

ANN ATWATER SESSION #3
May 5, 2006

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I don't remember where we left off, but we can maybe find our way back around to there. But I sort of wanted to talk to you today about the current state of affairs in Durham and to get your take on where you think we are now. We've talked a lot historically about how you got here and how your own activism began, and certainly some extraordinary moments where your involvement was really major and made a difference. But what's happening now? I'm curious about two incidents actually, the cross burnings that occurred earlier this year and also what you're observing with the whole lacrosse team situation and how that affects race in Durham.

Okay, you've asked me about the cross burning. Okay, as I said befo', I don't think the Klan had anything to do with the cross burning. I feel like that there were just some people that were mad and wanted to see some changes come about and figured that they would get out there and burn some crosses to scare somebody or to make get some some things movin and get em goin on, and that's what I you know I think about the cross, I- because nothin has come up about that, you know everybody's investigatin and lookin but they haven't found anything, nobody's said anything and nobody is pushin it to the point that something would come. But fer as the lacrosse situation, you know I think if they're guilty..you know they should be punished. If the girl is guilty then I think she should be punished. I I feel like it's- I I I it's-- that is nothin...for the community to split on, you know. We need to move on and go forward.

Okay, I guess that's what I wanted to ask you about, really, is not so much the guilt or the innocence but what is it doing to the community, what's the conversation

I think I think people has had to have somethin..to grab aholt to, to be able to get up and talk in th- and I'm I'm a use the black community, and the voting, I'm a use that. Okay, this here- and the organization is uh..um..uh..um.....what is it? black-- Durham Committee on the affairs of black people -- they were the organization that normally appoint people, _____? set people in positions. Well they did nominate and sent out they they they got their endorsements several endorsements, but if you look at the pa- and look at who got you know in..they bypassed that whole paper. Nobody but one person got in that they wanted, everybody else the people in the community just said well hey we gonna pick our own people. So that meant that black the black organization has lost its power and its pull...in Durham, so we need to do a revamp a reorganization we need to go back..and that's what needs to be done because somebody's cryin..out there wantin to come back want everything to change, so they doin everything they can..to make this change come about, you know bein it uh lacrosse situations or be it somebody

fightin, or you know it's just it's just it's just a mess. And everybody we- as I said early on I think that we were right back 360-degree angle from where we started.

So you feel like this has actually stirred things up in a way that's regressing, that's taking us backwards rather than forwards?

It it well it's not takin us back so far, but it want people wantin to come forward they want to see a change. And in order to see that change I think they're beginning to want to do somethin about it. Now that the school board has got new members, everybody's happy. Everybody you talk to..is just happy, and they haven't even had haven't even been seated yet on the board. And you see this is what I'm talkin about, ever-

That comes from how ineffectual the school board had been?

That's right, that's right...

So that there's a feeling that the new school board is moving forward in a positive way?

That's right, nobody has done- see when the when the situation was goin on on the school board, near everbody just set back and let it happen. And every night people'd get arrested, nobody said we oughta do somethin to hear these people. They would come in and put their problems on the table and they would get put out. And see people were tired of that cause everybody's somebody. And and so now that they got the new board, they feel that the people that's comin on...has a feelin for human bein, you know they want to see things work. And I believe that too because some of them people that I know when I worked with them and I know that they're you know good people.

I guess my question about these episodes had more to do with the dialog. Is the dialog changing? Are more people talking about things that they weren't talking about before, or is everything just staying –

They're beginnin they're beginnin to talk, we've had several meetings called where people were talkin about the past, the 60s, and it wasn't enough people there to really.. get to feel that people really understand, really know.

Is that because they're not interested that there's not enough people there, or is it—

I think some of em are not interested and some of em the people just don't know because we're dealin..with a younger generation of people, and they don't know. And it's gotta be organi- you know somebody needs to organize..and teach these people things that's happenin so that they will understand how we got to where we are and what we plan to do to go fuhther.

Is that happening in the school system?

That hasn't happened, but I think it will happen *in the school system* yeah, because I talked to one minister and he's getting ready on the 24th to call a meeting at his church, which this has never happened before. And they want to talk about all of the issues all kinds of issues...and he w- and it's open to the public and they want everybody to be there.

