Interview with **Rev. Orloff Miller**
November 30, 1985
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Note: These transcripts contain material that did not appear in the final program. Only text appearing in ***bold italics*** was used in the final version of *Eyes on the Prize.*

00:00:02:00

[camera roll 374]

[sound roll 1331]

[slate]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: TAKE ONE.

[sync tone]

INTERVIEWER: —AND CERTAIN EVENTS THAT KIND OF HELP—AND YOU'RE, YOU'RE GOING INTO MISSISSIPPI TO OBSERVE THE COFO EFFORTS. I'D LIKE FOR YOU TO TALK TO ME ABOUT THAT AND TALK TO ME ABOUT HOW THEY'RE BEGINNING TO FORM AND A, A CARING AND A DESIRE TO BE A PART OF WHAT WAS GOING ON IN THE SOUTH AT THAT TIME. TELL ME A LITTLE BIT ABOUT YOU.

Miller: OK, we're rolling is that what you're saying?

INTERVIEWER: WE'RE ROLLING.

Miller: Well I guess my first involvement in the civil rights movement at all was the March on Washington for jobs and freedom which, if I recall rightly, was in '63, spring of '63. And that was a, a real change event for me. It was the first time I had ever been involved in a demonstration and I wasn't an activist, at least, not up to that time. But to be a part of that

group in such an important event kind of turned my head around. And from then on I began to pay attention to what was happening in the civil rights movement. That was such an occasion along the reflecting pool there with those thousands and thousands of people and Martin Luther King's marvelous address which I've kept a record of it here. I've a phonograph record that every now and then when somebody wants something for a civil rights memorial occasion I, I get out that record because it was such a momentous speech. And Joan Baez singing and so many other people singing. Every time I see Joan, see Joan Baez, I remind her of that and what an important occasion that was for so many of us.

00:01:47:00

INTERVIEWER: NOW, TELL ME THAT MARCH, THAT TIME. WHAT DID IT—WHAT DID YOU COME OUT—AWAY FROM THAT WITH? WHAT DID YOU, WHAT DID YOU LEAVE THAT MARCH WITH THAT BEGAN TO CHANGE YOUR LIFE?

Miller: Well, I guess I came away from that with a sense that maybe—

INTERVIEWER: SORRY. START AGAIN AND TELL ME WHAT "THAT" IS, OK?

Miller: OK. I guess I came away from that March on Washington with a, a sense of involvement myself that this was finally black and white together. That we were doing something that could effect change. That there was a way of, of turning things around. I mean, I grew up in a segregated society myself. I grew up in Ohio. I recall that in second grade I remember there was a black girl in the class never got acquainted with her. There were football players in my high school class who were Negro, as we said then, I never really knew them as people. It wasn't until a Methodist Youth Conference out in Iowa that I really got acquainted with a black person for the first time. And he and I became friends and, and I'm delighted to say that I know that he's a Methodist minister in Los Angeles right now. And Jim Lawson and I corresponded over the years and, at one point, in the civil rights struggle, why he phoned me, and it was just a delight to renew that tie. And I think, as a result of that March on Washington, I was be able [sic]—I was able to put those things together and the religion that I grew up with in a Methodist parsonage got into focus now in terms of what had been taught to me as a religious person. The idea that all men, all women were brothers and sisters.

00:03:38:00

INTERVIEWER: OK. THEN WHEN THE CALL CAME HOW—WHEN THE UNITARIAN CHURCH OFFICIALS CAME TO ASK YOU TO GO, WHY DID YOU FEEL COMPELLED TO, TO GO TO SELMA AT THAT TIME?

Miller: Well, when the telegram came from Martin Luther King, asking ministers of all faiths to come to Selma, I had just been back two months from a denominational team that had been sent to Mississippi and we had visited the COFO projects there, the Congress of Federated Organizations, and much to my delight and, as I had suspected was true, I found Unitarian Universalist students in—very much involved in that Mississippi Freedom effort

that was going on and had been going on for some months. And so—because I'd been involved in that denominational team, I was inoculated, if you might say, and ready for that telegram when it had arrived. I, of course, had heard King in Washington. I had followed his speeches the Birming [sic] House Jail. Letter from a Birming House—Birmingham Jail and so—in fact, I, I kept a copy of that telegram that, that he sent to our denominational headquarters and Homer Jack, who was in charge of our office of Social Responsibility, immediately contacted me and said, Orloff, will you contact some of the other men that you know who would be willing to go to Selma who have some sense of what this is all about. And I immediately got on the phone and I called ministers who were connected with our college programs all across the United States and Canada. And so, between us and, and others at denominational headquarters we, we felt compelled. We, we wanted very much to let as many people know as possible that this telegram had arrived. The night before I had been visiting with a couple of mixed race marriage. My wife and I had been their dinner guests and we had happened to watch the evening news and we saw the television account of the beatings at the bridge. We saw Sheriff Clark's posse ride among the demonstrators and beat on kids and, and their mothers and, and, and fathers. The gassing that had taken place at the bridge. So when I arrived the next morning at headquarters, I wasn't surprised to hear about the telegram, I was ready.

