

Interview with **Rev. Ralph Abernathy**

November 6, 1985

Atlanta, Georgia

Interviewer: Callie Crossely

Production Team: C

Camera Rolls: 530-538

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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 530]

[sound roll 1514]

[slate]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: AND—

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 2: AND MARK.

[sync tone]

Abernathy: Where did I, do I look?

INTERVIEWER: YOU LOOK AT ME,

Abernathy: Oh, good.

INTERVIEWER: CAUSE I'M THE PRETTIEST ONE IN THE ROOM.

Abernathy: Oh, I [laughter] I agree with that. And your name again is-

INTERVIEWER: IS CALLIE, BUT YOU DON'T, THEY WON'T HEAR MY QUESTIONS

SO YOU DON'T HAVE TO REMEMBER THAT.

Abernathy: Callie. And will we have a cut-away afterwards?

INTERVIEWER: NO, NO. IT WOULD BE JUST AS THOUGH YOU WERE THE ONLY PERSON IN THE ROOM, SO YOU SHOULD REMEMBER THAT.

Abernathy: Oh, I see.

INTERVIEWER: AND TRY TO DO IT IN WHOLE SENTENCES AS I SAID.

Abernathy: And how, and—

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: DO YOU WANT TO TRY MAYBE—

INTERVIEWER: YEAH.

[wild audio]

Abernathy: —I will be just talking—

00:00:47:00

Abernathy: —never ready to be recorded?

[cut]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: SPEED AND MARK.

[sync tone]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: IT'S ALL YOURS, CALLIE.

00:00:56:00

INTERVIEWER: OK. I WANT YOU TO GIVE ME A BRIEF WORD-PICTURE OF WHAT LIFE WAS LIKE IN THE SOUTH IN THE MID-FIFTIES, ESPECIALLY IN TERMS OF RACE RELATIONS. AND I WONDER IF YOU MIGHT REMEMBER SOME ANECDOTE OR INCIDENT THAT OCCURRED TO YOU WHICH MIGHT ILLUSTRATE WHAT LIFE WAS REALLY LIKE THEN?

Abernathy: In the mid-fifties, life was most difficult for black people and all poor people. It was much better for poor white people than for black people in the South during the fifties, the mid-fifties. There was segregation; all of the restaurants were segregated, the hotels and motels were segregated. Meaning the fact that black people were not permitted to live in these hotels. And even in the public courthouse blacks could not drink water except from the

fountain labeled “Colored.” You could not use the filling stations that was not designated with a restroom for colored. You had a restroom for white males and a restroom for white women, and you had a restroom for colored. Meaning that colored people had to use the same restroom, male and female. But the woman's restrooms were for white women even though there was no sign saying “Except Women and Men.” And the janitor never, would visit, a pay cleanup, the restroom for the colored people. And this was an undisturbed fact. It was segregation on the jobs, we could not hold certain jobs. We were the last to be hired and the first to be fired. And I guess the only professional jobs– [sirens in background]

00:04:02:00

INTERVIEWER: WE HAVE TO STOP.

[cut]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: I HAVE SPEED AND–

[sync tone]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: OK, CALLIE, IT'S ALL YOURS.

INTERVIEWER: I'M GOING TO GET YOU TO PICK UP, YOU WERE TALKING ABOUT SEGREGATION ON THE JOB.

Abernathy: In the field of employment, blacks were not permitted to hold certain jobs in the South. Only the menial jobs, domestic workers, and common and ordinary laborers. The only professional jobs that were open to blacks were the ministry, like I am in, the field of pastoring a black church, and the, the school teaching profession was open because of segregated schools. White teachers didn't normally teach black students. They would teach black students in private situations, private institutions and so you would have principals of schools. We had a few doctors, probably in the whole state of Alabama where I grew up we had, less than five black doctors. And, we, we didn't do anything but dig ditches and work with some white supervisor that told us everything to do. Life was miserable, life was most difficult for black people during those days. We could not vote, we could not sit on the grand juries, we could not sit on, on the jury, period. There were no black judges, we, we had taxation without representation. To put it in another way I would say the people who live in South Africa today, we at that particular time in the mid-fifties were where they are at this particular hour in South Africa.

00:07:08:00

INTERVIEWER: LET ME ASK YOU ABOUT THE EMMETT TILL MURDER. THAT HAPPENED IN THE MID-FIFTIES AS WELL WHICH MAY ILLUSTRATE SOME OF THE OPPRESSION THAT WAS GOING ON ACROSS THE SOUTH. DO YOU REMEMBER THE IMPACT THAT THAT CASE HAD ON YOU PERSONALLY, AND CAN YOU DESCRIBE THAT FOR ME?

Abernathy: Well, the Emmett Till situation was, a horrible, incident that took place, but it was commonplace in the state of Mississippi. And so, every time, the officials would drag the Pearl River they would come up with bodies of black men and black women who had been drowned or dumped and who had disappeared, and families often were, were afraid to discuss their absence, and they didn't know what had happened to these people. And nothing was done about this situation. Emmett Till I remember very, very clearly and very, very vividly. As a young man, I wanted to do something about it, because this young man who had come from Chicago, I believe, and why he was not at all trying to be smart, quote-unquote smart. But he merely visited a grocery store to pick up some, [phone rings], items

INTERVIEWER: SHOOT.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: LET'S CUT FOR A MOMENT.

00:09:08:00

[cut]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: MARK.

[sync tone]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 2: COULD YOU CLOSE THOSE, THAT VENETIAN BLINDS? THANK YOU. OK CALLIE.

INTERVIEWER: OK, SO AGAIN, THE IMPACT IT HAD ON YOU AS A YOUNG MAN WHEN YOU HEARD ABOUT THAT.

Abernathy: Yes, it had great impact on me because I was greatly disturbed that another black man had been mistreated and murdered and killed, and we were helpless and we could not do anything about it. At that particular time we just had to live in fear and with fear because the state of Mississippi would not do anything about it, the Federal government would not do anything about it, and we were just, hopeless, that was a hopeless case. And a helpless case. We lived with the idea that I am glad that it did not happen to me. And it is unfortunate, but we looked forward to the day that it would happen to me. I looked forward to the day that it would happen to me. And so, consequently—

[wild audio]

Abernathy: —it was a horrible, horrible experience.

INTERVIEWER: WE GOTTA CHANGE—

[cut]

[slate]

[change to camera roll 531]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: I'M ROLLING. SPEED, SPEED AND MARK.