So that's a good thing, right? The fact that there's a dialog occurring where there maybe wasn't one before is probably positive, right?

Yeah. That's right.

Where do you think that's heading? What do you think needs to be done now? What are the things that we need to focus on?

I think we need to get together and talk with people and call these meetings and invite these people and after we meet.. and get an idea then we need to follow that idea, don't let the idea die, we need to work on it so it can move on out. Because people like me my age where we would I would hear take an idea when I was younger.. I could get out there on the street and work. Now I'm not able to get out there, all I can do is sit down in a chair somewhere and talk or get on the phone and talk somewhere, I'm not able to go, not unless I get my leg fixed, then I'd be able to do a little more walkin, but I am willin...to go and be- learn be taught what is happenin and to tell the people.

So who are the Ann Atwaters of today?

We don't have any, we haven't trained anybody.

So what do we do about that?

(chuckles) We need to train em. *We need to train em?* We need to train em. That's what we need to do.

How do you identify those people? I mean you came out of necessity, right? I mean you needed to solve a problem and—

Yeah, I needed, yeah, and I had I had the problem so I needed to get it solved. Well, I don't know, we don't know who have the problem now, we dealin right now with a medical- I'm workin with a group now with a on a medical field, doctors.. wanting to find out why people don't come for their services. Well, in talking to people individuals, they are told at the doctor's office that if you don't have the copay we can't see you. And sometime the copay is \$5, sometimes it's \$15. One man ran his up to \$50 so he just won't go...so now he's ran out of medicine and he won't go to the doctor to get the refills or doctor to write a prescription. And and and you know how do you let him know that it's all right to come? You know the doctors- the the the secretary says you can't get doctor won't see you. Well how do you get past the secretary? And that's what we have we got to fight that..in order to get thes- cause these people got serious illness.

Is it possible to get by the nurse? Is it possible to get by the secretary?

It- he- the doctor there agreed that he would see you -- that's his oath he made. He didn't say I will charge you -- I will see you. So we got to make sure that doctor stand up on his you know on his feet and honor that...you know. And we found out that if a person got uh Blue Cross Blue Shield who pays 100% and another person got Medicaid, the person with Blue Cross Blue Shield will get a better treatment when they go to the doctor than the person with the Blue Cr- I mean with Medicaid...because they have less insurance. The person don't have anything will just get looked at..you know. And I think it's I think that's bad, I think you need to give the whole hog you know to each one of em.

So information's not getting out.

That's right.

Is this any different than what you were facing in the 60s?

It's the same it's the same thing. See only thing we got to do, somebody... has got to go do' to do' to let these people know that there are services there to help them.. and where to go, have the information ready so that and leave pamphlets so that they can read.. how to get from from one from you know from point A to point B.

Whose responsibility is it to make sure that happens?

It's our responsibility. You know, if I know it then I oughta tell it. But then it's the if it's the medical field that they have that information, they need to pass it on..or either hire somebody that can go out there and do that for them.

Ben, do you have any--?

Ben: I'm thinking back to how this period might be similar or different to the period just before some of the charrettes when issues were really coming to the surface, and what propelled people to come to some of the big charrettes. And were people feeling like issues were really about to burst the way they are now? What were people feeling just before some of the major charrettes_____?

See, what we did we were in the community goin do' to do' talkin to the people, and we showed them that you've got the same problem I have, so if you don't want certain things to happen to you – say for instance if you don't want to be evicted, you need to come to this meetin and learn how not to be evicted..you know. If you want your house fixed, you need to come so you can learn what to tell the landlord. And and this is the kind of things we had to find the problem that would fit the people.

Ben: And were they black and white community organizers?

Well well it was- in some instances there were a few white organizers, but we basically stayed in the black community and got the __, cause we felt that the white community already was up fuhther than we was and we was tryin to get the black people up to that level..so that they would have it, but now that we got em up to that level, what they've done they have gotten how they got to where they could rent Section 8, you know you got a buncha children you can get into Section 8. So you take Section 8 you can move in any part of the city you want to, Hope Valley anywhere where before you couldn't get in there. And the people have gotten scattered...but they still don't have the the the the knowledge or understandin of what's out there for em. And they're lost and we gotta find a way to get over there in Hope Valley to that person and tell em because you livin over here, that don't make you be equal to what's goin on around around you. And see you got to have know everything to be able to go to sleep peacefully at night.

