was a couple of guys but then when Agnes got in there, she stayed until her death almost.

Davis: Right. Maybe a little too long, do you think?

Allen: Yeah, she was having trouble.

Davis: Yeah.

Allen: She was having trouble, and she knew that her life was not going to last long, so she just waited too long to even enjoy –

Davis: Yeah. It was a burden.

Allen: Yeah, yeah. It became, she was pretty sick. But she kept, she kept the name alive. And, then, it went sort of dormant. I don't remember who was president after her.

Davis: – my impression until Carl.

Allen: Mm-hmm. Until Carl.

Davis: And he really was a, I mean, he understood how you use the press to –

Allen: Somehow someone told me that he and Bernard Schoenberg?

Davis: Oh, Bernard Schoenberg? Yeah, with the newspaper?

Allen: Yeah, with the newspaper, were classmates and so –

- Davis: Really?
- Allen: Someplace wherever they were in school. I know that Carl went to Calvary Academy.
- Davis: Oh, did he?
- Allen: Yeah, and I don't know where he attended college. But anyway that they've always been friends, and he always had the ear. He was a pretty strong guy, you know. So I don't know who – I don't even know who's president at the moment.
- Davis: Well, and then wasn't Rudy Davenport president for a while?
- Allen: Maybe that's who's president now. Maybe he took up the reins from there.
- Davis: Right.
- Allen: Yeah.
- Davis: Back when you were briefly president and it was a delicate matter because the Jews were crucial to your support and your financial resources.
- Allen: Mm-hmm.
- Davis: But you said they kind of dominated the NAACP and there was a need for the blacks to really -
- Allen: Make, be on making decisions.
- Davis: Yeah, so you had to kind of mediate that –
- Allen: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.
- Davis: – and try to work out something?
- Allen: Yeah, we didn't have as good attendance on Board meetings as we had had before, but we kept the Board together. We had our annual meeting, and that's been one of the bright spots at the NAACP. The NAACP has always had wonderful speakers.
- Davis: Right.
- Allen: Always had wonderful speakers and always had a wonderful turnout because that was a big social gathering, too. But, yeah –

Davis: It still is a major event every year.

Allen: Mm-hmm.

Davis: And the mayor better be there. I mean, that's a –

Allen: (laughter) Well, I always think the Breakfast, too –

Davis: That's true.

Allen: – is a good one. It's –

Davis: Not the Prayer Breakfast?

Allen: No, the Prayer – the Martin Luther King?

Davis: That's right. The Martin Luther King Breakfast, right.

Allen: Mm-hmm.

Davis: OK. That's another –

Allen: And that was another good group that helped because they started out presenting because of the guys in it – liked jazz, they began, they started out presenting good jazz concerts. We had MJQ and all of the latest (laughter) jazz artists in the, I guess it was the '80s, '70s and '80s –

Davis: Right, right.

Allen: And then they went into, after Martin Luther King was assassinated, they went into doing that Prayer –

Davis: Yeah, Breakfast, right. OK. What about the Frontiers International? Have you had any association with that?

Allen: No.

Davis: Is that just a men's group or –

Allen: No, no. They have a –

Davis: Do they?

Allen: Yeah, they call them the "Yokettes." "Yokettes."

Davis: Yokettes?

- Allen: Yeah (laughter). The men are called “Yoke Fellows.”
- Davis: Oh, OK. I see. Well, if you don’t mind, do you want to tell me who, in your opinion, are the most effective today, the most effective and high-quality leaders in the black community of Springfield?
- Allen: Right now, I would say, Rudy Davenport.
- Davis: Rudy, right.
- Allen: He’s a stayer.
- Davis: He’s a class guy, too.
- Allen: Mm-hmm. He really is. And, of course, I associate him with the NAACP. You know, we’re into that age difference now and I presume in spite of all that’s happened, I presume Woodson would still be a leader.
- Davis: Right. That’s a painful situation and – Yeah. And he’s a dynamic person as well.
- Allen: And then we have, I think – Mmmm, I don’t want to forget her name now. You didn’t have to reach into the rolls of parties and I guess there are a couple of Democrats in there, and I can’t remember the husband and wife team. Ahh, I can’t think of her name.
- Davis: I know of a Republican. How about Candace Trees, is she a highly-regarded member of the black community, would you say?
- Allen: Well, let me say. She ran for something just this past, this past election and didn’t make it.
- Davis: She didn’t win.
- Allen: It was Mike [Dusik] or whatever.
- Davis: She used to be kind of an up-and-coming kind of – I always thought kind of picked by the Republican organization to be –
- Allen: Well, yeah, that’s one thing they do well.
- Davis: Yeah, they do it very well.
- Allen: They pick the women very good. You can just see –
- Davis: I can’t think who the husband-and-wife –

Allen: They were Democrats.

