

A N I N T E R V I E W

W I T H

J U N I U S H A S K I N S , J R .

Mr. Cardwell: This is an interview taking place in the office of Junius Haskins, Jr. Mr. Haskins you realize that our conversation will be taped and I will be using it as an interview, in a book that I am in the midst of trying to write.

Mr. Haskins: Yes.

Mr. Cardwell: Mr. Haskins, its a pleasure for me to sit here and chat with you. I know that you have been involved in bringing about social changes in the City of Lynchburg and without your involvement, I believe, that things would not be as they are today. The questions that I want to ask you will be concerning your involvement in the movement from when you first became involved until the present time. My first question is - When did you first become aware of the need to get involved in the movement for social change?

Mr. Haskins: O.C., I can vividly remember as a child about 13 or 14 then, this was 1957 when the Supreme Court ruled on the Brown Vs. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas Case. I remember my mother, who is deceased now, and some of her friends had gone out-of-town. I'm not sure where - but she came back with a newspaper photograph and clippings. She pointed out, there are my feet and Jordans feet. I asked here where were they. She said we were at the Supreme Court because they were ruling on school desegregation. At the time I was trying to make sense out of segregation and desegregation, the whole thing was just evolving. I knew all along that, you know we had in the neighborhood a lot of white kids that we were playing with as well as black kids. But any time we left the neighborhood, it was a different story. We had certain places we could go and could not go, water fountains you could drink out of and you could not. I kinda thought that was the way it was suppose to

be. Nobody ever told me that was wrong until the Supreme Court decision. Then I thought what about the water fountains, transportation, come to think of it, all of this was wrong. So it dawned on me suddenly there's a whole new life that I was just experiencing. It's always been private. From that point on, in high school, the late 50's and 60's I graduated in 1961, we ran into some difficulties with the Carter-Glass Newspaper. I remember a friend of mine, William Johnson, who was the Editor of the Dunbar Chronicle. He was also a featured writer on the Carter-Glass paper. Well he happened to write an article that criticized the segregated school system and not only did the Carter-Glass newspaper try to have him expelled, they almost tried to take away his college scholarship, a brilliant young man. That action caused the entire Dunbar population to rise to its feet for the first time, to say NO. You do it to one, you do it to all of us. I think that particular incident really caused my awakening and my directive. When I went to school, immediately of course in '61 the demonstrations were happening nationwide. In downtown Hampton we actually demonstrated and penetrated two lunch counters. That was my first physical participation. But from then on and to the present - it's been a thirst for freedom.

Mr. Cardwell: I can truly understand what your talking about, because I had to go into the military and leave Lynchburg before I actually realized that I was poor. I can fully appreciate what you have said Mr. Haskins. I know that you have been involved in any number of things - demonstrations, confrontations and picketing - things of that sort to bring about social justice in Lynchburg. What was your first official involvement or confrontation with the authorities in Lynchburg to bring about social change?

Mr. Haskins: In July of 1969, I had just been employed at the Lynchburg Community Action Group as a Youth Director. To develop youth activities, to create employment programs. In the City of Lynchburg at the time there were very limited youth service outlets of things to provide cultural and educational development for the youth. So in planning various activities at the Agency, one of the things we were looking at would be in the development of using a Summer Arts & Crafts Program. In doing that we had to have adequate facilities and the City of Lynchburg at the time didn't have recreation centers as such. So what we did is we developed the Arts & Crafts Program and then we started looking for a place to house it. We found this building in Diamond Hill on Monroe Street, the old Mars T. Jones School. At the time the school had been abandoned by the City because it was very old and vacant building. The windows were broken out, but was an open area that I felt we could make a lot of things good happen, with a lot of youth involvement. So we approached the City officials requesting permission to use the facility. We would sweep it out, clean it up. Of course it was during the summer, it had air conditioning. Some people didn't know what air conditioning was. So the group of kids that were involved in the Program all went on and started cleaning the place up, after we got permission. We got ready to start painting, we borrowed some paint, had some paint donated. We were getting ready to really spruce it up. The kids felt really involved in doing something in their own community. So after about 2 or 3 days, we went back over there on the third morning, we found on the door a sign that said - NO TRESPASSING. DO NOT ENTER BY ORDER OF CITY OF LYNCHBURG PUBLIC HEALTH DEPARTMENT. My first question was why would they let us use the building and then come right around and lock it up. So I got together with Rev. Robinson and said maybe we better find out just why they did board it up. We discussed it with the City

Manager to see what the problem was. He said it was too much unsanitary trash lying around. We offered once again to go clean it up, that's no problem. He said well you gotta clean it up and bring it up to our specifications. So the next day the only thing we did all day long was clean up with everything, you name it. From top to bottom, on the inside, that building was spic and span. We felt that we had made the necessary corrections. The very next morning when we went over to start the Program at 9:00 AM, there was trash that had been dumped all over the floors. Graffiti was sprayed all over the walls on the inside of the building. The blackboards had been smashed with hammers. Then we picked up the newspaper and it carried that very photograph. As if to say the very youth who were trying to rehabilitate that building, destroyed it instead themselves. We immediately perceived that to be entrapment, it was a set-up without question. Because apparently we weren't suppose to have a recreational outlet. So we went to the drawing board that same day and said we weren't going to take this lying down. I took some time off from work, I asked for it so I could really concentrate on this. In a meeting at Court Street Baptist Church in the basement, we organized an official protest demonstration. The first demonstration took place, I think it was August 8th, downtown at Monument Terrace. All the kids were involved, other youth that were concerned and committed to the program - they joined in. Adults joined in, black and white, because it was a terrible injustice that had been done.

Mr. Cardwell: Mr. Haskins was this the time that some of the students involved in the demonstration were chained together or was that another occasion?

