

Tuesday, November 12, 1985
Chicago, Illinois

Interview with Diane Nash
Sound Roll 1323
Camera Roll 353

INTERVIEWER: WE'RE GETTING READY TO START CAMERA ROLL 353. SOUND ROLL 1323,
INTERVIEW WITH DIANE NASH.

Nash: As a teenager, I think I really started emerging into being a real person, and I was very much aware of it, and I was looking forward in college to really expanding myself, and growing. I was taking those kinds of issues very seriously. And that played quite a part, when I got to Nashville, and why I so keenly resented segregation, and not being allowed to do basic kinds of things like eating at restaurants, in the ten-cent stores. So, and I really felt stifled, and -- and I very unfairly.

INTERVIEWER: YOU'RE FROM CHICAGO. WAS FROM CHICAGO. ROSA PARKS, TO GO TO LITTLE ROCK. TALK ABOUT THESE THINGS, AND HOW THEY MIGHT HAVE BEEN PART OF YOUR LIFE AS A YOUNG GIRL, SHAPING --

Nash: You know, I heard about the Little Rock story, on the radio. And Autherine Lucy. I remember the Emmett Till situation really keenly, in fact, even now I can, I have a good image of that picture that appeared in Jet magazine, of him. And they made an impression. However, I had never traveled to the south at that time. And I didn't have an emotional relationship to segregation. I had - I understood the facts, and the stories, but there was not an emotional relationship. When I actually went south, and actually saw signs that said "white" and "colored" and I actually could not drink out of that water fountain, or go to that ladies' room, I had a real emotional reaction. I remember the first time it happened, was at the Tennessee State Fair. And I had a date with this, this young man. And I started to go the ladies' room. And it said, "white and colored" and I really resented that. I was outraged. So, it, it had a really emotional effect.

INTERVIEWER: YOU BEGINNING TO TAKE PART IN NON-VIOLENT, DIRECT ACTION WORKSHOPS. AND YOU, YOU'RE JOINING OTHER STUDENTS TO DO THIS, AND YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT SITTING IN, AND ATTACKING LUNCH COUNTERS TALK TO ME ABOUT THOSE STUDENTS, AND, AND YOU AS ONE OF THEM. WHY DID YOU FEEL THAT THIS WAS SOMETHING THAT YOU HAD TO DO?

Nash: Well, I had by then experienced the emotional reaction, and was really feeling stifled, and my goodness, I came to college to grow, and expand and here I am shut in. And in Chicago, I had had access, at least, to public accommodations, and lunch counters and what have you. So, my response was, who's trying to change it, change these things. And I recall talking to a number of people in the dormitories at school and on campus, and asking them if they knew any people who were trying to -- to bring about some type of change. And I remember being, getting almost depressed, because I encountered what I thought was so much apathy. At first, I couldn't find anyone, and many of the students were saying, why are you concerned about that? You know, they were not interested in trying to effect some kind of change, I thought, they certainly didn't seem to be. And then, I did talk to Paul Lefred, who told me about the

non-violent workshops, that Jim Lawson was conducting. They were taking place a couple of blocks off campus. And the reason that I said earlier that I thought the other students were apathetic was that after the movement got started, and there was something that they could do, i.e., sit at a lunch counter, march, take part, many of those same students, who were right there, going to jail, taking part in marches, and sit-ins, and what have you, it was that they didn't have a concept of what they really could do, so when they got one, they were on fire. They wanted to -- a change.

INTERVIEWER: TALK TO ME ABOUT JIM LAWSON AND HOW HE MIGHT HAVE BEEN A CATALYST FOR YOU.

Nash: Jim Lawson was a very interesting person. He had been to India, and he had studied the movement, Mohandas Gandhi, in India. He also had been a conscientious objector, and had refused to fight in the Korean War. And he really- is the person that brought Gandhi's philosophy and strategies of non-violence to this country. And he conducted weekly workshops, where students in Nashville, as well as some of the people who lived in the Nashville community, were really trained and educated in these philosophies, and strategies. I remember we used to role-play, and we would do things like actually sit-in, pretending we were sitting at lunch counters, in order to prepare ourselves to do that. And we would practice things such as how to protect your head from a beating, how to protect each other, if one person was taking a severe beating, we would practice other people putting their bodies in between that person and the violence. So that the violence could be more distributed and hopefully no one would get seriously injured. We would practice not striking back, if someone struck us. There were many things that I learned in those workshops, that I not only was able to put into practice at the time that we were demonstrating and so forth, but that I have used for the rest of my life. That have been invaluable, in, in shaping the kind of person I've become.

INTERVIEWER: TALK TO ME A LITTLE BIT ABOUT THAT, ABOUT THAT GHANDIAN IDEA, AND HOW IT BEGAN TO BE SOMETHING THAT YOU COULD LATCH ONTO, SOMETHING ABOUT IT THAT CONNECTED WITH YOU. WHAT CONNECTED?