Davis: And they're black?

Allen: Mm-hmm. I just saw her name. Turner. Turner.

Davis: Oh, Clar- not Clarence.

Allen: Turner is the last name and -

Davis: Right. Well, OK, OK. So they are highly-respected people.

Allen: Mm-hmm. And, oh, then, let's go to the aldermen.

Davis: Oh, yeah.

Allen: Mc, Mc-

Davis: Frank?

Allen: Yeah, Frank.

Davis: McNeil?

Allen: McNeil.

Davis: Mm-hmm. I've always, well, admired him because he, he gets along with everyone but he's got a, he's got a program and he keeps pushing it. And (inaudible).

Allen: And I'm very respectful and then surprised with the Williams Brothers who were with Unity for the Community?

Davis: Oh, yeah. Now, I don't know them.

Allen: They started out being involved in the Million Man March, and then they've had little offshoots of that, and I think that they're doing a great job because I think they've learned that you don't look for large numbers. You get the few people who are going to do something and you just go on and do it with a handful. You know, so often in the past, we've looked for numbers.

Davis: Right.

Allen: And it's probably why things fell short or fell, period. But they just, you know, they just keep going, and I go sometimes to their meetings. And

they're our new people but they're our people. I'm not in the black church community, so I don't know other black ministers that have –

Davis: I was going to ask you next about that.

Allen: I don't –

Davis: You really don't know them?

Allen: No, because we've had a change of (inaudible)

Davis: Yeah, I mean, Rudy Schultz is gone and others who –

Allen: Yeah.

Davis: – were, for a long time, the –

Allen: Mm-hmm, leadership.

Davis: Huh. How about someone like Mike Pittman? Do you know him?

Allen: Yeah, I know him. I don't know that he's a leader of people. I think he's doing his thing and he knows that he needed the city government to help him. And he's got that thing wrapped up pretty tight. It's interesting how the white community only wants one or two, and they select them, and they don't let nobody else get by.

Davis: Yeah, yeah.

Allen: (laughter) No matter what you do, they're not going to let somebody else – I think Pittman is doing things, I hope, I hope he's not the front man. But I have to hope, I had more hope when he had the other young man who's the basketball guy –

Davis: Kevin Gamble?

Allen: Kevin Gamble.

Davis: right, right.

Allen: I had hoped that he was for real.

Davis: I think they're still partners but Kevin is not an active partner.

Allen: Yeah.

Davis: I think he has (overlapping dialogue; inaudible)

Allen: No, he's an (inaudible).

Davis: He's a coach now. But I think they still are partners, [that I know of].

Allen: Really? OK.

Davis: At least, we could say, that he's done it for his own sake but Mike has made an effort in the private sector to build up –

Allen: Mm-hmm.

Davis: – the commercial and residential houses.

Allen: And you don't make, you have to make deals.

Davis: Yeah.

Allen: There is no doubt about that. I used to make them when I was affirmative action (inaudible).

Davis: Sure.

Allen: I used to do, put people together and then I said, you know, I'd try to help the white clubs out there understand that the black man coming to that venture had just as much as he had – because of his blackness. Now you may not like that but that's, that's the way it is. So, don't start talking about, you get 5% and I get 95%.

Davis: [None of that's done, no.] Yeah. It's a tough, it's in the –

Allen: As soon as I worked that out and everybody's excited and walked away, somebody, this black guy was saying, "I'd take less if I knew I (inaudible)."

Davis: (laughter) Geez.

Allen: Gee, I had to have a contract when I worked in (inaudible) [fadeout].

Davis: Let's see, if there's anything else.

Allen: And I don't know where [Battalion] runs the black paper, the [major] black –

Davis: Oh, Washington?

Allen: No, no. The Pure News guy, Pure News –

Davis: Oh, I don't know him. No.

Allen: Yes, you do. He's in charge of, he's in charge of the Minority Contractors, I think. What is his name?

Davis: I just knew William Washington.

Allen: That's one of the old white papers. No, he's, he's the oldest –

Davis: Right, right.

