2012.3.21

DUDLEY MARTIN

and

DR. WALLACE ALSTON

DUDLEY MARTIN

Recording begins mid-sentence. DUDLEY MARTIN: . . . something comes to mind that has happened, that I've seen happen, whether it be an accident or fire or drowning or electrocution or something; and most of those things I like to remove from my mind, to get it out of my memory. Mr. [James] Mackay mentioned Dr. Tom Vinson, and that carries me back to one time Dr. Vinson and I went to a drowning. It was a very sad thing that happened, and that wasn't one of the things I was going to talk to you about; but it's just like I say, names come up, places, times, and they remind me of it. But one time, up on Thompson Road, they were building a house; and they had excavated a little bit for it. And while they did it, they had dug out, and it rained in it; and a child was walking around this puddle of water where the basement had been excavated and fell in and drowned. And we went up there and pulled it out and tried to work on it as best we knew how, and Dr. Vinson went with us. We picked him up at the Health Department. There were two of us, and we carried him up there. The Grady [Hospital] ambulance finally came and picked him up. We carried him to Grady, and the mother was walking around and around the pond while we were trying to get the child, trying to find the child in very muddy water; and she had a little cowboy hat in one hand and a boot in the other. And that's something that makes cold chills run over you. You never forget it. You never outlive those things. On the way to the hospital, the doctor or the intern at Grady looked back at Dr. Vinson in the ambulance and told him, he said, "Doctor, you know if you bring him around that you have nothing but a vegetable." [*Retrieves notes from jacket off-camera*.] And I thought that's so wrong, that [if] we could do to bring that life back that we should do it. You know I'm already messed up; I left half my cards over there on the table [*laughs*].

When I first came to work with the fire department, when I first wanted to, I moved into the county. We bought a little home down in one of the first subdivisions

that were built in the metro area, a little four-room [sic] subdivision--house with four rooms down off of McAfee. And I worked in East Point and traveled a great distance, and I'd always wanted to be a fireman. My brother was with the Atlanta Fire Department, had been there for about a year; and I had not long gotten out of the army and wanted to do it [join the fire department]. And so I saw this tent down at Candler and Glenwood, and [it] had the firetruck under the tent. And so one Sunday morning I walked down there or rode down and thought I'd go and talk to them about employment with them. And as I walked up there, I saw an old 1933 Buick backed up next to the firetruck, just left enough room for the firetruck to come out. And it had "EVergreen 2112 For Sale EVergreen 2112." Well, I went on up to the old WSB station, where the men slept in the station, and talked to the men on duty there about coming to work with the fire department; and I noticed over there they had one telephone. And I looked at the number on it, and it said "EVergreen 2112." And I thought, "My gracious." So I talked to them a little bit about how they received their calls; and they said, "On the telephone." And I didn't question it much, but I noticed here they were selling automobiles, using—on that telephone; they were—and I'm not knocking it. What I'm telling you is how it started off with nothing and how it got started and the fire protection you have. And so I talked to them about it, and that was the communication they had. And another thing, let me interrupt here and say when you talk about monitors here to listen to what I say, [*extends hand toward audience*] we have Mr. and Mrs. McDowell in here with us, too. And Mrs. McDowell is retired from the fire department, so she's holding [*inaudible; could be* "the line" *or* "the light"?] on everything I say. The only thing about it, something [*inaudible phrase*]. But anyhow, and I'm happy to have her and Mr. McDowell.

But anyhow, I talked to them [the firemen at the station] about coming to work, and they told me that I had to apply over on North Decatur Road. Well, I went over on North Decatur Road to go to work there—I mean, to see about employment. I noticed—I didn't even know where North Decatur Road was, didn't know where Emory Hospital was. But anyhow, when I went there, I saw the fire truck was in an old grocery store building; and they had two desks in there. And anyhow, I went ahead, and I talked to the chief about coming to work. And we rode over to the DeKalb Building—the old DeKalb Building was here then—and they gave me a job. But on the way he told me, he said, "Why don't you go to work for Atlanta?" He said, "DeKalb never will

pay what Atlanta does." And I told him that this was—I lived in this county, I had bought [a house] in this county, and I thought it was building and that I would really like a shot at it; and I did. But while I was there—I went to work for $110 a month. I was making considerably more than that, and my wife was working; and if it hadn't been for that, we'd have starved to death. But I did get a veteran's supplement. And so I went to work for it [the fire department]; and I learned that the firefighter made one amount of money, the driver-engineer made five dollars more, the captain made five dollars more, the assistant chief made five dollars more, and the chief made ten dollars more. Everybody was worth five dollars more than the other one, except the chief; he was worth ten dollars more [*laughs; audience laughter*].

So—but I wanted it, and I loved it, I went to work with it, I bought my own uniform; I did everything else. But that old station over there, I think we had more harmony in it or more closeness because it was so close that the firetruck—in an old rented grocery store—the firetruck, the chief's office, the sitting room for the firemen, the sanitary office, the sanitary director's office was [sic] all in the same room; and they all used the same telephone [*laughs; audience laughter*]. Then in the back room, the men all slept in one room, they built a shower out of tin, they had an old sink in it and one commode for a bathroom. And how in the world they ever survived I don't know. Those things you just couldn't do anymore.

No. 2 Station along about that time was in Brookhaven, and maybe it still is. But No. 2 was in a tin building. It was an old—the county owned that old building. And it was two-story. It was tin, but it had where the truck could back in underneath it. And the men ate and slept up above it. Next door to it was the old library. The county bought that building for $4,000. They sold it for $35,000. You mentioned Wheat Williams; one of you mentioned Wheat Williams [before videotaping began] a while ago. We called him "Sweet Wheat" in the county because when he came in, we loved him. He was only here for two years, but he did a tremendous amount. In there he sold that building for $35,000—the old Brookhaven tin building. He got enough money out of it to build two new stations—to build the one there in Brookhaven and also one in Tucker. He also cleared up the titles on enough land to build a park up there on Dresden Drive and also cleared enough property—cleared the titles on enough property to build a library, Brookhaven Library. And so that was the status of No. 2 along about that time.

No. 3 was in Avondale, and we owned that building; but you wouldn't recognize it now as being the same one; because you had the engine room—you could get two pieces of equipment in it--and the kitchen was just a small area; and the bedroom was about the size of the average bathroom in homes today, and that's where the men slept. We have added on to that over and over and over.

No. 4 was in Pierce's dairy barn in Chamblee. After that they moved. I mean, this fire department's come such a tremendous way over the thirty-five years that was with it. They moved from there to an old restaurant building—I believe it was a restaurant building—on Peachtree Road. Then in 1952 they went in with the City of Chamblee and built a station adjoining Chamblee. And that was a gala opening when they opened that station there.

No. 5 was something to see. No. 5 was in Carl Garmon's [spelling?] old service station at the corner of Lawrenceville Highway and Idlewood Road on Main Street [in Tucker], He had his service station downstairs in the corner, and upstairs over that is where the men slept; and they kept the truck in the washroom out there.

No. 6, as I said a while ago, was under a tent.

We built—we got the money to—from selling No. 2 Station to build No. 5 and No. 2. And one of the things that stands out in my mind so much—there was nothing much on Lawrenceville Highway when we built the Tucker station but homes there. And we—they got an injunction against us when we started building No. 5 to stop us from building the thing—the man straight across the street and the people next door. So they got the injunction against us, we stopped building, finally we got it cleared, and next we got it built. The people next door would let the children come over and buy refreshments and let us babysit for them [*laughs; audience laughter*]. The old man across the street came over and let the firemen wax his automobile for him [*laughs; audience laughter*]. So things—so then when we started to build the one in Brookhaven, though, rebuild it, then we decided we were going to use a new technique on that altogether. So we put the firemen out in the community, and we told them to go from house to house and see if you can get a petition signed to tell the people that you wanted it [the fire station] built in that park area across the street. And I think we got petitions from every—got signatures from everybody in the area; and when we built the station there, we had—the turnout was tremendous. We didn't have enough room to house them all in it.

Each station along about that time—they were new in the community. You had new taxi services, and you had new drugstores in it. And they would give these little telephone stickers out that would—"Call your doctor," you'd put your doctor's number in it; and your emergency number was Evergreen 2112--that would be the one down in the Southwest DeKalb area. And to call the taxi number, they'd have the taxi number. You've seen those little old things. You don't see them anymore, but they—the different ones for advertisement, they'd send them out. The delivery man would bring them to you and put them on your telephone. I'll get back to that in just a little bit, how that gave us a problem down the road. But what would happen, the people would call into those stations on those numbers, and then those stations—that is, if the line wasn't busy selling automobiles or men making personal calls—and they would call in and report the fire. And then that station would have to call the Druid Hills station, which was the main station; and if they needed help from one of the other stations, Druid Hills had to call another station when that line was open to get them to help on the thing.

Derrill Drive [fire station] was built in 1952. And when Derrill Drive was built in 1952—that's down [between] Glenwood [Road] and Columbia [Drive]—we had a community room next door to it. I mean, it's built in the same—inside the building. We had to divide it up. Now, the community building, the Women's Home Demonstration Group met there. I think the American Veterans met there; and we were afraid that alcohol would be used—we were very cautious about that. And Greenforest Baptist Church started their first meetings in the No. 7 Fire Station. That's where the held their first organizational meeting, then church meetings. Then along about the same time, over at No. 1, there on North Druid—North Decatur Road, the North Decatur Baptist Church Men's Class met in the fire station over there. So along with the sanitary [sanitation] superintendent, the chief's office, the fire station, and all of that, the Men's Bible Class met in there every Sunday morning. And what we would do is we would store the chairs for them—around thirty or forty chairs. We would fold them up, unfold them every Sunday morning, dust them off, and set them up; and usually they helped us put them back up. And if we got a call while they were in there, we really gave them a show, too. We showed them how fast we could receive their call and [*inaudible phrase*] getting out of there.