Nash: Well, several things. For instance, -- There were several principles that I learned in those workshops that I've been able to really use in the rest of my life. For example, I discovered that practical and real power of truth and love. Truth, I -- I've gained a respect for truth, not because it has anything to do with being good, or right, or anything, but it is being in touch with reality. When you're really honest with yourself, and honest with other people, you give yourself and them the opportunity to solve problems, using reality, instead of lack of reality. That makes problem-solving much more efficient. I -- I could give you an example.

INTERVIEWER: USING IT TO CONFRONT THOSE WHO WERE FIGHTING AGAINST YOU.

Nash: We felt we were right. We felt we were right, and rational. When we took a position that segregation was, was wrong, and we really tried to be open and honest and loving with our opposition. A person who is being truthful and honest, actually is, is standing in a much more powerful position than a person who's lying, or trying to maintain his preference, even though on some level he knows he's wrong. I think, on some level, most people really deep-down know that segregation was wrong, just based on race, and disregarding everything else about the person.

INTERVIEWER: THAT WAS A CAMERA ROLL OUT ON 353. WE'RE GOING TO 354.
IT'S FEBRUARY, AND YOU'RE INVOLVED IN FINALS, AND YOU FEEL LIKE YOU'RE GOING TO
GET IT STARTED, ONCE YOU GET OUT OF --
WHAT DOES [UNINTELLIGIBLE]

Nash: You know, we had, after -- during the workshops, we had begun what we
called testing the lunch counters. We had actually sent teams of people into
department store restaurants, to attempt to be served, and we had anticipated
that we'd be refused, and we were. And we established the fact that we were not
able to be served, and we asked to speak to the manager, and engaged him in a
conversation about, why not, the fact that it really was immoral to discriminate
against people because of their skin color. And then Christmas break had
happened. And we had intended to start the demonstrations afterwards, and we
hadn't really started up again. So when the students in Greensboro sat-in on
February 1, we simply made plans to join their effort by sitting-in at the same
chains that -- that they sat-in at. After we had started sitting-in, we were
surprised and delighted to hear reports of other cities joining in the sit-ins.
And I think we started feeling the power of the idea whose time had come. Before
we did the things that we did, we had no inkling that the - the movement would
become as widespread as it, as it was.

INTERVIEWER: WHEN GREENSBORO HAPPENED, AND YOU FOUND OUT ABOUT IT THAT DAY,
THAT OTHER PEOPLE WERE MOVING WITH THIS. WAS ANY OF THAT KIND OF THING
HAPPENING?

Nash: Oh, yes.

INTERVIEWER: DESCRIBE THAT TO ME.

Nash: It was very important, because as, as people our age -- It was very
important to hear news of other cities having demonstrations of their own,
sit-ins of their own, at these same chains. As, as people twenty years old --

INTERVIEWER: WHAT I WANT YOU TO DO IS GET BACK TO BEING IN THE DORM, AND HEARING
THAT ORANGEBURG, AND OTHER PLACES ARE STARTING TO MOVE WHAT THAT MEANT TO YOU IN
TERMS OF --

Nash: It was a total surprise, when other cities joined in the same chains that
we were sitting-in. And I can remember being in the dorm any number of times and
hearing the newscasts, that Orangeburg had demonstrations, or Knoxville or, you
know, other, other towns. And we were really excited. I can remember, we'd
applaud, and say yea. When you are that age, you don't feel powerful. I remember
realizing that with what we were doing, trying to abolish segregation, we were
coming up against governors of seven states, judges, politicians, businessmen,
and I remember thinking, I'm only 22 years old, what do I know, what am I doing?
And I felt very vulnerable. So when we felt, when we heard these newscasts, that
other cities had demonstrations, it really helped. Because there were more of
us. And it was very important.

INTERVIEWER: NOW, IT'S TIME. YOU'RE GOING TO MOVE. YOU'RE GOING TO GO DOWN, AND
GOING TO SIT IN. YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT'S GOING TO HAPPEN, YOU KNOW, WHAT'S GOING
TO FACE YOU. WOULD YOU TALK ABOUT THAT, WHAT THAT FEELING IS ALL ABOUT.

Nash: People used to tickle me, talking about how brave I was, sitting in, and
marching, and what have you, because I was so scared. All the time. It was like
wall-to-wall terrified. I can remember sitting in class, many times, before
demonstrations, and I knew, like, we were going to have a demonstration that

afternoon. And the palms of hands would be so sweaty, and I would be so tense and tight inside. I was really afraid. The movement had a way of reaching inside me and bringing out things that I never knew were there. Like courage, and love for people. It was a real experience, to be among a group of people who would put their bodies between you and danger. And to love people that you work with enough, that you would put yours between them and danger. I can't say that I've had a similar kind of experience since Nashville. And the friendships that were forged then, as a result of going through experiences like that, have remained really strong and vital and deep, to this day. There are people that, sometimes I don't see them over several years, but when I do see them, we are still very close.