Allen: – local thing.

Davis: Right. Well, I can't help –

Allen: I'll look for it. Pure News. What's his name? Gosh, if I can see –

Davis: OK. We'll come back to that.

Allen: 'Cause I don't know where he is in leadership.

Davis: Yes, right.

Allen: Now he's always at those nice Unity for Community people, he makes decent input in that.

Davis: Let's spend a little time unless you got – Well, any other volunteer – I've heard, I mean, you've been in many like the Meals on Wheels and all. But that have really been very, very important to you?

Allen: No, I don't think that's (inaudible).

Davis: Not that that isn't but –

Allen: OK.

Davis: OK.

Allen: Yeah, feeding. That's my mission out in the church is feeding –

Davis: That's good.

Allen: – the hungry.

Davis: That's good. Yes. Not a bad mission. Let's turn into some of your hobbies and all. I remember that you and Jackie got active in wine-making.

- Allen: Yeah.
- Davis: Are you still active in that?
- Allen: No.
- Davis: OK. You made all kinds of interesting like, parsley wine and (inaudible) –
- Allen: Right.
- Davis: – all sorts of stuff.
- Allen: Uh, huh.
- Davis: Did you grow, was that from your own garden?
- Allen: Most of the vegetable wines were from our garden like a tomato, which makes a very dry wine, and some of the others, they were from our garden. But much of what we did was – Someone would call us up and say, “I’ve got a crop of something,” maybe, “Can you make some wine?” When we were making wine, it was that era of home-made, people were making home-made wines, home-made beers – and all that kind of stuff. It was amazing. We were thinking of it as a retirement –
- Davis: (laughter)
- Allen: – business and it only lasted, it may have lasted 10 years as a big thing.
- Davis: But it wasn’t going to –
- Allen: Actually, you know, we –
- Davis: – be your nest egg, was it?
- Allen: Yeah. Actually, we did two things from that, and it was, we sold the equipment and supplies for making those, beer and wine, and then we introduced Jackie’s brothers to making wine, and I gave them a kit from here and then they’d [wine]. And then the next year, we introduced them to having an annual wine-tasting party. And, then, the next year, they opened a winery.
- Davis: Oh, really?
- Allen: Yes.
- Davis: Now where do they live?

Allen: Well, they lived in Oregon City but their winery, that was out of [Mt. Hood]. Well, that is wine country.

Allen: (overlapping dialogue; inaudible) wine.

Davis: I assumed that it was Jackie was the one who had kind of known about wine-making –

Allen: No.

Davis: – when they were growing up –

Allen: No.

Davis: – in Oregon? No? That was your –

Allen: No, it wasn't even mine. I'm not even sure how we got involved – Oh, I know, I know how we got involved. Believe it or not, it was started by a Baptist deacon.

Davis: (laughter)

Allen: He had some old crops and he gave us these crops, and his wife who was a deaconess gave us two recipes. And then it was either Babs or someone in her vicinity, the people that live in her vicinity that had some grapes. And we started making a wine because we had enough supplies.

Davis: Interesting. I just always assumed that (overlapping dialogue; inaudible) and there was a guy and he just grew up in Oregon or lived in Oregon.

Allen: No, she was a Scotch person.

Davis: OK. (laughter)

Allen: She was a Scotch person.

Davis: And her two brothers actually have an operating (overlapping dialogue; inaudible).

Allen: They operate, they, you know, most wineries do not have vineyards.

Davis: Right, oh, that's true. Right.

Allen: They buy the fruit or the juice. But they have, they live on an airstrip, the brothers do, a private airfield and all sorts of blackberries grow wild. We have come home with 50 pounds of blackberries on an airplane in a plastic

something with a little teeny short lady, old lady – 90-year old. She’s sitting on the top of it (laughter). That really was the good old days of carrying anything you wanted on the top of the airplane (laughter). And they actually developed a vineyard, so that very grove – they weren’t even groves, they’re local grapes. They grow Old World grapes.

Davis: Wow, for a specialty –

Allen: Yeah, chardonnay and all that stuff, you know. Those are not what we call “New World grapes” are.

Davis: Right.

Allen: I mean, like, the Concord and stuff like that – sweet wine.

Davis: Right.

Allen: But their sweet wines are all fruit wines and have been, all of that comes from around that area because of fruit country. And I bet you between, let’s just say, Portland and Seattle, there are 15 wineries right off of I-5. (laughter)

Davis: Is that right?