But in 1952 Derrill Drive [station] was built; then shortly after that No. 6 and No. 8 and No. 9. No. 6 [*inaudible*; *sounds like* "the one hundred of ten"?], went to—was built with a Quonset hut on McAfee Road. We thought this was a very wise thing. One was also built on LaVista Road and one built on Lawrenceville Highway. The one[s] on LaVista Road and Lawrenceville Highway were additional stations; and they were built—they were built for $16,000 each—they were made from Quonset huts. And the reason they were made that way is so they could be moved if ever needed to be and as the growth went about [sic]. As ISO—it's ISO today; it used to be the old Southeastern Underwriters—would come here and inspect the fire services for insurance ratings in the county, I took them around. I was promoted to a captain pretty quick and the chief officer when one of our chiefs was killed in an accident at North Decatur [Road] and Scott Boulevard; he was killed in an auto accident. And I was promoted in his place, and I was pretty young in the service. But I would take ISO, the underwriters, around to inspect our stations and things. And every time we would go to one under the tent [Quonset hut] down there, I would say, "This is always so embarrassing to me to bring you to this." And they said, "Don't be embarrassed; because it's better to wait and see where the growth is going than it would be to build it in the wrong place." And that station has been in the right place for thirty-four years, thirty-two years now. So they were built under Quonset huts. We sold the one on Lawrenceville Highway and the one on North Druid—on LaVista Road also.

We opened a switchboard in 1954 in the DeKalb Building. It was downstairs in the DeKalb Building; and I'm telling you, that was something else. We—the news media was [sic] there and everything. And we had gone from the old telephone at [Station] No. 1to the switchboard downstairs in the DeKalb Building. We had two rooms there. The chief's office was in one room, and the communications section and my office and the Bureau of Fire Prevention was [sic] in another room. But this room was the only exit to the outside on the south side of the DeKalb Building; and everybody getting off duty came right through the chief's office and through the communications section and that, but we still thought we were really uptown because we had done so well. And the Buildings [sic] and Ground[s] [Department] had built their shop just outside of our office. And it was nothing new to be receiving a bad call while the chief would be interviewing someone, and they—me [sic] be working on the budget and having to move out of the way to let Building and Grounds bring a table through or

something they'd been working on outside. We stayed there for several years, but it was quite an improvement over what we had had before. And I want to show you that old telephone. I brought it here today, and later I'm going to give it to the DeKalb Historical Society. But I want to tell you that in '55 and '56--we moved into that building in '54, with our chief having an office in there, even if it was a passageway; and we had a switchboard communications section. But even the switchboard operator, the only restroom he had was upstairs on the second floor—not even a restroom, not even a water cooler or anything down on that floor.

But prior to 1955 we had no work clothing at all. So many funny things has [sic] happened from that. We had no turnout gear, no—the only thing we had was an old rain hat like you see different workmen wear—an old rain hat and a rubber raincoat, and the rubber would stick to you. We had none of the protective clothing. And so we bought some—we bought helmets for everybody, and we bought a work uniform. And the work uniform was dungaree trousers and chambray shirts, and we were really dressed up. And we put "F" on one [hip] pocket and "D" on the other [hip] pocket, because we--so hard getting them, we didn't want the men doing their painting jobs [in them] and everything else off-duty. You'd never do that today, but we it did then. But anyhow, when we did that, the men, if they [the dungarees] didn't fit, they [the firemen] went straight across the street to Belk's. They [Belk's] sold Lee dungarees, and they traded theirs with the "FD" on them for those without them [*laughs*]. And one day Belk called me over there and said, "Come here and look at what we got [sic]. Do you have any idea where these things are coming from?" I said, "I believe I do." Well, we bought the whole stock off of them. That was the last of putting the "FD" on the back of them.

But along about '55, after all these improvements, we thought we were the best. We really did. Morale was high, and we thought things were going. And I can remember so well that people would come in that office down there and say, "How are things going?"

And, of course, we said they were doing fine.

And, "Have you had any fires lately?"

"No, a fire's afraid to get started in this county."

And along about that time we had [a fire at] Avondale High School, and it went from one end to the other. Later we were able to find the one—that was actually arson

[*inaudible*] that fire. In the auditorium he had set fire to a wastebasket that caught a curtain on fire, and it spread the whole way. Well, we had a couple of firemen injured in that fire. And that was in 1955, the first of '55. Right after that, before we got over that good [sic], we had [a fire at] Joe Almand's bag plant [on Second Avenue]. I'd been knowing Joe; I was in his Sunday school class down at Second Avenue Baptist Church. And we had one more time with Joe Almand's bag plant. That thing burned from one end to the other, and that was just right after Avondale High School. And then, while Joe Almand's bag plant [fire] was going on, we had a lady burned to death on White Oak Drive. And what happened, we went there, and then she was dead. And somebody in the community called EVergreen 2112, and that number had been discontinued from that station for a couple of years. And they [the caller] woke up some man sleeping and said, "A house is on fire on White Oak Drive, and a woman is trapped in it." And so he lay back down, and he didn't say anything; and finally he called. And, of course, we had all that on tape; and he called back and said, "Somebody called and told me"—and it was his number then, EVergreen 2112, that they had taken off of these old advertisements that came. By the time we got there, then, of course, she was dead. And from that day until this day today, I think we're poor. I think we can't handle anything. We need all the help we can get. We thought we were the best; and that brought us down right quick, that we weren't nearly as good as we thought we were, because those three things happening there at once was [sic] really more than we could handle.

Mr. Mackay was talking a while ago about somebody going to jail for selling pornographic—a fireman going to jail for selling pornographic literature. It reminds me that I don't doubt that because in the past we hired them straight out—I didn't, but they were hired on occasion straight out of the county prison system that they had. If they were down there, and they did good [sic], and people liked them, [and if they had a] good personality, then they had them hired right on to the fire department without any background study at all other than the prison record that they had. And at one time we hired a man who was supposed to have killed his wife, put arsenic in her milk in her coffee. And we tried to find out of that was true, and we were never able to do it; but finally we tried to get his fingerprints off of a glass of water in the commissioner's office, and he resigned. But to this day I think he was a murderer that we hired. But now we make an extensive background study on them.

[*Looks at wristwatch*.] I could go [for]ever and ever talking with you, but one thing brings on another. We had—we hired a man, and I was strictly against polygraph tests, and I'm still against polygraph examinations. I just don't—I think that we need to make an extensive background investigation on a person; and if he escapes that, if he comes on board with something hidden, then I think we need to go ahead and take him and give him a second chance. But we hired one man; he was number one in the class—in the recruit class. But he had put on his application that he had been arrested for trespassing, and we checked that out. It was in another state; and when we checked it out, we found out that he was an associate pastor, and he was at this church. And whenever one of the husbands of the wives was out of town, he would break into the home and crawl into the bed with her. There was never rape or anything else, but he would crawl into the bed with them. And I said from this point on, I think we need utilize polygraph examinations, because we just can't—we can't have that, because we have emergency medical service that he's bound to be working with, and we just couldn't do it. But we're one of the last fire departments in the country I know of to go to polygraph examinations. And my son is a polygraphist. I just don't agree with it, but feel like in these jobs sometimes they have to be used.

You know, an interesting thing—you talk about things I remember, I remember one time, Jim Cherry [former DeKalb County school superintendent], we were taking the grand jury around on their tours. Now I think they take them on buses if they go at all, but we used to put them in an automobile and take them around. And we took them up to Northwoods Elementary School, and we ate there. And Jim Cherry spoke. And I remember him saying up there so vividly, he said, "Ladies and gentlemen, I know that you are getting complaints on double sessions, you're getting complaints on classrooms on the stages." He said, "But let me tell you, in South Georgia they're having the problem of laying off teachers because of lack of students." He said, "If we had that here, it would be a far more serious situation than what we're having with growing pains." And I thought about that very much after that, because now we're having the same thing that Jim Cherry said they were having then in south Georgia; in other words, we're having to close some of our schools because of the lack of enrollment in the students [sic].

In 1973 we moved into the Public Safety Building. We did a lot of things then. We went into EMS service, and I felt like we had the very best EMS service you could

find anywhere in the country. In 1974—I believe it was 1974—we were awarded by the Georgia Safety Council a plaque for not having a chargeable accident in the DeKalb County Fire Department or EMS for the whole year. And wrecks are just something that I could never—that bothered me, I think, more than anything. And I keep saying "I" and "I" and "I," and I don't mean to be [*inaudible*]; but you asked me to talk to you about things I remember, so I have to say "I" so much. I tried to set an example in that department, and I never scratched a fender—not a chargeable or a non-chargeable, but I never put one scratch on a vehicle; and yet I had one assigned to my home April 1, 1955, until the day I retired. And I tried—all through the thing I said, "Safety, safety, we've got to have safety." They claim that more firemen were killed—statistics show that more firemen were killed in the United States, more than any other occupation. But most of them were killed going to and from fires. And I said, "That's needless." That's absolutely needless, and we should not. If they use their proper masks and they use their caution, then I didn't think we needed to be that dangerous with us [sic].

