

TRANSCRIPT: ANNE SHAFER

Interviewee: Anne Shafer
Interviewer: Elizabeth Gritter
Interview Date: June 24, 2004
Location: Memphis, TN
Length: One audio file, approximately 64 minutes (the oral history was transcribed from a digitized audio file and also is available on audio cassette)

Transcriptionist's Note: When the time is noted in brackets it indicates an inaudible passage.

Interviewer's note: Per my request, Anne Shafer reviewed a previous version of this transcript and sent me a memo dated July 7, 2009, with changes and corrections. She added the concluding paragraph (denoted as such). I accordingly changed the transcript on August 3, 2009. The transcript--not the tape recording--should be quoted.

START OF INTERVIEW

Elizabeth Gritter: This is Elizabeth Gritter interviewing Anne Shafer on June 24, 2004, in Memphis, Tennessee. [Break in recording]

Anne Shafer: I have little lapses and you have to--.

EG: Sure.

AS: You have to watch me.

EG: Sure. Okay. Testing, one, two, three. Okay, it's working. And I'm just going to be jotting down some words that you say that later on we'll have to go over the

spelling of them so I can make sure I'm accurate. But, yeah, I was interested in learning about--. I saw you were head of the League of Women Voters in the late '50s, '58 to '61, and interested in your political activity and civil rights activity, particularly in the late '50s and early '60s.

AS: Well I joined the League of Women Voters at the suggestion of a mayor of Memphis, Edmund Orgill.

EG: Okay.

AS: I had worked in his 1955 campaign for mayor and when his campaign was over he said, "I recommend the League of Women Voters to all you ladies," so--.

EG: Was this in his campaign in 1955, when he first ran for mayor?

AS: No, it was his run for reelection in 1958. He withdrew from the reelection race for heart surgery in July 1959 but held his office until his term expired January 1, 1960.

EG: Okay.

AS: And I really didn't know what the League was all about, but I--.

EG: I know he ran for governor in 1958.

AS: Yes, he narrowly lost, and then began his reelection campaign for mayor in 1958.

EG: Okay.

AS: It was for me a long time ago—the 1950s to now, 2004.

EG: Yeah.

AS: I admired him very much. He took a beating from the White Citizens Council and other segregationists. He was a good mayor who was attacked unmercifully.

They showed a picture. In the lines of voters on Election Day, they gave out copies of a picture of Orgill shaking a hand with a black man and they said, "See, a vote for Orgill is an invitation to a nigger for dinner." It was awful. It was so bitter. And so he didn't get re-elected, or elected if that was the governor's campaign, but I don't remember. So he was just a really good man and he was trying to be fair and honest and I supported him wholeheartedly. So whatever I did I was interested in the racial equality issue. Then the League of Women Voters had two or three black members. And the League, they had had two or three different chapters and had lost their charter--not lost their charter. What did they do? They just collapsed after awhile because the local politics didn't trust them. The old-line politicians, if you weren't either a Democrat or a Republican they thought you were communist. So they called the League communist, especially because we had a black member or two. So we just lived with that, and the only place we could meet in Memphis in 1958 and all through that period was at the YMCA--no, YWCA--and they had a really nice, big office and recreation and social building downtown that would accommodate all kind of things. So we met there and we met at LeMoyne-Owen College, the black college. So those were the only places we could meet. Oh, the Unitarian Church. We sometimes met there. Nobody else let a mixed group meet in their building or school or church or whatever. It was just too controversial and people just wouldn't stick their necks out. So we worked on the issues--. Oh, and the Freedom Train--I don't know if you remember what that's about--the documents--what documents?--the federal documents, the papers--.

EG: Yeah.

AS: It came through Memphis and the League--let me see--the League supported its coming but the city objected to its coming because it had to be integrated and they would not allow whites and blacks to go in on the Freedom Train at the same time. So anyway we supported that. And then I had a couple of friends, one lady on the League board, the treasurer, Alma Hanson, I mention her in that little book. [She's referring to her self-published book: *History of the Memphis City Beautiful Commission and Its Impact on Our Lives* (Memphis, 1996).] She was a white lady from--I don't remember no--up in New England, either New Hampshire or somewhere up there. She was a Congregational missionary. And LeMoyne-Owen College was originally a Congregationalist school. It probably still is. So Miss Hanson--we all called her Miss Hanson and then we got really close to her and called her Alma--but she had been the treasurer of that college so she was the one then who got us in all the time for our meetings. She'd set up the meetings over there. And I learned to respect her and like her very much and I was in and out of LeMoyne-Owen College a lot. And then we had also over there at LeMoyne-Owen College a black lady who was a linguist. She taught--I don't know now--English and whatever. She had made a study--. She has quite a reputation for her achievements. She did a study of dialects and she's well known for that. Her name is Dr. Juanita Williamson. She died now some years ago too.