Allen: Yeah, there are a lot of wineries. But you know what happened? Community colleges started classes in wine-making and how to grow grapes and how to take care of fruit and stuff like that. And we just went of into it like that. And most of them do limited, a limited quantity of wine.

Davis: Right.

Allen: So there is no, there is no national distribution –

Davis: Right, right.

Allen: – of it. But those boys, the brothers won every, they won the amateur –

Davis: Really?

Allen: – and, then, they got into the professional and they won that for years. They just stopped, stopped (laughter) [going], stopped entering anything. So, they have a good guy who can – a chemist – who balances their stuff with a recipe. And you have to do this, you know, every year with every crop because every crop don’t come out with the same amount of sugar, etc.

Davis: That’s right, that’s right.

- Allen: So their chemist is very important. But it's a simple, you know, it's an easy business because –
- Davis: Nature can kind of do a lot of it, yeah.
- Allen: Nature grows stuff, you press it –
- Davis: Fermentation is –
- Allen: Fermentation! You put it up on the, stack it up while it's (inaudible), you know they use barrels. Right now, they're using stainless steel, it's easier to keep clean.
- Davis: Right.
- Allen: You let it set and you go filter it, you let it set and then you bottle it. And I was really surprised at the shortness in the time that commercial wine takes to go through that process. [If I used it] last Saturday, in two weeks from Saturday, you've got stuff because it's controlled heat and –
- Davis: So that was kind of a fun project, I guess, for the two of you, though it was not enough fun to keep it going more than about 10 years, I guess, huh?
- Allen: Well, the other thing is that, you know, when you drink it, like it can become a habit, an addiction, so one of us got addicted, so we just stopped it.
- Davis: I see. 'Cause that's a sensible thing to do. Yeah, OK.
- Allen: I don't even make – We used to have grapes in our yard and last year, I just dug them up. I said, (inaudible) if I want. I know how to make wine from juice. I can go buy – whatever that guy's name is – No, it's really a corporation (laughter). Welch's.
- Davis: Oh, Welch's?
- Allen: Welch's is a corporation of farmers, you know.
- Davis: Right. Yes. I can –
- Allen: I can go buy their grape concentrate (overlapping dialogue; inaudible)
- Davis: Concentrate, sure.
- Allen: Concentrate and make a good wine –
- Davis: Yeah, you don't need to grow stuff.

- Allen: That's right. I don't need to do that.
- Davis: (laughter)
- Allen: We've planted (inaudible) we had to cut it out. What is the, the wine that – "Arsenic and Old Lace" –
- Davis: Oooh. I don't know. That they used to poison the visitors with?
- Allen: Yeah.
- Davis: (laughter)
- Allen: Yeah. But the funny part of it was that we did a, we did have people who enjoyed the dandelion wine, and the guy who was the president of the SIU School of Medicine, they used to come every three years and get –
- Davis: Oh, Dick Moy?
- Allen: Yeah. They used to get the dandelion wine. They had a rite (laughter), r-i-t-e, you know, that went with this dandelion wine.
- Davis: Oh, OK. A regular ritual, yeah.
- Allen: Yeah.
- Davis: Isn't that funny?
- Allen: That was the funny part (laughter) when you had these people asking you because people, you know – Dandelion wine, you still have to do more with it because you've got to make sure you don't get, that you get the flower thing –
- Davis: Right.
- Allen: – and not all that other tuka, tuka. The kids, you can't even get kids to pick them for you. You know, you used to give them a dollar or a snack and – "A dollar?" (overlapping dialogue; inaudible)
- Davis: "I'm going to put a snack in there." "Forget it."
- Allen: That's right. That's right. It's not a good industry.
- Davis: Times have changed. (laughter)
- Allen: (laughter) It's not a good industry.