I guess that's sort of what I'm also trying to ask: are people just wanting to go into their own homes and live their own lives and to pull away from it?

They they they do cause we when we were uh when we when I was uh trained..and we were told that if a person got a job like standin on the back of another one, well when that person got a job he reached back and pulled the next person up. Well _____ goin on everybody got a job but me, I was the last one to get a job. And the job I got I had to take it, it was with uh Operation Breakthrough Headstart Program. They wanted a social worker, well I hadn't been to college didn't know nothin about social work, but I knowed that was the last job and I know if they gave me a opportunity to work I could learn what they were doin in Headstart. So I went in and and um and told em that was my job and won't nobody gonna have that job but me, and they gave me the job. The lady was very overqualified for it and uh she had all her degrees and everything, I didn't have anything but a pencil and piece of paper. And but they gave me the job and uh then I went down to Central and I was gonna take the class social work class, but then they wanted me to look in a book and I didn't want to look in a book. I wanted to go out there and do it, you know go outside and go in the field, so that's why I started on Central's campus and goin out doin it learnin by doin it. And that's the way I learned how to do my social work is by goin out- I didn't read a book. I just went out and found a problem and worked on it and learned that way.

Ben: How long did you work for that agency _____(?)

I I worked for Operation Breakthrough I believe about...how long did I work there? I worked there about I reckon seven eight years because I served on their board seven years and it wasn't- and see by me servin on their board representin the community, then I got I was see I didn't have a chance to get one of the jobs that was comin up because I was so busy tryin to help the community. But when I found out that my livelihood was slippin away from me, I got off the board to get the job. And um...but then I worked for Durham Housing Authority ten years and my job there was liaison ["layizon"] between the residents and agency and that was to make sure...that all residents were heard because they weren't. The the the uh staff all they ever did was lookin at checks you

know money comin in and writin you know figurin out on the paper, they didn't hear the residents when they had a prob- called for repairs and thing, then the next thing they wanted to do was put em out. They didn't know what was happenin, why they were behind in their rent, somebody had to hear em and understand em, so there was two thousand and five hundred residents and I was had to hear every one of em. And uh and that was all we had 14 developments and see I had to sit there and listen and I worked day and night..and uh -- I said 80 hours a day -- to um hear them. And when I left Durham Housing nobody was being evicted, nobody. And one time you could ride all over town and you see people's furniture sittin out, but when I when I got the job they had to come through had to put everybody's eviction notice on my desk..and let me work it out. And I found out that some of em were renting buy- renting furniture you know uh and and when you rent your furniture you'd get three pieces you had to pay for all pieces separate. But they didn't have one check and that was AFDC check, so they couldn't pay for furniture and pay for rent too. So then what I did was recruited furniture for them. And people I'd call everywhere all over you know _____ all over everywhere people would bring loads of furniture and put it in my yard. My insurance company told me (chuckles) if I didn't stop it that they won't gonna sell me no more insurance, so I had to build three houses behind the house to house the stuff so I could get- and I still collect furniture today you know and stuff-

Ben: You built three houses behind--

Mm-hm, three three sheds behind my house now to put the stuff in for the people. And that's what I did and then I- see I give them I took the you know truc- uh uh White Rock Baptist Sunday School one of the Sunday school classes at White Rock Baptist Church gave me a old truck. And I got the truck and named her Crisis and I would take that truck and load it up and take it and give it to the people, call the renters and tell them to come pick up their stuff and got those people payin rent. I would go there some of em couldn't clean up...and I would sit there and show them how to clean up so it wouldn't be evicted for you know not you know when they come and inspect the house the house would be all right. I'd set down and counsel with em if they w- had marital problems, I went from one end of it to the other. And I'd set there and talk to the man and talk to the woman and you know got it workin got everything workin. And that's what I did, I did that for ten years and woulda been I reckon still doin it now if I hadn't of fallen on the job and _____ broke my back, my spine.

Did the Housing Authority come before Operation Breakthrough or after?

After. After.