INTERVIEWER: SO, YOU ARRIVED IN SELMA. WHAT I'D LIKE TO GET FROM YOU IS GIVE ME A FEELING FOR WHAT YOU ENCOUNTERED WHEN YOU GOT THERE, ESPECIALLY, GIVE ME A SENSE OF HOW THE LOCAL PEOPLE ACCEPTED YOU AS AN OUTSIDE MINISTER COMING INTO THEIR TOWN—

00:06:28:00

[cut]

[wild audio]

INTERVIEWER: —SUPPOSEDLY TO CHANGE IT. AND TO HELP—

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: WE JUST RAN OUT.

INTERVIEWER: OK. THAT WAS A SHORT END ROLL.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: YEAH IT WAS A TWO, IT WAS TWO—

INTERVIEWER: KEEP YOUR—

00:06:35:00

[cut]

[slate]

[change to camera roll 375]

[sync tone]

INTERVIEWER: GIVE ME A SENSE OF WHAT YOU ENCOUNTERED ONCE YOU GOT THERE. TALKING ABOUT THE PEOPLE, THEIR ACCEPTANCE OF YOU, WHAT WAS GOING ON?

Miller: We were met at the airport in Montgomery by people from the Selma. They knew that there would be some response to that telegram that Martin Luther King had sent. And they sent cars. They sent trucks. I remember riding in a car to Selma, a truck in front of us, an open flatbed truck with a lot of ministers sitting on the flatbed going on to Selma. And it had a flat tire and we stopped and there was a lot of concern about being stopped on this road between Montgomery and Selma and whether we were in danger or not. And the reassuring words of the drivers who had come for us, but you could see that they were looking around anxiously at the same time. And we arrived in Selma safely, obviously. We got into what was eventually called the compound, the George Washington Carver Housing Project, which surrounds Brown Chapel, Brown's Chapel. And folks were just so warm in their greeting of us. They, they were pleased that we had come and, and, and grateful that we had heard this, this plea for, for us to be a part of, of their struggle. And I, I remember eating at Brown's Chapel. We thought well we, we should really have no business taking from, from what food they may have, but they insisted on it. They, they wanted us very much to, to be a part of their lives and it was wonderful to do that. There was a never ending supply of food coming into that chapel for people around the housing project there. Eventually I stayed in one of the homes there of Lonsy West and his family. And, oh, it was—we were made part of family. Part of the community.

00:08:43:00

INTERVIEWER: TELL ME, WITH THAT IN MIND, SPEAK TO ME ABOUT THE, THE ROLE—

Miller: Chipper.

INTERVIEWER: —OF THE WHITE CHURCH AT THAT TIME. IT'S, IT'S—IN THE SOUTH YOU HAD THESE VERY SEPARATE CHURCHES. YOU HAVE THE BLACK CHURCH, YOU HAVE THE WHITE CHURCH. TALK TO ME ABOUT THE CHURCH AND YOUR OWN FEELINGS ABOUT THAT, AT THAT TIME, AS TO WHAT WAS GOING ON IN THE CHURCHES AT THAT TIME, ESPECIALLY, IN THE SOUTH.

Miller: Well, the churches in the South were deeply divided over the civil rights issue. Even our own Unitarian Universalist Churches, I remember in our trip through Mississippi—

INTERVIEWER: CAN I ASK YOU TO START AGAIN. WE HAVE SOME LOUD NOISE AND I'M WORRIED I'M GONNA LOSE THAT.

Miller: OK. [pause] The churches were very deeply divided over the civil rights struggle, South and North, but especially in the South. And I remember when we went through Mississippi in January of '65 and visited a few of the little rural Universalist Churches they did not want us there. They were very unhappy about our presence. The Birmingham Unitarian Church which eventually had to host the whole Unitarian Universalist Association's Board of Trustees following James Reeb's death they were very divided about the Unitarian Universalist involvement in the Selma fracas. As far as other denominations were concerned, many of the churches were still very segregated, well, to this day there still exists what, then, was called, the African Methodist Episcopal Church, Brown's Chapel was a part of that denomination. It's now called I believe, the American Methodist Episcopal Church. But the call that went out from Dr. King went to clergy. It didn't go to the denominations as such and clergy, I think, felt freer to respond than lay people did. There were a lot of lay people who came to Selma, a lot of lay people, but they came from very divided congregations in many instances.