[sync tone]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: ALL RIGHT, CALLIE, IT'S ALL YOURS.

00:11:14:00

INTERVIEWER: I WANT YOU TO TELL US ABOUT THE FIRST MEETING AT THE HOLT STREET BAPTIST CHURCH, ABOUT E.D. NIXON'S ROLE SETTING IT UP, WHO CAME, AND THE FEELINGS AT THAT MEETING.

Abernathy: Well, I would like to make it crystal clear at the Holt Street Baptist Church on December 5, 1955, E.D. Nixon did not set up that meeting. Yours truly, Ralph David Abernathy, set up that meeting. That meeting was filled with, thousands of people, and on the outside of the church there was approximately five thousand people. And I decided that I would go and ride with Martin Luther King, Jr., who had been elected as our leader, president of the Montgomery Improvement Association. And I had named the organization that afternoon in a previous meeting. And, and we were the leaders of the movement, and as we drew near the Holt Street Baptist Church Holt Street will seat less than a thousand persons, and, but they were standing in the aisles and everything. And when we made our way through the crowd by telling them who we were, and people moved back and let us go through. And we walked into the church, and they stood and clapped, and yelled and applauded for fifteen minutes. I don't know how the word had reached the church, but they knew that we were their leaders, they knew that Ralph David Abernathy and Martin Luther King were the leaders of the Movement. And I had the role of choosing the participants for the program because I was elected the, the program director in the prior three o'clock meeting, where Dr. King had been elected as the president of our newly formed Montgomery Improvement Association. And everybody had a cold, and everybody had difficulties reading the Bible, and everybody had other responsibilities, but when we got there and we were all together in that church with five thousand people standing on the outside, the men and women came to me and started to say, I will be glad to read the Scriptures, I will be glad to pray the prayer, do you still need me and want me? I will be glad to do anything. *The fear left, the fear that had shackled us across the years all left suddenly when we were in that church together.*

00:15:17:00

INTERVIEWER: WHO WAS E.D. NIXON?

Abernathy: E.D. Nixon, is a Pullman porter that lived in Montgomery, and he was the civil rights leader; and the head of the NAACP in Montgomery, Alabama. And he, he was living

there when I went there as a student, and when I pastored the First Baptist Church and he had been there a long, long, very long time, I guess he may have been born there, I don't know. But E.D. Nixon was a courageous person. And, but unfortunately when Rosa Parks was arrested on the, December the first, 1955, E.D. Nixon, bonded her out, got her out of jail, but he had to go away on Friday, December the second, and be away from the city three days, so he was away on Friday, Saturday, and Sunday. And he did not return until Monday. He was at Mrs. Parks', trial where she was found guilty and sentenced, and Attorney Fred D. Grey, who was the attorney for the Movement, appealed the case, and we had no idea of continuing our bus boycott [clears throat] beyond, Thursday or Friday, four or five days during that particular week. But Mr. Nixon was, instrumental in meeting with me and Reverend French, where we drew up the demands of the bus boycott. And, but the meeting was set in the basement of the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, Dr. Martin Luther King's, Jr.'s church on Friday evening, and we had decided to, to have this mass meeting in the heart of the black community. The people decided not to come to the First Baptist Church which was the largest, is the largest church in Montgomery. But they decided to against First Baptist, because First Baptist is, downtown, and so they wanted to be in the black community totally, and, we felt much more secure. ***We had never seen a crowd like that crowd before.*** I had never seen a crowd like that crowd before. I thought some prominent black person had died, and the people had gathered, or some prominent black person had been in an accident. I thought that tragedy had come to the community. Only a wave of freedom, a new birth of freedom had come to the community, and it took Dr. King and I, for fifteen minutes to make our way through the crowd, telling the people whom we were. And on the inside of the church I have already told you that ***it took fifteen minutes before the people would sit down and become quiet and let us begin the meeting. And I can tell you the name of the first song that we sang, and it was "What a Fellowship, What a Joy Divine, Leaning on the Everlasting Arms."***

00:20:17:00

INTERVIEWER: LET ME ASK YOU, WHAT DID MARTIN LUTHER KING LOOK LIKE?

Abernathy: Martin Luther King was a small man. He was short like me, about the same height, and he weighed something about a hundred and sixty-five or seventy pounds. He was not quite as stout as I am at this particular time, but he was as, we were about the same size during those days in the Movement, we were known as the civil rights twins, and we were buddies, the closest of associates, and he was just a lovely and wonderful person. He was short in physical stature but tall in terms of eloquence and spirituality and life in general.

INTERVIEWER: WHEN OVER THE COURSE OF THIS, OF THIS MONTGOMERY BUS BOYCOTT—OF COURSE IT WENT ON MUCH LONGER THAN ANY OF YOU EXPECTED—MARTIN LUTHER KING HAD AN OPPORTUNITY TO GROW AND DEVELOP IN THE ROLE OF LEADER. HOW DID YOU PERSONALLY SEE HIM EVOLVE DURING THAT LONG PERIOD OF TIME?

Abernathy: Well, it was three hundred and eighty-one days that the boycott lasted, and I saw,

him develop, and grow, and I saw him develop.

[wild audio]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: I'M SORRY, WE'RE JUST ABOUT TO ROLL OUT.

INTERVIEWER: OK, SKIP.

[cut]

[slate]

[change to camera roll 532]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: I HAVE SPEED. AND MARK.

[sync tone]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: I'LL ALSO REMIND YOU TO COME BACK TO HIM AT THE END.

INTERVIEWER: OK [laughter] I'LL REMEMBER THAT.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: OK, CALLIE IT'S ALL YOURS.

00:22:24:00

INTERVIEWER: OK, DR. ABERNATHY, DO YOU JUST WANT TO FINISH YOUR ANSWER ABOUT DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING'S LEADERSHIP EVOLVEMENT OVER THAT PERIOD.

Abernathy: He, Dr. King evolved during this period of the bus boycott that lasted for three hundred and eighty-one days, from a local pastor into an international spokesman for freedom, justice, and equality for all mankind, he even organized the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and became a national leader, but he didn't stop there. He even moved in the field of, international affairs, affairs of the state, and began to speak out against this godless and senseless war in Vietnam.

INTERVIEWER: NOW, MOVING INTO ALBANY [clears throat], WHEN HE GOT TO ALBANY [ringing], OH DEAR-[laughing]

00:23:37:00

[cut]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: I HAVE SPEED AND MARK.