So when did you have your accident that stopped you from being able to--

In 1990. Yeah, I had asked for a chair...and they promised to buy me a chair...and uh, they were made with me because I wouldn't let em sit the people outdoors...and um cause I'd threaten you know I threatened em and and uh, so when I went to- I went and brought my chair -- I had a chair a lady gave me had wheels on it, so I borrowed(?) and

somebody took the screws out of it, I didn't know it, and when they scoop up to catch the phone and the chair went one way and I come down, it had prongs on the end of it and my bottom hit on the prongs..and broke my coccyx bone _____ tail end of it off and then fractured my spine. And my desk fell on my knees, that's what happened to my knees, and crushed them messed them up and I had to come out..on disability. Both knees were messed up. But I could not sue em, I uh I took Workmen's Comp because I had just the Lord had just blessed me with my home and I didn't want to lose that and Workmen's Comp gave me enough money to make the payments until my disability came in. And that's why I wasn't able to sue the agency cause as a employee Workmen's Comp said you can't go back and sue the agency. And there I was _____ ?

Wow.

Ben: Ann, going back to when you were working at the Housing Authority, what was the rest of your life like? Did you have a social life, did you have time to go out with friends?

That was my social life. When I got up in the mornin and after I talked to my children see, I would we'd get up early in the mornin and around the table I'd get up real early and cook breakfast and you know get them they'd get up and get ready. So we'd sit around the table and I'd have to give them all everything all the rules and regulations for that day you know things that they'd need to do what I expected them and where I was goin if they needed to get to me and what time to be in the house and don't let anybody in the house and all, but I did but then I went on off to work. _____ I'd go through every development...I'd drive through every development I'd stop..to see if everything was goin on was anybody fightin or tearin up anything, then run on to the next-

Ben: This was before you went to work then.

Before I got to my job, before I got to my desk I went through all the developments and they knew the people in the developments know that I was comin, so somebody would be there to let me know to flag me in or let me know what had happened. Cause I set up like neighborhood councils, little organizations in each neighborhood where the people come together to talk about their problems so I wouldn't have to go do' to do'. And then they would come to the meetings and would tell me..and then I would pick out you know the people that needed my services you know come to the house, and from that meeting then I'd go to the house because I knew when they were comin around to inspect and I wanted everybody to you know pass, I didn't want nobody put outdoors. And you know I found some awful stuff you know workin there, they'd never been there were elderly people that had called in uh for plumbin..and they had not received the plumbin and uh where they'd used the bathroom the water had run down all the way upstairs all the way downstairs and you'd walk in there and your feet would _____ on the floor as you walk in there. I gave Housing Authority fifteen minutes one day to clean that house out..and uh to take those elderly people _____ put em in the hotel, but one of the nieces picked em up, was a man and his sister...and uh put em out and get that house fixed up before they brought em back in, and that's what I did, they they had to come and move em out. They couldn't even come downstairs, if they did the onliest dry place was up on

the couch you know at the bottom of the couch was wet and it'd been like that for a long time and they couldn't use the bathroom, they had them there five-gallon buckets and they were sittin everywhere. You could hear the room you could hear the house outside on the street. I went and bought disinfectant and poured all outside and all inside so at least it smelled better when folks passed there.

Ben: Were there other workers doing similar things?

No. They they jo- their jobs was a little different, see they they were so busy catchin the rent and all that kinda stuff listenin to complaints and not answerin them you know or nothing like that, they had a different type job, they were glad to be in the office. And my concern was for the person, not just my job, if they fired me that day after I helped that people that person I was satisfied.

Ben: So about what time did you get to work, get into the building?

