Oral History Project
Eileen Kelley Walbert
February 3, 1995
Code: Huntley [H], Walbert [W]

H: This is an interview with Mrs. Eileen Kelley Walbert from the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute's Oral History Project done by Dr. Horace Huntley at Miles College, February 3, 1995.

Thank you, Mrs. Walbert, for coming out and sitting with us this morning. As you know, what we are doing is simply attempting to sort of get a personality of individual people who were associated with the movement, or associated with Birmingham evolving from what we termed "Bombingham" to Birmingham, finally, and I want to thank you for taking your time out this morning to come and sit and talk with us.

W: I'm honored.

H: First, of all, I just want to get a little information, a little personal information, about yourself. You are not a native Alabamian. Tell me a little about your background.

W: Well I was born in a little village in Virginia. I was the first child baptized into the Episcopal church there that my grandfather founded, and I met my husband during the second World War and we spent a few years after that in New York and then we came to Birmingham.

H: You were born in Virginia. What part of Virginia?

W: It was a little village called Hilton Village about three miles from Newport News, which was an embarkation center.

H: Is that where you went to school?

W: Yes, that's where I went to school.

H: You finished high school there?

W: Yes.

H: Did you go on to college?

W: No I did not. I went back for a postgraduate course in stenography.

H: Then you moved to New York from Virginia?

W: Yes, when my husband had got out of the army we were in New York for a short time.

H: How did you like New York?

W: Oh, I loved New York. We would have like to have stayed there but it was very difficult at that time.

H: Then, did you move from New York to Birmingham?

W: Yes.

H: When did you come to Birmingham?

W: 1946.

H: What was the transition like moving from New York City to Birmingham, Alabama?

W: Oh, it was like, I've said this before, like moving to Nazi Germany because the second World War was just over and we hadn't recovered from the horrors from that, you know, and to come here and although there were no swastikas on most of the population, half of the population, their skin color served the same purpose for discrimination and oppression. The signs, 'Colored' and 'White' were just so revolting, so ...

H: Was this the first time that you had been in the Deep South?

W: No, I grew up in Virginia and how I escaped all of this, I mean… Virginia was the last integrated school, so it wasn't that good for African Americans. But, I just wasn't so aware of it. You know, I didn't even know there was such a thing as social studies and certainly we heard nothing in our history classes about the oppression of so many of our people.

H: So this was your first encounter then with this kind of situation?

W: Yes, yes, yes. It was a shock to go back years later and find that many of the people, or some of the people I grew up with shared those same prejudiced views.

H: Let me just back up just a bit and ask a bit about your family--your mother and father. Can you

tell us a little about them?

W: Well, they were Yankees. My mother grew up in New England and my father in New York. My father got carried away with Teddy Roosevelt's Rough Riders and he was, I'm told by the members of his family, pulling a train to go to Notre Dame where his two older brothers had gone to school and he got off in Florida. They were living in New Mexico at the time and joined the army and went to the Philippine Islands where he stayed for 17 years. During that time, he met my mother, who went there from New England as a missionary nurse and met my father and she was there for ten years. My three older sisters were born there.

H: How many brothers and sisters do you have?

W: I have four older sisters. All are deceased now.

H: Your brother, was he older or younger?

W: I don't have a brother. I'm sorry I didn't make that clear.

H: Okay. So you then...were any of your sisters born in the Philippines?

W: The three older sisters.

H: Have you had the opportunity to live in the Philippines?

W: No, I haven't. I really enjoyed Carlos Romero's book. He was the first president of the Philippines and, in fact, I sent it to my father some years later. But, my mother implanted in my brain I guess the idea that discrimination existed, because before she met my father and was working in a hospital in Manilla she invited a young Filipino man to accompany her to a dance or party or some affair there and was told never to do that again. That they must not...what is the word-- 'associate' with the natives. There's another term for that that escapes me right now... 'Fraternize' with the natives. That's the word. And when she told me about it, she used that expression with enough hate for me to realize that was not the proper thing. Though I was very young at the time, apparently it sank in.

H: What brought you to Birmingham?

W: Well, my husband is a musician, pianist. [He] teaches piano and the family business was a gospel publishing business in Tennessee where he grew up and they had contacts here that enabled him to have a number of students already signed up to study with him. Of course, we had to have some income, so that's what brought us here.