[sync tone]

INTERVIEWER: MOVING INTO ALBANY, YOU KNOW, THE LEADERSHIP FOR BOTH YOU AND DR. KING IN MONTGOMERY WAS SORT OF THRUST UPON YOU, BUT IN ALBANY THERE MAY HAVE BEEN A DIFFERENT SITUATION. WAS HIS LEADERSHIP DIFFERENT IN THOSE TWO SITUATIONS, AS YOU CAN RECALL?

Abernathy: Yes, it, his leadership was different in Albany, Georgia from the leadership that he displayed in Montgomery, Alabama. They had their own local leaders in Albany. Dr. W.G. Anderson was there, and he was well qualified and well able to lead the Movement, but he wanted Dr. King and myself there as co-leaders of the Movement. And so consequently we had to strategize and work in such a way to keep the local leadership alive and let them announce many of the decisions.

00:25:04:00

INTERVIEWER: NOW, ANDY YOUNG TELLS AN INTERESTING STORY THAT WHEN DR. ANDERSON INVITED YOU ALL TO ALBANY, THAT ORIGINALLY DR. KING WAS ONLY TO MAKE A SPEECH AND JUST LEAVE, BUT DR. ANDERSON GOT SO EXCITED THAT NIGHT HE SAID, OK, TOMORROW HE WILL LEAD A MARCH WITH US, AND THEREBY THE TWO OF YOU WERE IN, INVOLVED IN LEADING THE ALBANY MOVEMENT. IS THAT TRUE? IS THAT HOW IT HAPPENED?

Abernathy: Yes, we had given a great thought to, going to Albany because of the problems that existed, that existed there. There was a movement taking place already in Albany, and so, consequently, we went into an already-organized situation. And Dr. Anderson after Dr. King made the speech, announced that, we would be staying over, and he, Dr. King would be leading the march the next day. And because they had already begun marching, they had marched probably a month or so, but they could not get much done or accomplished. But on that march the Monday following Dr. King's speech thousands of people marched and were jailed, and that can mark, that really marked the beginning of the Albany Movement.

00:26:53

INTERVIEWER: LAURIE PRITCHETT. WOULD YOU DESCRIBE HIM FOR ME, AND WHAT WAS HE LIKE?

Abernathy: Well, he was a very, very fine person in my estimation, and carried out his responsibilities as justly as he could. He was a tall, fat, jovial person that was as non-violent as possible, especially when the eyes of other people were looking at him. I understand that there was another side which I did not know about but I understand that he could become brutal and mean to the poor black people on, under situations that nobody was looking at him. But he was a very, very fine person. I liked Mr. Pritchett very, very much.

00:28:03:00

INTERVIEWER: WAS HE A SEGREGATIONIST?

Abernathy: He was a segregationist, a s-s-sophisticated segregationist. He was, by no standard was he an integrationist. But, but he believed in carrying out the orders of the community, and of the city government in Albany, but he was a human being, and at heart, he meant well, I think, even though he was not, wanting you to be totally free.

INTERVIEWER: THE MUSIC AND THE SPIRITUALITY OF THE ALBANY MOVEMENT, WE HEAR THAT THERE WAS, LIKE, NO OTHER PLACE, NO OTHER TIME DURING THE MOVEMENT. IS THAT TRUE, CAN YOU DESCRIBE A LITTLE BIT OF THAT FOR ME?

Abernathy: Well, I do not agree that the, Albany Movement, had the greatest movement, greatest music. I think that the Birmingham Movement had the greatest music of all. We did develop a great singing group, led on by one of the fine young women there, but, it was good, it was moving, and it was most inspiring, but, well it was good.

00:29:57:00

INTERVIEWER: WHAT ABOUT BERNICE REAGON, DO YOU REMEMBER HER?

Abernathy: Ber- I, I remember her so very, very well. She is, she has a tremendous voice and she would sing with the Harris girls. And, but she didn't have a great choir like in Birmingham.

INTERVIEWER: I WANT TO GO BACK TO LAURIE PRITCHETT FOR A HOT MINUTE. YOU, WHEN TALKING ABOUT THE RELATIONSHIP THAT YOU HAD WITH HIM, IT SEEMS TO HAVE BEEN A WARM ONE. WE HEAR AN INTERESTING STORY ABOUT HIS, THE NIGHT OF HIS ANNIVERSARY AND MARTIN LUTHER KING'S. STOP YOU'RE TELLING ME TO STOP.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 2: YEAH.

INTERVIEWER: OK.

[cut]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: I HAVE SPEED-

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 2: AND MARK.

[sync tone]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 2: THANK YOU. OK.

INTERVIEWER: THE LAST TIME YOU WERE ARRESTED IN ALBANY, IT WAS IN JULY, CAN YOU TELL ME WHAT DID YOU COME OUT SO SOON THAT TIME?

Abernathy: Well, I had no alternative, but to come out the last time I was arrested in Albany. Because some person unknown to me paid the fee, the fine and that messed up my plans and the plans of Dr. King we were always jailed together and so, consequently when Mr. Pritchett came down and unlocked the door, and he said, "You may go now" and Dr. King asked why, and he said, somebody has paid your fine and we do not know until this day who paid the fine. I do not know.

00:32:15:00

INTERVIEWER: ONE OF THE THINGS THAT IS SAID ABOUT THE ALBANY MOVEMENT WHEN PEOPLE DISCUSS WAS IT A FAILURE, WAS IT SUCCESS IS THAT LAURIE PRITCHETT MAY HAVE BEAT THE MOVEMENT THEN BECAUSE HE MET NON-VIOLENCE WITH NON-VIOLENCE. IS IT TRUE THAT NON-VIOLENCE DOESN'T WORK IF IT'S MET WITH NON-VIOLENCE?

Abernathy: Well, I can only say that it slows it down. If you have a goal and if you have the eyes on the prize you will not give up until the system is changes. Till the problem is solved in the community, until your goals are fully accomplished, and so

[wild audio]

Abernathy: consequently Mr. Pritchett—

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: WE JUST ROLLED OUT ON THE CAMERA.

[cut]

[slate]

[change camera roll to 533]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: SPEED AND MARK.

[sync tone]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: IT'S ALL YOURS.

INTERVIEWER: I'M GOING TO LET YOU FINISH. YOU WERE TALING ABOUT REACHING YOUR GOALS A LITTLE SLOWER.