Mr. Haskins: Yes, that was one of the strategies. We wanted to devise the most impacting show of defiance in the City of

Lynchburg involving youth. By giving them symbolical reference that we are still being treated as slaves. I said now what we should do is this, I played tennis a lot at the time, so I got some wrist sweatbands - which looked like shackles - and got some lightweight chain and lined up about 20-25 kids and chained them together - to make it look just like we were slaves. That was one of the strategies we used and we marched down Fifth Street to Church, then down Church to Monument Terrace. We then went up on Monument Terrace and we sang "We Shall Overcome", "Ain't No Turning Us Around" and all of the civil rights and spiritual freedom songs. We literally stopped traffic at the intersection of Ninth & Church because this was not suppose to happen in Lynchburg. But folk began to realize that this is just the beginning of a change in the City of Lynchburg.

Mr. Cardwell: What was the impact on the community as a result of these demonstrations? Because I know that other demonstrations took place after that. I recall one was a motorcade through the white community. Could you tell us about that.

Mr. Haskins: That series of demonstrations, if I might add, as a result of that, my personally being ordered by Judge Cundiff, at that time, because we were on Monument Terrace making quite a bit of noise - which is what we planned to do - were to cease and desist with the noise outside of this court or I would be held in contempt. Well of course we just moved about one block away and kept doing what we were doing. I think that kinda triggered a series of enemies throughout the City. Not just related to recreational centers, because the City finally gave in and not only repaired the building, but where that old building use to sit, there is a brand new recreational center,

so it does pay off in the long run. But you're right, that motorcade began to send messages throughout the City. That it's not just the denial of recreational opportunities, but that it's a denial of human rights, civil rights for black people in the City. We wanted to send a broad, basic message. Not only to educators, but to private businesses across the board that be ready because we are going to make our presence felt. The motorcade was a show of force, the fact that we were organized, we meant business and we're gonna let you see us in full strength. So I think we had about 40-45 automobiles lined up, just riding through the area. We had announced it previously, so folk were in awe and gawking when they saw us riding through some areas of Peakland, that I had never been through, because you couldn't be caught over there in the first place. I think that sent a real message, that hey, Black folks in Lynchburg mean business. They've got guts and courage and it's no telling what they may do next. So it kinda put them on notice, if you will, that bigger things were yet to come.

Mr. Cardwell: You know, I had heard about the first demonstration that you had at the foot of Monument Terrace, which is the focal point for these types of events. I was on the way to Garnell Stamps house and passed Robert Withers on the way to the same place. So I picked him up and the three of us got together at L. Garnell Stamps house. As a result of that meeting, that was the first time that Robert Winfree and Garnell Stamps became involved in the movement. What date did you say that was?

Mr. Haskins: August 8, 1969.

Mr. Cardwell: Well, because of this particular demonstration, I know that from that day on - you have been involved in many

things to bring about social change in Lynchburg. You have really been the person that has made Lynchburg Community Action Group a success, along with Rev. Haywood Robinson, Jr. But I believe without your involvement, Lyn-CAG would not be where it is today. During your involvement in Lynchburg Community Action, you have been involved in various projects, beginnings and endings. Let's deal first with Co-MED, it was not given a name at that time, but the purpose was there. I went to Rev. Robinson and I asked him to put it under the auspices of the Community Action Group, which he did. Originally, it was suppose to be under the auspices of the Housing Authority and the Housing Authority alone. But, nevertheless, Co-MED was born and as a result you were appointed the Executive Director of Co-MED. In another section of the book, I have discussed some areas of Co-MED and what it's functions and obligations were to the community. But, I would like to know why you think we were not refunded after being in existence three years.

Mr. Haskins: I'm going to tell you why i know we were not refunded. You remember the first round of funding was very small. The Housing Authority transfered some of it's monay over to Lyn-CAG, I think it was in 1979. It was kinda like start-up money and then we would go back to City Council on our own. The first time we went back to City Council asking for funding, I think Council was talking about recommending some small amount, like \$75,000-\$80,000. Of course, I remember in making the presentation and talking with, at that time Councilman Curtis ~~Cabell~~, Vice-Mayor Thornhill and some other folks, thats not going to be enough. We are making an impact in providing support and technical assistance to minority businesses here in the City. Now it's going to expensive, and we really needed something more like about\$100,000-\$150,000. Well, we came out

of that with \$150,000, which was funding for the first year. The program became very well organized, folks knew who we were and what our responsibilities were. They were primarily to make sure that black contractors and businesses get their fair share of the local revenue. By being involved in bidding projects, like getting small business loans so they could participate in the local revenue sharing process and to be treated as equals. Once again this is 1989 and it's been 10 years since that time. The problem is still here, there's no doubt about that. We established a good program and started questioning things that the City was doing. How are they potentially offering contracts to this white contractor? What provisions do you have for white contractors to subcontract to black contractors? There were no requirements, they were doing as they pleased at will. It seemed then, that if our mission at Co-MED is to in fact provide an avenue for minority business participation and activity, then we got to open the doors for them. We did that, the first year they became involved in some projects. Then we began to question more things the City was doing in the private sector, they were doing to deny access to equal participation. The second year, I think it was, funding came down to \$100,000. By that time we were pretty well recognized as a force to be reckoned with. We were not going to stand by and see subcontractors really shafted at bidding opportunities anymore than minority business loans being turned down, just because people were black and this was obvious. The more questions we began to raise with City Planners, City Inspectors, and bank officials, the more we began to ruffle quite a few feathers. The word went up the line, these guys are over here turning over the rocks and seeing the real deal. Because who know what the country club atmosphere was. We were beginning to get ready to be a part of that process, which meant that we were stepping out of line. I remember clearly when they were going to build the Radisson Hotel and they didn't have any minority contractors.

