

Interview

with

AL McCULLOUGH

August 19, 2006

By Sarah Thuesen

Transcribed by Karen Meier

The Southern Oral History Program
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

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TRANSCRIPT - AL MCCULLOUGH

Interviewee: Al McCullough
Interviewer: Sarah Thuesen
Interview Date: August 19, 2006
Location: Birmingham, Alabama
Length: Approximately 2 hours

START OF CD:

ST: Today is the nineteenth of August, 2006. I am at the home of Al McCullough in Birmingham, Alabama. My name is Sarah Thuesen and I'm doing this interview for the Southern Oral History Program. It's part of our Long Civil Rights Movement Project. Thanks so much for sitting down with me today.

AM: Thank you.

ST: I thought we'd start with just a few basic questions about your background. You're a lifelong resident of Birmingham, right?

AM: Yes.

ST: What year were you born?

AM: '48.

ST: So you were coming of age in the '50s and '60s.

AM: Right.

ST: What did your parents do around here?

AM: My daddy was a bricklayer. My mother was, sounds terrible to say, she was a housewife until I was about fifteen when my daddy was badly injured in a construction site

accident. Then she had to go to work. I guess she was an office manager or secretary until she retired. She retired, the last ten years she worked was as a secretary of the painter's union here in town.

ST: Before your dad got injured was he actively involved in the bricklayers union around here?

AM: Oh yes. I'm a third generation member of Local 1.

ST: Oh yeah.

AM: I have my granddaddy's first union card from 1924.

ST: What sort of memories do you have of union activities when you were a child? Did you ever go with your dad to any union-sponsored events?

AM: I don't recall doing that. We used to have barbecues. I found photographs of the big annual barbecues that the union would have. I don't recall ever attending one of them. I doubt that we did.

ST: Do you remember him talking about the union and what it meant to him?

AM: Yes. Probably. Daddy didn't talk about those things a great deal. I would hear those things at my grandparent's house when I would spend the night over there. Granddaddy would get on the telephone talking with one of the other bricklayers and I would just hear Granddaddy's side of the conversation. The telephone was in the kitchen. There was a little room where the television was by the kitchen. My granny would always be in the kitchen. Of course Granny would listen to Granddaddy's side of the conversation as well. Then she would worry about the state of the union and talk about it with Granddaddy afterward. She was so afraid that they were going to mess up and let the monied people bust

the union. Even in the 50s and early 60s that frightened her badly. She could remember the days when they had no union.

ST: Right. How far back does the local here in Birmingham go?

AM: The Birmingham local got its first charter in 1882. About the same time that the International Union of Bricklayers was beginning to realize that it needed to be a fully, racially integrated union and taking action to do this at the international convention level.

ST: And the local here had black members from the beginning?

AM: Well, theoretically it did. I don't know that it actually did. It was open to it. I know the Montgomery local was chartered about the same time or shortly after the Birmingham local and the Montgomery local was chartered as a black union, a black local union which was really very radical in those days on unionism. Once again, like the Bricklayers International leadership recognized in the '80s that we needed to do this and started actively moving in that direction. Even to the point on the border states around Texas of organizing Mexican labor that was crossing the border.

ST: Oh really.

AM: They recognized back then and we've learned a lesson from that back in the '80s and '90s as we had these problems again, we need to organize these people that are coming over. There's work. They're going to do it. They need to be making the same wages as we are, not undercutting them. That's easy to talk about, another thing to actually accomplish. At least the intent has been there which I've been very grateful for at least knowing that that intent has been there however poorly it was lived.

ST: I want to get back to some of those issues in a minute but I wanted to get some of your general memories too of growing up during the Civil Rights era here in the city. How much did the Civil Rights Movement in Birmingham impact your childhood?

AM: Very, very little. It was almost like it was happening in another country. That state in time we were just on the edge of the city limits out here where we live now. Of course I lived out here within three miles of where I lived now at that time. Everything was taking place downtown. Of course, the news reportage of what was going on was typical American news. In other words, you got the barnyard news, Hee Haw style. I don't know if you remember the Hee Haw TV programs--.

ST: Oh, definitely.

AM: With the barnyard news. All the news is fit to be news. Well, they would decide what would be fit to be news. I did not realize what the real nature of the Civil Rights demonstrations and riots that took place were until the early '90s when I actually saw the actual footage and recordings of this stuff that was taken out of the Birmingham archives. It was a police riot. It was a police riot.

ST: The television reports you were watching at the time were pretty sanitized. Is that what you're--?

AM: Oh yeah. We were ticked off at Martin Luther King. He come in--. The thought that we had, view that we had was he was talking all these idealistic things but he was intending to have a riot which was not the case at all. But we believed that. We didn't know any different. We had no reason to believe any different. I was in my forties before I knew the difference. I'm ashamed.

ST: You, at the time, pretty much believed the TV accounts that you were getting and didn't have evidence to the contrary.

AM: Right. The TV accounts may have been better than my recollections truthfully. You live in the middle of--and somebody might be telling you the truth--but the broad body of people speaking are saying something different. The truth gets ignored. I hate to acknowledge that I have been as guilty of that as most people are.

ST: Were your parents fairly opposed to what King was trying to do?

AM: Yes and no. My mother was German, of course, that's one of the things I remember her talking about. She was so upset when Nat King Cole was going to come to town, once upon a day. Of course, he had a beautiful voice. She wanted to go hear him and because he was black it just became impossible for her to go hear Nat King Cole. She said--. The hypocrisy of it really bothered her.

ST: Why was it impossible for her to go hear him?

AM: Because he was black.

ST: And--?

AM: I don't know that he actually played here in Birmingham because of that. I really can't recall whether he actually played here or not. I just remember Mother talking about it and being so disappointed that she could not actually see a live performance of Nat King Cole because of racism. She didn't acknowledge it as racism. She was aware of the problems but she also, being an immigrant and when she came to America Germans were not popular in America. They were not welcome here. The fact that she came from a family that were Hitler resisters didn't matter. People didn't care. She had an accent. She was suspect

and she was the enemy essentially. She didn't make much noise. I know that she was not happy about that. Now, my daddy, on the other hand, just didn't speak about it. [Pause]

My family--. It's strange. We always got along with black bricklayers and black labor. You know you grow up in a family of bricklayers and half the crew is black because all our laborers or mason tenders were black. They were good people. They were appreciated as good human beings. In fact, I can remember once when we had black bricklayers in the union, all my life. In fact, one memory I have from when I was young was a black bricklayer named Johnny Crawley, came by the house one day, probably in the 50s, late 50s, maybe early 60s. He and my daddy were standing in the front yard talking. I just remember that just upset me. My daddy's standing in the front yard talking to this black man. All the neighbors could see this. I wanted Daddy to get Mr. Crawley to go in the house, out of sight. When Johnny left--and I didn't know Johnny in those days. I came to know him after I became business agent in the union. He's a fine, fine gentleman. I asked daddy after Johnny left. I said, "Daddy, why did you stand in the front yard talking to that black man?" In fact, I probably didn't say black man. I probably said nigger. He said, "Well, because he wouldn't come in the house. I wanted him to come in and have coffee." I said, "Why would you want them--? Weren't you worried about the neighbors seeing you?" He said, "I'm just as glad to see him as anybody. He's just as fine a person as I know. I'm honored that he would come to see me." That was my first awakening to something beside the standard racism dialogue that I heard nonstop, day in and day out from literally everybody around me.