I'd I'd get into work well well when I my j- our office hours was supposed to start at 8:30 but 8:00 I would always be in the office. When everybody got there when I worked back when my time to go to Odom Tower (?) I would go early like I'd get into Odom Tower about 7:30 quarter to eight and when I would get there see they I had all of the residents there -- see it 106 residents lived in Odom Tower -- I had them to line up they'd be in a line...to let me see if they look all right that day, and the reason for that was they would get up -- elderly people -- in their nightgowns...come downstairs to the mailbox. And I told them, they were leavin home just like goin downtown, when you come outa yo' do' you in the public. You don't know who's lookin at you. Say I want that hair combed, I want them dresses on, I want them pants ironed and clean, I want everybody to take a bath. And I had them to come and let me see them every day till it got in the habit. Amazing. Some of em had to come and take care of my flowers, I had the prettiest flowers, I would assign duties to different ones to come in and do that. And they had to look at me, I said now you check me out and see if I look all right today, and if I didn't loo- and they and they would do that, they would tell me well I don't think this dress look right today on you, it doesn't fit on you (?) well I said well I'll go home and put on another one, and I would leave and go home and put on another dress because I was tryin to train them. And I got em trained now that they will put their clothes on before they come downstairs. The men would come in their underwear..just come out and go to the mailbox cause it's locked in you know, and yet but it's in the public. And and uh...so it's a lot of things you have to go to, then you have to listen...to what they say to you cause they may be goin off a little bit, and you want to catch it before it gets too far, and if you listen to them talkin you can learn a lot. Then I found out that most of em didn't have insurance..you know uh life insurance, and then so I worked to get the insurance company to come in and sell them life insurance. Some of em bought them ____ 5-cent policies and didn't have but \$2000 or you know maybe not that much when they died, but then I had to make sure..that they bought the proper policies that the insurance people won't rippin em off. And I had to study all that and see about all that, I worked with um with uh um... the lady that set up the program now downtown where they can go and get help at 60 years old 65 with payin for their medicine cause some of em couldn't pay for

their medicine. So I went and worked with the health department and makin sure that if they couldn't get to the doctor they could come over there and get the shots that they needed and get examinations. You see I've covered the whole whatever the problem come up, I've worked on everything.

Ben: Ann, did the people in the community know that? Did they know about you? Did they talk about you?

Everybody called me, everybody thought that I could move mountain. And right now they still callin on me to move mountain. Everybody says Ann Atwater if you you want it done call Ann Atwater. And then if I'd call people sometime I could get- now I could get a bunch of people if I was ready to go to a meetin all I had to do was tell two or three people and they would tell I'd say meet me in _____ and we're goin downtown. And we goin we or either we goin again talk to the housing authority, I say now you need to go talk to em. I won't be there, but you tell em this this and this, and I would tell em what to say and they'd go in and say it and come out happy. You know then they'd tell me 'you told me to do it, and they gave it to me' and then I would be happy that you know I was able to get them to get what they want. For the instance, sometime you'll apply for housing and they'll tell you well I sent you a letter to appear...you know, then you don't come they'll withdraw your application. Well then a lot of em take it and go sit down, but my thing is show me a copy of the letter that you sent me, and they couldn't they couldn't find the letter, so the person got into public housin. And I got one man now holdin like that, he put in in 2000 so you know he don't have a letter, they don't either. So we goin up there and ask for that copy.

They probably know you downtown.

Everybody knows me, everywhere I go they know b- I called the other day for some mulch the mulch to go in the yard? And uh, the man told me all right, he said if you tell let me know who you- I said what I tell you what -- I'll let the mayor tell you who I am. And his secretary called and told him and he called me back and said well the lady will said will call you and let you know when it's comin. She said well we just can't give it to one person, we have to give it to you know like the community. I said well I'm not askin for I want it for my yard, I'm not ready for the commu- I want my yard, I live right in the middle of the road and I want it to look good. She said well if you can get you a truck, she said we bring that out there we're gonna start somethin, everybody we'll have to do that for everybody. Course you have to pay fer it. I said I told em I didn't have any money to start with, they know I don't have no money. And y'all givin it away? and why you cain't give me a little bit of it? She said if you have a truck to come here and get it we'll load it up. Now all I have to do is get the truck, so I called a man and told him to go out there today and get me a truckload of it and bring it and put it in my yard. Well I found out they were doin that and why not try it? It's like pickin up trash off the street, they pay people pay set the trash out they tell you to put it on the curb, and then they you got to pay them..if you got over five pieces..for comin and pickin it up. And that's crazy! Now if you've got ten pieces, why don't you lay em all out there and they go over there get em and go on about their business. So I called em and told em that these were elderly

people they were a mess didn't have no money and they needed trash picked up. Well how many pieces they got? Say I don't know, all I know they got some trash. So I told em put all they had out there and the man pick- when uh Operation Breakthrough I mean Durham Housin come through, they wanted to pick it up but they was goin to charge. I said don't touch it, the city is goin pick it up. So the city came picked it right on up and went on...and ain't said nothin. Well that's their job...do it every day.