We're talking about almost a \$20 million structure and they weren't going to look for the first black contractor. So we interceded up front and communicated directly with the developer from Minneapolis, MN and told him if you're going to do anything in the City, you're going to involve this agency, Co-MED. By making that direct contact, of course Minneapolis called the City and said we heard from these guys at Co-MED. I think we kind of struck nerves, if you will, because maybe that was not something we were suppose to do, it's not prodical. But, that's the only way we know we could make anything happen. If we had to sit back and wait for some City officials, we never would have gotten any participation. So we finally organized alot of the black contractors to say how are you guys going to accept this? Do you want part of this big project, if so, let's organize. If necessary, let's find out where the source of money is and they have to have an affirmative action plan, as well as officials to enforce it. So we went back to who we contacted, the people with the Housing & Urban Development Office in Richmond and we worked very closely with them. In irony, of course the public of Co-MED was coming to them anyway. With the support of the Regional Director at the time, Mrs. I. Margaret White, she was very supportive of our program and what we were doing, so we weren't going to be intimidated as an agency. We actually had to bring the current investigators in to see how the City was actually doing its procurement on this federal project. I guess you could say we were kinda biting at the hand that fed us. But I still take the greatest pride even today, in the fact that knowing that the staff was ongoing in that risk, by saying if we're going to help small businesses, black businesses and female businesses out here, we've got to go the wall with them at all risks. I think they respect us today, individually, for doing that. The following year we went back before City Council. They said we don't think we're going to

Mr. Cardwell: This is the reason I say we are retrogressing, instead of progressing. Racism is still with us and I guess will always be until Jesus comes.

During my tenure as President of the NAACP, I made many contacts with outstanding nationally known people to come to Lynchburg and speak to our organization. After my tenure as President of the NAACP, I was appointed Chairman of the Life Membership Committee and continued in this role of contacting outstanding speakers. Among some was the Director of the NAACP, Mr. Roy Wilkins who came to Lynchburg and spoke at the Virginia Theological Seminary and College where he received an award and his Doctorate Degree for his contribution to the integration movement, and social change.

I traveled to Washington, D.C. at my own expense and contacted Walter Fauntroy to come to Lynchburg and receive the Man of The Year Award. I called my friend and co-worker Dr. Virgil Wood and through him contacted Dick Gregory to come to Lynchburg and receive the Man of The Year Award. Through another friend in Detroit, MI, I contacted Rosa Parks to come to Lynchburg and receive the Lady of The Year Award and because of these nationally renowned speakers our life membership increased and as a result of the increases that we were having in life memberships, during the tenure of Attorney Charles M.L. Mangum as President, the local chapter received a certificate at the national convention for having the largest increase in life memberships in the nation.

You
DID??

During my involvement in the NAACP, I have served as Coordinator for the two marches that was held in our nations capitol, Washington, D.C. in connection with social changes. The first one was where Dr. Martin Luther King made his "I Have A Dream" speech and the second one twenty years later when they were having a memorial of the original march on Washington and at that time I wrote a letter to the Editor of the News & Daily Advance which read:

As one of the Regional Coordinators for the March on Washington to take place August 27, 1983 at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C. I deem it wise to call upon the fellow citizens of this community to remember the full meaning of the American dream of Liberty and justice for all. The conveners of this historic march seek to bring together a new coalition of conscience for jobs, peace and freedom on the Twentieth Anniversary of Dr. Martin Luther King's historic "I Have A Dream" speech. They seek in this way to help recapture a sense of noble and human spirit in which our domestic and foreign policies are consistent with the basic national purposes as articulated in the Declaration of Independence, The Bill of Rights and the United States Constitution. They seek a new coalition of conscience that will be an expansion of the historic coalition of the Civil Rights Movement. We believe that this is the historic moment to bring together the coalition of goodwill and conscience that will address the welfare of the whole nation. These are the concerns of the conveners of this March on Washington. Mrs. Coretta Scott King, Dr. Joseph Lowry and Congressman Walter E. Fauntroy.

O.C. Cardwell
Lynchburg, VA

I had been appointed Coordinator for the Virginia region by Congressman Walter E. Fauntroy, Congressman for Washington, D.C., when he brought in these nationally renowned speakers, it was usually during Black History Week and we had contacted local high schools and colleges and made available to them the speakers that we were to be using

at night, and they were able to utilize them in assembly programs to speak to student bodies during the day. Therefore, enabling the students to become involved in firsthand information coming from people who were nationally known. Dr. Martin Luther King, Sr. came to Lynchburg and spoke at the Court Street Baptist church to a mixed audience, a capacity crowd and the following is his speech made by Dr. Martin Luther King, Sr. at the Court Street Baptist Church.

On February 9, 1975, I as President of the Lynchburg Association for the Advancement of Colored People presented to Dr. Martin Luther King, Sr., the Man of The Year Award at the Court St. Baptist Church in Lynchburg, Virginia. He was also given, an Honorary Doctorate Degree from the Virginia Theological Seminary & College located in Lynchburg, Virginia. The following is a speech made by him at that time:

Mr. L. Garnell Stamps, M.C.: Ladies & Gentlemen, will you rise as one and greet the Man of The Year - the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Sr.!

Dr. King: Thank you very much, and let me rush to say to you how humble I am about all of this. I think I've been too busy to be chesty or boastful, I think my life has been too hazardous to boast about anything, but just simply to be thankful. To the honorable Mayor of this City, to the Pastor of this Church. To the President of this Branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, and to all of you. That ought to catch all of you. But, I most publicly thank my traveling mate, the Rev.