00:10:44:00

INTERVIEWER: HOW DID THIS—TALK TO ME ABOUT BEING A CLERGYMAN. TALK TO ME ABOUT YOUR PERCEIVED—

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: I THINK, I THINK THE CAT—WELL THE CAT'S OUT OF THE FRAME—

Miller: We're good—let's get rid of it.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: I THINK WE'RE—YEAH LET'S CUT FOR JUST A MOMENT.

[cut]

00:10:59:00

[sync tone]

INTERVIEWER: —THE CHURCH THAT YOU REPRESENT, I MEAN OR—

Miller: In that moment?

INTERVIEWER: YEAH, IN THAT MOMENT. WITH AN IDEA OF JUST CHURCH AND, AND, AND RELIGION IN, IN THE CONTEXT OF WHAT'S GOING ON IN THE SOUTH, AT THAT TIME, AND ITS ROLE, THE ROLE IT'S PLAYING.

Miller: One of the things I had to recognize was that Unitarian Universalism is an upper-class church, certainly was very much so at that time, very much removed from the black community—north or south. And so, what I was experiencing more was my boyhood religion of Methodism. I could relate through my boyhood experience more easily than I

could through Unitarian Universalism in terms of black religion as I experienced it in Selma. And I knew the black spirituals, the Negro spirituals because of that background. I didn't learn that through the Unitarian Universalist Association. And I was, in some ways, quite ashamed of the fact that Unitarian Universalism was not more involved, but Selma changed all that. Because before we were done with Selma and Selma was done with us, half of our entire denominational ministry was involved in Selma, present in Selma, actually got to Selma. And many, many of our lay people from all across the country were in Selma. After Jim was killed we had it—we established a Unitarian Universalist presence there and for the first few weeks we always had at least three people there, I guess representing Jim and Clark Olsen, and myself in some sense and then throughout the summer we always had a clergyman as, as the Unitarian Universalist presence there in Selma.

00:12:48:00

INTERVIEWER: OK, OK. MARCH 9TH, 1965. SOMETIMES REFERED TO AS TURNAROUND TUESDAY.

Miller: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: TALK TO ME ABOUT HOW YOU FELT WHEN THE LINE TURNED AROUND AND WENT BACK TO BROWN'S CHAPEL AND GIVE ME YOUR FEELINGS THAT DAY OF, ESPECIALLY, CONCERNING WHAT HAPPENED.

Miller: March 9th was a very frustrating time in Selma. First of all we waited and we waited at Brown's Chapel for the word to come that we could, we could finally march. We could go out the doors and we get on Sylvan Street and we could head to the bridge. And when the, the word finally came we were ready. We were eager and we marched. I had not seen downtown except very quickly through a car window as we came into town and so it was all very new to me. And I remember looking up at that bridge which just seemed huge. Now I'm sure living near the Golden Gate Bridge it would seem very tiny to me, but, at the time, it looked like a huge bridge. And it had this, this bend that goes up over the river and you couldn't see the other side over the bridge, but we marched up, wondering, what's on the other side? What are we going to confront? And as soon as we got to the top then we saw what we were going to confront. You could see the line of state troopers with their blue helmets lined up. And so we knew there was going to be a confrontation. What we didn't know was how far we could get. We remembered the television shots of the horses and the beatings and we didn't know whether the same sort of thing lay in wait for us or not. Within the front lines of the march, Senator Paul Douglas' wife was there and, of course, leaders of various religious groups with Martin Luther King at the head. And I had just gotten off the bridge, I was, I don't know, a third to a half way back in the march, perhaps, and the order came back in the lines, stop and kneel down on the highway. And apparently a prayer service was beginning. So we knelt and we prayed. And then we stood back up and ***all of a sudden I realized that the people in front were turning around and coming back. And I was aghast. What is going on? Are we not going to go through with this confrontation? What's happening?*** And it was very frustrating to simply be one of the troops, so to speak, and not know what was going on, but we were well disciplined to follow what was suggested by the

leadership and so we turned around too and marched back over that bridge with a terrible sinking feeling. I felt just awful. It, it wasn't what I had come for.

00:16:04:00

INTERVIEWER: WHAT DID YOU COME FOR?

Miller: I had come to take whatever was handed out in terms of Colonel Lingo's state troopers or Sheriff James Clark's posse. I had come to, to lay myself on the line just as much as people in Selma had done just forty-eight hours before on the Sunday the 7th. And so it was a part of me that felt, what have I come for? And so again, that frustration and I, I wanted to be a part of things. I, I wanted to, to know that I was there for something. That my presence meant something. And here I was in a turn-around march? No.

INTERVIEWER: THAT NIGHT—HOW WE DOING FOOTAGE WISE?