INTERVIEWER: 150 FEET REMAINING ON CAMERA ROLL 354.
QUESTION UNINTELLIGIBLE.

Nash: One of the things I remember about the bi-racial committee was that the students managed to move so fast, that other forces in the community couldn't keep up with us. At that time, we would have meetings at six in the morning, before class, for those of us that had eight o'clock classes. And then we'd meet again in the afternoon. And we received word that the bi-racial committee had issued their report one night, we received word one night. And formulated our response to it almost immediately. And it was very clear, we didn't have a hard time debating what would - the response of the committee had been that blacks and whites start at opposite ends of the lunch counters, and fill inward. And we were clear on that, that was still treating blacks and whites as though blacks were somehow inferior. We were just not free to go and sit down and be served, like anyone. And so we immediately decided to begin sitting-in. So, elements in the community that would have supported that position, didn't even have a chance to say, well, we think this is a responsible kind of workable situation. It wasn't, and we moved on it. And I loved the energy that that kind of feeling, like we right, feeling prepared to put our whole selves into what was right, gave us.

INTERVIEWER: QUESTION UNINTELLIGIBLE.

Nash: That was the thing that I could never envision, beforehand. I remember being at a workshop and asking Jim Lawsen, well, what happens when the police come and say they'll arrest us. And he would respond, and I must have asked him four or five times, that same thing, but what -- you know, what I was really trying to get him to do, was somehow say, well, everything will be all right, and of course he couldn't say that. And it was really strange, because I had no way of envisioning myself in jail, and how that would be. You know, it was like somehow, a wall here, the end of life, that I couldn't see behind. And after that workshop, I told the other people there, I said, you know, I'm really not going to demonstrate. I was afraid of going to jail. I said, I'll do telephone work, and I'll type, and what have you, but I'm really afraid to go to jail. And - and I meant it. And like I said earlier, the movement had a way of reaching inside you and when the time came to go to jail, I was far too busy to be afraid. And we had to go, that's what happened.

INTERVIEWER: THAT'S A ROLL OUT ON CAMERA ROLL 354. WE'RE GOING TO 355. AND ALSO THE SOUND IS CHANGING.

INTERVIEWER: SOUND ROLL 1324, CAMERA ROLL 355. INTERVIEW WITH DIANE NASH. LET ME GIVE YOU SOME REFERENCE TONE.

Nash: The movement had a way of reaching inside you and bringing out things that even you didn't know were there. Such as courage. When it -- when it was time to go jail, I was much too busy to be afraid. The sit-ins were really highly charged, emotionally. I'm-- I'm thinking of one in particular where, in our nonviolent workshops, we had decided to be respectful of the opposition, and try to keep issues geared towards desegregation, not get sidetracked. And the first sit-in we had, was really funny, because the waitresses were nervous. And they must have dropped \$2,000 worth of dishes that day. I mean, literally, it was almost a cartoon. Because I can remember one in particular, she, she was so nervous, she picked up dishes and she dropped one and, and she'd pick up another one, and she'd drop it. It was really funny, and we were sitting there trying not to laugh, because we thought that, that laughing would be insulting and you know, we didn't want to create that kind of atmosphere. At the same time, we were scared to death. And so there were all these emotions going on. Well, the day that the police first arrested us was interesting too, because their attitude, they had made a decision they were going to arrest us if we sat-in that day, and so, they announced to us O.K., all you nigras, get up from the lunch counter or we're going to arrest you. And their attitude was like, well, we warned you. So they repeated it a couple of times, and nobody moved. And of course, we were prepared for this. So they said, well, we warned you, you won't move, O.K. Everybody's under arrest. So we all get up and marched to the wagon. Well, actually, I wasn't in the first group. But everybody who was at the lunch counter was arrested. So then the police had the attitude like, O.K., we warned them, they didn't listen. And then they turned and they looked around the lunch counter again, and the second wave of students had all taken seats. They were confounded, kind of looked at each other like, now what do we do? They said well, O.K., we'll arrest those too, and they did it. Then the third wave. No matter what they did and how many they arrested, there was still a lunch counter full of students, there. And it -- it was interesting to watch their response, which was really, really surprised them. They didn't quite know how to act, and pretty soon it just got to be a problem for them.

INTERVIEWER: LET'S JUMP A LITTLE BIT FURTHER AND-,----- . HOW DID PEOPLE RESPOND TO ----- HOW DID IT AFFECT THE MOVEMENT AT THAT TIME?