Abernathy: Yes, I definitely believe Mr. Pritchett was able to slow down the movement in

Albany because of the attitudes. But it was in institutionalized system of racism and he was only one man. He didn't make all of the laws, he was merely the Chief of Police, and so consequently, he could not run the total system. He could not be the Mayor of the City, he could not be the Governor of the State, he could not be the President of the United States of America. So he may have been in charge of some things in the system, but the court system was unjust and he did not have any say so about that and people lived in the community and he didn't have anything to say about how one neighbor would treat another neighbor.

00:34:59:00

INTERVIEWER: WE'RE MOVING INTO BIRMINGHAM. ONE OF THE THINGS WE KEEP READING, AND KEEP HEARING THAT YOU FOLKS SAID ABOUT BIRMINGHAM WAS THE MOST SEGREGATED CITY IN THE SOUTH. AND WE HEAR THAT MISSISSIPPI WAS THE MOST VIOLENT, SO, LET ME ASK YOU, WHAT REALLY WAS THE WORST PLACE IN THE SOUTH?

Abernathy: I would say Mississippi was the worst place in the south. But Birmingham was an awful city. We called it "Bombingham." There had been so many bombings until we changed the name to "Bombingham." We often said Birmingham was the worst city this side of Johannesburg, South Africa. Even back then, during those days, but a whole state, the state of Alabama was not Birmingham. And so, consequently the whole state of Mississippi was bad. For instance in Mobile, Alabama, it was very, very liberal considered during those days, Huntsville, Alabama was very, very liberal, because these are cities that are made up out of cosmopolitan people. People who are constantly coming from the Northern areas of our country. The Eastern areas of the country. And so, as the state of Mississippi was the worst, and as a city, Birmingham as one of the worst cities in the state of Alabama.

00:37:08:00

INTERVIEWER: WYATT TEE WALKER SAID WHEN HE BIDDED HIS WIFE GOOD-BYE IN PREPARATION FOR GOING TO BIRMINGHAM, HE DIDN'T THINK HE'D SEE HER AGAIN, HE DIDN'T EXPECT TO COME OUT ALIVE, DID YOU HAVE THAT FEELING GOING INTO BIRMINGHAM?

Abernathy: Well, I was prepared on the day, on the day, on a daily basis, for the, whatever would come. I was prepared to accept it because I was totally committed to justice and equality and I knew what I had to do to change the system and I had made up in my mind that before I would be a slave I would be buried in my grave and go on home to my lord and be free. So, if death met me, I had paid my dues, I sought to treat my wife and children right. I believe that I am the best husband in the world, I believe that I am the finest daddy that ever walked the streets of America, or of the world. And so I lived like that each and every day.

00:38:32:00

INTERVIEWER: ON GOOD FRIDAY WHEN YOU AND DR. KING WERE ARRESTED, WHAT WAS DIFFERENT ABOUT THAT? WHEN YOU WENT TO JAIL IN

BIRMINGHAM?

Abernathy: Well, it was Good Friday, and we went thinking and feeling like Christ, I guess, felt on his Good Friday when he surrendered and when he was crucified, when he was killed and I was prepared to suffer with him and suffer with Martin Luther King, Jr. We had the backing of thousands of people all across America and thousands of people right there in Birmingham, Alabama, thousands of people there in the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church of Birmingham Alabama. And we were not alone, we were together, but Bull Connor, pulled that trick for the first time we, Martin Luther King and I, were segregated he put in solitary confinement on the sixth floor, and put me in solitary confinement on the fifth floor. And so consequently we could not talk to each other. And so, he wrote the letter for the Birmingham jail, if we had been together talking to each other, maybe we would not have that eloquent and profound letter from the Birmingham Jail. Bull Connor discovered that we drew strength from each other because I always carried in my inside coat pocket a Bible, a small Bible, and I always repeated my psalms, the twenty seventh number of the psalms, every time I was arrested Martin would say, Ralph read your psalms. The Lord is my light and my salvation, whom shall I fear, the Lord is the strength of my life, of whom shall I be afraid. When the wicked, even my enemies came up on me to eat up my flesh they stumbled and fell, and so forth, and so forth, and it closes with I would've fainted unless I believed to see the goodness of the Lord and the land of the living wait on the Lord, be of good courage and he shall strengthen thine heart. Wait I say, on the Lord. We had a good time. We had the assurance that we had the power, even though the policemen had the guns and the billy clubs.

00:42:17:00

INTERVIEWER: YOU HAD SOME OTHER ROUTINES THAT THE TWO OF YOU WOULD ENGAGE IN AS WELL IN JAIL. COULD YOU JUST BRIEFLY GIVE ME A FEW OF THOSE?

Abernathy: We would always fast during our stay in jail, and it became very, very difficult, particularly in Albany when the women would cook cakes and pies and fried chicken and bring it to us in large quantities. And we, it was very, very tempting, but we would always fast and we would always have devotionals services each morning. And we would fight and work to have exercise. We wanted to keep our bodies physically fit and even though we were often in solitary confinement and especially in Birmingham, but the lawyers finally won for us the right to be moved, twice per day. Once in the morning and once in the afternoon to an area and the large room, and, and they, the policeman in charge, would not let us talk to each other and we had to develop a sign language.

[wild audio]

Abernathy: They would, they didn't want us talking together.

[cut]

[slate]

[change camera roll to 534]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: FLAGS AND—

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 2: AND MARK IT.

[sync tone]

00:44:28:00

INTERVIEWER: I JUST WANTED YOU TO FINISH THAT SENTENCE ABOUT SIGNALLING EACH OTHER AND THEN WE'LL MOVE ON. WHENEVER YOU FEEL READY YOU CAN GO AHEAD.

Abernathy: Yes, when we were together, Martin Luther King and I in the recreational room, we had developed a sign language because the policeman were so mean and cruel until they would not permit us to greet each other even talk to each other.

INTERVIEWER: WHAT WAS YOUR KNOWLEDGE OF THE FBI ACTIVITIES IN BIRMINGHAM? AND IF YOU HAD ANY, IF THE LEADERS WERE AWARE OF THIS, HOW DID YOU RESPOND TO WHATEVER THEY WERE DOING?