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: YOU GOT ABOUT TWENTY-FIVE FEET LEFT.

INTERVIEWER: LET'S CHANGE.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: YEAH.

INTERVIEWER: STAY HERE.

[cut]

00:17:01:00

[slate]

[change to camera roll 376]

INTERVIEWER: OK SO YOU'RE, YOU'RE TALKING—

[sync tone]

INTERVIEWER: —AND YOU GO, YOU GO TO WALK—WALKER'S CAFÉ WITH JIM REEB AND CLARK OLSEN. TALK TO ME ABOUT—HELP ME TO UN—TO KNOW JIM REEB. AT THE SAME TIME, HELP ME TO UNDERSTAND WHAT YOU WERE ALL EXPERIENCING OUT THERE THE DAY ON THAT BRIDGE HIGHWAY.

Miller: Well, when we got back to Brown's Chapel after the turn-around march, ***we waited to hear Dr. King's explanation of why this had been,*** and he did attempt to explain that, though, ***we never fully understood*** what had gone on in the negotiations behind the scene, which became quite evident later. ***But we did understand his saying, as many of you as can, could you stay a few more days. Could you remain? Well, most of us had come without***

even a toothbrush because we thought it was a one day event, but nevertheless, a number of us decided to stay, I among them. And those of us from the Unitarian Universalists had gathered outside of Brown's Chapel, as a group, to kind of compare notes, decide who's going to stay, who can, who can't and, I remember, that Jim Reeb was a part of the group. In fact, I had a little Minox camera with me and I took a picture of the group and it turned out it was the last picture ever taken of Jim. But as we talked together, Jim changed his mind a couple of times as to whether or not to stay and finally had to get his things out of a car that he'd, he'd put his belongings to go back to the airport, but he decided to stay. And a mutual friend of ours, Clark Olsen, had just arrived. He had not been part of the day's turn-around march, but he had arrived late from California, took longer to get there. And the three of us decided to have dinner together. We'd been told that we should not try to eat in the white community downtown, but some of the black restaurants and we were given instructions where we might find those. So the three of us decided to do that together because we had some things in common. We were all—had all worked with college students. Jim was the Associate Minister at All Souls Unitarian Church in Washington D.C. before he came to Boston six months ago, before the march. And while he was there in Washington D.C., he had been our minister liaison with student groups at American University and George Washington University and, and the other schools around Washington, D.C. And so, that's how I had first known Jim, as a matter of fact. I had met him in my capacity as the Director of the Office of College Centers for the UUA and Jim was one of the ministers I had contact with in reference to campuses in a particular geographic area. And Clark Olsen was, in a sense Campus Minister here in Berkeley. For, he was the Minister of the Unitarian Fellowship in Berkeley at that time. And Clark and—

00:19:57:00

INTERVIEWER: ONE SECOND, I'M SORRY. WE'RE GONNA LET THIS CLEAR. OK.

Miller: Clark Olsen and I were both involved in working toward some International Study trips that summer for college students—Unitarian Universalists primarily, but others as well. And Clark was leading a trip to the Soviet Union and I and my wife were leading one to Europe and so it was natural that we would take this opportunity in Selma to compare notes as to how plans were coming for the summer. And Jim, because he knew about these trips and was interested about them, why—went along with us and that's how we happened to be together that evening. We went downtown by way of the SCLC, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference office, which was at Boynton's Insurance Company as I recall. Mrs. Boynton was a real civil rights activist in Selma and we, we double checked there about the directions to which restaurant to go to. Number of people had stopped there and they directed us to Walker's Cafe. And so we went around the block on the other side of where the Insurance office was and went to Walker's Cafe and found a lot of our colleagues there. There were a lot of Unitarian Ministers there that night, including Dr. Homer Jack, the Director of our office of Social Responsibility. And so, we, we found quite a convivial group and there were so many of us that the restaurant was hard pressed to find enough food. I remember I ordered steak and I got chicken. Turned out to be very good chicken as a matter of fact. After we had eaten there was a phone booth inside the restaurant and so I called my wife to let her know what had happened that day and that I was staying. This was news to