Nineteen seventy-six was a banner year for us. We built five new fire stations; four of them were additional fire stations, and we relocated one, the No. 8 station. And we went from a Class 6 to a Class 4 insurance classification, which was a great reduction that saved the insurance holders much money, around ten percent. And in doing it that's the first time that the insurance rates had been reduced in DeKalb County in over twenty years, so we were very proud of that.

One time Louise Trotti and I—we've always had a lot of "firsts" in the department—Louise Trotti and I were attending a management meeting—a management course—in the old DeKalb Building one time, and I talked to her. I said, "Louise, I like to read, and you've got the books. How can we go about getting some books in the fire station?" She said, "I think I can get a grant to get you some books if you can fix a place up for it." So we had moved into our new fire station over across from the CDC, and we took a part of the dormitory that we didn't need, and we divided it off and built a library in it. And we went to Surplus Properties and got sofas and chairs—some comfortable chairs to put in it. We built some shelves in it. We put the few books that she gave us in it, and one day I asked her to come over and look at the library. And I said, "Give us a branch number." And I think she gave us Branch 22. But anyhow, on the door I had had a little plate made over it. It said, "DeKalb County Fire Department Library Branch DeKalb County System." And I carried her over there one

day and let her see it, and it tore her up. [*Audience laughter*] From that day on we got all the books we needed. And to my knowledge we had the first library—the first branch of a library in a fire station in the United States. And today we still have one. When we built the new building, Public Safety Building, we made sure that we built a library in it so that the men could come in and study. And I think Ms. McDowell will vouch that it's one of the finest libraries, with all promotional equipment and fire literature and stuff that you could get into.

Also we went into—a little later, in '77 we went into 911. And this was a real battle that we had getting 911 [service] into the fire department. We had a battle with Southern Bell. Some of you may have been associated with Southern Bell; but we had to wash our hands with Southern Bell and go to American Bell, because Southern Bell said that it was American Bell's policy that we couldn't go into 911 in this community without having police in it, just the fire and EMS. And neither could they go in it without going into the whole region.

And we said, "Why?"

And they said, "This is American Bell's policy." They said, "It's policy."

"Who's policy?"

They said, "American Bell."

So we said, "Well, this meeting is adjourned. We'll go to American Bell."

"Well, wait a minute."

So we got a man named Warren Jacoby to come down from American Bell. He said, "There's no reason in the world why you can't do it."

And so we went ahead, though, and we got all of the communities—all of the cities in DeKalb County to agree to 911. They would not agree to it for police, but they agreed to it for fire and EMS. And, therefore, we went into it; and to our knowledge, the best we could find out from the telephone company or anyone else, we were the first fire department in the country to go under 911 for just the fire department and EMS alone. The rest of them, it always starts off with public safety—with police, sheriffs, and those things; and then it spreads into the fire department. The fire department's usually the last to hold out. They claim their knowledge of the streets and the numbers and all that. That is important, but we still felt like 911 was the thing. And incidentally I have the cards, the first dispatch cards for the first EMS call and the first fire call from the dispatch office that were [sic] made on the 911 system.

Don Juan Lane was a person down, and I forgot what the—there was an automobile fire somewhere, but I have those two cards; and later I will give them to the DeKalb Historical Society. I tried to load them up on very much stuff already, stuff that I had had; and I will endeavor to do that.

There are incidents that I remember that stand out in my mind, and they keep coming over and over. A little amusing thing, one time, I believe it was Cox Ambulance in Decatur. We had two men--Clairmont Road—they put a sewer system in or something on Clairmont, just out beyond LaVista Road. And two men, a man and his son, was [sic] trapped in a cave-in. And we went out and were able to dig them out and get them; and they were not dead, as so many of them are in cave-ins. And they were carried to—Cox Ambulance came out—I believe it was Cox in Decatur came, big old Cadillac. And I thought that I was a rather fast driver myself; but he [the ambulance driver] asked me, he put the two people in the ambulance and one of our men to administer first aid to them, and he asked me if I would lead them to Grady Hospital. DeKalb General [later DeKalb Medical Center] wasn't built then. They asked if I would lead them to Grady Hospital. And I did. And he got right on my bumper so much it frightened me; he just stayed there. Now, when you're the second car behind, if you're a little bit far, that's very dangerous. But when you stay just six inches behind that bumper in front, that's bad. And he stayed behind me and scared me almost to death. And we went through Little Five Points, went down Austin Avenue or Austin Drive or whatever it is and the old Atlanta Stove Works—I was trying to come out in my mind, "Where can I get ahead of him?" I cross the railroad tracks here at the old Atlanta Stove Works and go up through there, and maybe I can get a breather on him and get ahead of him, up to Randolph Street and into Edgewood Avenue. But every time I looked through [sic] the mirror, that thing was leaning on the curb just like I was; and he was right on my bumper. Well, we got to Edgewood Avenue. The light was red as it could be—Edgewood and Boulevard. And he was right on me. And two motorcycle policemen happened to be there, though, and stopped the traffic and let us go through. We went on to Grady Hospital and unloaded them and came back out; and the two motorcycle policemen came up and said, "Mister, what in the world were y'all doing?" And I said, "Well, we had two men that were in a cave-in, and we taken [sic] them to the hospital. What I was doing, trying to save my own life." [*Laughs; audience laughter*] I was trying to get ahead of him [the ambulance driver]. I just couldn't do it.

That's the fastest trip I think I ever—the most unsafe trip I ever made, because he made me do things I didn't want to do. But he was—if I had slowed up one bit, he would've been on me.

Our wrecks, as I said before, weigh heavily on my mind; and they've always done that. It's a very unsightly thing to see a firetruck turned bottomside-upward and all the hose [sic] strewn out everywhere, all the water spilled all the equipment that they carry on it. And whether it's our fault or whether it's not our fault, I still feel like that [sic] a little more defensive driving could help alleviate that. And where we have gone trying to build up a good image and everything, I always felt like that tore it down so much. And we did everything to stop that, to curtail the accidents at intersections; and now they rarely ever have one. We—before anybody I know of in the state of Georgia ever came out with it—we made it a suspension offense to go across a red light without coming to a complete stop, without crossing a stop sign without coming to a complete stop. Our argument is that if you go across it, and you get wrecked up, whatever's on the other end's gone anyhow then; and you can't do any good. But if you slow down just a little bit, you're going to get there, and you can do it. And that we can—that you're going to make it. And there are even five—I think there's five intersections in this county that a firetruck and an ambulance has [sic] to come to a complete stop on whether they've got the green light or not. And one of them is on College Avenue right there where Columbia Drive—the connector—comes under it [the railroad track above]. There's such a hazardous things [sic]; they're all under bridges. One is in Clarkston; one is in North Decatur and East Ponce de Leon—some our worst accidents have been [at] North Decatur and East Ponce de Leon. Our trucks come to a complete stop, whether they got [sic] the green light or the red light. We don't leave it for guesswork. They're trying to eliminate the accidents. And we've done that. I used to hear the calls and listen to my scanner, and I'd say, "I just pray that they get there without an accident." Later, I didn't even worry about it. I knew that they would surely be there.

I had a couple of incidents that really frightened me, one of them did more than the other. One was a well—I went down in a well to get a child out on Central Drive at Ray's Road. A little child had fallen into an abandoned well. And we went down in—or I went down in it and got her out and brought her up in my arms. And not long after that I had another well call, and it was down on Rockbridge Road between Northern

Avenue and East Ponce de Leon—or North Clarendon, and North Clarendon. And [it was] one of the nicer old homes there. And what had happened, the floor was painted this battleship gray; and it was beautiful. But right across where the curb—where the well had been setting [sic] on it, had been filled in with wood and nailed in. And this lady walked across the floor, and the floor gave way right over the well, and she went straight down into it—a very, very deep well. And she fell down into it, and where it had the sewer pipe in the bottom of the well, she drove straight up in the well. So I went down and had to get her out. The air was stale—I had to ask for oxygen down there, and when they turned the hose on, they turned it on at too great a speed; and it spent everywhere, and it started knocking dust in the air. But anyhow, it took about half an hour for me to tie ropes around her to keep from hurting her to pull her up out of the well; and then, after I had her suspended on one rope, I had to tie a rescue knot around her on the other rope and then let them pull her up. For somebody who had never lived a day on a farm and never spent much day [sic] on a farm, and wells always frightened me—they still frighten me; and that frightened me then. But when I went down in it, that—and you could see where it caved in all along underneath it and all the trampling around on top. But you don't choose the things you want in this business; you have to take what comes your way. And that came my way.

Another thing that bothered me, I think, more than—Jack Gober—somebody mentioned Jack Gober that was killed in the doughnut shop—the Dunkin' Donut [sic] up here [on Buford Highway] a couple of years ago—a year and a half ago—it'll be two years ago in November, I think. [NOTE: Incident actually occurred on September 21, 1983. A mentally unstable man entered the Dunkin' Donuts shop, shot and killed his estranged wife, who was an employee there, and then shot and killed Jack Gober when he rose to intervene.] That bothered me—maybe a year in November; time flashes by so much. But that bothered me, I think, as much as anything. Jack was one of our most beloved battalion chiefs, and everyone loved him. And anytime you met him on a fire scene and where you had to a Waffle House or Dunkin' Donut and get a cup of coffee with him; he just happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time when he was killed.