Nash: Attorney Lubey was a very, very respected man in the community. He had a reputation of defending people who didn't have enough money to adequately pay him, and of being a really decent human being. And quite by accident, the student central committee had a meeting scheduled for six a.m. that morning. And I remember I was up, getting dressed to go to the meeting, when I heard the explosion, although I didn't know what it was. I just heard this big boom, and by the time I got out of the dorm and went to the cafeteria and what have you, people had started talking about the fact of what had happened. So when we got to the meeting that morning, we were able to again, move very rapidly on what had just happened, and we decided to have the mass march, consisting of students from all of the schools, who were participating. And so we got back, it was interesting, too, the make-up of the central committee. There was a real continuum of students, those who tended to be more radical. By radical, I mean, going to the heart of the problem, a really progressive thing, the ones who were always ready to march. And then there was, you know there was a continuum of people, those who were in the middle, and then those who were conservative, in terms of, you know, wanting to go slow. I wasn't, personally, I wasn't sure that you know, this mass march, that fast, that day, was the thing to do, at that time. After that it was really clear that it was a wonderful strategy, and I'm

glad that the student committee decided to do it, even though I wasn't ready to at the moment. But--

INTERVIEWER: QUESTION UNINTELLIGIBLE.

Nash: The students met on Tennessee A&I's campus, and we marched, I think, three abreast. We were very organized. One of the things that we made it a point of was that whenever there was a demonstration, we were to be overly dressed. The men generally wore suits and ties, and the women -- we looked like we were dressing up for Sunday. And anyway, we marched quietly -- we were met later by students at Fisk. We passed Fisk campus. And other students, other schools had points where they joined in to the march. There were many thousands of people that marched that day. We marched silently, really. And the -- the long line of students must have continued for many, many blocks. Miles, maybe. And we marched to the mayor's office. We had sent telegrams ahead of time --

12 November 1985
Chicago, Illinois
Sound Roll 1325
Camera Roll 357, 100 feet remaining

Interview with Diane Nash

INTERVIEWER: TELL ME ABOUT [UNINTELLIGIBLE]

Nash: I think it's really important that young people today understand that the movement of the sixties was really a people's movement. The media and history seems to record it as Martin Luther King's movement, but if young people realized that it was people just like them, their age, that formulated goals and strategies, and actually developed the movement, that when they look around now, and see things that need to be changed, that they, instead of saying, I wish we had a leader like Martin Luther King today, they would say, what can I do, what can my roommate and I do to effect that change. And that's not to take anything away from Martin. I personally think he made a tremendous contribution. And I -- I liked him a great deal, as an individual, thought he was a really nice guy. And I, still feel the pain of his not being with us, but I think that, that, that it's really important to realize that each individual shoulders a great deal of responsibility, and, and, and that's the way the movement in the sixties was accomplished.

INTERVIEWER: EXPLAIN, DESCRIBE THE NEW REACTIONS YOU FOUND [UNINTELLIGIBLE].

Nash: Well, my former husband and I were sitting--

INTERVIEWER: O.K., THAT WAS A ROLL OUT ON CAMERA ROLL 357. WE'RE GOING TO 358. CONTINUATION OF INTERVIEW WITH DIANE NASH IN CHICAGO. I WANT YOU TO TAKE YOURSELF BACK, GET IN TOUCH WITH HOW YOU REACTED TO [UNINTELLIGIBLE]

Nash: Well, on the Sunday when the girls had been killed in the bombing in church, in Birmingham, my former husband and I, Jim Bevel, were sitting in Golden Frank's living room. There was a voter registration campaign going on currently, that we were involved in, and we were crying, because in many ways we, we felt like our own children had been killed. We knew that the activity of the civil rights movement had been involved in generating a kind of energy that brought out this kind of hostility. And we decided that we would do something about it, and we said that we had two options. The first one was, we felt

confident that if we tried, we could find out who had done it, and we could make sure they got killed. And we considered that as a real option. And the second option was, that we felt that if blacks in Alabama had the right to vote, that they could protect black children. And we deliberately made a choice, and chose the second option. And, at that time, promised ourselves and each other, that if it took twenty years, or as long as it took, we weren't going to stop working on it and trying, until Alabama blacks had the right to vote. So, we drew up that day, an initial strategy draft for a movement in Alabama designed to get the right to vote. Bevel continued working in the local, he had responsibilities in the local voter registration drive, and my job was to get on an airplane and have a meeting with Dr. King, and Fred Shuttlesworth, and encourage them to have a meeting with the staff to make a decision on what to do. Our strategy could be a draft, but -- wait a minute --