her, of course. But I let her know that we were safe and that things had gone well, but that King had asked us if we would stay. And then, Clark and, Jim both called their wives too from the same phone. And I went outside the restaurant while they were making their calls. I remember I bought a cigar. I still smoked in those days. And I stood outside the restaurant smoking my cigar as the streetlights were just about to coming—they were just beginning to come on. They were these sodium vapor lights and—or phosphorescent, and I thought to myself, what a peaceful scene this is. It was dusk and there was nobody on the streets and I thought this could be any Midwestern community like I grew up in, in Ohio. One could hardly believe what had happened on Sunday or even the events of that day, Tuesday. And then the others came and joined me outside the restaurant and we agreed that the shortest way back to Brown's Chapel was to turn right and, and we did and started walking down the street. ***And as we started walking from across the street there appeared four or five white men, and they yelled at us, hey, you niggers. And we did not look across at them, but we just sort of quickened our pace. We didn't run, but continued walking in the same direction, and they apparently came across the street from our left and behind us. And one of them was carrying a, a club, and Clark said he turned around and saw the club just as it was swung. And Jim Reeb, being closest to the curb, caught the full impact of that blow*** on the side of his head. He was struck down and I, I had immediately fallen to the ground in the crouch position that we'd been taught as non-violent resistors. And so I put my hands over my head and protected myself from the kicks and blows that that they swung at me and Clark lost his glasses in the milieu [sic], I mean they were knocked off him and broken, and he was beaten too. And I shouted and, I guess, shouted for help probably and they disappeared almost as quickly as they'd come. I don't think the attack lasted more than, maybe forty seconds—

[telephone rings]

Miller: —maybe a minute.

INTERVIEWER: OK, LET'S CUT.

[cut]

00:24:19:00

[sync tone]

INTERVIEWER: OK, SO WE WERE JUST TALKING ABOUT THE ATTACK AND THAT THE ATTACK LASTED ONLY FORTY SECONDS.

Miller: [pause] After they left, we got up from the sidewalk and Jim couldn't stand by himself. We, we lifted him up and he was incoherent, at first, and he was babbling and we couldn't understand what he was saying. Gradually he became more coherent and, and he complained of the pain and that's all he could talk about. Great pain. And so we guided him between us. He was able to stumble along and walk to some degree around the corner past what, I guess, was the Blue Moon Cafe and on around to the Boynton's Insurance Office

where we went to get help. And it was a good place to go because Diane Bevel was there and Diane called an ambulance immediately and we were taken to the Burwell Infirmary where Dr. Dinkins attempted to take an x-ray of Jim. Jim moved his head at that moment and the plate did not photograph well. So the x-ray didn't help, but Dr. Dinkins could ascertain even in that moment that there was more there than he could possibly handle that he needed a surgeon immediately. And so he put in a call to University Hospital in Birmingham which was sixty-five miles away, I guess, something like that. And Jim was pu—put back in the ambulance, by this time he was, he was unconscious and he had vomited a bit and we took him by ambulance down—we had to first stop at the Insurance Office. We had to have a deposit for University Hospital. They wouldn't accept us. They wouldn't accept Jim for care without some kind of a deposit and Diane Bevel made out a check for an hundred and fifty dollars. And I remember I took the check and put it in my pocket and we got back in the ambulance, by that time, a few of our Unitarian colleagues had heard of what had happened, had come from Brown Chapel, offered whatever assistance they could, there was nothing they could do. But Clark and I and Dr. Dinkins went with the ambulance and the ambulance driver and we got a few miles out of town and the ambulance had a flat tire. And they drove the ambulance further on until they found a place they could pull off and it was abreast of a little radio station. And Dr. Dinkins went into the radio station and called for another ambulance. Took awhile for the other ambulance to get there. Meanwhile Sheriff's car came along and they flashed their flashlights inside the ambulance and they asked us all kinds of questions. Whose—who is that there? What's happened? And we explained as best we could. Asked for an escort. They refused, you won't need an escort. You don't need anybody to help. So, we started out again in the second ambulance and the, the carrier that Jim was lying on didn't fit the second ambulance and I remember having to hold it as we went around the curbs at high speed. Dr. Dinkins, incidentally, had sent back for his own car to—he became the escort. He drove his car ahead of the ambulance. And we careened around those curbs at sixty and seventy miles an hour on the back roads until we got to a main highway. We did get a police escort for a few miles on the main highway from the state patrol. And we actually hit an hundred ten miles an hour at one point heading for Birmingham. When we arrived at the Birmingham Hospital, they were prepared for us. They immediately got Jim into the operating room and did what they could. [pause] Clark and I were—

00:27:59:00

[cut]

[wild audio]

Miller: —taken care of at the hospital too. And they took x-rays and made sure we were OK and bandaged us up and whatever we needed.

CAMERA CREW: WE'VE JUST RUN OUT.

Miller: OK. I don't know what you want at this point.

00:28:13:00

[cut]

[slate]

[change to camera roll 377]

[sync tone]

INTERVIEWER: THE FEELING THAT YOU HAD THAT—WHAT WAS, WHAT WAS GOING ON? WHAT I'D LIKE YOU TO DO FOR ME, NOW, IS BEGIN TO TELL ME WHAT YOU, YOU WERE FEELING THEN AND, AND CONSEQUENTLY, HOW IT MADE YOU BEGIN FEEL ABOUT THE, THE PEOPLE AND THE THINGS THAT YOU WERE ENCOUNTERING THERE. IF YOU COULD GET ME IN TOUCH WITH THAT.