Abernathy: Well, we, we were much aware of the FBI and we knew that they were taping our hotel rooms and bugging our houses, and automobiles and we were very much aware of the fact that they were monitoring our telephone calls, so we developed a code system, a code system for instance, if we were talking about our wives women, were always institutions, Martin would say, Ralph, that is a great institution. And we would develop a, a words that meant certain things and we were not doing anything wrong and we didn't have anything to hide. And so if they wanted to but our rooms, and I remember very, very clearly that the Willard Hotel, had Washington's cooperated with the FBI in Washington, DC. And so, we just decided that we were not going to try to hide or they could do whatever they wanted to do, but they would not be able to turn us around.

00:47:06:00

INTERVIEWER: FEDERAL INTERVENTION. THERE WAS NONE IN ALBANY, AND IT WAS LATE IN BIRMINGHAM. HOW DID YOU FEEL ABOUT THAT? IN BIRMINGHAM WHEN MARTIN LUTHER KING, [interruption]

Abernathy: Well, we felt very, very bad about it. Very, very bad about it. Because, we looked up, on, up on the Federal Government as being our friend. And when they did not respond, we were terribly upset. Later, in later years, we attacked the Federal government and that was not until after the death and assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr.

INTERVIEWER: IN BIRMINGHAM WHEN MARTIN LUTHER KING— [airplane in

background]

YEAH, I'M SORRY

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: THIS PLANE IS GONNA TAKE LONG.

INTERVIEWER: OK.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 2: CUT.

[cut]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: I HAVE FLAGS—

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 2: AND MARK.

[sync tone]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: OK CALLIE.

00:48:19:00

INTERVIEWER: OK. IN BIRMINGHAM, WHEN DR. KING GOT THERE TO PARTICPATE IN MEETING THAT MOVEMENT, IT WAS REALLY JUST AFTER THE BIRTH OF HIS DAUGHTER AND WE'RE STRUCK BY THE FACT THAT IT SEEMS HIS PERSONAL LIFE WAS, HE HAD TO BALANCE BOTH SIDES THE PERSONAL AND THE LIFE OF BEING THE LEADER OF THE MOVEMENT. HOW HARD WAS THAT FOR HIM? WHAT DID YOU OBSERVE AS HE TRIED TO BALANCE BOTH HALVES OF HIS LIFE?

Abernathy: He did it in marvelous and magnificent fashion. He was an excellent father, and an excellent husband, and he would take Coretta to Mrs. King, to the hospital, and Mrs. King is a very, very strong person and if she needed to go home without him she understood, she knew that what he engaged in. And he was, he was just very happy together and we had made up in our minds that we had a job to do.

00:49:40:00

INTERVIEWER: YOU WERE WITH HIM WHEN NOBODY ELSE WAS AND IT'S VERY CLEAR FROM EVERYTHING WE READ AND NOW SEEING YOU TALK ABOUT HIM THAT YOUR FRIENDSHIP WAS VERY IMPORTANT TO BOTH OF YOU. AND WE WONDER WHAT DID, WHAT DID YOU GIVE HIM THAT MADE YOUR FRIENDSHIP REALLY AN ANCHOR FOR HIM DURING THE MOVEMENT YEARS?

Abernathy: Well, I gave to him, I think, strength and courage and God blessed me to have

that strength and courage. He wanted me by his side at all times, and I was by his side even until the last. When the fire, when the bullet was fired in his body on the balcony of the Lorraine Motel I was there. I was the first person to get to him and I comforted him and cuddled him in my arms and said to him “Martin, don’t worry, it will be all right, it will be all right.” And his eyes were staring and turning in he could not utter a word, but he was upset, but finally he heard me. I’m convinced he heard me and he knew that it would be all right. It would be all right and he relaxed. I could tell you about time and time again when I had to comfort him and he turned to me and expected from me that comfort. And I tried to be that consoling force always with him and supporting the ministry and the work of Martin Luther King. He was my Paul, and I was his Timothy. And we worked hand in hand. And he often said to me, David, which is my real name, David, I could never have been to you what you have been to me. And I would say, Martin, and Michael which was his name, Michael, just to be second to you is enough for me. I know I do not want any glory but I would be terribly upset if anybody took my place in the life of Martin Luther King, Jr. We were together at all times. Even when we were not together in person, we were together in spirit. We thought alike.

00:53:17:00

INTERVIEWER: BACK TO THE SPECIFICS OF BIRMINGHAM, COULD YOU TELL ME ABOUT HOW YOU HEARD ABOUT THE SIXTEENTH STREET CHURCH BOMBING, AND YOUR REACTION TO IT?

Abernathy: Yes, I will tell you about it. I heard, I received a call early in the morning of the bombing of the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church that I was terribly upset. Because they told me that four little girls, while studying a Sunday School class had been killed. And this news came to me while I was in the pulpit. On the West 100th Street Baptist Church in Atlanta, Georgia. You know, Birmingham is on Central time and we are on Eastern Standard Time and we are one hour ahead of Birmingham. Birmingham has always been behind times and so consequently when it was Sunday School time in Birmingham, it was Worship time in Atlanta, so I was in the pulpit. I left the pulpit and received a call and discovered this awful tragedy. And I returned to the congregation and called for prayer, prayer for the families of these beautiful young girls who had been slain, prayer for their slayers–

[wild audio]

Abernathy: –in the spirit of love and the spirit of nonviolence.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: WE JUST ROLLED OUT.

[cut]

[slate]

[change camera roll to 535]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: OK AND MARK.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 2: I HAVE FLAGS AND-

[sync tone]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: OK CALLIE IT'S ALL YOURS.

00:55:43:00

INTERVIEWER: YOU WANT TO PICK UP WHEN YOU WERE, TELLING US ABOUT CALLING A PRAYER.

Abernathy: Yes, I returned to the sanctuary of West 100th Street Baptist Church and I called for prayer. I asked the people to pray for the families of these four beautiful young people that had been slain while studying the Sunday School lesson in the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church. I called on the congregation to pray for the perpetrators of these vicious acts and I called upon the people to rededicate themselves and pray for a sick nation that would tolerate acts of injustice like that. And pray for the President of the United States that he would be more courageous and pray for the Justice Department so that they would always be our friend, the friend of freedom and equality.

INTERVIEWER: WE HEAR THAT BLACKS GATHERED DYNAMITE THEMSELVES THAT NIGHT AND AMMUNITION AND GUNS THEY WERE SO ANGERED BY WHAT HAD HAPPENED. WHAT ABOUT THAT, DO YOU KNOW ANYTHING ABOUT THAT?