Dr. Brooks, who made possible my getting here. From now on I suppose this will be happening the rest of the days I shall live, that I'm not permitted to travel alone, someone has to travel with me. Now this isn't the way I want^r to be, I wish so much that it wasn't this way. I'm not afraid for my life. I do not go about looking and waiting, what time I'm gonna be killed or who' gonna do it, where, what time. I just go along knowing that God watches over the City. But for my daughter - my only child that I have left - my eleven grandchildren and one great grandchild, - For the people who love me, where I've labored for all these years, I do this. I think for them, for they ARE afraid. But let me rush, I wish that I had time to speak to you, I've got something to tell you. But it's late. Let me thank the President of the Virginia Theological Seminary & College for giving me this degree, I will try to wear it with honor and dignity the best way I know how. You did it so beautifully, but I didn't pick it up. I didn't know all of this was going to happen to me. But I'm thankful. Now this kind of procedure makes you wonder if you getting packed up, ready to go home. So many nice things are being done almost every day for me. I was donned with crucifixes Thursday and Friday. They presented me with so many plaques and awards I couldn't bring them all home, several of them are going to have to be sent to me. I didn't know that was going to happen. So many things. But let me rush to tell you as briefly as I can do it. I want this message to get across the world from my mouth. Now I'm serious about this, I've never been more serious in my life than I am when I utter these words, the statement I'm about to utter now. I am not bitter, I carry no ~~evil~~ will in my heart against any man. I refuse to stoop low enough to hate anybody. I do not hate, I do not have any ill feelings in my heart against the man

who came along and took my son's life. Took my name from me. They tell me he's serving time somewhere in Tennessee. I don't hate, I don't have any bad feelings in my heart against him. I hope they let him live and maybe he'll see what he's done wrong. If they kill him, he'll never know. Then go along for a few years, somebody comes to the church and took from ^{me} the greatest person I'd ever known in this world, ~~—~~ sitting at the organ playing the Lord's Prayer and shot her down. I don't hate that man, I don't want to talk about him. I'm going on lonesome, I suppose the rest of my life I'll be that way. Going on, at this moment I don't know what I'm going to do. God knows. One thing I'm gonna do - I'm going on. I'm not gonna let nothing get me down. I'm going on and see what the end gone be. Now, I am every man's brother, that's generic of course. Every man, I don't care what the color of your skin is or your type of hair. Cause what you have ~~in~~ this world, good, gone perrish anyway. Or how fine a car you're driving, or what your former ~~trade~~ trade may be. Or how gracious your house you live in may be. Or just even the least to be ^{of these} - that's where I belong anyway - cause it's more of them than all the rest. I am every man's brother. Now you wanna argue about it. You wanna debate it? Would a black man be my brother? Whether a brown skin man can be my brother? Go ahead and argue all you want to. I'm not gonna bother with that. I've got a job to do. I'm busy every day that I live. I'm trying to work out something now with these folks to get me back to Atlanta before 3:00 tomorrow afternoon. I've just got so much, getting back at 3:00 and half the day is gone. I've got so much that needs to be done tomorrow. Got all kinds of high powered cars, good drivers, get me on a plane that runs all night. I am your brother and I love you, everyone of you. Now I hope you love me. I'm just gone talk for another five

minutes; - you time me now. These three, they attribute to God, we oughta abide ^{by} them - Faith, Hope, Love. The greatest of these three is Love. Love, if you go around preaching love, they'll kill ya. They won't like you, I know this. That's all they killed Martin Luther King, Jr. for. But I don't care, I'm gone do it so help me God. I'm gonna keep on living, preaching, walking, talking, singing and praying L-O-V-E. This is eternal too brother. It's older than the family man. It's here to stay. Suppose such a thing would happen and you could speak to the first President of the United States. Say to him, President Washington, you're going to receive a call from Europe tonight at 10:00 - he wouldn't know what you're talking about. But you can do it you know, that's how far this world has come. But if you want to say Mr. President, which is the better group alive, he'd wake up and tell you, he would know it. It was there then and its here now. If you want to talk to him about faith, he would know what your talking about. If he went in the office on faith and came out on faith, he would know what you're talking about. It was here then and it's here now. If you want to say Mr. Washington, what do you have to say about love? Which is the better - Love or Hate? He would know what you're talking about. He'd go right on talking about it. These are here to stay, these are eternal. Well, you know if you were to go on, just go right on loving everyday. Go on in faith everyday, hoping everyday for the best. Our world would soon be straightened out. Now, I don't believe what some folks keep on telling me. We've go to learn to use some ugly folks, some pretty folks and stop lumping this thing all in one. You see when you say a preacher ain't nothing, you talking about me. That's what you said, won't it. All preachers ain't nothing, all they want is money. All they want is liquor.

I'm gonna tell them, they telling a lie. There are some preachers trying to do right. Trying to raise a family. Trying to serve in the community, people for the betterment of people, I know them. But you know somebody gone say, when the ~~man~~^{man} was down there he was just there for politics. I looked at this man and weighed him on my scales. This man's heart is right. This man's ready for the new social order. See my brother over there, the preacher that spoke, the man's right. Now he can't help it cause his skin's white. They didn't make themselves and I don't have no hand-ups on this color thing. I can look across this room tonight and see a pretty woman. Now you say, which way did I point. You say, you reckon it's that real light one. Nah, that ain't it. That light one look alright too. They all look good. But the one that I pointed out to them was a teasing ~~blonde~~^{tan bronze}. Brother, pick out one, of any other color than that teasing ~~blonde~~^{tan bronze}, they'd be too pretty. Good God! But church we do this. I've done it many times, even when my wife is right beside me. Can't you look at a pretty woman and admire her without going in the gutter. I'll play Bingo with that woman and just watch and see. Usually when I look at them like that, they come this way. Now I'm being jokular. I'm going to close cause I know I'm going over. But I'm still dawdling on these three, don't forget them. I been preaching a long time. I don't look as old as I am. I don't get about as old as I am. But I been preaching and pastoring almost 60 years and I look pretty good. If I had time preacher, I'd give you a text. I made the subject and everything - "Thank God for What YOU Have God". Martin Luther was taken - my name went to be buried with him. Next son, I didn't have but two, he was drowned. Then I began to look around and ~~bought~~^{brought} up the subject. Lost my boys, it hurt, but it didn't hurt too much. I still got a Martin Luther King, III. My name is still here, I got that left.