As it worked out, we always had an integrated union but we had white crews and black crews. We didn't have mixed crews on the jobs. Interestingly, the foreman was

always a white man not a black man for the black crew. The foreman was usually my granddaddy or my daddy. There were very few white men that could be effective foremen for the black crews. My granddaddy was probably the best of them simply because he treated them just like anybody else. He liked them. He respected them. He really made no distinction other than the color of the skin. So my family always had a good relationship with the black bricklayers and the laborers here and now. I would say a love relationship in the broadest sense. I didn't understand that as a child. All I saw was hearing all the blather that goes on among eight, ten, twelve, and fifteen year old kids all the time. It's hard to separate yourself from that. In fact, I remember in college and I believe it was a sociology class, that essentially our racial attitudes are established before we're ten years old. We never really escape them. I began dealing with that--never began dealing with that until I was an adult. I've overheard one other person really acknowledge that. It's someone I wish you could actually meet. It's Lawton Higgs. I know I've mentioned him to you.

ST: Yeah. I know. He sounds like he would be an interesting one to talk to.

AM: Lawton describes himself as a recovering racist, just like an AA member, a recovering alcoholic. You never get over it. The idea is to recognize it and realize that we're always in a tendency either failing to compensate or over compensating. It's hard to maintain a balance really. Intellectually we think we are not racist but we don't really escape it, I don't think. I hate it. It's a terrible, terrible thing to inflict on a generation.

ST: When you went off to college about what year was that?

AM: '66.

ST: And you were in college in Tennessee, right?

AM: Right.

ST: At--?

AM: Austin Peay. University. Clarksville, Tennessee.

ST: Was there much Civil Rights activity going on there?

AM: Well, no. We had an integrated campus. We had the first black player on the football team come while I was--. I was up there on a football scholarship. I remember the coach coming to us and telling us they had this player they wanted to recruit but wanted to talk with us first. We said well bring him on. If he can play ball let him play. If he can't we'll get rid of him. It was a typical macho attitude that you'd expect from football players that thought they were open minded. The basketball team there at campus was fully integrated. Of course, we're all in the same dormitory. It really was an awakening experience for me because after about a month of my second roommate, my sophomore year I would gladly have swapped any black guy on the basketball team for my white roommate.

ST: Is that right?

AM: Yes.

ST: So in college then did you have somewhat of an awakening on racial issues as you made more acquaintances who were African American?

AM: Yes. Probably the biggest thing was my future wife. I don't think she has ever been a racist even in the slightest idea. She's from way deep in the country and what was the most rural, and probably still the most rural county in Tennessee and the poorest county in Tennessee, grew up way out in the country. She was first of her mother's seven children that wasn't born at home. When she was born they were living in a log house that her daddy cut the trees, hewed the timbers, and built the house, he and his daddy. She never had any racial prejudice. She couldn't understand. She resented it. She would get in

anybody's face who said anything racist. She got in mine. Of course I was just blathering rhetoric to be part of the crowd. You know, you go along to get along type thing. When I first met her she let me know that didn't work with her. I had to back up and start to rethink things a little further than I ever had before.

Not only were the underpinnings that my daddy had given me at a younger age not consistent with the society that I lived in, the woman that I was eventually going to marry wouldn't tolerate it. It was good for me. I was a--. I came to have black friends. I didn't really come to have good black friends until after I was an adult, frankly. I was, but at least, open or had the possibility. It's not something that was really a smooth transition for me ever at any time. [Pause] It's strange. It is really strange. Once again, it's a terrible, terrible thing to inflict on a whole generation.

ST: You finished college in 1970?

AM: Correct.

ST: And did you come back right away to Birmingham?

AM: Yes. We came back. I got accepted into the apprentice program and then started graduate school two months later.

ST: The apprentice program for bricklaying.

AM: Right.

ST: And then you decided to go to graduate school in English was it?

AM: Mmm, hmm. I would do both. I would work until I had a thousand dollars in the bank. When I had a thousand dollars I would quit work and next semester would go to school. I could get about one semester and the money would be gone. Then I would go back

and I would lay brick until I had a thousand dollars again. My wife was so tolerant. She never complained. She never fussed.

ST: I'm curious, when you came back to Birmingham in 1970, how much had it changed from the time when you left for college in the mid 60s?

AM: Well, not that much in so many ways. Once again, I've always lived out here in the east part of town. The eastern part of town was pretty much a working class section where the working class was a suburb within the urban area. It was not really a suburb. It was annexed into Birmingham. A lot of the working class did come out east. In fact, part of it was out in the county actually. It was white working class. Legally we were integrated. Realistically we were still segregated. The main changes had not occurred. The interstates going through the urban areas just decimated them. I think it's probably one of the nastiest conspiracies that's been perpetrated on the American people. That's another whole thing in itself. The outward spread was beginning to take place. Parkway East was cut through while I was in college. There was eight lanes of highway coming through the eastern part of town down what is now the interstate. There was not an interstate coming through at that time. That was the eventual connection for the interstate. It made things more accessible to expand further east. It made racially segregated housing more accessible to downtown. Really, until the mid and late '70s most of the shopping was still in downtown Birmingham. The main shopping malls were---. I guess Eastwood Mall was built in the '60s. That was, of course, is being torn down to be replaced by a Wal-Mart Super Center which is disgusting. Most of the shopping was downtown. Very little shopping downtown any longer.

ST: So the process of white flight was really starting to accelerate but there was still some, more activity downtown in terms of shopping and--.

AM: White flight was facilitated, dramatically by the insertion of interstates through the urban area. We've got a city south of town that was established for the sole purpose of busting the city of Birmingham, said so openly.

ST: Which city is that?

AM: Hoover.

ST: Oh.

AM: I can't decide whether they named it after a vacuum cleaner or Herbert Hoover but they both sucked. [Laughter]

ST: Did you have a sense when you moved back in 1970 that the Civil Rights Movement in the city was over or was it still going on? What was your general sense of that?