H: And you said upon the arrival in Birmingham the atmosphere...

W: Well the first thing one sees are those signs, 'Colored' 'White' at the train station, the bus stations, over the fountains in all of the department stores and it was quite blatant.

H: What part of Birmingham did you live?

W: When we first came, we had a half a house in Inglenook and then through a mutual acquaintance we had an apartment in Mountain Brook and then we moved to Homewood. When we moved to Homewood, we didn't know we were moving out of Birmingham because, you know, all the little neighborhood communities used that title. And, at one point, when there was an election about joining Birmingham I was at the polls all day, that day. Although we won immediately, there was another election and it was voted against.

H: So, you, then, would not get the opportunity then to vote...

W: Not in Birmingham. And, my reason for wanting to be at the polls that day, my reasons for wanting to be annexed into Birmingham was in order to have a vote against Bull Conner. It was quite a motivation.

H: So you never got the opportunity to vote against Bull Conner as a result of you not living in Birmingham?

W: No.

H: Do you have any memories of relationships that developed between yourself and others who were attempting to develop inter-racial dialogue in Birmingham?

W: I felt very lonely in my neighborhood most of the time. I did have a few people through the connection with this musical friend who we attended events at his house and met a couple of reporters, so that was very heartening. And then..., but it wasn't until I guess in the [19]50s that I met Dr. and Anny—Dr. Frederick and Anny Kraus—who told me about the Birmingham

Council on Human Relations. It was at that time I began to attend those meetings and to meet people who were involved in trying to change things.

H: Can you tell me a little about the operation of that organization?

W: Well, we met once a month and the speaker very often..., The speakers were trying to get us to do something, you know, really constructive and overt, I guess I should say, at every meeting. There were so many atrocities being committed in this town, so many young African American men who were being knifed in the back...in the back, because they were resisting arrest, you know. I mean shot in the back, because they had a knife and were resisting arrest. And, uh, there were so many other horrendous things going on. Usually, at the meeting, the victim, or if he was deceased, a member of the family would be there in person to tell about it and ....

H: There were some rather trying times. Well, in that kind of setting, obviously we are talking about some people that turned Birmingham into being a police state and the Black community being under siege. The kinds of things that the Black community had to endure as far as the police were concerned...

W: Yes.

H: Some suggested that the police department was very closely tied with the Ku Klux Klan.

W: Oh yes.

H: How would you react to that?

W: Of course. I mean, there were so many incidents of that where.... One night, well I don't know if the Klan had anything to do with this, but I remember when the Reverend Herbert Oliver, who was president of our council for a time, in fact, just before the marches in Selma, was taken from his house, in the middle of the night, in his underwear by the police because he had the audacity to go up before the library board and ask for permission for Black people to come to the library.

H: And he was taken out by the police?

W: Yeah.

H: This is the kind of incident, of course, that would lead people to obviously associate the police and the Klan in the same...

W: Well, the Klan came to our meetings. And, also, Jamie Moore, the police chief, Jamie Moore had a representative at everything that was integrated. He would saddle up to any newcomer who came and get their name and address. You know, we knew this was going on but before we could get to them and say, 'Don't talk to him unless you want your picture in the **Birmingham Independent**….' But he...he did...and in the marches, you know, he would be pointing out, he would be there with the police and several police pointing out various ones and giving their names and they were invariably printed in this paper and the caption, though they didn't come right out and say he or she is a communist..., well maybe they did, but the way it was...you know... [they would say] we were supporting the Communists and that sort of thing to make us look like very disreputable, undemocratic people.

H: What was the atmosphere in the meetings when you knew that this individual was there?

W: Oh, he was very friendly, you know. We weren't intimidated by him but the Klan would follow us home and one night we came out of the meeting and the Kraus' and I, I forget who we were talking to, maybe the Reverend Harold Long, who was there then. We were the last to leave and as we started to come of the driveway, which went up, there was a car with the Klan, a couple of men in it and the lights were on bright, you know, shining down on our faces and so, when the Kraus'....and Dr. Roger Hanson was there that night.