Miller: One of the next things I remember at the hospital was the FBI. They wanted to interview us right away. And I didn't know what we were getting into. I knew that the FBI was not to be trusted. I didn't know whose side they were on. I still had my little Minox camera and the first thing I did was to whip out that camera and I took their picture. And they were really thunderstruck. You don't take FBI agents' pictures. I said, do you want the film? Well, I guess not. But they questioned us, course, as they needed to as to what had happened and, and they were fine. I think they were OK as it turned out. But, I wasn't about to trust them I must say. And the hospital staff, I didn't know what really to expect, but as it turned out the hospital staff was, like most people, very mixed in their reactions about these civil rights demonstrations. The person in charge, at that time, happened to be a Unitarian, a member of the congregation in Birmingham. He was not in sympathy with the demonstrations but he couldn't have done more to help us than he did, he was wonderful. And the hospital made available space for us. We were not patients Clark and I. Clark Olsen and myself. And we felt that while Jim's life was hanging in the balance the thing that we best could do was to get the word out as to what had happened and why we were there and to make Jim's life count for something if it was going to be lost. And we were pretty certain he was not gonna survive. So I remember endless interviews. Radio and television and photographers and newspaper people and we pretty well exhausted ourselves in that process, but I'm glad we did it. As I look back on it now, we got the word out. There were a lot of accounts, I found out later by the mail that I got, the phone calls, expressions of concern. It was a very frustrating time too because we didn't know what was happening with Jim. We were not part of the family and so while we were kept posted from time to time we weren't really at his bedside. But Marie finally arrived, Marie Reeb, Jim's wife. And once she was there and Duncan Howlett, the minister of All Souls Church in Washington, where he had most recently been associate minister, came also and that brought some change. And I'll never forget Marie's asking us to come and tell her about what had happened. And so we sat down with Marie and with Duncan Howlett and step by step tried to explain what had happened: the restaurant and the attack and, and the march. And I remember saying to Marie as we finished, Marie, thank you for sharing Jim with us. He was the right man at the right place at the right time. Marie wasn't ready for that. It was a harsh thing to say to her and I

regretted it later, but now I know that I did say the right thing. Cause he was the right man at the right place at the right time.

00:32:15:00

INTERVIEWER: WHAT DID HIS—WHAT EFFECT DID HIS DEATH HAVE ON THE PROGRESS OF THE MOVEMENT AT THAT TIME?

Miller: I don't hear you.

INTERVIEWER: WHAT, WHAT EFFECT DID HIS DEATH HAVE ON THE PROGRESS OF THE MOVEMENT AT THAT TIME? TALK ABOUT THAT.

Miller: It's a terrible thing to have to say, but some, for some reason it took the death of a white clergyman to turn things around. You talked about Tuesday as being the Turn-around Day, and it was. It wasn't just the turn-around of the march at the bridge though, it was the turn-around of how America saw the civil rights struggle. Because when Jim Reeb was killed in Selma, Alabama, a white clergyman from the North, people suddenly sat up and took notice and from then on things changed in the movement. People came from all over the country to Selma. Selma became a flood of demonstrators. And people went to Washington and they waited upon President Johnson. Ministers came to the White House and Johnson, rightly, said, where have you been all these years? And where had we been? Well, we finally woke up and it was Jim's death that woke us up. Well, as a result of all that, eventually even the Courts came around and the march was permitted to happen from Selma to Montgomery. And within a week it culminated in Montgomery.

[telephone rings]

INTERVIEWER: LET'S CUT.

Miller: I'd better answer it.

[cut]

00:33:50:00

[sync tone]

INTERVIEWER: TELL ME WHY YOU WANTED TO GO BACK FOR THE MEMORIAL SERVICE. WHY YOU THOUGHT IT WAS IMPORTANT TO BE THERE. WHY YOU, WHY YOU—YOU WERE NOT THERE. YOU, YOU HAD TO INSIST TO GO BACK TO—