Another thing that, really, talk about being bald-haired [sic] and white-haired and everything—things that could make your hair come out in a hurry, we had two men that were in a cave-in at the Chamblee Baptist Church. I believe that's the Chamblee

Baptist Church—big church, new church in Chamblee. And two men were in a cave-in. We had three men in the hole down in there, digging them out. And all at once there was a second cave-in. And I was standing on the bank watching, and I said, "My Lord! I'm standing right here and watching my men die right before me." And it just—no sound at all, the dirt just came down; and it covered two of them completely up. One of them was nothing but his head showing. It makes cold chills run all over to think about it. But one, his head was showing. The men managed to jump down, and I wanted to jump down in there myself and start digging; but I knew I couldn't afford to—I had to coordinate it. They uncovered the head of one man over there; and they were digging and trying to uncover the other one whose head was showing. And he kept trying to talk to me; and he said, "Chief, make them stop digging."

And I made them all stop digging; and I said, "Why?" I mean, that's a hard thing, to stop them all, when you know you've got one with his head showing, the second with his head showing now, and one not even showing.

And he said, "Captain Holcomb [*spelling?*] is under my right arm, and he's alive."

And I said, "How do you know he's alive?"

And he said, "I can feel him breathing."

And so I had them all digging on his right arm then, and the most beautiful sight was to see that red helmet. What had happened, he [Captain Holcomb] was under the arm of this person and one of the captains—the other captain—and he [the man whose head was above ground] had raked the dirt out of his [Holcomb's] nostrils and out of his mouth so he could breathe under that cavity there from his helmet and his arm; and we were able to get all three of them out. That's just where it gets so close to home with us. We have lost about ten people every year to fire in this county. And when you multiply that by 35 [Martin's years of service], and not seeing every one of them but seeing most of them—you've seen over three hundred of them—and those things will leave a mark on you that you'd rather forget.

One thing that happened—a little amusing thing: The mouth-to-mouth resuscitation and CPR hadn't come into being and especially mouth-to-mouth resuscitation. We had a call down on the south side of the county. A mother and a child had been overcome by fumes from an improper vented—it wasn't vented, it was a combustion chamber, I think, in a floor furnace that burst; and the mother and the child were overcome by it. And that day at lunch I had had onions; and I don't usually

eat onions, but I ate onions for lunch that day. And we got a call immediately after that. They had taken the baby outside, working on the baby, and I ran in. They had ventilated the house; they'd opened the doors on it. The men had the mother up in arms and were going to take her on outside. And as they came through the dining room, I said, "Put her on the table." They laid her on the table, and right quick I bent down and gave her three or four breaths of mouth-to-mouth resuscitation; I'd just read that you could do that. I thought, "She's not breathing or anything else. We'll do this before they get her on the outside." She came to. [*Makes coughing sounds.*] I went straight out to the [*inaudible*] and got in the car. [*Laughs; audience laughter*] I couldn't let her face someone who had such foul breath, even if it did bring her around. I've thought about that quite a lot since then.

Another interesting thing that happened was in Lilburn. We were not allowed to go out of the county with our resuscitators or fire equipment. We'd had one man killed, and Gwinnett County was building so fast around; and so we had to keep our resources here. So we were not able to go outside of DeKalb. We had instructions not to go out. This was on a Christmas morning. On Christmas morning the switchboard called me and told me that they had a man in Lilburn that needed oxygen, that he was dying; and he needed oxygen. And we explained to them that we were not allowed to go. So the man called me. One of the men called me and told me, "My daddy's dying. The doctor says that we must have oxygen for him."

And I said, "We're not allowed to come out."

And he said, "Mister"—and I had a resuscitator in my car; I carried it.

And I said, "We're not allowed to come out of the county."

And he said, "If you don't come, he's going to die."

This was one Christmas morning; and I said, "Well, I don't know where Lilburn is. If you'll meet me at No. 5 fire station and show me the way to get to your home, I'll come." So I went there as fast as I could and met him, and he led me on into it. And the family was all around the bedside, and I gave oxygen to the gentleman, whether it helped him or not; I hope it did. But anyhow, later, some several months after that, I was at the Clarkston Masonic Lodge; and they were having a play, *Rose on* [*upon*] *the Altar.* And at intermission, I just stood up; and I saw three men come walking across the lodge very hurriedly. And they came over there and said, "You don't recognize us, do you?"

And I said, “No, I don’t.”

And they said, “We are the sons of the man in Lilburn.”

And I thought how nice it was that they came to me to recognize me again. And some long time after that, my car was having all kind [sic] of problems. When you turned the siren on and the lights, the lights would go off, or the siren would go off. The county had done everything they could to it, and they sent me to Auto Electric of Atlanta or Auto Electric of Georgia or Georgia Auto. It was on Hunnicutt Street back then, and I carried it up there. And they had a whole string of things. When we went back—they kept it a day or two—and when we went back to pick it up, they had a whole string of—list of things that they had done to my automobile. And it [the invoice] had “PAID” on it. And when I said, “Who’s doing this? Where do I sign for it? What are they doing?”

And he said, “Nothing. You don’t recognize me?”

And I said, “No, your face is familiar, but I can’t place it.”

And they said this was one of the sons of the old man in Lilburn. So those things, you know, you don’t ever forget those.

My two greatest fires that stand out in my memory—and there’s been an awful lot of them—but the two that stand out the most are—some of—probably you people probably don’t even remember one of them. And one of them was Chalmette Apartments. And Chalmette Apartments happened about 1955, I think, around 1955. It’s on Chalmette just off of Briarcliff. We went there, and we did everything we could; but the fire was in the basement. And when I pulled up on the scene, I didn’t see much smoke. But I saw men out in the back, and they were laying the hose out; and I said, “What do you have?”

And they said, “Fire in the basement.”

And I said, “Well, let’s go down and put it out.”

They said, “Chief, you can’t get down there.”

And I said, “Don’t tell me you can’t get down there.”

So we went down the first flight of steps, started to turn to go down to the first landing; it was impossible to go. The heat just blistered your face and hands. There was no way to go. So we had to back out of it. Fire had started in the basement—only a four-unit apartment, but they were people that had retired. This was their—they [the apartments] were, I guess, today’s condominiums. They had retired; they had had all

of their life's belongings in there. They [fire fighters] could not get any of them [residents] out. And we tried—this was about five o'clock in the afternoon—and it had been cold, the pipes had been freezing all over the county, day in and day out. And so we called Atlanta [Fire Department] in to help us with an aerial truck. We couldn't even get enough water for them to put it out in an aerial truck. We sent fourteen men to the hospital there from slips and falls on the ice where—and we even had them up on the Normandy Apartments [next door] where the ice was sticking up there on it to keep the embers put out that would come over there. From 5:00 in the afternoon till 10:00 at night. At 10:00 at night the old ones that were here said that was one of the worst fires we ever had. We sent fourteen to the hospital. One of them had a back injury so bad that we couldn't even put him in an ambulance. We put him in the back of a panel truck, facedown. We couldn't even turn him over, he screamed so bad. Then we slid him down in an ambulance to take him to the hospital. At 10:00 that night, along about 10:00--we laid out all the hose lines we could to get all the water until we had dry lines. About 10:00 that night, the roof fell in. The walls stood, and the roof fell in about 10:00 that night; and I was really happy to see it when it fell in. We—the next morning Chalmette Drive had filled up with ice. The hose was all between it, and the sanitary department came and helped to pick the hose up and loaded it up in the sanitary trucks. We were exhausted because we'd stayed there all night.

Another thing that stands out—[*Glances at watch; to projectionist and to audience, off-camera*] I won't have time to show you those slides. I'll have to get with them some other time. Another thing that stood out—another Christmas morning was on Moore Road when four little children burned to death. It was nothing but a house fire, but we had four little children burn to death on Moore Road.

We have had other suicides and things, but I think the worst murder and suicide I ever saw was—I believe it was on Forrest Drive in Chamblee, up there near the oil tank. We got this call up there that night. The mother had poured gasoline on three children and on herself. And one of the little boys jumped out the window. He was—I don't think he was burned. I don't believe he was, but the three—she poured gasoline on him, but he managed to get out before they ignited. But the mother and the other two children burned to death. We debated on whether or not she was ever able to strike the match to it, because with the hot water heater being where it was, the [pilot] light from it could have set it off maybe before she even had a chance. But anyhow,

they carried them to DeKalb General Hospital [now DeKalb Medical Center], and we went to the hospital with them; and they pronounced them dead. We loaded them back in the ambulance. And the thing that stood in my mind so much is after we helped them load them back in the ambulances, here was [sic] nurses, doctors, firemen; and I happened to be standing down on the driveway part and not up on the ramp at DeKalb General. And I thought it was such a sad thing, because here's the mother, and had baby in the ambulance with her and one of the other children in the other ambulance by himself as they both drove off in the night. And I turned, and I looked up on the ramp there at the hospital, just turned to look up there; and I saw all the heads in unison, just shaking their heads. And I'd give anything if I had a picture of that. They were—every person there that watched it just thought that this was the most awful thing that they think could happen. And that really stood out.