I still have my daughter. I still have my eleven grandchildren and one great grandchild left - "Thank God for What You Have". I lost my mother a long time ago. But everywhere I've ever pastored, God always send me a dear mother in that congregation to watch over me. She didn't mind being called mother and she helped to keep the dogs off of me - I still have a mother. I see a brother sitting over there, I wonder if they any kin. She got hair, he ain't got much. But he did have a head full of hair, like this one day. But he got to sit down and worry hisself to death about he use to have nice long hair, but he ain't got none now. Brother, thank God for what you have left. Thank God, that you got a head left. Brother, thank God for what you have left. Thank God for what you have left, that's a good thing. That's a good thing to work with - Thank God For What You Have Left. Now I wanna send a little word to those that's in the seat of apathy. Won't help us do nothing. We have some here tonight, I didn't see them, but they here. They came just to see, didn't put nothing in the collection plate. Just taking up a seat to see. They here to see who ain't perfect. I wanna send a message for them before I take my seat. I got a story that will fit them. A woman was married and her husband died. She loved him, he was her sweet husband. She didn't checkup about what he was doing while he was living, about insurance or anything. So when he died, she went to the tombstone man, told him "I want the finest stone you have for my husband." He said alright here's one. She said that's alright, I already looked at that one. He said its very expensive, she said that's alright. I didn't aks you nothing about no expense. I want my husband to have the best. She said then I want you to carve these words on that stone to my dear husband. Write down there, "Rest In Peace". She went back home after that, searching out policies, searching out the will, etc.

Everyway she turned, every policy she found - that man had willed it to another woman. Now you can imagine how frustrated and mad that poor wife was. She went right back to the tombstone man. He said Yes, I have it ready. She said, I don't want it. I want you to change that, scrath it out. He said no, I can't do that. This is expensive, it will crumple if I try to erase anyting off of here. She was looking smart at him. She say, you say you got it down there? Say you, say you can't do nothing, you can add something? He say, Yes I can. Now I want this to go right over there, right at the end. Where you got "Rest In Peace" - You write this beside it - "Until I Get There"!

I N T E R V I E W

W I T H

O . C . T H A X T O N

Mr. Cardwell: I am sitting here in the den of Mr. O.C. Thaxton and looking around I see on his wall a plaque that says Black Power. We're here to interview Mr. Thaxton, one of the charter members of Lynchburg Improvement Association, who later changed it's name to Southern Christian Leadership Conference. An affiliate of the National Souther Christian Leadership Conference headed by the late Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Mr. Thaxton thank you for having this interview with me and I hope that you will understand that this will be published in a book that I am writing. Do you give your consent to publish whatever you might say.

Mr. Thaxton: I do.

Mr. Cardwell: What and how did you first become involved with the Southern Christian Leadership Conference?

Mr. Thaxton: Well, my first involvement, I guess, goes back with six college students sitting in at Patterson Drug Store and I was hauling for Patterson Drug Compnay at that time and Rev. Wood asked me to one of their meetings about some information concerning Patterson Drug Store and I became so interested I continued to follow their meetings. This is where I got involved in the Lynchburg Improvement Association which was later changed into the Lynchburg unit of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference.

Mr. Cardwell: Mr. Thaxton were you directly working for Patterson's Drug Store or were you an independent trucker?

Mr. Thaxton: I was an independent trucker. My trucking company was O.C. Thaxton's Transfer, and I had a contract hauling his drugs to his stores once a week.

Mr. Cardwell: Where were you when the picketing of Patterson's Drug Store began?

Mr. Thaxton: I was hauling for them. I was hauling for Patterson's but I was at home or at my business, one of the two, when they picketed. It was later when he fired me.

Mr. Cardwell: Well, Mr. Thaxton, do you think the reason that he fired you was as a result of the sit-ins or were there other reasons?

Mr. Thaxton: He told me why he fired me. As you know I had a contract to do hauling for him and several of his stores once a week and these sit-iners sat at his drug store. They locked them up and so they had a mass meeting to raise money. Someone called me and asked me to assist in lifing the offering at Court Street Baptist Church. I went up to assist in lifting the offering. The next day Mr. Patterson called me and wanted me to see him. He wanted to talk to me and I went down to his place of business and he told me that someone told him that I was wokring harder against him than for him. He fired me right on the spoit, right then.

Mr. Cardwell: According to the Lynchburg News & Daily Advance account of that particular protest, several people were arrested in the first demonstration held at Patterson's Drug Store, could you tell me about that please?

Mr. Thaxton: Yeah, it was the first demonstration. Two white girls from Randolph-Macon College, Mary Edith Bentley and Rebecca Ownes, two white students from Virginia Seminary, Kenneth Green and Barbara Thompson. These people wanted to

have lunch at Patterson's and they told them that they couldn't, because of the two Black members with them. They proceeded to sit there and they called the paddy wagon and had them arrested.

Mr. Cardwell: Had much time elapsed between the first sit-in and the second sit-in?

Mr. Thaxton: I don't remember the exact time, but it must have been a good little time elapsed, because these kids had took time out to have the trials and it was after they had their trial and was sentenced to thirty days in jail. They went to jail and made their jail time and then these other demonstrations. These other nine ministers and friends from Virginia Seminary went to sit-ins and this is when Rev. Wood and some more ministers went there and sat-in, too.