Miller: Monday the 15th of March, there was a memorial service for Jim at Brown's Chapel in Selma. And I very much wanted to be there. The Board of our Unitarian Universalist Association had adjourned its session in Boston. It was in meetings at the time of Jim's death

and they reconvened in Selma on Sunday night before the memorial service. A Catholic, not a church not exactly a monastery, but a Catholic group there gave them a meeting place in Selma and I was part of the denominational staff. I thought it was my place to be there and further more I wanted to go back to Selma. I thought it was important to be there to let people in Selma know that just because we had been attacked we weren't gonna run away. The job wasn't finished. There was more to be done. The march had to go on. And I wanted to be there. And while there was apparently some concern for my safety, there'd been threats and course, obviously I was a witness to the attack and what turned out to be the murder of James Reeb. There was concern that I not be identified by people who had been part of the attack. So I was sort of sheltered, in a sense, but nevertheless, I went back. I was there for the memorial service. I sat in the balcony the whole time. It was a marvelous service. It lasted about three hours. There were representatives there from many, many denominations. There was a rabbi, I recall. There was a Catholic priest. There was a Russian orthodox prelate, primate. There, there was Walter Reuther from the United Auto Workers was there. A number of union representatives and, of course, our own representatives. Dana Greeley, the president of our Association was there as our, our main spokesperson. And there were many, many speeches, but of course, Dr. King's was the highlight. And one of the things he did, that I will never forget and always have been very happy that he did, it wasn't a memorial service just for James Reeb, it was also a memorial service for another Jimmy. Jimmie Lee Jackson, a black man who had been killed just two weeks before involved in some of the same demonstrations there in Dallas County. And so he linked the two together: black and white together. The two Jims and that was appropriate. And then we, after the memorial service was over, wonderful news, the Court had granted us permission to march down to the Courthouse. Up to that time we'd been forbidden. Nobody had gotten out of the compound since Tuesday as far as marches and demonstrations were concerned. But we got permission to march down to the Courthouse and lay a wreath in Jim's honor and to have a prayer. And that's when people really said, Orloff, you can't do that, you mustn't go, you must stay here at the chapel. I said, nothing doin', I'm going. And we marched five abreast and they made sure I was in the middle and well-protected. And so I marched down to the Courthouse too. And then we came back to Brown's Chapel. Then I was back down in, in Alabama—

00:37:53:00

INTERVIEWER: LET ME ASK YOU ABOUT THE—HUTS—[sic] HOW MUCH DO YOU HAVE OUT THERE?

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: FIFTY, FIFTY FEET. SIXTY FEET.

INTERVIEWER: OK TELL ME ABOUT GOING BACK DOWN FOR THE FINAL MARCH AND WHY YOU THOUGHT YOU NEEDED TO BE HERE FOR THAT.

Miller: Yeah. [pause] It was about a week later that the culmination of the march took place. And there was one Unitarian that represented our denomination throughout the entire march, Dick Leonard, the minister from New York City, a minister from New York City. And many of us, though, were determined to be in that last day of the march as we gathered there in Montgomery. And so I went back down and—while I was in Boston, in that intervening

week, we managed to get a lot of blankets together and sent them down by plane to the marchers. Operation Blanket Lift we called it. And I came back down then to Montgomery. I'd had a chance, by that time, to meet with Dr. Martin Luther King in, in his hotel room at the Ben Moore Hotel, I believe it was, and what a gathering that was. At, I think it was St. Jude's or some such name the, the group, gathering place it was a, a Catholic center and there were—

00:39:06:00

[cut]

[wild audio]

Miller: —so many of us and it had been raining so much the place became just a, sea of mud, red mud. And the marchers who had come—

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: THAT'S OUT.

Miller: OK.

00:39:17:00

[cut]

[slate]

[change to camera roll 378]

[sync tone]

INTERVIEWER: —AND WE WERE JUST TALKING ABOUT HOW IT HAD GOTTEN ALL MUDDY AND, AND I'M REALLY—WHAT I'M INTERESTED REALLY IN, RIGHT NOW, IS NOT SO MUCH THE SPECIFICS OF THE MARCH, BUT WHY YOU FELT YOU NEEDED TO BE THERE. AND I'LL TELL YOU WHEN YOU CAN GO. OK. YOU READY?

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: YEAH. WE'RE SET.

INTERVIEWER: OK.

Miller: Why did I feel I needed to be there? Well, I had started out on that march—

INTERVIEWER: EXCUSE ME. TELL ME WHERE "THERE" IS, OK? WHERE, WHERE, WHERE ARE YOU NOW?

Miller: Why did I need to be there for that final day of that march from Selma to