AM: My sense was that it was over. Of course, so was the Labor Movement. If you're not moving forward you're not moving. You can't call it a movement. I didn't see movement any longer. I didn't notice it, let me put it that way which is not to say that it was not there. It's just that--. Changes were taking place. As I was an apprentice bricklayer and then eventually a journeyman and eventually a foreman I remember seeing our first black foreman on a job working as a foreman over a white crew. Now a lot of the guys snickered about it. "He's just there because he's black." So what. I can remember that. I can remember when we started having the first integrated crews of bricklayers on the jobs. Those didn't really start taking place, in any kind of a noticeable fashion, until after I did come back. So yes. In point of fact there was movement. It was like residual movement. It's like its time had come. The only reason the time came was because of what happened in the '60s. It paved the way. People became radicalized in their thought and open to the idea

so that the resistance to it was dramatically diminished. The people that were most likely to be a problem were so much in the minority that they could not afford to make a problem. So they didn't. They just accepted it and talked under their breath and went to work. Bottom line was we all had to make a living. So we did.

ST: The integrated crews and the black foreman you mentioned, that was early '70s, those developments took place in?

AM: Correct.

ST: Whose decision was it to have a black foreman? Do you know how that came about?

AM: Well, with the particular company I was working for it was the owner of the company or the owners of the company which would--. I almost hate to say it. It was John Swindal. He's been a serious union buster. I've had my differences with John. But he's quite old now. He's probably--. Well, I have somewhat of a history with him. I spent a big part of my apprenticeship for him when it was S&W Masonry before he and his first partner split the company up. He went off and formed John Swindal Masonry. When he did that--. I had quit him before then because I got tired of the way his foreman were, basically I felt like, using me poorly and did not work for him for a number of years. He got in contact with me one day when he started his new company on his own and asked me if I'd come run work for him and blew some smoke up my butt. I did. Not too long after that happened Reagan came into office and union busting started. He was a major proponent of union busting. When he went nonunion I just didn't have a job any longer. He was quite ready to be a union buster. In fact he had experimented with it as it worked--. I didn't know this until I learned it

later from one of his other foreman. He had experimented with it quite earlier in a very quiet way, outside the edges of Birmingham so that no one really saw it here.

ST: So on labor issues you parted ways with him obviously, but he--. Would you say that he was more advanced than some of his peers on racial issues? Why did he take the step of appointing a black foreman?

AM: You know I don't know. I never asked him. I can only guess. I suspect part of it was the trend was coming so you can get with the trend and ride with it and not fight it and not get hurt by it. He may have felt like it was just thing. I really don't know. There was part of me that doesn't want to give him credit for doing a just thing. He's not a bad person. He hurt me. He's just like all of us. We get trapped between our ideals and our egos. Our egos always mislead us.

ST: What was life like within the integrated crews that you're describing and also within your union at this time?

AM: Fine. We all got along fine. I went through apprentice school with some young black people. Well, we were all young. We're all old now. Larry Robinson, Cecil and Barnette and some others. They're good people. We all became good friends. You learn to recognize people personalities, their sense of humor, their good traits as a bricklayer, their bad traits. You know we've all got strengths and weaknesses. Really we jelled very nicely I think. One of my biggest surprises was how easily the black bricklayers were co-opted away from the union when the union busting started. Of course, the bottom line was economics.

ST: Tell me a little bit more about what you are describing there. Where did they go?

AM: Nonunion. Basically, we had something that happened here in Birmingham that should not have happened. If our business agent at that time, who was a frined, had had a better relationship with our lawyers or had maintained a good relationship with our lawyers and probably had spent some time at UAB at the Center for Labor Education Research and learning some things, we could have kept our contractors. This was before the days of the Deklewa Decision. I don't know if you're even familiar with that.

When I took office, basically all of our contractors just sent us a notice in letters that effective expiration of this upcoming contract which I guess was around 1980 or '79, right there in the late '70s, early '80s, that they would no longer negotiate contracts with us. That was against the law. In fact, even the terms of the contract, the signed agreement was every party--of course it was a combination of that and labor law. Contractually they were required to sit--now they'd sign their name that said that yes at the expiration of this contract we will in good faith sit down and negotiate a new contract. Well, if you signed your name you can't just send somebody a letter saying we won't talk to you any longer. That's against the law. That's violation of the contract. That was also a violation of labor law. Tony didn't know that. He never talked to our lawyers. We just stuck these things in our file and held our heads down. We didn't have a clue how to organize. Labor had not done any effectively--at least Building Trades Labor--had not done any real organizing since probably the late '40s, early '50s. I blame George Meany in large part for that. Even though that was before the days of the merger of the CIO and the AFL, he reached an agreement with the monied elite folks at Bretton Woods, New York but at least what I've read, he would not try to organize any sectors of the economy not already organized into unions. I don't know if you're aware of those agreements called the Great Social Contract that we never signed. In my opinion

Meany sold everybody in labor out. Of course, I didn't learn about this until I was in my forties. I don't know a huge amount about it now because I've not ever been able to really research it properly to learn all the details. I think that I read something at one point, in the '60s George Meany was quoted in the *New York Times* he didn't care if he didn't organize another soul into the AFLCIO. We should have run him out on a rail with tar and feathers on him. They named a training center after him.

ST: There's, as I'm sure you're aware of, a lot of debate on these issues about how much control labor had at this time to stop somewhat impersonal and large economic forces. You feel like if some of your local leaders had maybe strategized more effectively or been better educated on these issues you could have resisted?

AM: We could have. In fact, some of the unions did more than the Bricklayers. The Bricklayers made building trades what they used to be in Birmingham. Bricklayers were at one point the strongest union probably in Alabama, the local one here in Birmingham. In fact, when I was a little boy when someone said, what does your daddy do? I'd say a bricklayer. They thought more of that than if he was a doctor.

ST: Is that right?

AM: Bricklayers were highly respected. Union people were highly respected. We got soft and fat. We didn't do any internal organizing nor external organizing. We didn't do any indoctrination of our membership. Nobody knew the history of labor. I mean I had dinner back in the early '90s with some friends, one of the guys was an immigrant Italian doctor here in Birmingham at UAB. He knew more labor history than I did. I'm talking about American labor history. It stunned me because this is taught in their school in Italy.

They're learning American labor history in school in Italy and I don't know a thing about it here in Birmingham, Alabama. I don't know if you're familiar with Wayne Flint.

ST: Oh yeah.

AM: He pointed out in one of his books that Birmingham was the lynch pin of the South for the AFLCIO in the '50s and '60s. That's long faded. That had to do with we didn't do our job. The guys that made unions what they once were in Birmingham are really the guys that came through the Depression, my granddaddy's generation. I don't know if they're true and I don't know how much of it I've embellished in my own mind but I seem to remember hearing my granddaddy talk about how during the Depression most of the bricklayers--you know there wasn't any work. Nobody could pay dues. So, most of the bricklayers dropped out of the union. We owned a building down of Twenty-Fifth Street downtown between Seventh Avenue and Eighth Avenue North. It was heated with an old wood burning stove, probably they used coal, old pot bellied stove.