Mr. Cardwell: I recall the second sit-in, because arrested during that time were four ministers I know. I know they recieved some time and their names were Rev. Lanksford Hankins, Rev. Ralph Revis, Rev. W.W. Roberts and Rev. Wood. It was four ministers, because it is my understnaindg that they organized a quartet while in jail and at subsequent mass meetings, this quartet performed for us. Okay, leaving the Patterson's Drug Store incidents and moving on into the civil rights movement. Could you tell me a few of the things that you were involved in. I know that it would be impossible to tell all, because I could probably write the entire book concerning your experiences while you were in the movement. But give me some of the highlights?

Mr. Thaxton: Three os us decided to sue the City to integrate all of the public facilities. Even the court room was segregated, the water fountaions had colored and white

labels on them for you to drink. The restrooms were the same, colored and white. We had this suit to integrate all the public facilities. We had to test these places. For instance, we went to the Armory to a fight one night, it was a closed circuit televised thing. They let us sit anywhere because there wasn't anybody in there. So we decided to come back and go to the wrestling where a crowd of people were there. We went there one Friday night to wrestling and they wanted us to sit in the balcony in the bleachers. We told them no, that we had ring side tickets. They took the tickets and brought us to the door and gave us our money back and was going to let us sit there. That was one of the highlights of my career. Then we had a thing at the Miller Park. A picnic at Miller Park on the 4th of July. They let us play soft ball, checkers and whatever, but when it was time to go to the pool house to take these kids for a swim in the pool, it was a different story. I went down to the pool to get in the pool and I asked admission to the pool, but the lady never looked at me and these six kids I had with me. Then I insisted that I was not going to ask her again to let me get in the pool and she was looking over my head all the time. Then someone behind me said, Mr. Thaxton didn't Rev. Wood tell you that if you tried to get in this pool that they would close this pool. I looked back to see who it was talking to me and it was either the City Manager, Robert Morrison or Floyd McClenny, the man that was head of the Recreation Department. It was one of the two and he said it again. I asked him what did he say. He said didn't Rev. Wood tell you, if you insisted on getting in this pool that I would close this pool. I told him that it was hot out there and we wanted to go swimming like other folks that were swimming. He said okay, if you insist. He blew a whistle and made everybody get out

of the pool. I never even got down to the dressing room. He made everybody get out of the pool and then they said they were going over and close Dearington pool. They had a pool out in Dearington exclusively for colored people. They were going out to close that one and this ended our stay at Miller Park.

Mr. Cardwell: There were no arrests made at the Miller Park incident?

Mr. Thaxton: No there were no arrests made. One of the memorable things I would like to tell you, I don't understand it as I look back, as I told you this person said something about insisting on getting in the pool. As I look back they had police out there and this great line of police stretched across from one side to the other of the pool and a mob of white people right behind them and the colored people were behind them. I don't know to this day what they would have tried to do to us had those policemen not been there. I don't know yet why they were there and where that great mob of people had come from, because when we got there they were not out there.

Mr. Cardwell: Mr. Thaxton, I have always given the city police, even in those days, credit for providing protection for both sides during those days. Wherein most places police were taking part with the white establishment. Beating up black folks and putting them in jail and sicking dogs on them. But you don't recall us being faced with anything like this here in Lynchburg, do you?

Mr. Thaxton: No nothing. We never had that type of incident. The only incident we had one time, I can think

of with some whites, were we had Hugh Long carrying a picket sign in front of Patterson's. This white man ran up and pushed him down and a police was around and he stopped that right away. No damages, nobody hurt at that time.

Mr. CARDwell: I know that there are many changes that have taken place in Lynchburg and it is strange to me that if you pick up any publication concerning those days, not even the newspaper, really gives credit where credit is due. I know personally without your involvement in that era, that things would not be as they are now in Lynchburg. How do you feel about the fact that Black History isn't told or that which is told is distorted?

Mr. Thaxton: I feel that from what I've heard of it, most of it is distorted and some of the people that are emphasising these things weren't even involved. They didn't even participate in it and they are staring rumors of all kinds. For instance, we were passing through Miller park one day, four men and I was in the car with them. This man looked over at Miller Park and saw where they had closed the pool and covered it. He was telling one of the men "You know what that hole is over there?" He said no, what is it? That's where the swimming pool used to be. He said do you know why they closed that pool? He said no. He said Rev. Wood jumped in it with no clothes on. Who ever heard of such a thing. Rev. Wood would have never done anything like that, being a minister of the gospel and a very intelligent man. He would never. When I went home and told my wife about this, she said what did you say? I said that I didn't say anything, because people are going to have their way. They are going to act like they did this and they did that, so there is really no need in talking about it.

Mr. Cardwell: There is one question that I would like to ask you, because as I said before, we are talking about at least thirty years ago or at least twenty-five. Both of us are up in age now and my memory needs to be jogged every now and then to bring back some of these things. I would like to ask you some questions concerning the Bi-Racial Committee. According to one person that I interviewed, they stated that the Bi-Racial Committee was appointed by the City fathers, to try and keep the Southern Christian Leadership Conference quiet or try to get them not to be so militant in their approach to ending segregation in various places in Lynchburg. In other others they were to be a watchdog over the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, take messages back to the powers concerning our involvements, what we were doing or what we were planning to do. Could you shed light on this?