So, we went and told them what was going on and they came out and we left and went around the other way and I was so impressed with Roger and Frederick. Frederick was driving the car and he circled around the block and by that time the Klan car had pulled out and parked on the ... just backed out the driveway and parked. So, he went up behind them and made a big to do of taking their license number, you know, and when we went by very slowly, and they were glaring at them, you know, so Anny and I did the same thing. And, then, he just snaked through the neighborhood—Frederick did—on the way out to be sure they were really following us, which they were. They followed us into the University grounds and then they just sort of waved when they turned off. And, it turned out they were guards at the University.[1]

H: Is that right?

W: But this happened. They followed people home oftentimes. I remember one person just drove into the police station and they followed her to the police station. She was…Alice Kidd was her name. She's deceased now, but she was not deterred by...intimidated by anybody.

H: So she just drove ...

W: Right. They, you know, backed off, drove off.

H: Were any of the members ever harassed, I mean, physically beaten?

W: Let me think. I don't recall right now.

H: They were too intimidating?

W: Dr. Boykin and his wife attended the meetings—the parents of Dr. Joel Boykin. And I remember before I began attending the meetings that they had built a very fine clinic and it had been bombed. They were a lovely couple.

H: Where was that clinic located?

W: It's in Ensley, I think, still. I'm not sure. I get addresses in Ensley and Fairfield confused.

H: They're close, adjacent to each other. When did you first come in contact with Fred Shuttlesworth?

W: Well, when Phillips High School... When he tried to get his children registered in Phillips High School and was so brutally beaten and hospitalized as a result, my daughter wrote him a fan letter. I didn't know all of this was going on, because, you know, we were so terrified for our children and so they arranged to meet at one of the council meetings and I don't suppose he even remembers that, because his life was pretty exciting at that time. But, that's when I first met him.

H: How old was your daughter?

W: She was a freshman in high school. Ultimately, the Kraus' daughter and Pam[2] and the Shuttlesworth children got together a few times and then we read in the paper that the Southern

Christian Leadership Conference was having a....it must have been a youth conference. I tried to find a newspaper article about that, but young people were conducting the meeting and there were mostly young people present, so I assume it was a young conference at Bethel Baptist Church.

H: Was this about the same time that your daughter had written the letter?

W: Yes, soon after that. So, we went there and we were greeted by C. T. Vivian, because the Rev. Shuttlesworth was.... You know, there were several times when he had to rescue his children, I think. I'm not sure this was the Anniston incident. He was somewhere in the county getting them out of jail or taking care of his children. That's where we first learned the freedom songs. We also had with us a young man whose, I don't know where his family's sympathies were, I feel sure they weren't hostile, but they were not actively involved and...so, uh, it was the most religious experience I had ever had up to that time. He taught us 'This Little Light of Mine' and 'We Shall Overcome' and it was just beautiful.

H: Did you attend these more than once?

W: No, this was a one-time event, so far as I know. They were to have been an ongoing thing....but, well, when it was over they were going across the street for refreshments and someone came in. The children had already gone over, and someone came in and said that there was green car and these men were riding around and had circled the block a few times. They didn't seem terribly concerned, but I panicked and ran over there and got the children, you know, and got out. You know, Pam was just ashamed and said, 'Well, you'll have to call Mrs. Shuttlesworth and apologize,' which I did, but we had this young man with us and I thought if something happened it would....Well, that gives you an idea of how terrifying things were.

H: Were you the only White parent there?

W: I was really surprised that there were no other White people there. I guess the word hadn't gotten around to, you know, the other White people who were connected with the Council. I feel sure that some of them would have come, but...

H: There was no other time when there were more that were involved in that kind of participation?

W: No. No. I don't know what the children did after that. It wasn't too long after that Pam left

town and I really don't know.

H: Did she leave before she graduated from high school?

W: Yes, she got a scholarship. No, not before she graduated. Yes, she did. I'm getting confused. She got a scholarship to a school of drama in New York, went there and then came back and finished high school. She didn't stay very long. She went to Birmingham Southern after that.

H: In 1960 and '61 we had the sit-ins and the Freedom Rides. What was happening in Homewood at the same time that this was taking place?

W: The 'Keep the Schools Open' meetings were going on.

H: What kind of meetings?