Abernathy: Well, they didn't use guns because of our teachings. Martin Luther King Jr. held to the fact that an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth would end up with a blind society and a toothless generation. And he would say in most of his speeches, every time, Jesus says to every potential Peter, put down thy sword, for he that fighteth by the sword must perish by the sword. And he would go on to say, not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, says the Lord of Host.

00:58:22:00

INTERVIEWER: OK, WE'RE MOVING ON TO THE MARCH ON WASHINGTON. THERE WAS A GREAT DEAL OF CONTROVERSY IN WASHINGTON AROUND THE SPEECH THAT JOHN LEWIS HAD WRITTEN. ARE YOU AWARE OF THAT? CAN YOU DESCRIBE THAT AS YOU KNEW ABOUT IT?

Abernathy: Well I don't think that it was much controversy. John Lewis just speaking for the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, as its President. John Lewis, just wanted to say some things in the script that was much more radical than Roy Wilkins of the NAACP and Whitney Young of the National Urban League thought was necessary, and they solved the problem and everybody was pleased about it. I guess, other than the press.

00:59:33:00

INTERVIEWER: WHAT WAS YOUR FEELING AT THE END OF THE MARCH?

Abernathy: Oh, the greatest day, greatest day in my life. I remember so vividly after that day, Martin Luther King and I went back to the grounds about six or seven o'clock that evening, and *where 250,000 people had sat that day, there was nothing but the wind, blowing the left over programs and scattered litter across the way, across the reflection pool. The wind was moving and blowing and blowing, and keeping music.* And we were in communication with the Great Emancipation, Emancipator—Abraham Lincoln and we went up and, took a good look at his statue once again. *And we were so proud that, of the fact that no violence had taken place that day. And we were so pleased. But these, this beautiful scene of the wind dancing and the sands of the Lincoln Memorial, I will never forget. This was the greatest day of my life.*

01:01:43:00

INTERVIEWER: DID YOU THINK IT ACCOMPLISHED ANYTHING?

[cut]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: MARK AND—

[sync tone]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: OK CALLIE IT'S ALL YOURS.

INTERVIEWER: DID YOU THINK THE MARCH ACCOMPLISHED ANYTHING TANGIBLE AND IF SO, WHAT?

Abernathy: I think that it accomplished a great deal. I think that is, it had first established a vis, a visibility in this nation that the struggle was nearing a close that people were coming together and all the, the organization could stand and fight and struggle. And stand together. I think that the next thing it demonstrated that there was a unity in the Black community for the cause of freedom and justice. I think that it made it that, that we do not have to use violence, to achieve the goals which we were seeking. And it made way for the Birmingham movement. And it made way for the Selma movement. I think it told the nation you had better get your house in order.

INTERVIEWER: WE'RE GOING TO SELMA NOW. WHAT WAS YOUR FEELING GOING—

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: CAN I CUT FOR ONE SECOND.

[cut]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: AND, AND MARK.

[sync tone]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 2: OK.

01:03:44:00

INTERVIEWER: SHE WANTS YOU TO DESCRIBE WHAT THE MEETINGS WITH THE MAYOR'S COMMISSIONS WERE LIKE AND WHY COULDN'T THE ISSUES OF BOYCOTT BE SOLVED IN THESE SESSIONS. C.T. FITZPATRICK SAID THEY KEPT AGREEING ON SOLUTIONS AND THAT BLACK LEADERS, YOU WERE ONE OF THEM, WOULD SAY, WOULD TAKE IT TO THE CONGREGATION AND IT WOULD FALL THROUGH. AND HE MAINTAINS, FITZPATRICK DOES, THAT IT WAS JUST A WAY FOR YOU TO CONTINUE RAISING MONEY. I GUESS WHAT I'M ASKING WHAT WERE THE MEETINGS LIKE AND RESPONDING TO WHAT FITZPATRICK SAYS AS WELL.

Abernathy: Well the meetings with the Commission were simply meetings where we came together trying to get the Commissioners of the three of them and the bus officials to bring an end to the bus boycott. We were not even asking for integration of the buses. Our first demand was to have more courtesy on the part of the bus drivers to eliminate calling our women out of their names and cows and niggers and things like that and pulling off taken, after taking our dimes and during the rush hours blacks were required to put the dime in the slot and get off of the bus and they would often pull off without opening the back door for them to board the bus. And take the dime with them and often people had been had doors closed on them and they were dragged down the street a distance until they could get rid of the coat or the jacket and so, more courtesy on the part of the bus drivers. And the second question had to deal with the seating policy. Blacks would begin the rear and whites would begin the front—

[wild audio]

Abernathy: —and why ever they would meet that would be the dividing line, but-

01:06:35:00

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: IT JUST RAN OUT.

INTERVIEWER: IT JUST—

[cut]

[slate]

[change to camera roll 536]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: FLAGS.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 2: AND MARK.

[sync tone]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 2: LET ME ALIGN MY CAMERA.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: OK AND IT'S ALL YOURS CALLIE.

INTERVIEWER: OK, THE ATMOSPHERE IN THOSE MEETINGS WITH THE MAYOR COMMISSIONERS...

Abernathy: Yes, Mayor Gayles [sic] was a very, very passive individual. But the meetings were always tense because Dr. King was the spokesman and he did not seek to respect that fact and that made for a lot of tension. He wanted to make me the leader Rev. Say the leader, pastors who had been there in the community for longer than Dr. King. And we could not solve the problems, because they were not willing to give in, they were not willing to cooperate and we could've solved the problem because all they had to do was change the law. And make it permissible for black people to ride on the buses under these conditions. The bus company affiliates, officials could have solved these problems.

01:08:26:00

INTERVIEWER: SO FITZPATRICK'S STATEMENTS ARE JUST SO MUCH HOG WASH THEN?

Abernathy: Nothing but hog wash.

INTERVIEWER: WHEN DID YOU THINK YOU COULDN'T COMPROMISE WITH SEGREGATION IN THIS INSTANCE, THAT SEGREGATIONISTS COULDN'T COMPROMISE WITH YOU AND WAS THIS THE MOST IMPORTANT LESSON OF THE BOYCOTT?

Abernathy: This is the most important lesson of the boycott. And we learned it very, very early. That is where we appealed the case of Mrs. Rosa Parks I would say we learned this lesson about the sixth or seventh day of the bus boycott. Because we knew that the system was not willing to tolerate and we had to go higher, we had to go to the Supreme Court to get the justice we needed.