So why—

They exempt they got me exempt, I don't have to put my stuff on the curb. They come in my yard and get it with their truck and pick it up and put whatever out there.

...the man knows if Ann calls..._____ (?)

And they do they do I mean I'm serious about that, they do that. I don't worry em to death you know..every day..but it's people call me for help, I try to help em.

So you still stay active then...on the phone and...

Yeah, even though I even though I don't get paid for it, I still feel- my my thing is God give me a gift, I think I told you this, to reach out and touch. And if I'm reachin out and touchin, I'm happy. If somebody calls me and say uh I understand you'll help me with my rent, I light up like a light, be somebody cut a bulb on. And then I'll go to callin different places to see if I can find the monies that that person need to pay their rent. Now my rent might not be paid...but that person need their rent paid, so I'm gonna pay that get that person rent paid first. Then I'll sit back and say Lord, you promised to take care of me and I wait on the Lord and the Lord'll send something by..or somebody by.

Are the problems the same as they were 20 years ago or have they changed? I guess I'm trying to get a gauge on-- you're the best person I can imagine that could help bring some perspective to what's happened. What has happened over the last 20 years? Has anything happened? Has anything changed? Are you still fighting the same battles now?

We're fighting the same battles because goin back to Durham Committee on the Affairs of Black People, when we organized that group..back there 30 years ago..low income people were all blacks, could go in there, set down and talk, say whatever you had to say. Before we organized it you could not do that. There're these rich people that was runnin it and you could barely get there. So we opened the do' that low income people and all black folks could go in there and set down and talk. Now they goin right back around to you can't get they don't want you to talk when you go there, you better not put your hand up and vote for nothin if you haven't attended the meetin. See if I went I haven't been to a meetin and I go down there and I want to vote on what they talkin about now, I can't do it. And see that's that's wrong, we said that meetin is for everybody..every black person, that's the way it's set up, is a member whether you just got there today or you been there 20 years.

So as a community are we slipping or...

We've done already slipped, we've forgotten, we've forgotten.

And the only way to keep that memory alive is actually through people like you talking and...

People talkin and workin together and pullin together..um..both black and white talking together, blacks talking to blacks to make them see that they need to talk to blacks and not hate blacks, and white need to talk to white to show them that they're not we need to get into the schools where the children-- I was really struck, that's how I got sick I think, I went out to Durham Academy, I got there at 8 o'clock in the mornin. They start me to talking, I didn't stop talkin till 4:30 in the evening, take one stop. And all of my energy inside I had talked it out, but they had questions, they were hungry, they wanted to know.

What did they ask?

Well, you know about how I got started, different questions you know about you know how is it over here on this side, because they don't know nothin about bein poor bein on this side scrappin for what you got to get. All they know the plate is on the silver spoon is in their mouth over here, and and I had em to come to my house after that. I got sick, when I got feeling better I say you get a group and y'all come to my house and we'll do some mo' talkin, and they came to my house...brought food and we set there and we talked some mo'. And I said you know they said they were willin, they're ready. I said well have your parents

These are students?

These are students, these are _____ 11th and 12th grade students. They were ready to come out and I told em to get out and get with the school and people's gettin ready to vote, get up with the people that they know and help them go out do' to do' and grab up people for the voting, and I think this is how a lot of those people won cause the children were minglin, the high school children were minglin. I went over to the Catholic church and I talked to those people at the Catholic church cause they have people that's runnin, and to get behind em and get out there with em. You know you just can't say I'm runnin on the board nobody know about you got to get somebody know that somebody know you fore they vote for you. And them children put them- cause that's how them people got got got on the board...them children was ready and grabbed hold and went to work. And I told em I said what we used to do what was done a long time ago was tell the city council that Durham would be hot, and and nine time out of ten Durham was hot..cause things would go to burnin. And they would burn anybody's house down you know whoever was burnin it down was- Durham was sho' enough hot. And soon after I left the campus, fires started burnin all back out cross over yonder they was fires. I said well I don't know who set them fires, I don't know nothin about it, I don't know if it was the children, _____ say(?). Then they found out today how those buildins and things

caught on fire, and I said I'm wonderin..did some of them children go out there and set it afire you know and get away with it. But that's the wrong way to do business, you don't do that now. What we did back then to get attention you don't have to do that now to get attention.