Another kind of amusing thing that happened one time—it wasn't amusing at all, but the thing that did happen, when they were building I-85 and Clairmont Road, a big piece of road equipment—a big derrick—came in[to] contact with one of those 110,000-volt or 330, whatever they are—that big, heavy transmission line that comes across 85. And this derrick got in—came in[to] contact with it—and a man was electrocuted [sic; he suffered a severe, but not fatal, shock] with it. We went there and administered oxygen and first aid, and I went to the hospital with him, rode to the hospital. And on the way to the hospital he was talking, and a long time after that they tried to enter suit—well, they entered suit against Georgia Power because the man was supposed to have not been able to breathe for several minutes, causing brain damage; and they wanted me to testify in their behalf—in the man's behalf. And I kept telling them, "No, I can't do it, because the man was not unconscious that long, in my opinion."

And they said, "Well, he was until he got to the hospital."

And I said, "He was not until he got to the hospital."

And they said, "Well, what did he say to you?"

And I said, "You go ahead and put me on the stand, and at that time I'll tell you."

But here's what the man told me in the ambulance. I don't like to go to court, because I'm not going to the scene to look at things that I'm going to have to present in court. And so I told him, I said that they could put me on the stand, and I'd tell what I saw. Well, they made a settlement afterwards.

But anyhow, in going to the hospital with him, the man said, "My feet hurt."

And I said, "Your feet hurt?"

And he said, "Yes."

And I said, "Well, let me take your shoes off." And I took his shoes off, and on the bottom of both feet, right where the shoe heels had tacks or nails in his shoes, had burned. That's where it made the contact with the ground with those—they were just perfect imprints of those nails where they made the contact into his feet.

I want to show you one other thing. [*Gets up and walks around to back of table to retrieve a large cloth bag, which he places on the table*]. I know it's 5:00, and we won't go into the slides at all; but one day, if you'll let me come back, I'd like to spend the time with the slides and show you those. [*To Mr. Mackay*] Have you got about five minutes I can show you this? Mr. Mackay, I don't know if you ever went in the old Druid Hills Station over there or not to see this thing, but it was there when I went to work for the fire department. [*Removes and displays a rectangular board with a narrow shelf attached. An old black candlestick-style telephone sits on the shelf; and a black plastic box, wiring, a mousetrap, a metal clip, and a light bulb ceramic fixture socket are fastened to the board.*] And it was still there when we moved out of the old station. This is the communications system that the fire department had, and the whole thing is what was there. And later I want to give it to the Historical Society, if they want it. It's a contraption that nobody remembers what caused it—I mean, who came up with it. But I just want to show you what a dangerous thing it is. [*Polishes and inserts a large, clear light bulb into the socket. Points to wiring on the board.*] This is a throw switch right here; and if you touch those two contacts, then you get 110 volts; and if you're well-grounded, then you suffer the consequences. But this was on the wall in that old No. 1 fire station over there, that children, schoolchildren, or anything else could come in and touch it.

[*Points to various components of the "communications system."*] This is original [*phone*], this is original; and, of course, we had to replace mousetraps all the time, because the springs would break and everything else. This is not the original box. This is a plastic box; but I do have the old metal, original box, which is a little bigger than this. But when I got it, I didn't have a chance—when I got the phone, I didn't have a chance to get the other phone with it—I mean, the other box with it. But later I got—even the old clip here is the original clip that held the pad on it for the firemen to

write calls down if you got them. The only difference in this thing is that there was a wall back here behind it; [*Demonstrates location of the wall and position of the board.]* the door went in here, and there was a little—a wall here, but it had a little shelf right behind it. And this light was on the reverse side. And at night they took this telephone—and I've got it mounted down—but they would take the telephone and the extra receiver, and they would put it around on the other side in the bedroom.

But here's what happened: When at night, when you went to bed—and you'd hear them cursing because if the mousetrap mashed their fingers when they were trying to set it or if they got shocked with it—they would set the mousetrap every night. Now, every telephone—this is where every call in DeKalb County came in to the fire department. They had to receive it on this phone in this station and then dispatch it to one of the other stations up until 1954. Well, they still kept the telephone right over until '62, I think, when we moved into the new building. It even is the old DEarborn 2542 before the DRake-8 exchange came in, before the seven digits.
But here's what happened: So the firemen would wake up at night when a call came in. When a call came in, the telephone would ring, this [*Indicates black box on board*] is attached to the bell clapper, and the clapper would trip the mousetrap, the mousetrap would pull the throw switch over to make the electrical current that turned the light on in the bedroom so they [firemen] could see how to get up and see how to get out [*Audience chuckles*]. I put a battery on this thing and hooked it up so I can simulate the telephone ringing so I could show you what it does. [*Activates from back of board; phone rings, and light bulb glows. Audience laughs.*]

And they were so good at that—[*Brief, inaudible exchange between a few audience members—including a mention of "Rube Goldberg"-- and Mr. Martin*]—and they were so good at getting up, though—and I've got to say, back then I believe they hit the floor quicker than they do today [*audience laughter*]. I went to Emory Hospital [sic; means Emory University]—I believe it was Sigma Chi, they had an upstairs Coca-Cola machine that set fire up there in it. I went up there, and Chief Bailey, he was my driver along about that time, and I was up there; and he said, "Guess what?" And he pulled his old long, rubber raincoat up, and he said, "I haven't got any britches on" [*audience laughter*]. I said, "Look a'here." I didn't either. Neither one of us had taken time to put our pants on.

But this thing—let me explain this to you right here. [*Picks up old telephone receiver from communications board*.] It had two receivers to it. The captain or the chief, whichever the ranking officer was on duty at that time, would answer the telephone and find out what they had. And the next man over here [*Picks up other receiver*.] would listen to it—the driver would listen to it. And all of us watched him. And he would nod his head, "Yes, we've got something," or he'd just say, "No," and we'd go on about our business. Or maybe somebody was trying to tell the captain where it was, and this one right here [the driver], not talking to them [the caller], would say [*whispers and gestures*], "Yeah, I know where it is." And he'd [the captain] say, "Yes, we got you. We know where it is." He [the captain] wouldn't even know, but this man [the driver] did know, and they would stop and tell where it was [*audience laughter*]. And that [*inaudible*] more than thirty-five years, because no one, when I came to work there, even knew what it [the extra telephone receiver?] was.

So if you've got a question or two, I'll take it, if you'll please excuse me for running a little bit over.

Inaudible voice off-camera, followed by applause.

END OF RECORDING

DR. WALLACE ALSTON

DR. ALSTON: I'm very glad to be here and to share in what you're doing. I think it's a most interesting thing, and the prospect of it is exciting. I've seen for the first time—before I'm actually starting in to what I have to say [*inaudible*]—I've seen for the first time the [DeKalb Historical Society's] historical museum. I should have seen it a long time ago; I've heard a lot about it. I am thrilled with what you're doing there. I [*inaudible*] have to say "you," because we have become members here, though we're living over the line; we're living in Gwinnett County for really the first time—I suppose the first time in our lives since we've been here in the Atlanta area. We know DeKalb, we've loved DeKalb, and Decatur has always been home, no matter where we actually lived at the time. It's been home.

The great Danish philosopher Kierkegaard once said something that comes back again and again to you, and that is, "We must live forward, but we understand backward." That, I think, is a true statement. And the person who doesn't, at times at least, indulge in recollection and share recollections with other people who are trustworthy is cheated, cheated of understanding and cheated; it seems to me, in one of the deep things of personal living. We must live forward, but we understand backward. You've determined, by the very nature of what you're doing, the procedure for this afternoon, for this period. And that is of necessity, particularly in my case, because I'm not a businessman; and I'm not a person who has, throughout his period in DeKalb County, frequented the courthouse or even the stores around the courthouse. Being a minister and a person who's been dealing with education, I have been around the fringes, and I hope it's the heart of the things of DeKalb County and of Decatur. But I believe it's important for me to say some things that are quite subjective and more autobiographical, I think, than I've ever been in the same length of time. I don't know any other way to do this; so you'll forgive it if it's overdone.

I was born in Decatur, July 16, 1906, on South Candler Street at the home of my grandparents, Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Alston—184 South Candler Street, a little house across from the college [Agnes Scott College], catty-cornered across from the [Agnes Scott College] president's house. As a small child we [sic] moved several times because of my father's business. He traveled for John V. Falwell [Co.] out of Chicago,

and in those days transportation for a traveling man was a problem. He had an early automobile or two that I chuckle when I think of; they're—they were strange-looking things. But he made it, and it was necessary for us to get at the center of his business at any given time. So as a small child--as a baby, as a matter of fact—we [sic] moved first to Thomasville, Georgia, where my brother was born—my brother, Robert. And then after a time we went to Anniston, Alabama. And then after a time we went into Tennessee, into three small towns in middle Tennessee: the town of Jackson, the town of Martin, and the town of Milan, all small towns.

I particularly liked Milan [pronounced Mi-lan]. It was a homey little place; the church meant a great deal to my family there. And I began to indulge in something that all through my childhood meant a lot to me, and that was sandlot baseball. I've always been a baseball fan. I played sandlot baseball--and that's about the only kind I was good enough to play—from the time I could hold a bat or a glove or throw a ball. There on the sandlots of little Milan, Tennessee, I became acquainted with a person whose friendship has meant a great deal to me through the years. Some of you know him, perhaps—Andy Holt, who became president of the University of Tennessee and was my childhood friend. We played baseball together incessantly with other young boys about our own age. We were very, very little. And the type of baseball that we played was very crummy, I'm sure. I never will forget Andy. He's—I don't know whether you knew him or not. He's been an after-dinner speaker. I haven't heard him lately; I don't know anything about what's happened to Andy. But delightful individual. My earliest recollection of him was that he had one pants leg always down below his knee, his cap was always on the back of his head, and his face was always dirty, and his hands were always grimy. Now, why he was dirtier than anybody else, I don't know. I told him that [years later], and he said, "Nothing of the kind. That's my memory of you." [*Audience laughter*] So I suppose we both were of that breed.