Mr. Thaxton: My impression of the Bi-Racial Committee was that it was organized to keep the races in check with the Committee. This is what it seemed like they were trying to do. For instance, we decided on a selective campaign line and in this campaign we weren't going to buy from any of the stores that didn't employ black clerks and these stores then were mainly on Main Street. There wasn't a shopping mall or anything like that then. So all these stores on Main Street - J.C. Penney, Leggett's, Miller & Rhoads, Baldwins. At that time one of the Bi-Racial Committee members decided that he would talk to us and try to get us not to picket the places during the Christmas Holidays and because of this they claim that they didn't need extra help until after Christmas. Then they would start making plans to enter or get Black clerks in the stores. So then they wanted us to negotiate or set-up a sixty day moratorium. So, I came to this meeting and brought people to vote for a moratorium that had never participated in the civil rights movement

whatsoever and out voted the group. So we had this moratorium. In part of that talk that these people had promised that they would employ clerks and so forth. The next day the paper interviewed the merchants and the merchants said they did not tell us anything. What are you going to do with members on a Bi-Racial Committee? What kind of committee is it? This upset quite a number of the people who were trying to get jobs for our people. So what I am thinking is, I can't feel as though the Bi-Racial Commission has ever done anything to upgrade the blacks, the whole time they were in operation. I don't know if they are in operation today. They never did anything to upgrade them. We sued to benefit all the public facilities and we asked some of them. Some of them told me that they could not do it because they were on the Bi-Racial Commission, as if they weren't Blacks just like I was. They said no they could not go these places. Blacks could not go to the restaurants and eat. They couldn't go either as a Bi-Racial Commission. So in my opinion they never did nothing to upgrade the living of Black people.

Mr. Cardwell: It is my understanding that the City administrators appointed the Bi-Racial Committee. In those days, and we were talking about the early sixties, what type of Negro would the city of Lynchburg appoint?

Mr. Thaxton: I will give you an illustration of the two of them that was on the commission and you can judge for yourself. When we went to court for this suit to integrate the public facilities, one of the Bi-Racial Commission members, and I don't mind calling his name, Dr. M.C. Allen. The lawyer asked Dr. Allen, what did he think of the suit. Dr. Allen told the lawyer, I don't believe in agitation, I

believe in arbitration. This will give you an idea as to how this one particular man felt. Then we had another Bi-Racial commission man, he wanted to practice obstetrician/obstetrics in the hospital, he wanted to deliver children. Dr. Lippard tried him on a case and he couldn't complete the case. Dr. Lippard told him right there in the court room that if he went to an accredited school and got qualified to deliver children and came back and applied that he would use him. He came back and Dr. Lippard didn't accept him on the board and said he would be the first one go resign. He also stated that the lawyer asked him if he believed that the patients should be segregated. Yes, he did believe that they should be segregated, they shouldn't be on the same ward. At the time Lynchburg had all the black people on, what I think was B Ward. Don't care what you were in there for, you were on B Ward. If you were there for tuberculosis, you were on B Ward. If you were in for cancer, you were on B Ward. The whites were separated from the blacks on one wing of the hospital at Lynchburg General. At Virginia Baptist, no blacks were there at all, that I knew of at that time. I went to the hospital and Ward B was full. I wanted to have some dental work, to extract all my teeth, I asked them for a room on another floor. They said you know you can't get on another floor. I said why. They said because you are black and you can't be on this floor. So my testimony in court was to the effect, that we had this suit and I testified. So in court Dr. Lippard asked this other white doctor where did he take his internship. He said in Philadelphia, he called the name of the school. The lawyer asked him, "Did you have white and blacks on different floors?" He said NO, wherever there was an available bed, that's were we put them. Whether they are black or whether

they were white and since he had been in Lynchburg, he didn't understand why they were separate.

Mr. Cardwell: You know when I think about this, I think about the fact that you see no monuments locally to people such as Virgil Wood, yourself, or Dr. Jackson - those people who really were responsible for social changes in Lynchburg. Not only Lynchburg, but the state of Virginia. But you do see a school named after one of the black school board members, Carl B. Hutcherson Elementary School. You see a tennis court named after one of the Bi-Racial Committee members. You know, I think that Miller Park swimming pool should have been named after you. It is not too late yet, because they call it Miller Park Swimming Pool. I think a movement or something should be started to have that pool named after you. What do you think?

Mr. Thaxton: Well Mr. Cardwell, this is a wonderful thing to say, but all I want is to live to enjoy the fruits of our work. This is all I enjoy. I didn't get into it for publicity that some may seek to get and then participate. I got into it because I believed in it and I wanted to see the day come that these things would be done away with and I have seen part of it done and I am just thrilled to be here to see it. I'm happy just like I am.

Mr. Cardwell: I was President of the Lynchburg NAACP at that time and surprised at some of the people who didn't know some of the history, that weren't too old at that particular time. I suggested your name as one to receive one of our highest awards for local achievement in the City of Lynchburg. The night of our annual membership campaign, I don't recall exactly who was the keynote speaker, I believe

it was Congressman Fauntroy, the representative from Washington, D.C.. Could you tell me how it made you feel to get this most coveted award?

Mr. Thaxton: I termed this as one of the highlights of my life about the civil rights movement. I enjoyed getting this and I felt that this was a great honor to receive this award, even though I had some adversaries that may have thought that I didn't qualify for this thing. But I was certainly belated and I want to thank you again for nominating me for the award.

Mr. Cardwell: I recall that night, I don't know your exact words but maybe you can enlighten me on them. Most men don't recognize their wives when they receive things of this sort. You said a very touching thing at the end of your acceptance speech of this award, concerning your wife. Do you recall what you said?

Mr. Thaxton: Yes, I recall saying about how good she had been. My wife was one of the few people who worked behind the scenes in the civil rights movement. I can't begin to tell you how many people we would feed. She would prepare all the meals for these people every weekend for a year or two, we just had people in here just about four or five people at a time. Food was very high at that time, because I lost my job and money was scarce and everything, but she suffered through it all. I felt as though she should have been there to stand with me and this is why I wanted people to know her efforts.

Mr. CARDwell: Mr. Thaxton I know that you opened your home to Attorney Kunstler and one of his staff members who stayed

here with you. Lived in your home, ate your food, slept in your beds and so forth by the name of Miss. Helen Stein. She assisted Attorney Kunstler in gaining information and so forth on the City of Lynchburg and it's surroundings. I am commending you for doing this. Incidentally, Miss. Stein was a white person. This was in 1963, Lynchburg was very much segregated at that particular time, and yet you opened your home. Not only to this person, but many other people who were involved in the movement. Could you tell me some of the people who visited your home during that time and people that you were involved with outside of the City of Lynchburg?