Nash: Well, we tried for some -- Well, the first time I remember being in direct touch with the Justice Department, of course, was with the Freedom Ride. And their response was to try to discourage us from going, and of course, we had decided to go, and we weren't asking them if we could go, we were informing them of what we were going to do, so that they could, you know, offer protection, or whatever they wanted to do. And their response had been, well, don't do it. All right, so then in Birmingham, I remember calling the Justice Department one day to tell them that the Birmingham Police had police dogs, and were, had brought the police dogs into the demonstrators. And their response was, well, have they bitten anybody? And I said, no, as far as I know, unless they've bitten someone since I left in order to come and make this phone call, so, you know, the Justice Department's response was well, if they haven't bitten anyone yet, there's nothing we can do, until they actually bite people. Which wasn't the case, because there had been the incident of the, I think they were called RAM, who were making plans to blow up the Statue of Liberty, allegedly making plans to blow up the Statue of Liberty. Well, they certainly arrested them, before they actually did it. And so I, I really felt impatience with the Justice Department, because if United States citizens were getting discriminated against, they had a responsibility to act like a government, and assert themselves. Civil rights laws were the only ones -- later, after Kennedy offered the Civil Rights Bill. Violating civil rights laws and discriminating against blacks, you couldn't get in jail for doing. Nobody was jailed for violating those laws, or, or seriously fined. It was like they were playing. So, we realized that we had to really show the responsibility to our movement ourselves, and not count on Washington to do that.

INTERVIEWER: SPEAKING ABOUT GOVERNMENT, AND GOVERNMENT'S INVOLVEMENT, GOING BACK TO SIT-INS, HERE YOU DON'T HAVE DISTINCT LAWS THAT SAY A PERSON HAS TO OPEN THEIR STORE TO YOU OR ALLOW YOU TO SIT NEXT TO ANOTHER PERSON AT THAT COUNTER. WAS THERE ANY WAY THAT YOU FELT THAT YOU COULD ENGAGE LAW ENFORCEMENT, OR LAW TO AID YOU AT THAT POINT. WAS THAT A PART OF YOUR STRATEGY?

Nash: Now, the laws I was referring to had to do particularly with Kennedy's Civil Rights Act. And in fact Gloria Richardson and I sat down at a meeting that Kennedy had called women from across the country to support, and we circled the loophole in every section of that bill, which really weakened it. Now, interestingly enough, the , the law and the reality of action, is, is, has an interesting relationship. For example, in Nashville, in 1960, and later, there were laws on the books, that said it was illegal for blacks and whites to eat together in public accommodations. Well, we desegregated the lunch counters, and those laws stayed on the books for some years. I presume that they are no longer there, but it was in practice while there were in fact, laws that forbade it. There were injunctions issued throughout the movement. And if thousands of

people disobeyed the injunction, the injunctions were forgotten about. So, laws that are immoral, I think people have to realize, that there do in fact exist higher laws, and that they shouldn't tolerate, or, or obey those laws.

INTERVIEWER: QUESTION UNINTELLIGIBLE.

Nash: First of all, I always felt like I was an individual, even though at the same time, I've been very aware of being part of a larger movement. I think during the period of time where we kept hearing newscasts that city after city was, had begun demonstrating at lunch counters was when I began to see there is really something sweeping the country, and started feeling a real identification with people, many times, whom I had never met. But I knew that there were hundreds of people in various cities that were a part of the same thing I was a part of. And it was important, it was quite an experience.

INTERVIEWER: UNINTELLIGIBLE.

Nash: Like a part of something strong and powerful and right and good and, and growing and transcending some really negative, unhealthy stuff that was going on.

INTERVIEWER: JUST ONE MOMENT, DURING ALL THAT TIME, THAT MAKES YOU LAUGH, MAKES YOU SMILE, MAKES YOU FEEL GLAD.

Nash: The moments when I got out of jail. I think, when we had the mass meeting and announced to the Nashville community that we had won the struggle, was really a, a high point. And, and you look back and realize that every kind of emotion had been evoked. The anger, the fear, the, the tension, the awareness of being part of a large, powerful issue, and group and, and the happiness, the feeling like, justice has triumphed. The, the Voting Rights Act, that Alabama blacks actually had the right to vote, and that there were federal referees going to come in to make sure of that, after having made a commitment to, to help issue that in, that was a great moment.

INTERVIEWER: ON CAMERA ROLL 358, AT THE END OF THE ROLL OUT, SOUND WAS STILL GOING. O.K., THIS IS CAMERA ROLL 359.

INTERVIEWER: BACK IN NASHVILLE, YOU'RE SITTING IN A ROOM WITH JOHN LEWIS, BERNARD LAFAYETTE, MARION BARRY, AND OTHER PEOPLE. IF YOU LOOKED AROUND THAT ROOM, DO YOU THINK ALL THESE PEOPLE WOULD BE SO IMPORTANT TO THE MOVEMENT, DID ANY OF THEM HAVE A FEELING FOR WHAT WAS HAPPENING?

Nash: I don't understand the question. That they would be important to the movement itself? During that period of time? Or that they'd emerge later?

INTERVIEWER: DID YOU REALIZE, DID YOU HAVE ANY FEELING FOR WHAT WAS IN THAT ROOM-- .