After a time in Milan—well, I should say that the first grade was attended in Milan. I started to school in Milan. And I have a [sic] unforgettable recollection of my teacher, a Miss Daywood [spelling?], who was a delightful person and began to interest me in going to school. Now, it's amazing that you'd have to be interested by somebody in the first grade in going to school, but I think you do. And I think I was, and I was grateful for it.

We moved to Decatur when I was eight. We came back home. And we came back a little late for me to go to the school on McDonough Street, so I had to go up to Oakhurst. And Oakhurst was regarded at that time as a little bit out of bounds and a little bit rough and tough; I thoroughly enjoyed it. I made some good friends there. I made friends with some of the boys, particularly, who organized a team later, and we had sandlot competition—the Decatur Juniors and the Oakhurst Juniors; and we had much, much fun. And we were able to do that, I think, because we'd become acquainted during that period that I went to school there.

I mustn't be too long about my grammar-school education. We came on from there, and I was at Glennwood after a while—Miss Fulton, I remember very vividly; an excellent principal and an excellent person. I suppose the most vivid recollection out of my grammar-school days is of Miss Emma Davis, who taught the third grade over on McDonough Street. I returned to McDonough, I should say, from Oakhurst and had Miss Davis, who was the strictest disciplinarian I ever met in school and an excellent teacher for people in the grade school. I have a vivid recollection of her methods and of the high standards that she upheld in her work.

Now, I must move on from this and say that I went on through the grade schools in Decatur. My family moved several times before we found a house that was suitable. We lived for a time on McDonough Street and on South Candler Street and then on Winnona Drive. And then after my grandparents' death we came back to 184 South Candler Street. The experiences of my childhood were very happy ones. As I think many of you would say, we didn't have much money. We didn't have as many things as children do, as young people our age do now; but we made fun for ourselves. We organized these teams and had fun. Scouting meant a great deal to me. And I remember during the First World War that the father of Malcolm Lockhart, who was a good friend of mine, organized a little group that grew to help in doing something in the war effort. That's the First World War. And I have a vivid recollection of that. We did all kinds of things to make a little money to buy savings stamps and to do anything else that we could find to do. When we heard that troop trains were coming through Decatur, we'd show up and let the soldiers yell at us. They called out to me, and I had big ears—I was a little skinny boy; and they said, "Pull in your ears, boy! The government's hunting for mules!" [*Audience laughter*] I'll never forget that. But we thoroughly enjoyed our participation in the First World War.

Scouting, as I say, was important to me. I stayed with it all the way through. The other interests—baseball and scouting and studying, because that was necessary, and I really loved it—but I liked my church. I joined the Decatur Presbyterian Church as small [boy] of ten under the guidance, in the ministry, of Dr. J. G. Patton. I loved Dr. Patton. He was always to me an old man. I cannot imagine his ever being a young man. He always looked to be an elderly gentleman, though I'm sure he wasn't always an elderly gentleman. I remember that cringed at the increasing criticism of Dr. Patton; and one of the things that people objected to was [that] he had the children of Israel in the wilderness, and he couldn't get them out to save his life [*audience laughter*]. He preached every Sunday, so the criticisms went, on the children of Israel in the wilderness; and he never got them out.

Well, at any rate, the thing became very serious; and the old-timers in Decatur will remember that one of the things that hurt us all, whether you were Presbyterian or not, was a church split—a church row. And Presbyterians are not supposed to have church rows; we leave that to other unmentioned denominational groups. But we did; and when we have one, we have a good one. The row centered around Dr. Patton. There was a desire that Dr. Patton leave, that he'd been there long enough. And I, as a member of the church, even though a little tad, wanted to attend every congregational meeting that was held and, with my parents' permission, did. The situation grew very serious. I was cut to the heart by things that were said by people I liked, by people I trusted; and that stayed with me through the years. I haven't held it against anybody, because these people were distinguished people, good people; but it's indicated to me how much does go into the minds and hearts of little folk. I heard and saw things in that period of disagreement—some of it rather stringent and unkind. I heard things that cut me to the heart. And yet there were things that made me love my church.

Now, what happened was the thing that Presbyterians do in an extremity. The presbytery was asked to come in. The Atlanta Presbytery came in and took over the church, declared the pulpit vacant, and required the resignation of all the elders and deacons. I thought that was drastic, and it was; but it did the work. A very stalwart group of ministers and elders from Atlanta Presbytery took over the church and conducted the services or provided those who preached and tried to prepare the church for the next step, which was to have a search committee and find a successor for [sic; to?] Dr. Patton and then to have the election of new elders and deacons. I went

through all that, and it is a vivid memory out of my childhood. My mother was on the committee to select a new pastor. My father, at that time, was chairman of the board of deacons of Decatur Presbyterian Church; and we were vitally concerned about the selection of a successor to Dr. Patton. The person selected was a person who's meant a great deal to the city of Decatur. He and his family are well-known— were well-known here—and that is the McGeachy family. Mr. McGeachy he was then, M-C-G-E-A-C-H-Y [*pronounced Ma-ga-hee*].

I never will forget the congregational meeting that set up the committee and then the first congregational meeting that heard a report in which the McGeachys were described. Mrs. McGeachy always had an A-plus rating. Mr. McGeachy was severely criticized for several reasons: he was loud and rather impulsive and furthermore sent one of the most distinguished citizens in Decatur—I almost decided that I was going to call his name, but I've decided I will not [*audience laughter*]—I remember he got up and he grabbed the pew in front of him, and he said, "I cannot vote for him. I understand he has long hair like an Old Testament prophet." But he did; he had his hair long. And, little by little, it either came out, or he'd cut it; and it didn't serve any bad purpose over a period of time.

But I remember when the McGeachys arrived in Decatur after his call and after the presbytery acted on his call favorably. They had a vital life in their family. He was Mr. McGeachy at the time; later he became Dr. McGeachy, I knew him as Dr. McGeachy. Dr. McGeachy and Mrs. McGeachy were two choice individuals, and they meant a great deal to me as a youngster growing up in Decatur because my church meant a great deal to me. And they had three boys. Their oldest son was Dan, or Daniel; he was at the time a student at Davidson. And English and Neil were incomparable. I remember the first time the McGeachy family—of course, at the time, Dan was at school—but the father and mother and the two other boys had dinner at our home; and before we knew it, English and Neil were throwing biscuits at each other at the table. I've liked them all better since then because it sort of loosened up the whole situation [*audience laughter*], and I felt I knew them; and I felt very close to them. My father, at the time, had a little committee brought from the church; and I remember they uncrated the boxes as the McGeachys moved into the Presbyterian manse. Well, enough of that, except that the church was at the center of my life and had a great deal to do with my own profession and my own decision to become a minister.

The high school experience that I had was very distinct. I had some good teachers, and I had some very poor teachers; but I remember one of the good teachers. And if I'm going to talk about my memories of Decatur, Miss Winnie Love would have to be mentioned—a funny-looking little person, little and round. I hope she doesn't have any kin people here, except that I'm about to say some nice things about her. She was an exciting English teacher, and she simply set that class on fire in her interest for—well, for Tennyson, Browning, a little bit of Shakespeare but particularly the poets. She left us just longing to know more of what excited her up to such an extent. She was a good teacher. Her enthusiasm was contagious.

I must speak at some length of the best friend I had when I was in high school, and that was the principal. Mr. W. M. Rainey, who has been a figure here in this county for [sic] over the years—he's gone, of course, a long time now; but he was my friend. And somehow he noticed that I was a stammerer, a stutterer, and a bad one; and he took an interest in me.

He said to me one day, "Would you like to get rid of that? It's terribly unattractive."

I said, "Yes."

And he said, "I can help you, I think." And he said, "I won't hurt you. I think I can help you, and I might even cure you if you'll do exactly what I'll tell you to." And I was willing to do anything in the world to get rid of stammering. It's a terrible curse. So he said, "I want you to meet me at times that I'm going to designate, times that are convenient to me." And they were times in the late afternoon and at night. He would meet me at the schoolhouse; and he would say, "The first thing I want you to do is to go out competitively for both declamation and debate." And he said, "I want you to do it seriously, now."

Well, Henry Grady's "The New South" became my sugar stick. I knew it forward and backward and could recite any part of it in the middle of the night if touched and wakened. He [Rainey] also insisted that I get into debating, which I did. Now, in those afternoons and evenings his method was indeed a unique one. He said, "Just don't pay any attention to me," getting in the back of the classroom and beginning to make the most horrible faces. I'd never seen the principal of a high school who looked like he did. And he would jump around like a monkey, and he would say, "Don't stop. Go right on, and do it with enthusiasm, because," he said, "my method is to increase your

concentration and your emphasis on what you have to say." And he said, "Fight me. Fight me by just going ahead when I do something that disturbs you."