Mr. Thaxton: Well one of the main persons that stayed with us other than Helen Stein was Lynn Holt, the lawyer. Attorney Holt, he was a lawyer from the law firm of Jordan & Holt, they were the lawyers for out suit. Holt visited me quite often and called me all the time. He often brought lawyers here with him. He brought a fellow here by the name of Micheal Standard from New York to help with the cases in Danville that he had and stayed here. William Kuntsler who worked for Thomas Carlton Wansley, on his first night in Lynchburg, spent the night here and the next day he, Rev. Wood and I went to Roanoke to talk to his lawyer. The lawyer that he had then Reuben Lawson, a black lawyer in Roanoke. We went to Roanoke and ate at the Holiday Inn there on Orange Avenue. But anyway, Helen Stein, I want to tell you that she was a jew and she used to go to the Jewis synagogue on Friday nights. She said that people at the synagogue would asked her, I understand that you are living with a black family. Is the house clean? Is the food clean? This is the sort of thing that she had to be

intimidated with, these were just a few. The Randolph-Macon students along with the two girls that did the sit-in at Patterson's Drug Store. Miss. Stein and two other people came to our house just about every other weekend, if we were eating cornbread and cabbage, they would sit down and eat with us. They did not feel bad about that. One of the girls was going to get married and she invited us to the wedding reception to one of the white churches on Rivermont Avenue. We had to tell her that they didn't allow Black people in the church. I thought you might like to know this. She had to take her invitation back and she was crying and saying that she wasn't going to get married. We also went to her recital, she was an organ major. We went to her recital at Randolph-Macon and we were never accepted any more cordially than by Dr. Quenalin, the then President of Randolph-Macon. He accepted us, he was glad to have us and he commended us on how cordial we were to the girls who had visited us. We entertained the freedom riders, they came through on their bus tour. We fed them at one of the local churches, Eighth Street that night. Some of these people were notables, such as Dr. Burglin. He was a college professor at the University of Chicago. Then we had a fellow, these are white people named Biglow, he as an architect. There was a fellow named James Peck, who was one of the Peck heirs to this great big store Peck's. A black boy by the name of John Lewis that was President of the student non-violence coordinating committee. They tried to get a shoe shine in Rock Hill, SC and they were beaten and had all these stitches on their head and face. But the next day, they were out and on the road again. Genevieve Hughes, a white girl, who was on the bus from Alabama, she had to jump out the window because some caught the bus on fire. Dr. Burguler and his wife were beaten very badly in Alabama.

Rev. Schausburger came to their rescue. But all of these people, at one time or another, visited with me in my home. We just had a good fellowship together.

Mr. Cardwell: Mr. Thaxton, do you recall that after, I don't recall if it was before or after Martin Luther King came to Lynchburg, that he made a second visit to Lynchburg and we went out to the Lodge of the Fishermen. I think during the time that he was here, his youngest child was either born or had just been born. Do you recall this?

Mr. Thaxton: Yes, I do. I remember his second visit. He had a speaking engagement in Charlottesville. He called Rev. Wood from Charlottesville to say that he would be by to visit and Rev. Wood called me and we carried him to the Lodge of the Fishermen to hear Dr. Reed. He had a speaking engagement that night in Danville. We accompanied him to Danville. I was in the car with Dr. Reed. The driver and Dr. King were in the front seat, Rev. Wood and myself were in the back seat. We went to the Lodge of the Fishermen there. There were these professors, Frederick Roa from Randolph and some of the people from Lynchburg, some of the people from Sweetbriar and I can't remember all of their names now. But they were there asking all these questions and everything. After the interview was over we left and went to Danville. On our arrival in the City of Danville, the police stopped us. I remember Dr. King said to Dr. Reed, who was driving, "I don't know what you've done, but the policeman has stopped us". Reed said he realized that, everywhere we went, they would follow us. We went up to Halter Street, we went up Main Street through Gage Street and then the police followed us and then went three or four blocks when another one would jump out and follow him.

After we went to this house on Halbrook Street, we decided to go down to the People's Drug Store and have lunch. We went down there to have dinner that night and the police followed us there. When we came out of there, there were eight or ten police cars with police sitting in them. So from the drugstore we went to the Armory where he was supposed to speak, they followed us there. We found out later, by asking some of the leaders there, who said that they were determined that wasn't anything going to happen to Dr. King while he was there in Danville. This accounted for those police following us.

Mr. Cardwell: After that incident Lynn Holt went to Danville and a lot of demonstrations and things of that sort broke out. My son was going to school at Union University in Richmond and with a program there he had to go to Danville and got arrested. Rev. Wood and myself drove to Danville to try to get him out. We drove by Rev. Campbell's church and then by Rev. Chase's church and another church on High Street. I don't recall the person who was at that particular church. The police followed us all over the place. All three of these churches were in different locations in the City. We also went to Attorney Ruth Harvey's home, which was in another section of the City. The police were following us. We didn't know the reason why, but I am sure that it wasn't to protect Rev. Wood as they were protecting Dr. King. My son, Owen Cardwell Jr., was arrested and sent to the City Farm while protesting in Danville, along with some other students. Rev. Wood and myself were there to get him out of jail.

Later in the year we went to Prince Edward County to help their struggle for freedom. The Rev. Griffin was President

of the local chapter of the NAACP in Farmville at that time. As a result of these protests, Princed Edward County closed all their schools rather than to integrate, and established private schools which were later ruled unconstitutional by the federal government. Therefore they were forced to open their public schools to all races.