- Davis: You've lived with Jackie for – what? – forty, thirty, forty years?
- Allen: Yeah, ['78].
- Davis: Thirty years.
- Allen: '71? (inaudible) Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.
- Davis: That's obviously been a very important part of your life?
- Allen: Definitely.
- Davis: Yeah.
- Allen: Let me say, I would not have had this adventure. I think most of that 30, the last 30 years has been more adventurous than I ever would have thought to do [fadeout]. I was as surprised at myself who had never flown anywhere.
- Davis: Yeah, you have been a Springfield person.
- Allen: My first overseas flight, I did it myself 'cause I was going to go – And I had, I was just amazed. They told me, "You've got to go here on this date and this is the hour and you get into Geneva Switzerland" and "You take a cab or get into, you go into Geneva and then you get yourself back on that plane to go to Ethiopia. And then you get yourself on the plane to go to Kenya and all that sort of stuff." I never thought I could do that, you know. But I was on time. I had myself together. It was just –
- Davis: You did it.
- Allen: – so amazing.
- Davis: So, really, it really widened your world, didn't it?
- Allen: It did, it did.
- Davis: So, to travel with her and at her suggestion?
- Allen: Mm-hmm. Yeah.
- Davis: So you've traveled a lot since then, too. Haven't you?
- Allen: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm. I had pretty well gotten in the United States by myself. Vacations, I'd take off and be gone maybe three weeks and stuff like that and just drive, just –

Davis: Sure.

Allen: – to see things. And I'm always amazed when I go back over some of the roads, you know.

Davis: "I was here." (laughter)

Allen: (laughter) I started driving with the advent of the interstate system.

Davis: Yeah.

Allen: You go back that far, you see two lanes going around the mountains –

Davis: Right.

Allen: Four lanes going through the mountains.

Davis: (laughter)

Allen: You go out, half the mountain is (inaudible)(laughter).

Davis: What a difference.

Allen: It's just amazing –

Davis: It is.

Allen: – what the changes are.

Davis: Do you two still travel a fair amount or –

Allen: We don't travel as much. I am saddened that we won't be traveling much anymore, and that's part, that's in part because we've been where we really want to go. And that's in part because you age and there are some things that is bothersome about travel. I used to go, we used to get in the car, Jackie and I used to get in the car in Springfield and on a Friday night and on a Sunday morning, we would be in Portland, Oregon.

Davis: (laughter) You'd just drive straight through.

Allen: Well, or if we stopped, I mean – So we went sun up to sun down.

Davis: That's punishing now, isn't it? Yeah.

Allen: Oh! It is like, it killed us, the summer we went to Denver. (laughter) But that road to Denver is a boring road now, for young people who love to speed.

But I'm a 75-mile-an-hour person. That's not speeding because a lot of people – pfyooo! – they come out of nowhere and they go where –

Davis: Right past you, yeah.

Allen: That's right. I was always so happy when they put speed control on.

Davis: Right.

Allen: And when I step [out of] the car, I am not bothered but Jackie has (inaudible) a hip problem.

Davis: So she's uncomfortable in the car a long –

Allen: She's uncomfortable a long – So we stopped more often.

Davis: Sure.

Allen: We take longer to go.

Davis: It's not as much fun as it was.

Allen: Not for her. And, you know, we had a – and we still have – we are better together when traveling than we are (laughter) –

Davis: At home?

Allen: – at home because we are dependent upon one another.

Davis: Right. OK.

Allen: And we have established the pattern. If we get lost, whoever is at the place where we were supposed to stay, you stand still. The other person needs to find you.

Davis: So both of you go in a circle?

Allen: That's right. One of the scariest things. We were in China. We had all the different ways of transportation – boat, train, air –

Davis: Bus, air.

Allen: – bus, all of it. Well, we got on the train – and the train was a long ride and it was day time because we were able to see the beautiful country – but the train was a long train. I mean, it was transportation for the Chinese and we were in a small group, a very small group – we had maybe probably eight people in

our group. And our Group Leader said to us, “The bus is across the street from the train station. It’s Number – whatever – and so all you have to do is go out and go get the bus.” So many Chinese got off of that train. We couldn’t even see the bus. We got lost from one another, just going up – You know what I’m saying?

Davis: Yeah, yeah, it’s just a little short distance but you couldn’t –

Allen: We got lost from one another. And I don’t know whose bus will stop here. And we didn’t want to miss our bus. We felt, “Well, if everybody else is going to be there and we won’t be there.” Well, they were not going to go off and leave us.” But the thing was that was so scary because all you could see – and that’s one thing I’ve learned to be afraid of – I was afraid of the blackfaces in Africa when the second, we were there in Kenya, when the second president was sworn in and the Africans were in trees, on the ground and all of those things trying to watch the celebration in this big, huge [park].

Davis: It was scary, though?

Allen: You’re not accustomed to seeing them.

Davis: Right.

Allen: It has nothing to do at all with their color.

Davis: No, it’s just a mob.

Allen: It’s different, it’s a mob, you know.