Well, what he did was very disturbing, because soon he began to throw erasers at me; and the erasers would come and go "Plop!" at my right and then in a few minutes "Plop!" at my left, and I really didn't have any idea how good his control was. But through weeks and months of that sort of training—intermittently, of course—I did at least gain some self-confidence. I was willing to get into these contests and prior to that time was utterly unwilling to do so, because I had no confidence that I could even say "Wallace." It was particularly a "W" that I couldn't say. I couldn't say McPherson, either; that was my middle name, and I never had any success with that. But I did find that for me, concentration upon what I was trying to say and emphasis—now, sometimes I found that I emphasized the wrong things, but he said, "Don't bother about that now. Just go ahead and fight me." And I spent a lot of my energy just—I was mad half of the time. He'd almost hit me, you know, and acting so silly and insisting that I not even stop. He wouldn't let me laugh at him or anything. Well, I came through that loving debating and went on to Emory later and debated and became, as I entered my junior year, the freshman debate coach, which was to me a very interesting but amusing thing; because I remembered very well the time that I couldn't say my name without stammering and the debt I owed to Mr. Rainey, who, out of the goodness of his heart, was trying to untie one tied-up tongue.

Well, I must move, because there's just a great many things that I would like to say. I went to Emory my freshman year after graduation from Decatur High School on a scholarship from Emory and was there in the freshman year for a regular course of study. Transportation was a problem for me because I lived at home. I had a bicycle, and I often rode my bicycle to Emory. Now, if you remember, the route from Decatur to Emory in those days, in the days when I was a college freshman, let's say, you know that it was chiefly woods--woodsy, very woodsy. There was the Diamond [spelling?] home; and there was, of course, the Houston property and a few other places. But for the most part it was dark and forbidding as you would try to go on your bicycle or walk. Now, there was a little man--and he may have some kinfolks here, too—with a Ford car, who ran a little jitney between the courthouse and Emory, the main gate at Emory at the time. Mr. Jones had a little moustache and always about a third of a cigar sticking out of the front of his mouth—never lit, but always that little cigar. You

remember him? Mr. Jones. When I had money enough, I'd ride with Mr. Jones; but often I walked. It did me good. I think I began to gain a little bit and to eat more, and so I don't think it hurt me any.

Following that freshman year at Emory a strange thing happened to me: I didn't have any money to go on to college. I was in the same shape that many of my friends were in; they didn't have any money, either. It was a time where [sic] youngsters just didn't have much money. And so I wanted to go on with college work and decided to stay out and work. Now, Mr. Rainey, who was my friend, meantime had become the DeKalb County Superintendent of Schools; and he made an appointment with me, and he said, "You're broke, aren't you?"

And I said, "Yes, sir."

And he said, "You want to go on back to school, don't you?"

I said, "I do."

He said, "How would you like to teach for a year?"

And I said, "Well, I just finished my freshman year, as you know."

He said, "That doesn't make any difference. Doesn't make a bit of difference to me."

And he put me out at Avondale High School, which is now torn down. It's the one there on Rockbridge Road that hasn't stood for a long time, and it was—it was pretty primitive at that time. But it was a school, and I knowed [sic] it was a good school. He put me out there to teach, and I did. But at the end of about the third week the principal left without notice, and Mr. Rainey was high and dry without a principal for the school. And he said to me, "I want you to be acting principal of the school."

And I said, "Now, Mr. Rainey that's just too much—that's going too far."

"No," he said. "I want you to do it."

I not only accepted that and tried to function, but I had it saddled on me for the whole year and found it a great challenge and an opportunity to learn a lot of things that I never in the wide world would have learned about human nature as well as about high school administration.

After that year I returned to Emory. During that year two things of great importance happened to me. I found that Emory was offering some good extension work for credit on Baker Street in Atlanta at night, and I began to take some of those courses. I had two of the best professors and two of the best courses I have had

anywhere in any school today during that period. We called him Jimmy Hinton—Dr. Hinton—in his course in *Othello* and in his course in *Lear*—excellent courses. And Dr. Steadman in his courses on Tennyson and Browning. I thought a great deal about what's happened in colleges. In so many colleges and universities now a youngster can go and not even know what a full professor—certainly the chairman of the department—what he looks like, without any contact with him in the classroom. These two men taught these courses on Baker Street at night to anybody who came, and we had a conglomerate [sic] attendance. But here's one person who is deeply grateful for what Emory did and what these two men did.

The other thing that happened to me this year out of Emory was I met the girl who later became my wife. And I have to tell you a little bit about that. Madelaine's here with me now; she's been with me for fifty-three years, six years before we were married [*Audience laughter and remarks of surprise*]. That's a spell, isn't it? We became acquainted while she—after a year at Agnes Scott—was a student at the Atlanta Conservatory of Music. She was living with the [Charles] Cunninghams on South Candler Street and taking her meals at the McKinneys'—Mrs. Claude [Candler] McKinney, Mrs. S. B. McKinney—Callie [Caroline McKinney Clarke] and her mother. And Mrs. McKinney, in order to introduce Madelaine to people in the community, to young friends, invited me through my mother, who was a very close friend of Mrs. Clarke, to a house dance--and they were the bane of my existence at that time—to a little house dance on a Saturday night. Well, I had a date with a very attractive blonde, who was going with me to the Forrest [Forest?] Hills Country Club, and in order to please my mother said that we would go by Mrs. Clarke's so that I could meet her guest; and we did. And I could scarcely pull up anchor with this attractive date I had when the time came to leave.

When the evening was over, I went into my mother's room, as I always did as I came in at night; and she said, "Well, how did you like Mrs. Clarke's guest?"

And I said, "Well, I'll tell you truthfully, I'm going to marry her."

And she said, "You are sleepy. I want you to go to right to bed" [*Audience laughter*].

The next day was Sunday. After church I called Callie, who is my lifelong friend, Mrs. Clarke; and I said, "Callie, we had a nice time at your house last night. I wish we could have stayed longer." And I said, "I want to speak to—" and I couldn't say

Madelaine's first name, and I couldn't spell it—M-A-D-E-L-A-I-N-E. And her second name was worse—Dunseith—D-U-N-S-E-I-T-H—I couldn't think of that, and I couldn't spell it and couldn't pronounce it. And I said, "I want to speak to Thing-a-ma-jig" [*audience laughter*]. And somehow I got through to her, and a six-year courtship ensued that led to marriage in May of 1931.

Well, that was, I mean, that was a part of my year out [of Emory]. I went back and finished Emory in the mid-year of 1927 and had already decided what I was going to do. I was going to go on with my master's--just stay there, go on with my master's in philosophy. I was going to take the philosophy master's under a very interesting gentleman, Dr. C. G. Thompson, whose nickname was "Heavy Duty." Everybody had nicknames. Great-big man, rather slow, plodding. Some of you know him, because you're smiling. But at any rate in the middle of the year, after I had started my master's, he left; and the faculty had the task of indicating [sic] somebody who would be my major professor and go on with the work that I was undertaking. They chose a wonderful person in Dr. Parker, who was the dean of the theological school and one of the really great men I've known in teaching.

Under Dr. Parker I did some extra work, some extra reading, took some extra time on this master's but was allowed to elect some courses in the school of theology; and in that way I had the privilege of some courses in church history under Dr. Plato Durham, who's one of the great teachers that I ever had, and, of course, Dr. Aiken Smart, who [sic] I had known and continue to know and appreciate for so many years after I studied with him.

Well, I received my master's there and then went on to Columbia Seminary for my theological work. I had this experience: At that time Dr. R. T. Gillespie was the president of Columbia Seminary; and he said to me, "Now, if you want to do a little teaching"—he knew I'd had some Greek—"I will arrange to have you go to the university of your choice for two summers as the compensation for the teaching that I want you to do. I want you to teach New Testament Greek to beginners." And I did. I took some special work in New Testament Greek or in Greek; and as a part of the time that I spent at Columbia Seminary, I taught New Testament Greek.

And I had these two great years—I mean summers: one at the University of Chicago and the other at Union Seminary of New York. At that time both institutions were in the summer bringing in some of the ablest people in this country and on the

Continent, and they were teaching courses. I had Dr. James Moffatt at Chicago; I had Dr. William Warren Sweet. I had others whose names in their particular fields were outstanding at the time—Henry Nelson Wieman in philosophy. The next summer at Union Seminary I had Dr. Douglas Steere in some courses that I've never been sorry I took. He was a Methodist who became a Quaker, and he was a teacher for many years at Haverford and at Earlham and a person who was tremendous stimulation to a young person who was entering the ministry. So I had a great experience by that rather irregular program that was outlined for me with the help of Dr. Gillespie.

Then, as soon as I got through with seminary, I got married. Madelaine's birthday is in late May, and our anniversary is in late May. The only way I can remember which is which—that the anniversary is on the twenty-second and her birthday is the thirtieth of May—is that I know I went straight from the seminary to the marriage altar [*audience laughter*]. I didn't do anything else—so that always is the thing that provokes [sic] me to remember what the distinction is between the birthday and the anniversary.

Well, now, let me just pass on from there for a few minutes. I don't know how the time is going. [*To Mr. Mackay*]: We're through at five, aren't we?

MR. MACKAY [*Off-camera*]: Not necessarily. Just you keep up with what you're doing—just keep on.

DR. ALSTON: That's long enough for people to have to listen. I want to say a thing or two about what I did after seminary. We went as bride and groom to the funniest little house you ever out at the Rock Spring Presbyterian Church, here in Atlanta; and that was my first pastorate. The little house was right next to the church. It was right on the ground, no basement of any kind. But two of the happiest years of our lives were those two years in that little church. We went from there to Lexington, Kentucky, and from there to Richmond, Virginia, where I directed the young people's work at the Presbyterian church for three years and then from then [sic] Charleston, West Virginia, to the First Presbyterian Church for six years. We had a great experience in the pastorate; we loved the pastorate. I had no intention of ever leaving the pastorate.