But anyway so I developed a number of black friends. Then I was raised Catholic here in Memphis and of course Catholics were in a minority too, and my mother raised me to keep your religion and your politics to yourself because you might run into trouble somewhere if you make an issue of anything. Well, but so the Catholic Church was small here in the South and in Memphis too and they would not take a stand on the racial issue.

We had an elderly bishop. He lived in Nashville, and a synagogue was bombed in Nashville, and so he--. He wouldn't take any stand at all on the Civil Rights Movement when it started. So I got into a hassle with them. And with a number of other people we formed a group called Catholic Human Relations Council. It was a member of the National Council for Interracial Justice. And then the local clergy called us all a bunch of communists and so we--. [Laughter]

There was a lot of harassment that we did run into and I'd get letters in the mail, mostly anonymous, and telephone calls that were awful. If you got a chance to go by that Women's Foundation, it's down on--. I didn't know where it was exactly but it's on Third Street at the corner of Madison and Third, I believe. That's their office. But they wrote up a little history of this group called Concerned Women. That's where we took a lot of harassment too because it was a city-wide group, that is we had Jewish members and Catholics and Protestants and I don't know what else. And so we took a stand with the black men who were setting up the Civil Rights Movement at the time. And they planned--. The whites were saying there's no poor people in Memphis. That's what they were saying. We were defending the poor, which we thought were mostly black, and so all these whites were saying, "There are no poor people in Memphis." So this black group set up an itinerary for us to go on a bus and tour some black, poor people's neighborhoods.

EG: This was in the late '60s, around the same time as the sanitation strike?

AS: Yeah, yeah.

EG: Okay.

AS: So--I lose my train of thought and I have to work at getting it back. Anyway, I came home one day from one of those meetings and there was this huge pile of sand in the front yard, three tons of sand. And the phone rang off the wall for about three or four days and I finally just left it off the hook. I'd pick up the phone, I'd say, "Hello," and they'd say, "It should have been nigger shit," and they'd hang up. They'd call right back and I'd think it was somebody else surely and I'd pick it up and say, "Hello," and they'd say, "Should have been nigger shit." You know that just went on for two or three days. I never could understand how people could be like that and it just made me more determined to stay in the fight.

EG: You mentioned on the phone too about how there was a bishop who went around, or priest, equating civil rights workers with communism and how that made a lot of people fearful of getting involved.

AS: The priest was a member of the John Birch Society and his name was Father Edward Cleary. Now they don't--the family and all--they ignore this part of his life and his career. He was an organizer and he went on all over the South on a speaking circuit talking about anybody who got involved with the interracial movement was a communist or a dupe of the communists. And he was a fiery speaker. He went all over the South. Unless people reacted negatively to him then he won them all over. And so I think we had a lot of that going on and that's why it became so hard to overcome the barriers. But anyway he picked on me one day. Well I wrote a letter to the Pope. And I didn't tell anybody I had done it but some of the priests found out about it and they told it around so he told it around. He said, "She's a nut. She's even written to the Pope." [Laughter] But I wrote to the Pope because I had been writing to that little elderly bishop in Nashville

telling him to shut this man up, that it was wrong, he was wrong, we were not communists and we were good Catholics. This Catholic Human Relations Council, they were all good Catholic people. There were white and black Catholics in it. So the man who--one of the men who--helped get it organized was a black man, a principal of one of the city schools, high schools. So it was some prominent people in there who were black and they were for racial justice.