ST: This was a union building?

AM: The union building. In fact, eventually we bought more property all the way up on the corner and built a larger two story building and sold our old building to the Sheet Metal Workers. In fact, we had a group of unions right in there. The Sheet Metal Workers owned the building right behind us. Then on the corner the operating engineers had a building on the south of us. Next to the operating engineers, the laborers local had a building in the middle of Seventh Avenue south between Twenty-Fifth and Sixth Street. We had nice a little labor community there for a while.

Most of the union membership dropped out because they couldn't pay dues.

However, they would come and sit at the union hall everyday hoping to find a job. If they

could find a job or get a job they would pay some dues and go to work. Or they would work--. In fact what was in the bylaws then was you could work until you made a payday, then pay your dues. It wouldn't hurt you. You could--. Nobody had any money. They were as loyal as they could be. We still--.

The nastiest contractors around were the ones that thrived. Of course they wouldn't sign a contract and they were nonunion. The story I heard and was told and I can't recall if I heard it from my granddaddy or--I don't recall if I've embellished this in my own mind, made it sound the way I want. It was a story I've told guys when I was trying to organize them was that when the Depression was over the, mainly the bricklayers picked out--of course this was back in the days when the contractors did their own work. They didn't sub their masonry out to subcontractors. They hired bricklayers directly. The workers, construction workers, led by the Bricklayers Union, picked out the two nastiest contractors in town and said no one will work for them. Now, they were the largest people in town. They could get all the work they wanted but they could not hire a soul to go to work for them. They were both put out of business.

ST: Is that right? This was back in the '30s?

AM: Well, actually I guess it was into the '40s when that actually happened, might have been the '30s. I don't recall any dates ever being passed around. Part of the story was that one of the contractors got rather belligerent and nasty. They told him he needed to pack his bags up and get his family out of town. His response was that this was a free country and they would live where they wanted. Apparently he still had plenty of savings. He just couldn't hire construction workers any longer because workers stuck together. Any rate, after being served the ultimatum to get out of town and refusing to go he went to the grocery

store and found out that no one would bag his groceries and no one would ring his sales up. No one would do business with him. He was not welcome. Ultimately not only was he out of business but he had to leave town. That was only effective because workers stuck together in total. They were powerful. We were powerful together.

ST: What exactly--? Help me understand a little bit more about what happened to that solidarity in the '70s.

AM: We didn't keep talking about these stories like I just told you, about what workers did. What they had to do. How they had been treated. Through the '70s work was quite plentiful. By the late '70s we had three, four coke ovens being built here in town. We probably had four hundred bricklayers out working on coke ovens. They competed for labor by adding overtime to the jobs. They were all working six tens. Bricklayers were making a lot of money. We had to bring bricklayers from out of town to man all the work that we had. Of course, part of the danger too was that we turned our back on the commercial work which unfortunately had become the back bone of the workplaces for us of our work. Of course you don't get to work six tens on commercial work. When it rains you don't get to work.

Let me explain this too. This is somewhat important. Nationally, bricklayers average working 1500 hours per year. Because when it's raining you can't work. When it's cold you can't work. When you're between jobs. When you're finished this job it might be a week or two days or two weeks before you start the next job depending on where it is or what the economy is doing, such as that. Birmingham, because we have a better climate than most of the country, bricklayers average working 1600 hours per year. The better bricklayers stay more steadily employed, will generally have 1800 hours and more. I always had 1800 to 2000 hours a year, generally. Average is 1600 hours a year. When you're out there working

six tens on coke ovens you're not getting rained out. You're not getting frozen out. You're getting fifty, sixty, well all that overtime. All that over time was double time. By then we had gone to time and a half, I take that back. That was part of the weakening too when we started accepting time and a half instead of double time. That was a--. That was something that we never should have done because it was a beginning of weakening our resolution, our resolve, our--. It was the beginning of the end. We were pressured by our international union to accept these things too which they were getting strong pressure in other areas. This was getting--. Of course, we could not understand it. We were not looking at the big picture either. I know I'm jumping around. There's so many things. It's a broad country and a lot of things happening at once. Another aside to that was that in the late '60s, early '70s my daddy was business agent of the bricklayers union for two terms which amounted to four years. We serve two year terms in those days. He started taking notice of the existence of ABC, the Associated Builders and Contractors which was formed for the sole purpose of busting unions. Interestingly the first national president was Ted Williams--Ted Kennedy here in Birmingham. Ted is from Canada. In fact, I believe he actually has his Canadian citizenship. I'm not certain. I don't know that. Ted and I became friends before it was all over with.

ST: He was the first president of the Associated Builders and Contractors?

AM: Correct. He was a notor--. He was also the president of BE&K. He was a notor--, probably the leading union busting construction firm in the nation. You may have heard of some of the riots and killings in Jay, Maine when they went up to do the Champion Paper Mill. That was BE&K. Daddy took note of what was happening with ABC and what their strategy was. He was concerned that they would come to Birmingham. When you got

the president right here in Birmingham you got to expect that you're going to be a focal point at some point. They started out in the Southwest. The first people they organized were large residential contractors, people building large scale apartment projects. Then they just jumped across. They didn't try to go through the buildings downtown and then thirty story building, then ten story buildings and schoolhouses. They jumped across and took on the paper mills and the power plants, the huge industrial projects. Then they just collapsed to the middle and took the rest of it. They got where they could get. Daddy noticed this happening and said we'd better start doing some internal organizing fellas. The bad guys are coming and if we're not ready they're going to crush us. Well, he got laughed out of office. I mean I remember some of the blather. "This is union town USA. This is always been union and it will always be union." Well, it had been union since 1882 but never strongly union. It didn't become strongly union until after the Depression. We had a generation there. My granddaddy's generation built the-- You know, they got bloody over it. My granddaddy got hurt over it. He had to work nonunion during the Depression. He also, as soon as he could get a union job, he was back in the union too. They literally--I won't tell you the rest of the story now but they was tough. They had to actually go out with pick handles and drive people off of jobs. They had to get hit with levels. They have people brandish, you know trowels are quite sharp.

ST: I imagine so.

AM: You sharpen them every day all day long when you are cutting mortar off of brick. It was tough. They took the workplace back. They secured the workplace. My daddy's generation, they were kids. They were growing up.