Nash: I had a, I really never felt very able to envision the future. I was intensely aware of them as people, at the time. My respect for them was profound. They very brave, very wise people. And, and I loved them very much. And we were all parts -- they were very reliable. I could count on them to do things. We were all really aware that each other's lives depended on other people in the group. And that's the way I related to them, and I think that, I know that's the way they related to me also. And that experience was very important. But as to envisioning where we would all be in twenty years, or

anything like that, it was possible for me to envision. I don't know, I don't think I tried very hard.

INTERVIEWER: QUESTION UNINTELLIGIBLE.

Nash: Well, C.T. Vivian and Jim Lawson were older than the students, and I mentioned to you that, for me, being twenty or twenty-two represented a certain kind of vulnerability and I felt like we were coming up against people who were older and more powerful and more experienced. C.T. and Jim were part of the student central committee. They were representatives from the group that we used to call the adults, the Nashville Christian Leadership Council, and they were right there with the students. They sat-in at the lunch counters right with us. Anything that happened to us happened to them. They were vulnerable to being beaten up or jailed, or what have you. So, they were very important links to the older community. And C.T. offered a kind of fire in his personality, you know, his, his commitment was something that I've always found beautiful and it's lasted through the years. It's, it's been a very long relation.

INTERVIEWER: QUESTION UNINTELLGIBLE.

Nash: I guess his fire was very much in evidence that day. C.T. Vivian made an initial presentation. He was the person who presented our, our position to the Mayor, to Mayor Ben West on the steps that day, in Nashville. And he was an eloquent spokesperson. His, his fire, was very much in evidence that day. He, he has a certain commitment in his personality that really pervades the things he does and says, and, and that was his role that day, to make our, state our position.

INTERVIEWER: THIS WILL BE ROOM TONE WITH THE DIANE NASH INTERVIEW, STARTING NOW.

Nash: There were many thousands of people that marched that day. We marched silently, really. And the, the long line of students must have continued for many, many blocks. Or miles, maybe. And we marched to the mayor's office. We had sent telegrams ahead of time, telling him that as a result of the bombing, turning the Lubey's home into a state of violence, tension, violence in the city of Nashville, we felt like we needed to talk to the mayor. So we met him on the steps of City Hall. And confronted him with what his feelings as a man, were. As a person. I was particularly interested in that, as opposed to just his being a mayor. And I have a lot of respect for the way he responded. He didn't have to respond the way he did. He said, that he felt like it was wrong, for citizens of Nashville to be discriminated against at the lunch counters, solely on the basis of the color of their skin. And I think that was the turning point. The Nashville newspaper reported that, in the headlines, the next day, and it was one more step towards desegregating the lunch counters. And I think that day was very important. One of the things that we were able to do in the movement, which was one of the things that we were also, that we learned, also, from Gandhi's movement, was to turn the energy of violence, that was perpetrated against us, into advantage. And so if Attorney Lubey's house was burned, that was used as a catalyst to draw many thousands of people to express their opposition to segregation.

INTERVIEWER: HE MAKES THE STATEMENT, THE DOWNTOWN MERCHANTS EVENTUALLY DECIDE TO DESEGREGATE. IS IT A VICTORY THEN, HAVE THEY WON? OR IS THERE ANOTHER --

Nash: Who makes a statement?

INTERVIEWER: THE MERCHANTS DECIDE THAT THEY ARE GOING TO, THE MAYOR SAYS THAT HE DOES NOT THINK -- MERCHANTS EVENTUALLY DECIDE TO LET PEOPLE DESEGREGATE THEIR COUNTERS. IS IT A VICTORY THEN? OR IS THERE MORE?

Nash: Well, I think that when blacks were actually served at the lunch counters, that was clearly reaching the goal we had set. There was another very important element in terms of the economic withdrawal. The first time we talked to the merchants, their attitude, well, you wanted a meeting, here, we're having it. They listened to what we had to say, they very quickly said no, we can't do it, and then their attitude was like, we're busy men, we're ready for the meeting to be over. That's it, no, we can't have desegregation.

INTERVIEWER: ROLLED OUT. WE'RE AT 356.
SO TALK TO ME ABOUT THAT, THE BUSINESS COMMUNITY AND HOW THE BOYCOTT CHANGED THEIR MINDS.