And I thought this man, Cleary, he didn't know who anybody was. He painted us all with this broad brush. And the little bishop up there in Nashville after the synagogue was bombed in Nashville then he wouldn't do a thing and this priest just had free reign. So the Pope sent a different bishop over here, a man from Birmingham who had some experience, I don't know how much, with the civil rights activity in Birmingham. And he had read the letter of Dr. King's from the Birmingham jail. Now whether he visited Dr. King in jail or not I don't know. It's possible he did. I've forgotten all that. I read some of it in a newspaper article but I don't recall the details. So anyway his name was Bishop Joseph A. Durick, D-u-r-i-c-k. And when he got to Memphis he called me up and said, "Come to my office. I want to see you." See he got a copy--. He got the letter I sent to the Pope. They sent it back to the bishop who then called me on the carpet. [Laughter] Well I told him that my whole life was a spiritual journey. I knew Southern history and I was doing what God meant for me to do . . . That's a long story and I think it influenced him somewhat. He broke the "logjam" in the Catholic diocese and in Memphis which Fr. Cleary and his followers had established. There was no communism involved. So after two or three meetings I convinced him. So he went out and took a stand himself and then he got two or three of the other priests to go with him so that kind of broke up the block

of anti-communist position the Church had in Memphis. So they all went down and marched on Main Street in one or two of the marches and, oh, the conservative Catholics were enraged that the bishop was out there with the communists. [Laughter] Anyway, it all finally eventually blew over but--.

EG: When was this that Father Cleary was going around talking about civil rights workers equated with communism? Was this in the '60s, or the '50s and the '60s?

AS: I want to say '50s and '60s because he was pastor of one Memphis' largest Catholic parishes out in Whitehaven. And he had all this John Birch literature for sale in the vestibule of the church. That book, *None Dare Call It Treason*, have you ever run into that?

EG: No.

AS: Well I'll never forget that book, but anyway there's some other stuff. And he would get up on Sunday and allude to a lot of that stuff. He believed it every word. And then so his church bulletins had a considerable amount in them, and I do have some copies of those bulletins but I don't know if I could put my hand on them right now. I'll think about it a minute and see if I can remember.

EG: So this Bishop Joseph Durick, that must have been around the mid-1960s?

AS: Yeah, it was '65 when Durick got here.

EG: Okay. And before he met with you he hadn't taken a stand for civil rights but then afterwards he did?

AS: He may have done it in Birmingham. See I don't know what he did there. I don't know how it was. This was Pope Paul VI. I don't know how Paul VI knew about Durick and selected him because he was not a bishop. He might have been an auxiliary

bishop in Birmingham. I don't know that either. But he definitely leaned in the same direction I leaned in so it wasn't any leap for him to change when he got here.

EG: Sure, sure. One of the things that I looked at in my research as a case study for what Memphis politics and civil rights activity was like at that time was the 1959 city election in which Russell Sugarmon ran for the public works commission post. And I saw that there was a big movement among most white citizens to defeat Sugarmon and that that was a really big thing in the city that he ran. And I was wondering if you remember anything about that?

AS: Yes I do because I supported Russell Sugarmon and I supported A.W. Willis and Jesse Turner. And they ran--. As they ran for office if there were two or three white candidates in there they would agree among themselves which one would get out so the black wouldn't have as much chance to get elected. It was an awful lot of maneuvering going on that way. I was kind of on the fringe. I wasn't very involved in that but I did support them. They knew that I supported them. And I was just one of those radical whites that they knew, well she's--. They tried to discredit you or ridicule you.

EG: Who tried to discredit or ridicule you?

AS: The whites, to discredit me because I was supporting the black candidates. Then the group that--. When Mr. Crump died--he died in '54 I think--and then that's when Memphis politics opened up. Everybody was scrambling to be the leader and there were so many of them fighting among themselves. And some of the people who had been Mr. Crump's leaders--he had them all appointed to all the different commissions and whatever--so they were all vying for power too. And when I ran--. When I got involved with the city in '64 I supported the progressives, including Pete Sisson for

commissioner. Well the reason I did that, I did not know him at all but he was running against a man who was a Crump man--had been a Crump man--and he was running on a ticket that was called "Keep Memphis Down in Dixie." I knew the men, formerly of the Crump machine. Some were Catholics, and they were not for racial integration; progress, for them, did not mean racial equality. So I just didn't vote for any of those people.

[Laughter] I voted for the independents who were not racist. So where are we going with that? Did we--?

EG: Do you remember what people were saying about Sugarmon's candidacy and the candidacy of blacks at that time?

AS: You know only that they were--. Whites did not want any blacks getting elected. They didn't say too much about them except they were niggers. I hate to keep saying that word but that's what they said. In fairness, all segregationists were not as crude as others. The hard core were very active trying to prevent Civic Clubs and the Council of Civic Clubs from including the black Clubs in the "Council" structure. Arguments in the white clubs were constant and drove people away—the Civic Clubs eventually shut down.