Montgomery? Well, Jim couldn't be there so I had to be there. And I had started on that march, I had started across that bridge that first day back on Tuesday, first day for me. And we'd had a Unitarian representative on the whole march and I wanted to be there for that, that finale. I wanted to be in Montgomery and I wanted to go to the state capitol. I wanted to confront George Wallace. So I was there with lots of other Unitarian Universalists and people of many denominations. I had people come up to me there at the rallying place for the march whom I hadn't seen in years from my Methodist background. And they brought me greetings from various people and one of the Unitarian ministers brought me greetings and sympathy from President Johnson. He had been one of the ministers who had sat in with President Johnson during the week in Washington D.C. and various reporters of course. But anyhow—but the people who had been on the whole march, they were the wonderful people. Those black kids and the, the demonstrators from families in Selma that had put their whole lives on the line to be a part of that march. They were the ones that I gravitated toward. And then to be a part of the group going into the city and as people stood on their doorsteps, their front porches as we went through the black ghetto and they cheered us on and waved flags for us and some of them even decided we got to be a part of this too and they joined the march. That was very heartwarming. It made it all worth it, you know. Because we made it possible for them to feel that they could do it too. That they could stand up for their own rights and they did and many of them—I have no idea what kind of repercussions they may have gotten from their neighbors or their bosses who might have seen 'em on television later. But they marched too. We got down to the state house and, of course, there were all kinds of speeches and singing and Peter, Paul and Mary and—we're told that George Wallace saw us that he hid behind the curtains in the state house and watched us. And that awful Confederate flag flying over the capitol, the American flag wasn't flown. The Confederate flag was there—Confederate flag and the flag of Alabama. But I was glad I had come and one of the poignant sights for me was seeing Martin Luther King's little old Baptist church where he had begun his ministry there in Montgomery. And where the Montgomery Improvement Association had staged their bus boycott and where Rosa Parks had started the whole thing off.

00:43:00:00

INTERVIEWER: TALK TO ME ABOUT THE, [coughs] THE GAIN. WHAT WAS IT ALL FOR? WHAT WAS, WAS—WHAT WAS ALL OF, ALL OF THAT SUFFERING ALL OF THE DEATHS, EVERYTHING, WHAT WAS IT FOR? WHAT, WHAT WAS WON?

Miller: [pause] Ostensibly it was for voting rights.

INTERVIEWER: START AGAIN FROM "IT."

Miller: What was it all for? Why did we go to Selma? Why was there a march to Montgomery? Ostensibly for voting rights. We'd had students and others in the South for more than a year trying to help people register to vote and they weren't being allowed to register in Selma and that's why the march from Selma to Montgomery. So that people could go to the Courthouse and register to vote and be recognized and not have to take some crazy

literacy test. And Selma, the march to—from Selma to Montgomery made possible that change. From that time on, from that fall on, people began to register in great numbers and eventually they did vote and I am glad to know now that there are some blacks on the City Council in Selma, Alabama. That things have changed. Sheriff Clark is no more. I understand he died an alcoholic, I'm sorry about that. I hoped one day to actually meet the man. I've always wanted to go back to Walker's Cafe and take my children back there. Have a chance to see Selma as it is today. How much more nearly integrated community. Oh, there's still problems in Selma, lots of problems. And there are problems in the North too, but America was never the same after that march from Selma to Montgomery. We recognized we had a responsibility for one another thereafter and it wasn't them and us, it was all of us together. Black and white together. And I'm glad I was a part of that struggle.

00:45:09:00

INTERVIEWER: OK. YOU PERSONALLY—TELL ME WHAT—HOW ORLOFF MILLER HAD BEEN CHANGED BY THIS TIME IN HIS LIFE.

Miller: [pause] Every now and then I know that my own personal life has been affected by the Selma encounter and largely because of Jim. Jim and I were professional acquaintances. We weren't close friends. Before I went to Selma in December we had chanced to meet in the lobby of a theater in Boston; he was taking his children and I was taking my children to a holiday movie, "The Sound of Music." And so I guess I identified very much with Jim and his family I visited them in Casper, Wyoming several times after Jim's death. I talked to Marie on the tenth anniversary of Selma, Jim's wife. And I know that I'm never involved in a social concern, but what Jim's also involved in a way, because I'm there in some sense because I know Jim would want to be there. And I don't have to ask myself twice whether I should be involved. Because I know Jim would want to be involved and so I've kept on in various social concerns ever since. Yes, my life was changed.

INTERVIEWER: OK, LET'S CUT.

00:46:50:00

[cut]

[wild audio]

Miller: Wow.

00:46:53:00

[cut]

[sync tone]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: THIS IS EIGHT.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 2: YEAH, YEAH, YEAH.

Miller: You're rolling?

INTERVIEWER: YES.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 2: YEAH. WE'RE SET.

Miller: I've been asked many times what business white clergy had in Selma, Alabama. What right did we have telling folks how they should run their lives? We not only had a right, we had a responsibility to be there because some of our family, our black brothers and sisters, were not being treated fairly. And wherever people are not being given their fair shot at having a full and meaningful life we have a responsibility to do what we can to help change that. And if it means we have to argue with other brothers and sisters about that then we better get in there and argue about it. And help them to see that there is another way of living as one human family. Yes, I think white people had a responsibility and white ministers, especially, had a responsibility to be in Selma, Alabama.

INTERVIEWER: OK. GOOD.

[cut]

[end of interview]

00:48:11:00