Nash: You know, Gandhi actually developed a way to declare warfare without using violence. And it is efficient, and effective. And I - I sometimes marvel that in spite of the success that we had with the southern movement, that we are not studying it and developing it and pursuing it more. it's -- it's a process that a community goes through, that consist of five steps. One of the important phases of the movement in Nashville was the economic withdrawal, where the oppressed people really withdraw their participation from their own oppression. So there was a withdrawal of shopping, by the blacks, and by whites who agreed with us, and who would participate, from the downtown area, that while blacks couldn't be served at the lunch counters or in the restaurants of the department stores, we didn't shop downtown at all. That was the height of the Easter shopping season, which used to be even important to, to retail merchants than they are now. Everybody used to get brand new Easter outfits, that, that could possibly afford to. And that boycott was, I think, about 98% effective, or more, among blacks in Nashville. So that the next time -- when we began negotiating with the merchants again, they were much more interested in talking to us than they had been the first time. And they had a real interest in working out how we could really resolve the situation. And I think the - the experience was important for me, personally, because we really began to see them as people, and try to hear what their reservations were. For instance, you know, they were concerned that there would not be a boycott of the whites, at the lunch counters, if they began to serve blacks. And we started really strategizing how we could avoid that. So, some of the whites in Nashville who were, who recognized that it was important to desegregate the city, figured into the, the strategy, because they made it a point to sit next to the blacks, who were being served, so that there could not be a white boycott. So, those kinds of experiences made me really look at the fact that bringing about social change through violence is probably not nearly as, as realistic. Because, who do you kill? Do you kill all whites? That doesn't make sense, because we had whites who were our opposition the first year, who the second year, who were merchants, even, the first year. The second year, they took an attitude with the merchants whose lunch counters we were desegregating of, kind of, I know how you feel, I felt that way last year. It's not that bad, in fact, it really makes sense. And they were, they were helpful to us the second year, in bringing about desegregation.

INTERVIEWER: CAMERA ROLL 356. 200 FEET REMAINING.

WHAT DOES THAT MEAN TO YOU, AND THEN HOW, HOW DOES IT THEN BEGIN TO FORM ITSELF INTO A, INTO A ----- . SO TALK TO ME ABOUT HOW THE FEELING, THE IDEA TO, TO ORGANIZE AS A STUDENT, ORGANIZATION CAME ABOUT.

Nash: I remember receiving the invitation to attend the conference that would bring together student leadership from many campuses where there were sit-ins, sit-ins going on. And, of course, we had been really excited by the fact that there was a national movement in many cities involved. We felt a real kinship with the students who were working in other cities, to bring about the same things that we were. And it, it felt like a good idea. We were interested in meeting the people that -- meeting as individuals the people that we had heard about. And we decided to send a large delegation to the -- that was Raleigh, I believe, yeah, North Carolina. The impetus, we understood later, had come, for that meeting had come from Ella Baker. And I, I'd like to just say a couple of words about Ella Baker. She was a person who I think was very central to setting the direction that the student movement --

INTERVIEWER: START IT AGAIN, TELL ME WHO ELLA BAKER WAS, IN CASE I CAN'T CUT IT.

Nash: Ella Baker was very important to giving direction to the student movement at that particular point. And not giving direction in a way of her making decisions, as to what the students ought to do, but in terms of really seeing how important it was to recognize the fact that the students should set the, the goals and directions, and maintain control of the student movement. So, she was there in terms of offering rich experience of her own, and advice, and helping patch things up when they needed to be patched up. She was very important to me, personally, for several reasons. Number one, I was just beginning to learn, during that period of time, how everyone, particularly people who were older than we were, had other motives for their participation. Motives other than simply achieving freedom. There were people involved who worked with civil rights organizations, who were very concerned about their organization's image, and perpetuating their organization. Who were concerned about fund-raising, and who would make decisions and take positions, based on those concerns, even at the expense, sometime, of actually gaining desegregation, such as the students were trying to do. And that was a very energy-draining thing for me, sometimes. And I didn't, I remember a couple of times when things had happened that really bothered me, that I didn't totally understand, I never had to worry about where Ella Baker was coming from. She was a very honest person, and she was, she would speak her mind honestly. She was a person that I turned to frequently, who could emotionally pick me back up and dust me off. And she would say things, like, well, so-and-so is concerned about his fund-raising, maybe that's why he took -- and it would make things click, and fall into place and she was just tremendously helpful. To me personally, and also to SNCC. I think she was constantly aware of the fact that the differences that the students had were probably not as important as the similarities that we had, in terms of what we were trying to do. So, very often, she was the person who was able to make us see, and work together. I think her participation as a person some years older than we, could really serve as a model of how older people can give energy and help to younger people, at the same time, not take over and tell them what to do, really strengthen them as individuals and also strengthen -- she strengthened our organization.

INTERVIEWER: WHAT MADE YOU FEEL THAT WHAT YOU HAD IN THE STUDENT MOVEMENT AT THAT TIME WAS SOMETHING NEW, SOMETHING SPECIAL, WAS ABOUT, WHAT ABOUT --

Nash: You know, when you're that vulnerable, and you're afraid of getting killed, and you're being sent to jail, and you never know what the next hour --

INTERVIEWER: O.K. THAT WAS A ROLL OUT ON CAMERA ROLL 356. WE'RE GOING TO 357. THIS IS STILL CAMERA ROLL 357. O.K. FRESH ROLL 357. WHAT I WANT TO DO IS, I WANT TO JUMP TO THE FREEDOM RIDES, AND I WANT YOU TO TELL ME ABOUT HEARING ABOUT MONTGOMERY AND THE FIRST RIDES AND STOPPING WITH WHAT THAT DID TO YOU.