EG: Yeah.

AS: They were really fearful, I mean genuinely fearful for themselves and their families if a black stepped out of line, crossed the segregation line. It just didn't--. I know how and why because I had grown up with it. I knew where they were coming from, but how grown people could have been so fearful. A lot of them knew black people. Most people in the South had grown up with domestic help in the house, taking care of the babies and cooking the meals and putting them on the table and everything.

They weren't afraid of those black people, but to them those were not the people out there marching for equal rights. So it was the thrust for equal rights that terrified the whites.

And I had gotten to know some prominent blacks. The first ones I met were two Catholic women, black women. One was Jesse Turner's wife, Allegra Turner, and another one was Mattie Sengstacke, who just died last week or two weeks ago. And so those were both religious women. Mattie Sengstacke had been a Catholic also. I got with those two and we integrated some Catholic women's groups, a retreat and a luncheon. I just said, "Let's go together," and we went together to these things and marched right in and sat down and ate. [Laughter] And they were both educated women, so--. And somebody said, "Well, yeah, but you know the educated ones. You don't know these others." Well "these others" were decent human beings too. And then of course some of them were lawyers and doctors and bankers. Jesse Turner was a banker.

So I got elected to the 1965 Tennessee Limited Constitutional Convention. The Shelby County delegation had eight people, all white males except Jesse and me. So we were staying in--what's that hotel in Nashville? I forget for sure which hotel it was; it was an old one in downtown Nashville. Jefferson Davis, or--? I don't know; some old founding father of something or other. [Laughter] Anyway, so a lot of times in the morning when I'd come down for breakfast if I saw Jesse sitting over there by himself I'd go sit with him and eat breakfast with him. [Laughter] And I think that horrified some of them because we had in our delegation of delegates Wyeth Chandler, a quite young Wyeth Chandler, Friarson Graves--. I can't think of the other guy's name. Morgan, one of them was Morgan. Anyway they would not have a caucus, a Shelby County caucus,

which was the thing to do, so that all the delegates from Shelby County discussed the issues and we knew how we wanted to vote. Well because of Jesse Turner and me they wouldn't have a caucus. So they never had a meeting of the Shelby County delegation. So there were two other women up there. Jesse was the only black man in the convention, and these other two women, one from Nashville and one from Oak Ridge. Molly Todd was the lady from Nashville. She was very progressive for her day. And Prince was the lady from Oak Ridge, Audrey Prince. Her husband was a city judge. And me, so there were the three women. So they accepted Molly Todd because she was already in with the Republican or Democratic, whichever party it was she was in. They all already knew her and accepted her. They accepted Audrey Prince because her husband was a judge. But they didn't accept me because they didn't know where I was coming from. I was not an active party person and I was in that League of Women Voters [Laughter] which they were suspicious of too.

In fact the way I got into that was for a couple of years the reapportionment of the state legislature was the main item of study in the League of Women Voters. So I had been through all that study for a couple of years and I thought well I could run for that convention because I knew that issue. That was my only qualification for doing it.

EG: And who elected you to the constitutional convention?

AS: Yeah, I was elected in a countywide race. Eight people were elected Shelby County Delegates. The entire county voted for all Delegates. All had competition. They, the old boy's political group, did not take me seriously. They didn't think I would win. There was a lawyer running against me, but I had been City Beautiful chairman and so I had kind of gotten known around town. So I beat the lawyer, I've forgotten his name

now, but well it really shocked them when I won that race. Then after that I ran for a position, At Large, on the City Council. Well, ten men came out and ran against me, including Wyeth Chandler.

EG: In 1967?

AS: Yeah. Because then they knew I might get elected again. So somebody told me, "The big guns are going to come out against you, just wait," because I announced first. And then I just sat there and let them all come out and declare against me.

[Laughter] But I really didn't care. I would like to have gotten elected the two times I ran but it wasn't something I had a lot of--. My heart wasn't totally a hundred percent in it. It wasn't going to hurt me if I didn't get elected. So when I did not get elected to the city council and saw who all did get elected I was glad I didn't get elected, because they fought every day down there. There was a black group and a white group and they had never mixed before. It was--. The same way with the school board; they had blacks on the school board and whites on the school board for the first time. And the whites usually were the most conservative. They were the ones who were out there to stop this "evil" trend we were on. [Laughter] So it wasn't a good place to be.