I remember daddy telling me different places they had to live during the Depression. They lost their house. One place they lived, for him and his older brother was great, was they lived in a store front down in Terrance City while they had this huge store area that was open. Of course, they heated with a coal stove and an upstairs mezzanine. For a couple of kids it was a great place to play. They didn't realize they were getting by in a storefront that was abandoned. They were just a half a notch from being homeless. As my daddy's generation began to become of age my World War II started. They went off and they won World War II. I mean, looking at it from my daddy's end of it. They went to Germany, kicked Hitler, married his women and took his wine and beer. Daddy has told be stories about things that they did in Germany. They were the conquerors and they knew it. That's all this generation knew was that they had conquered the world. They had beat the bad guy. They came home. While they were growing up and while they were gone winning the war their daddy's had fought the battle of the work place and secured that. All they had to do was come home and go to work. We were the only country on earth with their industrial plant intact. We had full employment. Unfortunately, we didn't have a very well organized economy under Eisenhower who didn't have a clue what to do with it. We kind of bounced from one recession to the next. None the less we still had plentiful work and as a result of what Roosevelt had put in place, the New Deal, the standard of living improved every single year from '33 onward until '68, Richard Nixon. Then it just kind of hit a flat spot.

They didn't know what it was to organize the workplace and how to secure the work place. They just came on the conquerors and a lot of bravado. The World War II, regardless of the fact that economics was at the--especially the war with Japan, strictly economics. We were keeping them out of the Pacific basin because we had designs there. They needed to get

us out of--. They were trying to get us out of the Pacific basin because they needed to expand off that little island. They were stifled. Regardless of all that, as far as these young people were concerned there was a very idealistic war. You know, Hitler and Mussolini and the--. You demonize all your enemies as you well know. You can't go out and kill people without demonizing them. You can't acknowledge these as human beings and do what you've got to do. Very few people are capable of murder and that's what it is unless you can demonize these people. They went out and they beat the demons. They came home. They occupied and all they had to do was work. It just rolled in.

Gosh, to be a good union man for two generations, all you needed to do was bitch. When I was young, a bricklayer didn't like something on the job he just grumbled about it and the owner of the company didn't argue about it. He said what do you want me to do. How high do you want me to jump? You just tell me--. We didn't have that much trouble. Frankly, most of our--. After we really got away from general contractors and bricklayers were working for subcontractors at the time.

Our subcontractors all came out of the ranks of bricklayers with the exception of Dixie Construction which Harry Strauss had started. They were bricklayers. They had come up through the apprentice program. They had come through the ranks. They just happened to have a good eye for business and a good feel of business and they did well. Most of them didn't make it in business but the few that did, did well. Of course that was part of our downfall too was that we did extra for them because they were part of the--one of the guys. We violated our own work rules very often to help them out. I know I can remember when Mr. Autry, after he and Mr. Stuart split up contract. I think it was a basic science building over at Sanford University. He had--. I don't know if he miss bid the job or

what. He was losing money and it looked like he was going to bankrupt. The bricklayers didn't want to see that happen so they just all agreed they were going to go out there for a couple of Saturdays and work for him for free, give him that time. Those were double time days. But basically give him the free labor so he could come out and make money on the job and not bankrupt. We did things like that. However, by the late '70s, early '80s those days were gone. Finance began to take control. I remember one of the bricklayers that--Dixie Construction through the '60s and '70s was the largest masonry contractor in the South. They were based here in Birmingham. They were mostly a traveling contractor. They had difficulty competing with other local contractors in Birmingham. So, they would do the Civil Rights Institute in Atlanta but they couldn't--or the Martin Luther King Center I guess it was in Atlanta. They would do work here but they just didn't do that much work in Birmingham because they needed to be on large capitalization jobs. Any rate, I forgot where I was going with that. I lost my train of thought.

ST: You were talking about workers in the '70s sort of almost becoming complacent and working, helping the subcontractors out.

AM: Yeah we did these things because these were one of our own. We wanted them to do well. Some of it we would do for ourselves like laying--scaffold high was four feet. We would always go four feet eight inches so we wouldn't have to bend down so low. It was hard to strike up that bottom course by the scaffolding because it's right there even with the scaffold boards. Then they started using six foot six walk through scaffold frames and you needed to lay that extra course just to get up level with it. Now they got these guys out there laying block, you know nonunion, block eight courses high. Well, that's too high. You can't be productive with that but it makes it easier for the laborers. It's stupid use of

labor. It overworks your bricklayers and puts them in strains. It basically shortens the work life of each bricklayer having to be placing those kinds of strains. Plus productivity. You can't be productive like that but it makes it easier for poor labor. The reason they've got such poor labor, and I say labor. I should say mason tenders. Most places if you go to Chattanooga they don't call them mason tenders. They don't call them laborers. They call them hod carriers or hods. A lot of parts of the country they're known as hod carriers or hods. That's probably--. Here in Birmingham we just always called them laborers because the Laborers Local had them organized. They pay laborers so poorly that they can't get the quality labor that they need. Of course, laborers set the table for the bricklayers so a bricklayer can be productive. In fact the foremen are not up to it. The foremen they have now are really not up to organizing the jobs that well. I know because I was MasonryArts first personnel director.

MasonryArts is at least at the time was the third largest specialty contractor in America. Formerly they had been John Swindal Masonry. When all of the nonunion stuff started they formed MasonryArts. Shortly after getting the company started they got a contract on a thirty-three story, South Trust Towers which was a marble job which was the first big marble job done nonunion that I know of in the whole country. That was a whole can of worms there too. They had to get union marble masons hired away from--what's their name? I can't remember the name of the marble contractor. They not only set it they cut it and polished it. Intrepid. They were based in New Orleans. They were probably the largest. I'm not sure they were but I think they were the largest marble contractor, stone contractor in the country. We had a lot of marble masons that came out of Birmingham. Frankly, marble masons travel constantly because they are going where the jobs are. They hired a lot of these

guys away from Intrepid and used them to bust the union and then ultimately got rid of every one of them. They hired them away from a union company to bust unions and after they had learned everything they needed to know to get into the marble business they didn't have any use for these guys any longer. I'm sure if you talk to them about it they'll have a different story. I did not question them about that when I was their personnel director down there. They have some serious top down structural problems with their company that they don't comprehend and don't want to hear--. They don't want to talk about their productivity could be raised literally 50%. If they raised it 50% they just get back the levels of productivity they had when they were union.

ST: At the same time your union was losing strength in the '70s there were some pockets of increased union activity in Birmingham, especially I'm thinking among public employees with the Laborers International and the strikes that some of the city workers led. I'm curious whether your union supported those actions or what your union members thought about them.

ST: You know, it wasn't even a matter of discussion among us. That's a shame. That's part of the damnable stuff that the Social Contract left us. We stopped communicating. We stopped being--. You know I told you the story about the contractor couldn't get anybody to sack groceries or check him out at the grocery store. It didn't matter whether you were in the Bricklayers or the Steelworkers or the Public Employees or the United Food and Commercial Workers. You were union and if you violated one you violated every one. And we all stuck together. As soon as you stepped on one everybody knew it. An injury to one is an injury to all. We lived it. By the time I was involved that was not even a memory. That was not even something that was talked about much. It was something

that some people would use from time to time maybe a bricklayer or a worker that wasn't doing the work that he should be doing would try to get everybody else to protect him in his laziness sometimes so that it became even less respected among us. We became individuals. We allowed ourselves to be reduced to the lowest common denominator: the individual. When you do that the person with the money is always the one in power.