What do you mean back then when you'd-- what would you do to get attention?

Well we would fight and argue(?) and cuss and holler and go on and talk loud and pick-do a whole lot of picketing and up and down the road like that. We didn't do we we did that to get attention. But now I think we have have gotten out ourselves so that we can set down..and talk it out you know. I don't think we need to keep on talkin and talkin and talkin, I think we need to go in a meeting for a meaningful situation and then talk about it and get the points out and get up and go to work. I think you hafta at each meetin we ought to be ready to work on something. If it's fundraising, then we need to raise funds you know, somebody set somebody out to go to raisin the funds, do what you gotta do. And I think that's what we have to do.

So the mechanism has changed somewhat then, the way in which things get done has changed somewhat.

Yeah...right, because people have found their own way..and so they're usin what they have their power for themselves. If I know I can do somethin, I'm not gonna bother you, I'm just gonna go do it. *Right.* You might could help me, but I'm not gonna bother you, see?

What are the ways that you stay in touch with the community now, I know you're on the phone all the time, you said that. Do you go to church every...?

I go to church every Sunday that I'm able to get to church and not only do I mingle with my church members, you know I I call everybody. I got a book at the house and I just call people- people in somebody else's church is sick or something, I call them to see if they're all right if they're doin all right. People that I know about you know I just call em..generally to see you know how things are goin.

What are people talking about now? What are the people at your church-- what are the things that are concerning them?

They're not talkin nothin much about what is hap- they they see what's happenin, but when you go to church now people just talkin about the holy ghost you know bein saved and bein powerful the power of the Lord workin within them. This is what they're lookin for and I guess they feel like if the power of the Lord hits them hard enough, it will help them to get out there get the courage you know you got to have strength and faith to go out there to know that you can do and courage to go out there and do, a lot of people still don't have the courage they're afraid to talk for themselves _____they're afraid. And they probably figure if they'd cause if they started off at the church..and I figure they figured if you come to the church and and and talk you don't even talk about it now at

church, you just it happens sometimes we have a testimony service somebody might get up and tell about their problems..and then if somebody's there serious enough to catch it.. they will work with that person. But nine time out of ten some people go in there and testify tell what problem they havin, that just leave it in the meetin.

So nothing ever happens.

Nothin never happens.

So where else are people talking?

Well they may I don't I don't know see cause I'm not out there on the streets now like I used to be and and and I don't know, but I know usually a good place for people to talk is at the barbershop you know and at the beauty parlor, they still talk about things there. Anywhere you can congregate you know people'll talk.

That interests me a lot, that those are places where the community can get together and there's again a dialog going on.

Right, now you could be surprised at what they talk about in the barbershop and in the beauty parlor. And when they get through there they they you know they they got it out of their system and they go on right back home, but nothin happens _____.

You always look wonderful, do you go to the beauty parlor? Yeah. You do? I need to go now.

No, you look wonderful. Give me an idea about what a conversation might be like if you were going in and talking with these people.

Well, something might happen in the community where somebody's husband just got arrested, somebody that they thought that wouldn't or shouldn't be arrested, well then that conversation would go on and things would come up about that person that happened years and years, I remember way back there when, and they'd run on around and by the time they got through talkin about that they done included four or five..people into that same one situation, so that's the way it goes.

So it just branches out. Yeah.

...

I think it's important, if we were ever going to do anything with this piece, I think the thing that makes it worthwhile doing is that it somehow has a home in today.

You gotta remember that a lot of these people that where I was you know sub- was livin in substandard housing, and now their houses are m-- some of em...are meeting the code, and we still have substandard housin in Durham today and uh..and why I don't

know. And uh so you see people are still hung up about that, but the ones that's in the substandard housin it's like they was when they was in there before, they're afraid that they might get evicted if they say somethin about it. They don't know that they can get up and argue about it and get that house brought up to standard. And uh that's and I was you know lookin at that and lookin around at people you know..and then sometime people when they worked and put out like the Rogers – Rita Rogers she's dead now, but she had eight children, well she had seven children big enough to get out on the street, and when you'd go round and pick up somebody to picket, you got eight people, she would bring those children with her. Well I don't know if anybody's ever reached back to say thank you. So those people won't budge you know, I don't care what's happenin around they just don't budge, you know sometime people need to be told that I'm you know I thank you for what you did.