EG: And you ran for city council in '67. You said you ran again? Was that--?

AS: No, I ran just for the--. I got elected the first time.

EG: Oh, with the Tennessee Constitutional Convention.

AS: And then the second time, I never tried again. Somebody said, "Try again," but it wasn't worth it to me. It's a lot of hard work. And we had that--. During the city council race we had the open housing issue come up. And so the black group put out a questionnaire where you stood on open housing, so I said yes I was for open housing and

I signed the letter. Well that killed me right there [Laughter] because Wyeth Chandler went around town saying, “She’s for open housing. You want a nigger living on your block just vote for her.”

EG: What did open housing mean exactly?

AS: It meant they couldn’t segregate the streets. It meant no discrimination in blocks and neighborhoods. Anybody would have--. If they had the money to buy on any street they could buy where they wanted to buy, which you couldn’t do back then. The first black family that moved out here was over north of Poplar. He was a man I had known in the Catholic Human Relations Council. I’ll say his name in a minute. It won’t come to me yet. But he was also a school principal, high school principal, and a white friend bought the house and then turned around and resold it to him. That’s the only way he broke that neighborhood. Well he was a good natured man, the black man. He said, “I need to put a sign in my yard. I want to put a sign out there that says, ‘The nigger lives here,’” because his front was cleaner and neater than the neighbors. [Laughter] He said, “I don’t want them to think that’s the house down there where I live.” They had a lot of stuff piled in their carport.

EG: Did you vote for Sugarmon in 1959?

AS: Mm hmm.

EG: Okay, because I noticed looking at the press coverage that there were a few whites who supported him.

AS: I’ve voted for the black candidates in every race since they started running.

EG: Wow.

AS: They were all highly qualified, well educated, some of the best of the black community. They wanted to be considered “first-class citizens” in Memphis, said Althea Price. She was the wife of Dr. Hollis Price, who was the President of LeMoyne-Owen College. She and I were at a LWV Luncheon-meeting, held at the YWCA, one of the few places that allowed racially integrated meetings.

EG: Why do you think that whites were so fearful and thought it was so dangerous?

AS: Because I listened to them talk. I lived with them.

EG: Yeah.

AS: Well they were afraid of intermarriage. That was the big thing, see. What’s that word--miscegenation?

EG: Yeah.

AS: And they said that “many blacks had venereal diseases” and were an “inferior class.” That was the excuse for separate water fountains and restrooms. I got literature in the mail, anonymous literature, little pamphlets about that one issue and that it would lead to interracial marriage. They didn’t want interracial marriage. Well of course it has led to interracial marriage but I think interracial marriage among all people is the only thing that enables people to overcome the barriers, the walls they’ve built up around themselves which keeps hate going. See as a child I grew up here in Memphis and down in Mississippi where my mother’s people all had come from, and my mother was half German and half Italian, and the German and the Italian people lived in Vicksburg where my mother came from. My daddy was three fourths Irish and one fourth Spanish. Well those people didn’t like each other in my mother’s family. The Germans didn’t like the

Italians and the Italians looked down their nose at the Germans, my grandmother and the uncles and all that stuff. There just is--what do you call it?--it's a cultural thing. They've all--up until we started really mixing, they all grew up in a little segregated neighborhood where in a lot of cases they didn't all speak English. So the Italians spoke Italian and the Germans spoke German and all that. And they never really got to know each other. They didn't work at trying. The Church didn't encourage it. They had a church with a German pastor and a church with an Italian pastor so he could talk to those people who couldn't speak English. So nobody was promoting mixing these nationalities. But now I grew up in a family that was mixed and when I would hear these derogatory statements made: "that old dago," or--what did they call the Germans?--"kikes," I bristled a little bit every time I heard it. "The dirty Irish"--they were before called "the dirty Irish" all the time. And I'd ask my daddy where he came from. He said he was Cajun. He grew up down right out of New Orleans. His parents migrated to the US and came in in New Orleans. Well the Italians and the Germans, I think--. No, some of them came into New York. But anyway I don't know how they ever got together and married one another but they did. And now you see so much of that has changed. You don't even think about that anymore, the prejudice between those people.

EG: Right, right.