Davis: Right.

Allen: And even going to New York, I’m not seeing that many people because I, mean, other cultures seem to love the touch of each other.

Davis: Yeah.

Allen: They can just get together and block everything. And they’re not trying to. That’s the way they are. They walk with their arms –

Davis: Right.

Allen: – interlocked or around each other and stuff like that. And, boy, when we got off the train and all these Chinese were getting off the plane – some of them pulling off their bicycles; you know, they carry all that.

Davis: Sure.

- Allen: Boy, that was scary. That was really scary.
- Davis: But you got (inaudible) where you (inaudible).
- Allen: Yeah, but you know what? Had we waited until the crowd dispersed, it would have been probably forty-five minutes to an hour.
- Davis: Wow.
- Allen: There were that many. You know when you're –
- Davis: Yeah.
- Allen: – when you're traveling in other countries, people use public transportation. We don't even know what it is.
- Davis: Exactly.
- Allen: And so –
- Davis: And so the huge crowd, then it takes a while for them to all kind of disperse.
- Allen: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm. Oui, oui.
- Davis: So that kind of travel just is no longer –
- Allen: We may go to France because there's a niece there that's married to a Frenchman.
- Davis: Oh, OK.
- Allen: We may go to France again. And we took them to Spain for their wedding gift.
- Davis: Oh.
- Allen: But I don't know, Jackie's – And it's difficult to – When we went to Texas, she was [a little more different]. And, [Heather], we have dogs –
- Davis: Yeah, you've got responsibilities –
- Allen: And the dogs cost more, more in the [pot], more in the kennel than it – (laughter)
- Davis: Of course, they do.

- Allen: – than (laughter) our plane fares, sometimes.
- Davis: (laughter)
- Allen: We have two dogs and they need to be put – So I think travel will be quite shortened, and I realize now it's – That will be all right. I used to hear people say they'd go someplace for four days. Well, I know, you know, they're going to the coast. You go down by plane –
- Davis: Right.
- Allen: – it's an all-day trip if you have to transfer someplace – and, then, in Springfield, you do.
- Davis: Right.
- Allen: You either go to Chicago and wait or you got to St. Louis.
- Davis: Right.
- Allen: And I've learned the St. Louis thing because if we keep flying the same airline, well, then, we just take the first plane out of Springfield, then we get the first plane out of St. Louis. But it's a half day.
- Davis: Well, sure.
- Allen: So you say, you have two days and, then, you fly back. Well, I don't like to think I'm spending \$250 to \$500 to do four days.
- Davis: No.
- Allen: I really don't.
- Davis: I agree. So you take longer trips –
- Allen: Yeah. I want to do that but it is a wise thing. What we're doing now is combining – I have a niece in Washington State and she has family in Portland. My niece is thinking about moving to Las Vegas. I don't know how I'm going to handle that. But the thing is we sort of break it up –
- Davis: Yeah.
- Allen: – take a longer time and break it up and get a car and drive and do our own, really do our own thing.
- Davis: Sure. Well, that's a [fair] way to do it.

- Allen: (overlapping dialogue; inaudible) our family but now our family's getting (inaudible). The brothers are old enough to, one of the brothers is retired from his job. The other brother runs a winery. So we have one brother that is available to do some things with us, and the other brother who can't because he never did. He's been a free guy, and he's been – In the time that I've known him, he's had five different occupations.
- Davis: Oh, really? He's just always –
- Allen: But he's always wanted to work for himself. He never did bother anybody else.
- Davis: Right, right.
- Allen: He was a backhoe operator, he's been a plumber, he's been a bunch of –
- Davis: (laughter)
- Allen: – a few things. But, you know what I mean? But he hasn't got anything built up for retirement.
- Davis: Right, that's scary.
- Allen: Mm-hmm. So if this winery (laughter) – I had hoped the Pepsi Cola – Pepsi Cola made him an offer. You know that's another thing that I – In the wine industry, it's a soft-drink company who's buying them up.
- Davis: Oh, yeah. I had read that. We're going to have to wrap up here but I wanted to ask kind of a wrap-up question. OK?
- Allen: Mm-hmm.
- Davis: We've talked about your whole life –
- Allen: Mm-hmm.
- Davis: Work, childhood, friends, volunteer activities, interests, religion, church. As you look back on your life – although you've still got plenty of it to live – but as you look back on what you have lived, what kind of lessons do you think you've learned about life, living it here in Springfield?
- Allen: Well, I've always enjoyed the Springfield area. That's one thing because it's – We used to say, it's right on the line between Chicago and St. Louis. If you've got big money to go to Chicago and then you spend two or three days. If you've got little money, you go down and watch the ballgame and drive home the same day.