W: 'Keep the Schools Open.' This..uh, I wish Betty and Roger Hanson were here to tell you about that but, because Betty-- They feared for her life at a meeting that I believe was held in the library, because she had the first women's radio program and had brought a Swedish lady in to talk about Planned Parenthood and for that she was labeled the baby killer of Alabama and these, I would say, 'pro-violent' people turned up that... I was not present at that meeting. I forget why I was not, but something else was going on. I did attend the next one, and I think the library didn't allow any more meetings there and I'm not, I believe it was at the Tutwiler, but I'm not sure about that.

The most repulsive White man I think I've ever seen, just the personification of evil, got up at that meeting, you know, which was about keeping the schools open and everything and he said something so horrendous I don't even want to put it on tape. It was just...it was just... they were really frightening people. They are frightening people!

H: Well, what did he say?

W: Oh, God.

H: You don't necessarily have to say it, but what was the essence.

W: Well, I mean the essence was very brief. It was specifically, you put a Black man in bed with a White woman and a Black snake will crawl out. I mean, oh, God, some people...

H: So this, then, the 'Keep The Schools Open' campaign was as a result of the **Brown v. Board** and the attempts to integrate the schools, I'm assuming?

W: Yes, and as a result of all of the protests against that. It was to reinforce the teachers and faculty and community that wanted this to go on.

H: So those were some rather heated meetings?

W: Yes, they were dreadful.

H: So, as the sit-ins and the demonstrations or the sit-ins and the freedom rides were going on, these kinds of meetings are also happening at approximately the same time.
W: The Council meetings were going on every month.

H: And you were dealing with different issues, different issues such as the schools. Did you ever...

W: And, we had, we had a lady from the American Friends Service Committee come on and, I mean it was dangerous to even hold a seminar on integrating the schools. We went to some little community out in the county and I-- In retrospect, I think just to go there and register was an act of defiance or whatever you want to call it.

H: You were going to discuss integration of the schools?

W: Yes. I don't know how many of those there were. The Council was involved in that...well, my involvement was with Willa Adams, Oscar Adams' wife. He was an attorney for the schools and now a retired Supreme Court Justice, Associate Justice. I worked with Willa on gathering data as to why the schools were unequal which wasn't difficult to do because, you know, even before we went out, there were people like a teacher in Bessemer, Della Bryant, who attended our meetings regularly. She was telling about the school in which she taught as having a separate building for lunches and in rainy weather little children would have to carry their little plates from the lunchroom through the rain—or whatever, there wasn't even any kind of a shed—to their classrooms to eat because there was nowhere to eat in the lunchroom. Well, I don't have to tell you about that. The things...they were so disproportionate.

H: What other kinds of inequities did you see?

W: Well, at Edgewater School I remember, and that was a beautiful building as I recall, very well constructed and it... We asked to see the library and the principal took us behind the stage in the auditorium and there was a little bookcase, a little two-shelf bookcase.

H: This was a Black school?

W: Yes. Just a handful of dusty books there and that was all they had. At one time, Anny Kraus and I came out here to Miles to... We had many friends here that we met through the Council and at the invitation of the science teacher, Connie, do you remember Connie, all of a sudden, I can't remember her last name. But, she was teaching science and chemistry and we were taken to the labs and I think the chemistry lab had to go across the hall to the science lab even to get water. I mean, it was so unfair, you know. But, Anny went back to the University and I wasn't with her, but she persuaded a lot of the professors there to donate much needed equipment to Miles College.

H: She went back to the University of Alabama?

W: University in... UAB, where Frederick was teaching at that time and Roger was teaching ... Roger Hanson I spoke of was teaching there and also Abraham Segal. He was happy to take down those 'Black' and 'White,' I mean 'Colored' and 'White' signs, even before they…he was told it was alright.

H: What was the reaction of White communities to the demonstrations that started to take place here in April and May of 1963? Were there any relationships that evolved with the Birmingham Council and...

W: Well, I remember at the time driving towards Homewood where I lived, south on 18th Street and there were the Miles College children demonstrating. They were singing their freedom songs and there was such a feeling of elation and, you know, you really felt like they were experiencing true freedom for the first time just by getting out there and putting their 'warm bodies,' as they used to say, on the line for freedom. Among them was a tall, gray-haired White man and his name was Frank Fulton. He was a teacher here at Miles. And, until that time, although I supported the demonstrations in my heart, I didn't think that was something I could do, you know. But, he really started me thinking about that—the need for all of us to get out into the street.