To encourage them to go on.

That's right, that's right.

Well, what I was saying is that I think what's important if we were going to make a piece of theater about this, which is what we're trying to do, I think it's somehow going to be important that we understand how it reflects what's happening now and how it reflects- I mean in other words can it be used as something which is going to do exactly what you're talking about. I know you know this, but the arts can be a very, very powerful medium. So is there a way that we can tell your story that makes people want to do something about it now, not so much appreciating- appreciating who you are and what you've done and what you've meant to this community, but maybe even more importantly

Show but I think it needs to show what was here and what is here and what need to go on you know..uh uh..how you miss people, things that were missed you know cause we didn't have-- like the mayor, we didn't have a mayor that would look at us...and when I say us I'm talkin about black folks...they wouldn't look at us. But now we do have a mayor, we have a black mayor and he must look at us. So then if he

(turned tape over)

he need to go around he been on on the campus of of Central. He spoke at my church...but then he needs to go a little fuhther because the day that he spoke nobody at my church had never heard of him..you know and and but he needs to hit the dirt, let people know about him.

...

Maybe thinking towards the next time we get together, I'm curious-- if you could sit right there and you could design a plan of action for the future, I'm curious-- think about for me what you think would be included, what would be the areas that would most need attention do you think in the community?

Well I know one right now...and that's the school. We need to find a way... uh..magnet school is not the answer, it is a it's a help...but it's not the answer. What magnet school has done was received everything that public school have dished out, ____ rejects... mainly(?) went to magnet school. So magnet school couldn't get any fuhther because it had rejects, and so they couldn't move no fuhther. And so the people the what the students that they got wasn't didn't do anything over there, you know they got over here and their minds were not set to do anything, but magnet school was set to catch the folks that was ready..and move em on, not the rejects. But they got to (excuse me) and and we need to find a way to make the system the the system recognize the what the school is all about. See when the government gives..the school the money to upgrade the school, it means the school, it means the whole the paint on the wall the paper that the kids write on the people in there the children themselves, we need to have people in these schools that know whether a kid needs to have one-on-one and not just let everything slip through the crack. I think we need to get sharp on that and school is really-- that's why parents are fussin now at _____ because some of the children are slippin through the crack. I have a grandson that has attention deficit disorder and he has high blood pressure and diabetes and he has obesity and all that other good stuff go along with it, and uh...he did somethin at school and they called me and was gettin ready to send him home. I said well the doctor sent you gave you a letter, the doctor told you what was wrong with him and what might happen. Have you had him tested? They never read the letter. So they never tested him. So they had to back up..from sendin him away from school and go right b- aaaall the way back around..you know to work with him. So I figured he would get into trouble later on because I made em mad, so I took him out and put him in another school, I put him over in Raleigh. So he's done- Raleigh is workin good with him over there, he's in the Boy's Club and he's goin to school over there. He's graduatin this year I hope he will graduate. He stopped studyin a little bit, but then I told him that uh...he got to he's got to for Grandma..he's got to graduate. And that would mean that I had four children that I got out of high school by myself, the other two one went to junior college and the other went all the way through got everything except a doctor degree and now is pastor been pastor in a church now seven years. She's in St. Louis, Missouri, and the way she got it she we didn't have the money..you know she she went in and applied for grants to get her there and you know and this is the way she did she went in there that way and they just accepted her.

That's great. All right, last question: What's your favorite hymn?

My favorite hymn is Amazing Grace I believe is my favorite hymn. I like a lot of songs- Love Lifted Me is another one of my favorite hymns. Love Lifted Me, I sang that mostly in my choir when I sang is that.

...

Y'all have got me wound up tight cause I ain't talked in so long you got me wound up and I don't want and I don't want to stop, I don't want to stop.... But I will have your paper ready I'll have it ready fer you when I come back. *Just have it in your head, you don't have to write it down.* I know it I know, I'm gonna have it in my head, I don't write

much no way. I can't read it off I can't read it I can't see that well to read it back to you.
I don't read well..like all words. So I'd ruther memorize em.

...