ST: At some point in the '80s you began working full time for the union, is that correct?

AM: In '84. February of '84.

ST: Is at the same time that you became president of the Labor Council here in Birmingham or is that later?

AM: That was later. It would have been early '90s. I don't even remember the exact dates of that. First I was secretary/treasurer of the Central--It was the Central Alabama Building Trades Council. We had--. You also had the Jefferson County Labor Council.

ST: Right. But you weren't an officer in that?

AM: No. I was on one of the--. I don't remember what the committee was but I was on the committee that got the Jefferson County Labor Council to recommend Chris McNair for endorsement for the US Senate instead of Richard Shelby. We came so close. It only got--. We were the largest voting block in the state. It should have carried. I think what happened was Shelby's people got into the minds of some of the leadership of the state AFL-CIO. I know I walked into my office the morning after we had made the decision. We stayed there quite late. We used to meet in those days down at the Steelworkers Hall in Fairfield. I guess we were probably until 10:30, 11:00 hashing that out so I could make our recommendation. Each local is not supposed to endorse a candidate. What you do is you go

to the state convention and you vote for who you want to endorse. The Bricklayers Local can do that--. Of course then Bricklayers Local can do it and we can also have the Central Alabama Building Trade make its vote. Then the Jefferson County Labor Council makes it vote. All these different sources get to vote in it. Most locals don't understand the procedure and just ignore it. It's not unusual for somebody like the Iron Workers to say we're endorsing so and so. In fact, that happened with Bob James. That's how he became governor the first time. We had some renegades. Main thing was we almost endorsed Chris McNair. Of course when I walked into the office the next morning Richard Shelby's first cousin who was handling Asbestosis litigation for us, David Shelby, he was a friend, had left a message for me on my answering machine. There it was 6:30 in the morning and he already had a message for me. He said, "Al, what in the hell are you people doing? You all going to go down there and you all going to--. If Labor endorses McNair he's probably going to win the primary. You will get--. The Republicans will spend ten million dollars in Alabama to get a Republican elected to the Senate." I called David and said, "Well, David from my point of view they already have a Republican in the Senate. He just hasn't admitted it." As it worked out, after the election was over he jumped parties. I remember it--which didn't totally surprise me. I had long since, in my mind, written him off as useless as far as Labor was concerned. We're just a vehicle that he used to get in office. He was a manipulator and a behind the scenes player in a most insidious way. Don Siegelman was the heir apparent to step into that Senate race. The story, the way I understand it, was Shelby got some dirt on Siegleman. The dirt was that Siegelman had started raising funds apparently one day too early to be legal, politically. The option was given Don was the he had to drop

out of the Senate race. Basically, Shelby was elected to the Senate simply because Labor got behind him, probably the last election we really affected in this state.

ST: Speaking of politics. When you were working in various leadership capacities for the union, how did local politics affect your work? Were there certain local officials that you felt like were really sympathetic to some of the challenges your union was facing?

AM: Yeah. One thing that became so clear to me was money was what it was all about. Unless you could really--. Richard Arrington was sympathetic to unions. He was always ready to see me. He's, "Oh you don't need to call me mayor, Al. Just call me Dick." I always called him Mayor. He was always proud to let me know he used to labor for bricklayers some when he was a kid.

ST: Is that right?

AM: Yeah. In fact, he even made the promise to me that when the Civil Rights Institute was built in Birmingham that this would be, at least the masonry would be union.

ST: And it wasn't?

AM: No. It wasn't. After it was over with--. That was my shortcoming. I didn't understand that. I was promised this would be done union. So, I didn't stay after them. I just assumed that's it. If I tell somebody I'm going to do something I do it. After the fact, a friend of mine who is now director of Planning and Engineering for the city, came to understand that this was something that had been agreed with me that was not lived up to. He said, "You should have stayed after us. You should have stayed in contact." I didn't understand that. I felt--. I started to on a number of occasions but did not because I felt like that was too pushy. I didn't need to do that. I don't need to insinuate myself there. I was wrong. That was my loss. That's an expensive lesson to learn. We needed that job.

ST: You felt like, at least in terms of your conversations with Arrington, that he was sympathetic to unions but in practice it didn't always play out that way?

AM: No it didn't always play out that way. Of course, he had so many problems. This is somebody that came under federal investigation. He was constantly under investigations from the time he got on city council until the time he was out of office. There was always one investigation or another. They would always leak it to the press that they were investigating this or that. They would never leak to the press that they didn't find anything. They bugged his office. They tapped his telephone. They sent somebody wired for sound to set him up in an entrapment scheme. Of course, when he turned evidence against the state, against the government, they killed him. They made it sound like something else. I don't know if you know the story of [Robert] Mousallem.

ST: Yeah.

AM: Got his head blown off his shoulders. The way I understand it he became concerned about what was going on and he went to Arrington and was giving them information about how he was being used to set him up. Within a week was killed. The guy that killed him was on early release from a federal prison. He blew his head off his shoulders with a shotgun at point blank range. It was called an accident. He was just meeting him there to show him this gun that he had wanted to sell it to him. Well, first off he's on an early release from a federal prison. He violated the fire arms act to have a firearm. No way in the world this guy shouldn't be back in prison. But he didn't go back to prison. There's only one entity that I know of that could keep him out. One get him out of a federal prison and two keep him from going back to a federal prison for violating the law. That's the Justice Department. There's no doubt in my mind what happened there. People were

actually thinking Arrington had him killed. This was the rumor. He was always investigated. You know, when you are under that kind of stress--it had to impair his ability to function effectively as mayor in this city. There's so many--. He should have--. I supported him. I've been by myself in fund raiser for him and everything else. The thing that I've always faulted him for is he had the political clout to say, "Okay, education is going to be our main point of interest here. We're going to do whatever it takes to fund our education system at or equal to the highest funded in the state. We're going to have a good program because money does make a difference." We could have a good education system but that wasn't done. Now we're in such bad shape that frankly--. You've probably read the stories about US Steel wanting to de-annex 2000 acres out here so they can--.

ST: Build a Wal-Mart.