Nash: Well, we heard about the Freedom Rides in Nashville, when they were starting, and we all agreed with their purposes and agreed that it was really an important thing for CORE to do. We also were very aware of the tact that taking the route that they were taking, which was down the eastern seacoast, into the deep south, through Georgia, Florida, Alabama and Mississippi, we knew that that was awfully dangerous, and that they would probably meet with violence a number of times. So in Nashville we decided that we would watch them, as they, as the Freedom Ride progressed, and if there were ways that we could help, we'd stand by, and be available. And true enough, that's -- well, they were beaten and attacked, many, many times. When the buses were burned in Anniston, on Mother's Day, the Nashville group met and -- When those buses were burned in Alabama, since there was such a close kinship, between us and the Freedom Riders, we understood exactly what they were doing, and it was our fight, every bit as much as theirs. It was as though we had been attacked. And a contingency of students left Nashville to go and pick up the Freedom Ride where it had stopped, been stopped. Now, that was really one of the times where I saw people face death. Because nobody went and joined the Freedom Ride without -- it would have been really unwise to have gone without realizing that they might not come back. Some of the students that left gave me sealed letters to be mailed, in case they were killed. That's how prepared they were, for death.

INTERVIEWER: WHY DID YOU, WHY DID YOU THINK YOU HAD TO CONTINUE RIDES, THEN?

Nash: You know, if the Freedom Ride had been stopped as a result of violence, I strongly felt that the future of the movement was going to be, just cut short. Because the impression would have been given that whenever a movement starts, all that has to be done is that you attack it, massive violence and the, the blacks would stop. And I thought that was a very dangerous thing to happen. So, under those circumstances, it was really important that the Ride continue. And again, part of the non-violent strategy understands that when that type of negative image is directed at you, one of the important things to do is find ways to convert it to, to positive energy, which we were able to do as a result of continuing.

INTERVIEWER: WHAT DO YOU THINK THAT THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT WAS GOING TO DO? WAS THERE A PLAN TO THEN FORCE THEM INTO SOME SORT OF ACTION, WAS THAT A PART OF THE PLAN THEN, TO GET THEM TO RESPOND TO --

Nash: As I recall, there was some, different individuals had different feelings about that. Of course, our whole, right-- our whole way of operating was that we took ultimate responsibility for what we were going to do, so we made our decisions, and then we told the federal government what that would be. It was felt that they should be advised, in Washington, of what our plans were and what we were going to do, and we certainly made sure that they did know what we were going to do. Some people hoped for protection from the federal government. I--I

think Jim Lawson was, he cautioned against relying on hoping for federal protection.

INTERVIEWER: BUT YOU SAID YOU WERE CONSTANTLY IN TOUCH WITH THEM, YOU WOULD CALL THE JUSTICE DEPARTMENT CONSTANTLY.

Nash: Well, as my -- the students from Nashville who were going to pick up the Freedom Ride elected me coordinator. And as coordinator, part of my responsibility was to stay in touch with the Justice Department. I was to keep the press informed, the Justice Department, keep the communities that were participating informed, such as Birmingham, Montgomery, Jackson, Nashville, etc. To coordinate the training and recruitment of more people to take up the Freedom Ride, etc. etc., so I advised the Justice Department regularly as to what our plans were, and what kinds of things were happening.

INTERVIEWER: NOW, WHEN THE RIDERS ARE AMBUSHED IN MONTGOMERY, THE SECOND WAVE, WITH JOHN LEWIS, JIM ----- AND THESE PEOPLE. WHAT DID YOU FEEL ABOUT -- DID YOU, DID YOU EXPECT THEM TO BE PROTECTED AT THAT POINT?

Nash: Well, I hoped they would be, of course, everything was so uncertain. We never knew what the situation would be like ten minutes from the time that it was. During the Freedom Ride, in my job as coordinator, I found myself really, that was an intensely emotional time for me, because the people, some of the people I loved most, who were my closest friends, I was very well aware of them -- of the fact that when I went to sleep at night, some of them might not be alive the next night. And during that particular time I think I, I cried just every night, profusely. And I needed to, as an energy release. It was so much tension. It was like being at war. And we were very upset when they were attacked and injured, and I remember visiting them in the hospital, and there was so much concern over which of these injuries would be permanent. People really stood to be permanently injured for the rest of their lives.

INTERVIEWER: TELL ME ABOUT GOING TO JACKSON, TELL ME A STORY ABOUT GOING THERE, BEING --

Nash: [singing] Here will I stand 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.

INTERVIEWER: THAT WAS WONDERFUL. [APPLAUSE]

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