01:09:39:00

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: WE NEVER, THEY'VE NEVER SAID WHAT THE LESSON WAS, WHAT THE LESSON WAS THAT HE COULDN'T COMPROMISE-

INTERVIEWER: OK. YOU NEEDED TO SAY TO ME FULLY WHAT THE LESSON WAS THAT YOU COULDN'T COMPROMISE IN THE BOYCOTT. YOU SAID IT WAS THE MOST IMPORTANT LESSON. I JUST NEED YOU TO SAY WHAT WAS THE MOST IMPORTANT LESSON.

Abernathy: The most important lesson was that segregation had no place in the life of America. And we was, we were not going to compromise we and the system, the leaders of the system was not going to compromise so consequently, we needed a ruling from the United States Supreme Court.

01:10:33:00

INTERVIEWER: IN THE MONTGOMERY STORY, THERE WERE A NUMBER OF WOMEN WHO WERE VERY ACTIVE, LIKE ROSA PARKS, AND JOANN ROBINSON, AND WAS THERE SOMETHING ABOUT THE SYSTEM OF SEGREGATION DO YOU THINK THAT MADE IT EASIER FOR A WOMAN TO BE POLITICALLY ACTIVE THAN A MAN.

Abernathy: Well, there were not as many women active as there were men. But I would agree with you I would agree that, it was much more easier for women to be respected and to be involved in the movement than for Black males to be involved in the movement.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: OK CUT IT OFF.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 2: OK. CUT.

[cut]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: FLAGS AND MARK.

[sync tone]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: OK. OK IT'S ALL YOURS CALLIE.

01:11:47:00

INTERVIEWER: WHAT WAS YOUR FEELING WHEN YOU WENT INTO SELMA? WHAT DID YOU THINK THAT CAMPAIGN WAS GOING TO BE LIKE?

Abernathy: Well, I thought it was the successful campaign because at this point in my life I had become terribly committed and determined and I was going to, back home, Selma was the closest fairly large city to my native London, Alabama. And the people that ran Selma knew me personally, and my sisters and my brothers were all employed in the school system of Selma, not Selma, but of Marengo County, Alabama. And so, the marches came from my native Marengo County, Alabama.

01:12:59:00

INTERVIEWER: ONE THING THAT IS SAID ABOUT YOU OVER AND OVER AGAIN IS THAT YOU HAVE THE ABILITY TO PUT WORDS TOGETHER AND TAKE A SERIOUS SITUATION AND ENTERTAIN PEOPLE WHILE MAKING A POINT AND ONE OF THE THINGS THAT WE HEARD ABOUT SO MUCH IS THE DOO HICKEY STORY. I WONDERED IF YOU COULD DESCRIBE THAT TO ME.

Abernathy: Well, that the officials had bugged the church and for the mass meetings, and they could hear what was taking place in the meetings. And I names that “the doohickey” and so consequently, I would preach to the doohickey and I would talk into the doohickey, I would locate it and they thought that we could not find it. But we were not afraid and we had been totally emancipated from all fears and were were determined to win our god given rights and freedom.

01:14:16:00

INTERVIEWER: ON MARCH 7TH WHICH LATER BECAME KNOWN AS “BLOODY SUNDAY”, YOU AND DR. KING WERE IN ATLANTA WHEN HOSEA WILLIAMS CALLED AND SAID “LISTEN, I HAVE THESE PEOPLE HERE AND THEY WANT TO MARCH.” COULD YOU DESCRIBE FOR ME THE CONVERSATION YOU HAD WITH DR. KING ABOUT WHAT TO DO ABOUT THAT SITUATION?

Abernathy: Well, first the conversation with Hosea Williams. Hosea Williams called my church and said to me, Ralph Abernathy, Mr. Pastor, you are the only person that can get Dr. King to let us march. We had advertised that we would march on that particular Sunday, and so consequently, the injunction had come down and we decided to abide by the injunction. But Jose wanted to break the injunction. But Jose wanted to break the injunction and he told me he had thousands of people. I know he was exaggerating and so I called the Ebenezer Church and asked for Dr. King and they put Dr. King on and he said, “Ralph, what do you suggest?” and I said, “Well, I would suggest that you let them go on and march.” And he said “OK, I have to go into church now and give the service, but you do whatever you want to do.” And so consequently I called Jose back and, and so I informed him to go ahead. And march his thousands and thousands of people that he had. And so consequently, when I got out of church I heard on the radio that the people had been brutally beaten in Selma, and Hosea Williams even had been hospitalized and John Lewis, the leader of the march.

01:16:51:00

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: I NEED TO CHANGE BATTERIES

INTERVIEWER: OK WELL-

01:16:53:00

[cut]

[slate]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 2: AND ROLL SOUND.

[change camera roll to 537]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: FLAGS AND MARK.

[sync tone]

INTERVIEWER: GO AHEAD.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: LET ME GET, YEAH IT'S ALL YOURS.

INTERVIEWER: SKIPPING OVER A LOT, ON THE FINAL MARCH FROM SELMA TO MONTGOMERY, WHEN THE APPROVAL WAS DONE, AND YOU'RE MARCHING NOW THOSE FIFTY MILES, WHAT WAS IT LIKE ON THE ROAD?

Abernathy: Well, it was enjoyable and it was tension-filled all at the same time. We knew that victory was in sight. And we always experience a great deal of hostility because we had to march on one side of the road and the, of the highway, and the cars had to move on the other side of the highway. And we had a great deal of fun and a great deal of profanity it was yelled, from the passing cars, and the old farmers came out, mostly white people and they looked at us with utter disdain. And, but we knew that the victory was in sight.

INTERVIEWER: WHAT ABOUT BLACK PEOPLE ALONG THE WAY?

Abernathy: They would come and join the march. And they were invited and we invited the white people to join the march also and strangely enough many of those white persons did join up with the march.

01:19:05:00

INTERVIEWER: WHILE THE ACTIVITIES WERE GOING ON IN SELMA-THE MARCHES, THE EFFORT, THERE WAS A WHOLE OTHER STORY GOING ON IN WASHINGTON, DC, WERE YOU AT ALL AWARE OF WHAT WAS HAPPENING IN WASHINGTON WITH THE LEGISLATORS AND WITH PRESIDENT JOHNSON SLOWLY COMING AROUND TO THE VOTING RIGHTS BILL?