AM: No. It's out here on the--. It's another damnable thing. They want to build this stuff on the Catawba riverbanks which is going to pollute our main water source. Of course, they got to get it out of the city of Birmingham because no one wants to be trapped with the Birmingham school system. Of course, Leeds does not have a very exemplary school system. They're barely solvent. The main thing is Leeds has to offer is it's not Birmingham. That's terrible. Arrington could have made that different. He could have said education is the issue. Education is the problem. There are people who have recognized it already. He should have. He's fighting for his political and freedom everyday. He had to know he was under constant investigation, constant harassment. Of course that come from the residue from the twelve years of Reagan/Bush where they basically took control of the justice department by planting people so deep that they could misuse it, abuse it. We're seeing the residue of it now.

They reckon by the time George the first left the office that they had people planted so deep in the justice department that they could with stand twelve years of Democrats in office and the White House and still control the Justice Department. We got eight years then little George comes into office and if you look every time you got any kind of quasi liberal Democrat, they're investigated. You know like what they've done to Don Siegelman. There's no doubt in my mind it was a railroad job. They did the same thing to Chris McNair. They're after Jeff Germany now. I filed an ethics complaint against Jabo Waggoner our state Republican, one our state senators who is a Republican over here in Yuppyville. No question, not only should the ethics committee nailed him but our state attorney general ought to have his ass in the court and the federal prosecutor ought to be looking at him. But they wash it all under the table. And frankly I think people at the Justice Department ultimately ought to be under investigation for ignoring it. However--.

ST: It's not going to happen.

AM: It's not going to happen.

ST: Yeah.

AM: I'm more likely to get investigated than they are.

ST: Yeah. I'm wondering at this point within this current political climate, what you see as the future for the Labor Movement in Birmingham?

AM: [Pause] Looking at the status quo it's bleak. It's bleak. However, I believe that there is a mind change taking place right now that, frankly, the business community doesn't comprehend and will never believe until this crushes them. Are you familiar with Harmen by any chance?

ST: With what?

AM: Are you familiar with Willis Harman by any chance?

ST: No.

AM: He wrote a book several years ago called *The Coming Global Mind Change* or the *Global Mind Change*. Willis Harman was the director for a number of years for the Institute for Noetic Sciences. I don't know if you're aware of it or not. It's a little weird for most people to talk about. You remember Edgar Mitchell?

ST: Yeah.

AM: Apollo Astronaut.

ST: Yeah, right, right.

AM: Well, like I say Dr. Mitchell so it kind of qualifies him. He was a scientist. He came back from his Apollo mission and he had an epiphany on the way home from the moon. He had this epiphany that by golly the universe is all unified and the universe is conscious and that the universe is developing and learning and always changing and growing. He came back and he founded the Institute of Noetic Sciences which is about consciousness or consciousness studies. There are about fifty or sixty thousand members worldwide now but they fund studies at Berkeley and Duke and UCLA--and I guess Berkeley is UCLA isn't it?--about consciousness. They do studies on ESP, remote viewing, remote healing, studying consciousness the way--, meditation, and mass meditation changes consciousness. Any rate, the idea is to make this--. This is a very subjective thing but the idea is to research this subjective thing scientifically. Any rate in his book Coming Global Mind Change he documents how the mind--. First the world has gone through in our recent, say 6000, 8000 year history, three or four major mind changes, one of them being the scientific revolution, the other one being the industrial revolution. He claims what's happening right now is the

mind change is taking place. It's actually of a spiritual nature. That it's happening and it really--. It can't be reversed. It's going to happen, kind of like the magnetic poles of the earth are going to flip. There's nothing we can do about it. That it's really taking place and we're in the middle of it now but it should pretty much be complete by 2010, 2012 somewhere in there. That we're going to see some major changes over this next five, six year period that none of us can even expect right now. That we won't believe. They're going to be revolutionary changes but it won't take a revolution for them to happen.

ST: Do you see evidence of a significant mind change here in Birmingham here so far?

AM: Yeah I do. It's very subtle. Like I go every Monday night and meditate with a bunch of Buddhists. I'm an elder at First Presbyterian Church which is the oldest church in Birmingham but this is very--. People are searching for something like this. You know, Buddhism is on the rise in America not because it's an ideological philosophy. It's really anything but. It does affirm the consciousness and the basic goodness of each individual and our capacity to live consciously with compassion. Of course, it's hard to believe in the light of Kosovo and this atrocities that are going on in Iraq and the Middle East right now that this is happening. In a way it makes me think of--. I started this described about this someone else many, many years ago when I was a kid. Like the last flash of a light bulb before it burns out. I think that's what's happening. I think that--. I one of those annoying people that broaches conversations with other folks at the auto mechanics shop while I wait for my car at the tire store and the grocery line about the way corporations have stepped on us and hurt us. You don't have to say much before some of them want to talk about how they or someone in their family or their community or everything already put together has been

damaged by this corporation or that corporation. Everyone agrees that corporations are wildly out of control. We've got to get them under control. Of course at the same time everyone feels totally daunted to do anything about it which is exactly what the controllers in the corporation want you to feel is daunted. None the less, this comprehension of this, fifteen years ago, very few people would have agreed with you.

ST: Do you think the Labor Movement will be a part of this reawakening?

AM: I'm trying to get them to be a part of it. I've been trying get a meeting with Rich Trumpka for some time. I sat and had a lengthy conversation with him probably fifteen years or so ago when he was still president of the United Mine Workers. We held a labor rally here. We had about six or seven thousand people attended and Trumpka was one our main speakers. Then we had a reception afterwards and I was the head marshall for this thing. I was at the reception. I just sat down and he was just a great--. He's a terrific fellow. I don't know if you've ever met him. He's a mine worker's son. He was a mine worker himself. He put himself through school at Penn State, went to law school. I mean, was gutsy in taking over the mine workers. He went in there was all kinds of corruption and stuff going on, probably his life was in danger. Dynamic speaker, just make you want to get up and shout, do something. He's also smart. He told me he was looking for something then. He said, "You know, labor has been in a retreating action for thirty years. Corporations take a step and damage workers here. First, labor has to recognize it, move to it and try to stop it." We're pretty effective at stopping it. But then they drop the next foot. We back up. Each time they drop the next foot we retreat to this and we've lost membership and we've lost influence and power. He was hunting for a method to cut across the corporations and force them to go on the defensive and react. I think that I know what it is now.

ST: What?

AM: I think organized Labor is the only entity in the nation with the capacity to do this but lacks the will to do it. They need to go after their corporate charters. I'm the local president of the Birmingham chapter of the Alliance for Democracy. I don't know if you're aware of that or not.

ST: Yeah.

AM: But, we're all about corporate charters and citizen sovereignty. You have citizen sovereignty by denying corporations sovereignty which they can't possibly have. Citizens are still sovereign. Corporations are property. They just organize property. They're creatures of the state. The Secretary of State revokes charters probably every day of the week, at least once a week. It revokes one charter or another. It probably has a rubber stamp to revoke them with. It's just a matter of you don't revoke Philip Morris' charter very lightly. Although, the--I wish I knew the name of it--the trade organization that represented all the tobacco industry very quietly surrendered its corporate charter because it was going to have it revoked anyway. They didn't want the precedents of having the charter revoked on the books so they just very quietly surrendered the charter just, didn't renew it. We the people have the power to grant charters and revoke charters.