Davis: (laughter)

Allen: So it's like a shopping center –

Davis: Right.

Allen: – St. Louis is but –

Davis: Right.

Allen: – the Big City is the place where you really enjoy. So I've like that mixture because we have had an opportunity between the two cities and now we have some of it here to see plays, to, you know, some of the finer things –

Davis: Sure.

Allen: – of, of life. And so it's been a nice locale for me to grow in. Even if I hadn't seen the rest of the world –

Davis: Right.

Allen: – it was a nice locale. The other thing that I've learned is that life does really begin at 40.

Davis: Mm-hmm.

Allen: That's when the mind and the body catch up with each other, and they're not running ahead and you can, while you may not plan, you don't over-plan or you don't overdue because you know that there are other times that might present itself with an opportunity to do this thing again. And the other thing is that you know that life goes fast enough, you don't need to hasten it with your pace.

Davis: (laughter)

Allen: You know, you just try to enjoy all of those things that really happen. And I mean, I wish that I had probably learned [journaling] not only [journal] (inaudible) things. I wish I had learned [journaling].

Davis: OK. Keeping a journal?

Allen: Yeah.

Davis: I get it. OK.

Allen: Mm-hmm. Not a diary but looking –

Davis: I understand.

Allen: – at something and saying what happened and, then, you know, doing something and then saying what happened and “was that OK with you? What did you learn from that experience?” But the other thing is you have to be open to what comes. You know, there are times that you think that you shouldn’t do this or you shouldn’t do that and, then, you hear that little voice say, “Try it, you might like it.” And you do find that it’s [sort of] exciting. I think when you look back, you can always see the excitement but I enjoyed it as it went along, even the times that I’ve been frightened being lost or whatever in the Civil Right Movement when we were down South. But I always found it exciting ‘cause I wanted to hear what was going on, and I’ve really been exposed to a lot of things, [sort of] our ideals and philosophy and I found that I’m now much stronger in what I believe.

Davis: As a result of that. Yeah. Now of all your many achievements, can you pick the one of which you’re the proudest or the most satisfied?

Allen: Mmm, yeah. My affirmative action –

Davis: Mm-hmm, OK.

Allen: I really do.

Davis: You would have made a difference there.

Allen: I felt I did. And I felt it was because I – I heard several kinds of things. Bill Cellini told me – I think I may have said this someplace – told Velma and I. We were testifying before the Transportation Committee, the National Transportation Committee, and he said to us, “Now if you raise your voice in anger, nobody’s going to hear you. So you have to make sure what you want to say and say it in such a way that people can hear you and then decide upon it.” And I learned then that the loud voice bothers those in power. They’ll take care of you somewhere or another (laughter).

Davis: That’s right. Yeah. [You lose out.] Yeah.

Allen: Yeah. And if your voice – [cause I started presenting myself with a softer voice, make people lean out –

Davis: Lean forward to hear you?

Allen: And –

Davis: You got their attention then?

- Allen: Got their attention and people were not afraid of me, so I could put out a lot of stuff to them, you know. And so I think that that was the success, that I heard that early enough to be able to make a [dent].
- Davis: So it was a good feeling that you were able to have an, make an impression upon people –
- Allen: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.
- Davis: – and to influence them in some way.
- Allen: Yeah, because I would tell the contractors – I had the nerve one time to tell one company, “You’re not going to take me back to the 1950s or the 1940s (laughter). We’re here. Deal with affirmative action. You don’t want to deal with me, you don’t deal with my agency.” I mean, it was a real nice power –
- Davis: Right.
- Allen: – feeling.
- Davis: Yeah, yeah.
- Allen: And the guy came around ‘cause he was a big contractor. Velma said, “Well, you got to pay some attention to him.”
- Davis: Carey?
- Allen: “You don’t have to do everything,” she said. “But pay some attention.”
- Davis: Right.
- Allen: But anyway, that –
- Davis: Well, I can see why. Bettie, it’s been a pleasure.
- Allen: Thanks.
- Davis: I’ve enjoyed it very much, and thank you very much.
- Allen: Right. (inaudible) Thank you.

End - Bettie Allen Interview Tape 6