Then in 1940 I was called up to the Druid Hills Church. My father had been ill. I felt I had to get nearer my family; I felt maybe this was God's way of helping me do something that I very much felt that I wanted to do. I wanted to be near them [Dr.

Alston's parents] in their old age and as they needed me. So we came on to Atlanta, much as we loved our work in Charleston [West Virginia]. Came on to Atlanta for four years in the Druid Hills church.

And during my fourth year there Dr. [Ross] McCain and Mr. George Winship began to talk with me. It was Dr. McCain's proposal—[*Aside, acknowledging presence of Ross McCain's son, Paul McCain*]—glad Paul's here. He can check on me about some of these things—it was his proposal that I consider coming on to Agnes Scott [College] soon as vice president and professor of philosophy and that I understudy him, that I prepare to follow him when he retired in 1951. That was in 1948 that I actually was approached, and serious talks ensued. Mr. George Winship was a quiet man, if you knew him, but a very persuasive person. And he followed Dr. McCain, and the two of them after a time made a deep impression. They interpreted Agnes Scott in a way that accorded with my own interpretation of my ministry and of my call and of my desire for my life. And at long last I took, for me, the most serious step that I could have possibly taken; I left the pastorate and went to Agnes Scott, realizing that I wasn't technically an administrator, that I wasn't even technically an educator, though a minister had better be an educator. But I felt tremendous lack, tremendous need. Dr. McCain and Mr. Winship said, "You have the main thing that we want. We think the president of a small Christian college needs to know students. He needs to be a friend of every member of his faculty. He needs to be able somehow to tie a small college together around his own home and his own personality." I never thought of it quite that way. And there are not many colleges in this country that, in my opinion, do have that philosophy of the job of a president. I bought it. I went. And I spent twenty-five years at Agnes Scott.

We were in a little house on the corner of South Candler Street and Dougherty Street, at first--old Ansley. It was torn down after three years; we had three happy years there. One of the things Dr. McCain wanted to do was to build a house in which he would never live, but a house for his successor; and that he did. We were consulted freely. We had the chance to think with him and with the architect, but we moved into the house as the time came to succeed him [Dr. McCain]. Now, during the three years that I served as vice president and professor of philosophy, I taught, I traveled, I went to all of the Seven Sisters—the great Eastern women's colleges, I went to Europe and studied the education of women on the Continent and in England, I had the

opportunity to know what was going on in the inside—Dr. McCain opened up everything to me—everything except Mr. Todd's mind and art [*Dr. Alston and audience laugh*]. I didn't quite get on the inside of that, but Mr. Todd was our treasurer and very, very close to Dr. McCain. And he became my good friend, too; but we had—there was a bit of caution as I approached Mr. Todd at first.

We had a fine experience getting acquainted with faculty. There were some wonderful people in the faculty at Agnes Scott at that time—some old-timers and some youngsters. Soon youngsters like Bill Calder came in and his wife, Frances. I had the privilege of performing their marriage. We enjoyed our twenty-five years at Agnes Scott. There were problems. We had a long money-raising spree from '53 to '64, our seventy-fifth anniversary campaign, where we had to raise—we did raise—twelve and a half million dollars for endowment. Three-fourths of that went to endowment and the rest for the physical plant. And then some wills came, and Agnes Scott was able to build up its invested funds considerably. I had a good time doing that. I had a good time doing it all. It was sheer fun, even though there were times when it was extremely painful.

Now, let me say before we finish a few things that sort of top this off. I realize this may be quite different from other things, where people tell you about Ansley Goss Drugstore, Weekes Brothers' store, and Bailey Brothers'—I knew about them, and the unpaved streets and the rest of it. I knew Decatur at that time and loved it. It was home. But this was my life, and my memories are primarily of what I did and the places I went and the things that I undertook. I want to tell you a few things.

First is my relationship with Paul's [McCain] daddy [Ross McCain]. He was one of the most interesting people I've ever known. He was my friend. I knew him first when I was a little tad on South Candler Street, and he with his family moved onto the [Agnes Scott] campus. That was in 1915. I didn't know that he ever noticed me; I noticed him. He was an interesting person to me. I liked the way he walked. He walked with great dignity. I liked their family life that I heard about through my mother and father. I just found them quite delightful. Now, I've known other Agnes Scott people. I knew Alec [Alex] Gaines's grandparents, the first president and his wife, Dr. Gaines [and] Mrs. Gaines. Again, it was a little shaver knowing distinguished people who had come to the college. I knew Miss [Nannette?] Hopkins. Goodness knows, she was a character. She came to Agnes Scott under the persuasion of Dr. McCain and Mr.

Winship to be there one year. She was at Hollins Institute [later Hollins College], a native of Stanton—Stanton, Virginia. She was persuaded to come to Agnes Scott one year to help get things started. She came and stayed forty-nine years [*audience laughter*] and helped to give shape and tone and quality to the institution. I suppose I am the only college president in America who was run off the campus when he later was called to be president [*audience laughter*], and that's literally true. We used to go over there with our tennis rackets, and we would play the poor night watchman. At times he would just leave us alone; it was the line of least resistance. At other times he cleared the decks, and on occasions I had to get off [the tennis court] as the other little fellows in the community had to get off, too. I never brought that up to the trustees and ask for special consideration because of that [*audience laughter*], but that was a fact.

Now, my friendship with Paul's daddy, with Dr. McCain, was quite different. When we moved into the president's house, particularly—he was our next-door neighbor, and we knew him well. He was not the kind who comes over intimately and breaks into your private affairs; that wasn't his type. But he was there. If you needed him, he was there. He was a friend. He could not be put into any mold, [*to Paul McCain, in the audience, off-camera*] could he, Paul? No. And I didn't want to put him into any mold; I liked him as he was. Oh, he had so many personal traits that interested me. He was very careful about his language, of course. When he got real upset, instead of saying some of the words that I knew pretty well, he would say, "My, my" [*audience laughter*]. "My, my." And when Dr. McCain went around saying, "My, my," I knew it was time for things to close up.

Well, at any rate, when I became president, I felt that it would be unwise in every way for Dr. McCain to sever his connection with the board or with the administration of the college. And so we had for fourteen years a situation where he was chairman of the executive committee, of the board, and a member of the board. Now, you tell me that isn't good practice that the books say that when a man finishes a long stint, he ought to do something or other. I followed that advice, but I didn't want him to. I wanted him to do what he did. He meant a great deal to the college, a great deal to me, and his fifty years, more or less, of active service to Agnes Scott—a high mark, a high mark in the history of a great little college.

Now, a word about my relationship to the faculty. When I went to Agnes Scott, I went, so far as they knew, as an unknown. I was a minister, and that didn't strike some of them as being exactly what they wanted. They had seen some ministers, and they didn't altogether approve of the academic standards of some of the ministers they knew; and I had to face that. I had to prove, first of all, that I was there for serious academic work; and I had to justify my rather well-thought-out, I think, view of a Christian liberal arts college in terms of what it meant and how you go about getting it. Needless to say, I felt, before many months had passed, strong support; and I did have strong support from a splendid faculty, people like Emma Mae Laney, Miss McDougall, and Ellen Douglas Leyburn, "Miss Mell." Oh, my goodness; you start in, and you don't know where to stop. But people of real quality—teachers. Teaching was emphasized. And then people who were qualified, such as Joe Frierson and Walter Posey and Bill Calder in his very important field, astronomy and physics. We had a good faculty, and my relationship with the faculty was one of the happy things that I had over at Agnes Scott, not an unhappy experience. I felt that there was mutual trust, and there was a great deal of excitement in working with these capable people.

I want to say this; I've already alluded to it. One thing about both Emory and Agnes Scott in my student days, and one of the things I tried to keep, was this: I think freshmen need the best you have. They need your full professors. They need the chairmen of your departments teaching, and so often they don't get it. You get some instructor who is given to freshmen and some inexperienced teacher who is teaching sophomores. Freshmen and sophomores ought to have the very best you have to offer, and we did that, and I think it was important.

Another thing that I felt at the time and feel it now is that a small college, in the South especially, would do well to try to bring the great figures in the various disciplines to the campus for as much time as they can spend and we can afford. We set aside a house and prepared it for visiting professors. We brought George A. Buttrick here for a quarter. We had Theodore Greene in philosophy here, oh, for a good many quarters. We had John Rothenstein from Oxford, Oxfordshire, who is regarded now, I just heard the other day, from some materials that were being put out by the English that he's regarded now as the most knowledgeable person in English art alive. We had him on our campus—[*to Paul McCain*] How many times, do you remember? Three? I mean, for three periods of time. He came and stayed with us, he

and his wife. We tried to bring as lecturers the top people in the country in their respective fields. Now, I don't think it matters whether you agree with them or not, whether their point of view is your point of view or not. It's a college. You have a college, a place where you are trying to teach in the field of higher education, and young people need to have ideas presented to them by top-flight leaders who can make those ideas important, and then they can fight those ideas if they're able. We, of course, had a longtime friendship with Robert Frost. We've had on our campus C. P. Snow and Arnold Toynbee and Sir John Gielgud, Paul Tillich, Paul Lehmann, John Bailey, Elton Trueblood, John McKie [spelling? McKay?], Howard Lowery [spelling? Lowry?], Dean Rusk, W. H. Auden, Andrew Young, Eudora Welty, and scores of others. Now, I believe in that. I think one thing a small college ought to try to do is expose
[RECORDING ENDS ABRUPTLY.]