H: Were there any reactions of, say, your neighbors to your involvement?

W: Oh, one Sunday morning the children came in and said that there was a cross in the front yard that had been burned, but when I went out to investigate, it wasn't done by the Klan, I'm sure. It was much smaller than they do and I had a feeling that if it was anyone close- by watching, that I didn't want them to think that we were intimidated by that. So, we made a big to do of...spoke loud enough for anyone to hear, [saying] ‘Well, we'll just prop up this shrub here with it,’ you know, which we did and left it there for I don't know how long. I don't know how.... They didn't say too much about it. I'm sure they felt something, but...

H: But they didn't really say anything?

W: They knew it was .... what we were doing was right.

H: Were there others in your neighborhood who were as active as you?

W: No. One…Some neighbors up the street that I persuaded to attend one of our yearly state dinners was one who was victimized by that infamous paper. That time, they not only threw... What they would do was encircle your name and throw it on your street and on...for all the neighbors to see. They would throw it on the lawns of all the neighbors.

H: This was the **Birmingham Independent**?

W: Yes. That day, they threw out two, and they were intimidated by that enough that they didn't attend any more meetings. I don't know if their job were threatened or...I don't remember. There was too much going on to...

H: Did your husband attend the meetings with you?

W: When he... Most of the time, he was playing. He played at what is now University Inn during the dinner hour after teaching all day to keep a roof over our head. But, he attended the state dinners and, in fact, he sang those Tom Lehrer songs, some of those about "when Alabama gets the bomb" and some of those funny things. He was able to go to a march in Bessemer that Caleb Washington (unclear) freed many years ago. But, he really had a harder time than I did because I was associated with all of these wonderful people and he had to, in his work, put up

with that. He had a photograph of Martin Luther King in his studio and someone called and said, you know, that her daughter wouldn't be able to come anymore because she just...she was just disturbed by the photograph of that communist in the studio and when he was working at the University Inn, he was working with two men who taught school and had to be waiters at night because their income was so poor.

H: These were two Black men?

W: Yes. One night, he told me he was really disturbed about this. They asked the manager for, what amounted to a permission slip and he wanted to know what that was all about and he had to say on there that they were out after dark on legitimate business...they were waiters at this Inn. And, I mean, you know, these were grown men and it was...there were so many awful stories like that. I remember someone, another teacher in the schools who attended our meetings and they were having a party in their yard, in the summertime, and because, you know there were more than several people there, the police broke it up. Then, of course, you know there was so much brutality against young African American men. I mean, Aaron Henry and all the bombings and everything that had been going on, you know it was just awful.

H: How did you feel as a White person attempting to make changes in Birmingham?

W: Well, there weren't so many of us, but I guess at the time, we had hope that things would change because there were so many books and articles and then we had television, so there was all of this exposure and, as I say, I was meeting so many stimulating people and learning so much about Black history...that it was a terrible time but a very enlightening time also.

H: Did you know Chuck Morgan?

W: Yes.

H: Was he associated with the Birmingham Council on Human Relations during the time that you were?

W: I'm trying to think. I think that Chuck was involved with so many other issues at the time, I feel sure he must have attended some of the meetings, but not regularly. He was on a different... I think that many of the lawyers were doing other things. He was, I believe, working with the African American lawyers.

H: You had mentioned to me earlier that you had the opportunity to meet Hosea Williams?

W: Yes. Hosea was a speaker at one of our meetings and he was telling us how, about the brutality in Selma. This was during the Selma marches and how the young people were beaten and herded into corral like enclosures or sheds and water hoses poured on them and it was...although it was in the spring, it was bitter cold. Well, actually, it was in March, which can be a very bad month for us.