AS: So after a generation or two of intermarriage that's no longer an issue. So I decided after a generation or two of the white and black intermarriage it would be less and less of an issue. So I was for it all along. And I think today there's still got to be a lot of intermarriage between Arabs and Christians and Jews, whatever, until--. That just

seems to be the only thing that breaks down the hatred. I believe all people are God's people, God loves all of us! That is my motivation.

EG: Another thing that I saw, I read an opinion piece in the *Washington Post* that talked about the '59 election, and [the writer] said among the white community, underlying it, was a fear of school integration and that's why a lot of whites were opposed to electing black candidates.

AS: Yeah, they didn't want their children going to school with black children. I heard an awful lot of that. I also was--. When my husband was called back in the military it was during the Korean War. They sent the group headquarters to California-- from here to Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri to California--it was a Memphis reserve outfit. Well when these--. All these women--. I didn't have my child yet by then. I still didn't have any. But all the other mothers were thrilled to death to be going to California because they had free Kindergartens. Well when we got to California and they went down to the school and took their little children to the school they saw the mixture and it terrified some of those ladies. They did not want their children down there in that school with Mexicans and blacks and Indians and whatever. It was a real--. We were in northern California, sixty miles north of Sacramento at Camp Beale Air Force Base. And I walked with one of them one day to the school and I thought these were the prettiest little children. They were beautiful to me, some of them, with their little almond eyes and the little Mexican children. They were all sparkling clean and dressed up to go to school, little first graders or Kindergarten children. And I thought, "How beautiful they are." Whereas here were these other Memphis mothers--because this whole group was

Memphis people, group headquarters--they were fearful of their little child sitting in the school with these different nationalities.

EG: When was this?

AS: It was 1951. No, it was probably 1950. Yeah it was 1950 because we came home in the first part of 1952. We were out there--I don't know. I've forgotten--seventeen months. But I know full well how they think and how they feel about that mixing, because if it's going to wear off--. Well some of them here still say--. One lady used to live down the street here from us and she moved because her child was in the public school and she had left her--it was a young child--and the child was beginning to talk, she says, like the blacks talked. So I didn't hear the child myself so I don't know, but she said, "She's picking up their language," so they took her out and they moved out to the county, the county schools.

So that's the whole thing. It's just--. To me it's sad. I know there's a difference in people and there's a difference in the level of education and refinement, if you want to call it refinement, but my mother would always say to me, "It doesn't matter what other people do. You don't have to do what other people do. Just because they do it you don't have to do it. We don't do that in our family." She used to always say, "Everybody else runs and jumps off the bridge you don't have to go jump off the bridge." [Laughter] So I don't see why other people can't have that same attitude too. You go along and do what you have to do but you don't have to pick up all the worst of what other people do.

EG: You mentioned that the League of Women Voters was involved with the Freedom Train. So were you involved with the League of Women Voters before 1958?

AS: No. I wasn't with them when the Freedom Train came through.

EG: Okay, because I knew that that was like in 1947.

AS: Yeah.

EG: What was women's activism like in political campaigns, like when you were with the League of Women Voters?

AS: Well see the League is nonpartisan and we do not--if you're a board member that is. I have to clarify that. Board members cannot be involved in partisan politics. Now just the members, if they don't hold a board position, they can go and support candidates. But the League itself and those who represent the League to the public they have to focus on the issues and not the candidates. So I got my early political education in the League and I started out then focusing on the issues. And it was great for me because I learned to be objective about the issues, which most people don't learn because they start out going with a friend to a political organization and then they don't ever--. They take one side. They take a side. They don't ever analyze the issues impartially, but League of Women Voters do. But I had been, from my early family problems, I'd learned to analyze issues too, just seeing--. I could see the difference in the family when one group was talking about the other group. And it would cause me to wonder, "What's going on?"

EG: How big was the League of Women Voters? How many members did you have?

AS: Very small. No, I can't tell you the number. [Break in recording] --such a fit about the possibility of intermarriage. Through the League of Women Voters I got involved in this international visitor program and that Organization of American States program where Tennessee was paired with Venezuela. So I helped organize a group. We

went down to Venezuela and I kept a boy from there for the summer and the lady down there kept my boy for the summer one year. Well I had seen the people in Venezuela; they were half black and half white all over the place. Everybody had a mixture. It was the odd ones that were not mixed. And then I come home again and they're still saying we can't mix. It just--. And I don't know why everybody doesn't see what I see, but they don't see what I see. My sister finally did. My two brothers never did. So I don't know if it's a--. I don't know, but it's--. It creates an awful lot of trouble in a community where you've got these two dedicated factions that think they have to stop it, prevent it. I argued with a man one day, I said--. He was against blacks using the restaurants. He said, "They don't have a right in the restaurants." I said, "Well, I have a good friend who's black and if she and I want to go to lunch one day we have a right to go to lunch wherever we want to go to lunch." "No, you don't." Well they weren't logical.