Abernathy: Yes, we were very, very much aware what was taking place in Washington. And we monitored that, and we were eagerly looking forward to the passage of the voting rights bill and President Johnson almost but sang the anthem of the civil rights movement when he said, "We shall overcome, deep in our hearts, we do believe that we shall overcome." This was before a joint session of the House of Representatives and the US Senate. We were glad

and we knew that we had won the victory.

01:20:28:00

INTERVIEWER: HOW DID YOU KNOW ABOUT THE STORY FROM WASHINGTON? WERE THERE CONGRESSMEN IN TOUCH WITH YOU? HOW DID YOU GET THE INFORMATION THAT THINGS WERE HAPPENING?

Abernathy: Yes, we got the information from Congressmen. And we, we steal away and look at the television and we, Dr. King was a, an avid news person and we had reporters right there on the scene and they would keep us informed. And he would read every newspaper that was published in the country and we, people had radios, who were a part of the march and we would stop every night and pitch a tent after having walked about fifteen miles and we, we it was just a glorious victory march from Selma to Montgomery.

01:21:37:00

INTERVIEWER: ONE OF THE SAD NOTES ABOUT SELMA WAS THAT SOME TENSION THAT HAD BEEN BUILDING BETWEEN SCLC AND SNCC WORKERS SEEM TO REALLY COME TO A HEAD FINALLY, REALLY THERE. AND THAT SELMA WAS THE LAST TRUE RIDE, AS SAID BY A LOT OF HISTORIANS WHO WERE REALLY THE WHOLE OF THE TRADITIONAL CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT AND THAT EVERYBODY WAS TOGETHER. DID YOU HAVE A SENSE THEN THAT IT WOULD NEVER BE THE SAME AGAIN AFTER SELMA?

Abernathy: Well I didn't have that feeling. Because I do not agree with the fact that the tension that existed between SCLC and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee was much of a problem. We couldn't see that the student are friends and the, that organizations made of most worthy contributions and there was no evils spirits, broken heart, we were just all together in love, we certainly came together when the national television personalities like Harry Belafonte and Joan Baez all came to Saint Jude grounds on the outskirts of Montgomery, Alabama, and entertained us on that night just before we went into Montgomery, Alabama, and to the state capitol.

01:23:38:00

INTERVIEWER: I HAVE A FEW PEOPLE I WANT TO ASK YOU ABOUT. AND JUST REALLY QUICKLY IF YOU WOULD TELL ME WHAT THEY LOOKED LIKE AND WHAT THEY DID AND IF YOU HAVE SOME EXPERIENCE WITH THEM—

Abernathy: OK.

INTERVIEWER: IF YOU'D JUST GIVE ME A WHOLE SENTENCE, BLAH BLAH DID SO AND SO OR WAS SO AND SO. JIM CLARK.

Abernathy: Jim Clark was an awful, mean, cruel, fat man.

INTERVIEWER: WILS-

Abernathy: White man.

INTERVIEWER: WILSON BAKER.

Abernathy: Wilson Baker was a tall, fat, red skinned but I felt that he was a decent person.

INTERVIEWER: WILLIAM ANDERSON.

Abernathy: Dr. William Anderson was tall, handsome, black, very, very educated, very trained and very articulate.

INTERVIEWER: FRED SHUTTLESWORTH.

Abernathy: Fred Shuttlesworth was the bravest man I have ever met in the movement and he was very, very outspoken, very, very courageous and a fine person, a founder of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference.

01:25:04:00

INTERVIEWER: ANDY YOUNG.

Abernathy: Andy Young was a, and is a very, very, fine person that draws love from me and he is loved by white people and black people. He has a lot of personality lot of warmth but he's kind of canny, kind of sneaky, he's a lovely person in many, many respects.

INTERVIEWER: BULL CONNOR.

Abernathy: Bull Connor was the most evil man I have ever had any dealings with but we changed him from a bull into a steer.

INTERVIEWER: JIM FOREMAN.

Abernathy: Jim Foreman was a mischievous lad, very, very kind, but very, very mischievous, and would try to provoke you and bring out the worst in you while still laughing.

INTERVIEWER: JOHN LEWIS.

Abernathy: John Lewis was a dedicated person, a fine person, a sincere person, very dedicated.

INTERVIEWER: A. PHILLIP RANDOLPH.

Abernathy: A. Phillip Randolph was the dean of the black leadership in America. He was a

courageous man, a beautiful man, one of the great stalwart leaders of this nation.

INTERVIEWER: FREDERICK REESE. FREDERICK REESE.

Abernathy: Frederick Reese was a very, very fine, person. He was tall, and not that handsome, but a very fine person to work with.

INTERVIEWER: AND LASTLY, MRS. AMELIA BOYNTON.

Abernathy: She was a very tall lady, and very nice woman, a very lovely person.

[wild audio]

01:27:57:00

INTERVIEWER: NOW WHAT ABOUT THE SONG?

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: WE JUST RAN OUT.

[cut]

[slate]

[change camera roll to 538]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: I HAVE FLAGS AND MARK.

[sync tone]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 2: JUST GIVE ME ONE SECOND HERE CALLIE. MIGHT AS WELL DO THIS RIGHT. OK CALLIE IT'S ALL YOURS.

01:28:14:00

INTERVIEWER: OK, WE GOT THE SPIRIT FROM LISTENING TO YOU TALK ABOUT IT, AND I WONDERED IF YOU COULD JUST SING A LITTLE BIT OF THAT FIRST SONG, THAT FIRST MEETING IN CHURCH.

Abernathy: [singing] "What a fellowship, what a joy divine. Leaning on the everlasting arms. What a blessed peace, what a soul divine, leaning on the everlasting arms. Leaning on Jesus, leaning on Jesus, safe and secure from all alone. Leaning on Jesus, leaning on Jesus, leaning on the everlasting arms. What have I to dread, what have I to fear, leaning on the everlasting arms. I have blessed peace, with my Lord so near, leaning on the everlasting arms. Leaning on Jesus, leaning on Jesus, safe and secure from all alone. Leaning on Jesus, leaning on Jesus, leaning on the everlasting arms. Back to the first one. What have I to dread, what have I to fear, leaning on the everlasting arms. I have blessed peace, with my lord so near, leaning

on the everlasting arms.” [speaking] That, I got my words mixed up on the first singing. I hope you will use the second verse, the second time.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: THAT WAS WONDERFUL. GLORIOUS. [applause]

INTERVIEWER: THANK YOU

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: OK.

INTERVIEWER: –SO MUCH.

[cut]

[end interview]

01:30:47:00

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