We had many talks from people like [C.] Herbert Oliver, the Reverend Herbert Oliver, and Joe [Joseph] Ellwanger, who was our leader at the time about, you know, about doing more than just deploring and writing letters and that sort of thing.[3] Two of our members, two of the women members, had on their own gone to Selma and came back and told me about how the police were there, the troopers, you know, laughing at the freedom songs and, you know how, the general way they acted trying to intimidate people and everything. And, they had gone down just because they were curious and wanted to see for themselves what was going on and this was just a few days before this meeting. So, when he finished speaking, I said, 'Well, how would it be if some White people went to Selma to let the world know that those people who are trying to prevent American citizens the right and privilege to register and vote did not speak for all the White people in Alabama?' Of course, Hosea got very excited about that and we had...The whole Council group was not in accord with this and we had to take a vote. Since it was not unanimous, we decided… Those who wanted to go [to Selma] stayed on and we formed a separate group, which we ultimately called Concerned White Citizens of Alabama.

By the next morning, Hosea had sent two people over here from SCLC[4] who came to my house. All of this was so fast! The coordinator of our march's name was Allen Lingo. That was just very interesting, you know, Al Lingo, the state trooper's nemesis.[5] So, we even, I even met with Anny and Frederick [Kraus] and various others who would be at the little planning meeting at our house the next day about what to serve, you know, so quickly for lunch. So, I had to go to the store the next morning. They were coming very early, like 10:00, I guess. I left a note on the door for them to come in, I'd be right back, I was at the grocery store. And when I got back, there they were sitting there. I'm trying to think of her name. But, anyway, we had our little meeting and planned our strategy and we were… There weren't that many of us, but we were assigned various areas to go to, people to approach, you know, locally, and then the other Human Relation Councils throughout the state as in Auburn, Huntsville and Talladega and, did I say Tuscaloosa?

H: What was the response like?

W: Well, we ended up with 72 people and over a short period of time—ten days' time. I mean, people were going out all over, just in little groups.

H: So, then, did you actually march?

W: We went to Selma on Saturday, April, what was the day of 'Bloody Sunday,' the sixth, seventh? The day before—the Saturday before 'Bloody Sunday.'[6] We assembled at this little Presbyterian church there and I was acting secretary for just this little event and as we came in, we all signed this little notebook and we had… Under Allen's instructions we had our marshals and I can't remember who they were, but Frederick and my son, David, served as marshals and gave out our little pamphlet. I did give you a copy of that did I not, with our statement? Joe Ellwanger read it at the steps of the courthouse. We marched as though we were on air almost. It was frightening towards the end, but there were carloads of the Selma Black community, you know, driving along beside us as though to protect us, which I'm sure they did. Then, as we got near the courthouse, the march stopped and we moved up front to see what was going on.

[END OF SIDE ONE]

W: Joe Ellwanger was reading a telegram from the Lutheran Synod, you know, which was not in support of our march. I can't remember the wording, but I'm sure you'll be interviewing him.

H: Yes.

W: And…which gives you an idea of how little support there was from the White churches generally. We crossed the street and, some of us were to face the courthouse and some to face the street, you know. I was facing the courthouse and someone had fired a smoke bomb or something, but the wind had blown it over whoever had done that, you know, out of our direction, which was a small triumph. He read, and there were the usual yahoos and carrying on and, you know, loud. And then, when Joe finished reading the statement, we heard this roar and I thought, 'Oh, my God, they're really out in force,' and I turned to face the building across the street. It was the whole Black community of Selma, I think, assembled there. They started singing 'We Shall Overcome' and I'm telling you, I'll never experience such a euphoric moment again.

H: This march, then, was simply a march of White people that was protected, in effect, by the Black community of Selma?

W: Yes, right. Then, on the way back, they were in their cars following us on the way back also. But, we got word when we got back to get out of town as fast as we could because they had seen people coming in with the baseball bats and that sort of thing, you know. But, the reception when we got there to that little church was something that I wish had been recorded because it was fantastic.

H: What church were you a member of at that time?

W: The Episcopal Church. I'm trying to think what… I guess it was after the Shuttlesworth incidents that Pam and I went to the Suffragan Bishop and were told, in essence, that there was nothing they could do. They couldn't afford to turn away any of their flock—which, you know, we thought made us expendable—but that we could do something. That's putting it rather crudely, but I didn't go back after that.

H: So the church was not involved?

W: No. We had a token membership from the church during all that time. Two people.

H: How would you evaluate the Birmingham movement, its successes and failures?