EG: Yeah. Did you see as the result of the candidacies of Sugarmon and other blacks running for office any change in any of your white acquaintances at all, or did they pretty much stay the same?

AS: They stayed the same. They stayed the same. Those of us who were open minded on the subject--I'll call myself open minded, progressive--I think we're the ones who know the real values in the world and they don't. [Laughter] They just never changed and they still haven't changed. They're still--. Now it's not as bad today as it was. There are more whites who accept integration, especially the younger population. I've noticed that here in the neighborhood association there's a few black families--. There are quite a few moving in from the very south end of this neighborhood and a lot of whites have moved away, but there are a lot of whites staying.

EG: You talked about how you worked on Orgill's campaign. What sort of work did you do and what sort of work did women do in his campaign or campaigns during that time?

AS: Well, of course I never did know the head of the campaign. [Laughter] Those were the lawyers and other prominent men in Orgill's campaign. The ladies that I knew, we answered the phone in the office and we stuffed envelopes and did that kind of thing. Then we'd go out and hand out literature. But there were a few women who were [Coughs]--excuse me--Frances Coe, you've heard of her?

EG: Yeah, yeah.

AS: Well she was in the group that was among the leadership. I was not among the leadership in those days and Frances Coe was, so she had a more prominent role in those political campaigns than I did because she was educated for it and her family was involved in more things. I think here in the South a lot depends on who your family is and what they do. You get in on their reputation or their status. My family didn't have any status. They were just plain, poor, working folks. [Laughter] They were 1st and 2nd generation Americans—Christians, who tried to get along and practice good citizenship. And they had never gotten involved in politics. They never failed to vote though and they knew their civic duty. My mother would sweep the driveway and then go out there and sweep the gutter. She was a believer in keeping your property clean, which you don't see all the time today. She was the 1st generation citizen of my parents; my dad was 2nd generation, we think.

EG: What was the role of civic clubs in terms of local campaigns? I'm told that a lot of candidates for office made appearances at civic clubs.

AS: Well that goes back to Mr. Crump's days. Crump organized the whole city that way because we had--. All the Italians lived in one neighborhood and the Jews lived in another neighborhood and the Irish lived in another neighborhood, so they each had a civic club. And Mr. Crump would pick one from each one of those groups to be on his leadership committee. And so, it's funny, Memphis was more nearly integrated from the beginning because of Mr. Crump. They had a Catholic commissioner, a Jewish commissioner, he spread it all around. Then he had black people organized in Memphis too, doing prominent things, but they didn't overlap. So--have I gotten away from your question?

EG: No, no.

AS: So the civic clubs had the responsibility of teaching citizenship and being responsible to the city of Memphis and to the neighbors. If there was a pothole in the street it was the civic club's duty to call downtown and tell them about a pothole that needed to be fixed. In the schools, if there was a problem in the schools, the civic club leadership did their duty by keeping the city hall informed and then the work crews went right out and fixed whatever was the problem. So they moved--the leadership moved--up the ranks in the civic clubs and frequently then they became one of Mr. Crump's crowd or they ran for office themselves. It was a leadership training program going on and they were divided on ward and precinct boundaries. In the white community they called them civic clubs and in the black community they called them by their name, the 29th Precinct or something club, or they called them the City Beautiful club. But they were involved in the very same thing the white people were doing which was trying to make Memphis clean and beautiful. Because they were very embarrassed by the reputation they got

when somebody came through town and wrote in a New York paper that Memphis was a dirty river town. Well they were mortified about that so all the focus was to clean it up and make it beautiful and they worked very hard at it.

EG: You talked about how the League of Women Voters focused on issues. What sort of activities did the League of Women Voters do?