W: I wish we had continued and I wish we had taken up Dr. King's anti-war movement, because, to my way of thinking, it may be simplistic, but I think the Vietnam War was the thing that really destroyed our dreams. We lost our ideals a lot and the money for that program that was going to give everyone an opportunity...[she begins to weep].

H: So that, you are suggesting that the Vietnam War actually took the money that could have gone for the movement and...

W: For that education we were promised at one of our meetings, so that every child could go as far as he wanted to educationally, and....

H: How would you, then, evaluate the impact that the movement had upon your family, friends and

community?

W: Oh, well, I am sure it…[wiping her eyes] It was broadening to say the least. It gave us a sense of freedom that we certainly didn't have before, because we were all victims of the system. It was great liberation for all of us.

H: In talking with Vincent Harding, he was saying, and he has said in his books, that the movement, in a sense, freed the community—both Blacks and Whites—and had a tremendous impact upon the ways in which people viewed themselves and the way people viewed others in relation to themselves across racial lines. And that seemed to be what you were suggesting.

W: Yes.

H: If you could turn the clock back and you found yourself as chief advisor to Dr. King, Rev. Shuttlesworth or the White business community, how would you advise them in terms of changing what took place, or would you advise them to do anything different than what was done?

W: Well, good heavens, I don't feel like I could advise any of those people in what to do. I mean, they were certainly right in getting rid of all the signs and doing more hiring and that sort of thing. The thing I still weep about is the plight of so many of our children, and that they haven't provided them with the environment that they deserve—that they have a right to. I don't know how many of us who live in safe communities could survive in one of these terribly dangerous areas for one day and we expect our little children to do that and come out unscathed. Everyone should have the right to grow up in a, not necessarily with a lot of wealth, but certainly in a beautiful environment with trees and a chance to be close to nature. Being close to nature, I think, is an essential part of the need for human development. It's unconscionable that we've let all these years go by and haven't done anything about that.

H: And you see that as being something that has to be done?

W: We have to have money to get the children in safe environments and that can't be done by the African American community alone. It has to be a coordinated effort.

H: Finally, let me just ask you if there is anything else that you would like to add that we have not dealt with that relates to race relations in Birmingham and how the society has evolved over

time—your involvement or any other thing that you would like to say?

W: Well, I would like to see our neighborhoods more integrated. I think that... You know, you can feel a kinship to your neighbor whether you have anything in common or not just by having everyday contact with them. Like, I am sure there are many people in your neighborhood that you don't see socially so much, but you care about them. We're so isolated from one another that there isn't as much opportunity for that as I would like for there to be.

H: How do you think that could be achieved?

W: I don't know. It isn't... I don't know. And, I don't know if that is so important as building better communities...building up communities where the children can be safe. That's my primary concern in that their schools be as good as any school in well-subsidized communities such as Mountain Brook and Vestavia and Homewood. That they have the same ....

H: The children are the future.

W: Absolutely.

H: And, when we look at them and whatever our children are, that's what we will be in generations to come. I agree wholeheartedly.

Mrs. Walbert, I want to thank you for taking time out of your schedule to come and sit with us this morning and just to talk about our Birmingham and maybe we'll have to do this again sometime.

W: Thank you, I enjoyed being here.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

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[1] The University of Alabama at Birmingham.
[2] Mrs. Walbert's daughter,Pam.
[3] Reverend Oliver was a minister and Birmingham native who, in 1960, formed the bi-racial Inter-Citizens Committee, a group dedicated to documenting and educating the public about incidents of police brutality. Reverend Ellwanger was a Lutheran minister and Selma native who served as president of the

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Alabama Council on Human Relations, a bi-racial organization. For more on both men, see Concerned White Citizens of Alabama Collection, BCRI Archives.

[4] The Southern Christian Leadership Conference.

[5] "Colonel" Al Lingo was Head of Public Safety for the State of Alabama. As such, he was head of the state troopers and, thus, responsible for much brutality on the part of law enforcement officials. Mrs. Walbert comments on the fact that a staff worker sent by the SCLC to help the Concerned White Citizens of Alabama stage their nonviolent march in Selma—Allen Lingo—shared the same name with a man so infamous and notorious for perpetrating violence.

[6] This actually took place in March of 1965, not April. See Concerned White Citizens of Alabama Collection, BCRI Archives.