AS: Well, we have a study group that meets once a month. Now there's a night group and a day group. And the program is adopted every year at the annual meeting what the studies are going to be about. They'll study schools or--. I got to do something here. [Coughing] The League's program is local, state, and national. Then they have an international study program. So we study a local issue, a state issue, and a national issue. And we get good literature from the national League office for the national issues. Local issues, like Frances Coe was a League member, we studied school issues, local school issues. And on the state level we studied issues about children. We studied the reapportionment of the legislature. So they study them in the study groups and then as soon as they think they're ready, they take consensus. And then they publish, you know, they try to get a newspaper article that says the League supports thus and so. We did that all the time. So that way we learned to be interested in a local issue and a state issue and a national issue and an international issue and learned the subject rather than the politics. I think it's one of the best things around, the League of Women Voters.

EG: Yeah. I have to watch my time a little because my friend has to pick me up at 3:30. So I think, I want to see if I have any other questions, but is there anything else that we haven't talked about that relate to our conversation that you can think about, or would like to add?

AS: My head is as jumbled up as this room is. It's cluttered. [Laughter]

EG: Do you remember anything about the Unity ticket or the Dedicated Citizens Committee that was involved with the '59 campaign?

AS: Was that Orgill's group?

EG: Yeah.

AS: Yeah, I was in one of those groups. The Unity ticket supported consolidation, did it?

EG: Yeah.

AS: Yeah. I worked on that. And I don't know what we did exactly because a group of professionals wrote up the position paper on it. And I believed it was a good thing so I got involved in that group. There was always a good government kind of group going on and usually the Orgill crowd was anti-Crump. So they were the ones always having the good government groups going because the Crump group wasn't the good government group. Well, I know some people now, I didn't know them back then, who were long-time Crump supporters, and they thought of themselves as being good, honest, hardworking people too. So more and more I think there are just automatically factions and neither will see the other side, just like how polarized we are today. But this one friend I have, her daddy was a Crump man, Rudolph Jones, Sr. I worked with him down on the riverfront. He was on the Shelby County Board of Commissioners and LWV studied water conservation. And his daughter's a wonderful woman. I know her very well. We worked together on the Bluff Walk. So she told me one day, you know they had been--. She felt kind of bad when people started running down Crump. But I don't know. And I learned too, that's why I like the League I guess. I couldn't always be

certain that a person in office was being objective. You don't know where they're coming from, and they've got so much power, so much pressure put on them from groups competing for the power, that I think--. The League is an answer to everything because you learn you've got to--. Like a friend of mine who taught journalism for so long, she says, "I have to keep telling these students to check it out. Even if your mother said it, check it out yourself." Well see, people don't do that.

EG: What sort of impact do you think that the League had on politics?

AS: Well it's a little better now than it was way back, and of course the League members, all except the board members, they're out there working in the politics in everything. So I'm sure they've had an impact. They've helped get women elected and they've helped bring women's issues to the surface. I even, when I learned about Catholics for Free Choice I thought, "Whoopee!" Not that I, you know I was past the age of worrying about getting pregnant but I thought there has got to be an end to this control of women's reproductive rights by religious leaders, U.S. officials, and zealots. And now I see all these women's groups who are so well educated and they're so knowledgeable about all of these subjects. I think some of them go too far but I applaud them because the sexist issues are as bad as the black/white issues. [Anne Shafer's Addendum to This Transcript as of July 7, 2009, follows] And renaming, reclassifying things, like abortion as a "social" rather than a religious issue in order to avoid First Amendment clauses ... as the Catholic Church has done for the "Pro-Life" political movement. Pope John Paul II redefined freedom to mean: "Freedom is not for individuals but for the Church to carry out its mission." People do not notice that. I had so much conflict with my church over the years, and I believe it must reform itself. I finally saw God's will as "respecting the

rights of all people” – even if they are wrong, to be responsible for their own conscience and not mix religion with politics. I never saw the racial issue as “religious” – it was the U.S. democratic system of equal rights for all people. So after all of those early years, I became a Presbyterian, in good standing! I have seen firsthand that priests, bishops, and popes can be wrong; in these—my issues, they were wrong on important things. The division today seems to be between progressives facing the modern world, and the “traditionalists” who never want to accept change until/unless they are forced to. I know from a close friend who was in WWII, that German soldiers had on their belt buckles, in German, “God is on my side.” But they were wrong!!! White segregationists, and their clerical support (because it was part of the Communist plot) were wrong as well. Right-to-Lifers are also wrong because they violate the rights of others who have different beliefs about morals and life. I will be 86 years old on August 22, 2009, and I believe I still have work to do.

END OF INTERVIEW

Transcriber: Deborah Mitchum

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