ST: Do you see organized labor, maybe in the future, leading this--?

AM: If the labor movement doesn't do it, it isn't going to happen. I'm involved with getting another group off the ground, a coalition of various citizen groups called Common Ground here in Birmingham, off the ground. The Catawba River Society, the Alabama River's Alliance, Greater Birmingham Ministries, Alliance for Democracy, the Transit Rider's Association, all of these are trying to come together for mutual benefit so that

an injury to one is an injury to all. When we raise an issue we're going to have 5000 people write or call, say 200 people call this legislature or this council member about this issue. So it's not just one person and not somebody in West End but somebody in West End and somebody in Huffman and somebody in Hoover, somebody in East Lake, somebody from all over. So it's not--. We don't get isolated, get reduced to just one-liner special interest group but a lot of people. It's all a common interest. Bottom line is every one of these groups, not one of them is capable of challenging a corporate charter because it takes--. It would take a half million dollars in legal fees to do that. Every one of these groups gets their money to operate from a foundation, from a grant. Well, the foundation is just a way for corporations and the moneyed elite to use their money tax free to shape our society. I think we're the only country in the world that allows foundations to operate like this. None of these--. Call them liberal but they're no more liberal than the moneyed elite allow them to be. The only thing, entity out there that has still the wealth and the power and the might to actually go in and effectively challenge a corporate charter would be organized labor.

ST: What do you see as the area of union activity in Birmingham right now that has the most momentum?

AM: [Laughter]. Momentum. I don't know if there is any. I'm real high on the United Food and Commercial Workers. Their main employer is closing up stores left and right, the Brunos. Joe Bruno left the stores to his heirs and they did fine until they had a big plane crash and the key people died. All the key executives were in this plane crash. You know, crashed over in Georgia. Not to diminish the people that were left behind but this was just not what they needed to be doing. It's a tough thing to run something like that. So Bruno's has been passed from, well KKR bought it. First it kept declining, the stock kept

going through the floor. Things were not being run well and KKR bought it. That's nearly the kiss of death. You know, Kohlberg Kravis. I think they've changed hands three or four times. I think the big Swedish food distributor had it for a little while but they had accounting irregularities and had to sell it. I forget who's bought it now but each time somebody new buys it more stores get closed. So they're losing members left and right. Bless their hearts, Elaise Fox who is the president of UFCW is just busting her butt, sticking her thumbs in dykes all over the southeast right now. I have the highest regard for Elaise. She's a terrific person. I don't know if you've met Elaise or not.

ST: I tried getting in touch with her but I got the impression she was--.

AM: She's hard to reach.

ST: Fairly busy these days.

AM: I deal with Elaise and I involve her with a lot of things. I deal with her through Kay Greene her secretary. I don't even try to talk to Elaise. Kay, tell Elaise this and tell me what Elaise says and then if we need to get together, when we can get together, Elaise just needs to call me directly she'll do it. She's hard to track down. Lives up in Fultondale. Nice person. Smart. Tough organizer. She organized the Beverly Nursing Homes. Had those people so mad they couldn't even speak. She is an organizer. She is a grass up organize. She knows how to do it. I have the greatest admiration for her because I--. I have to say the best I was, was incompetent as organizer. Biggest thing was I lacked the confidence to go in there and do it. I might have the confidence now but I did not at that time because I did not know. I didn't know how to do it or what to do. I wasn't that sure of myself. It takes a special person.

ST: Is there one single thing you can think of that you would do really differently as a union leader?

AM: If I were there now?

ST: Yeah.

AM: I'd go in and I'd raise hell organizing. I'd go in ready to make mistakes and ready to get challenged. I would yell. I'd stomp. I'd scream. I'd get these guys on the phone. I'd get them to meetings. I tried to do things like that but I did it very tentatively. When they didn't show up for the meeting I'd go out and say--. You'd call them on the phone, these guys I'd gone to apprentice school with and I knew they weren't happy. I knew they were getting screwed. First off they were making six or eight dollars an hour less than what they should have been making plus they lost their health insurance plus they didn't have pensions anymore. They had to work six and seven days a week from candle to cant. Overtime was a thing of the past. They pulled all sorts of little scams. One of the tricks was we'll have hour banks. Well, you might work sixty hours this week but next week, when it rains, we'll pay you. Bull shit. That's against the law. But these things were done. Probably still being done, I don't know.

I didn't know how to take advantage of it or didn't have the confidence to take advantage of it and go in there and drive a wedge in. I was wrong. I was incompetent. What can I say? There was nobody else that would do it either. Then the guy that took my place I love him. I got him to leave a job and come in town and take over as president of the first co-op of this country, sponsored by the International Union in modern day times. I hand picked him. He's business agent now. He's doesn't even care about trying to do the commercial work.

Here's the thing about masonry. Two-thirds of all masonry is installed residentially. That's where the biggest market is. Well, my daddy is the last person to organize any residential contractors. That was back in the late '60s, early '70s. About five percent or less of all masonry is installed industrially, that's fire, brick, or acid work. That leaves you about 25-30% that's commercial work. Commercial work had been the backbone of our workplace from the mid '70s through until Reagan busted the unions. We could have survived on it. We could have gotten by except that we turned our back on it. If the Bricklayer's Union is going to get in this-- Commercial, the refractory work, I think would really be quite easy to bust up. Probably the biggest refractory contractor around here, in terms of most active refractory contractor in the area, is a nonunion contractor. It's just that there's enough of the other stuff going on, too, with it that he's ignored. His name is Hal Roach back in an office over here on Rose Hill, probably about three or four miles from here. I shut one of his jobs down once at US Pipe.

ST: You may not be too popular then with him.

AM: Oh, I wouldn't care. I don't like him either. I've never met him, don't want to. The refractory has changed so much that work doesn't really take skilled bricklayer any longer. In fact, we have a special designation for people that do refractory work that really can't make it out there in commercial work. It's called refractory specialist. It's listed on the card as RE. I had one member that kept trying to say that's Refractory Engineer. I said, "No, that's just for Refractory. You're not an engineer, Wade." He was a smart ass.

ST: When you refer to refractory work could you just clarify what you mean by that for someone outside the bricklaying trade?

AM: Another common term is firebrick, building coke ovens, lining blast furnaces, stoves, cupolas--We call them cupoloes--cement kilns, such as that.

ST: That's all within the industrial component?

AM: Correct.

ST: The five percent you were talking about that's--?

AM: It makes up less than five percent of it. Part of that five percent is also acid brick work and the largest--unless it's changed recently--at least back in the early '90s, the largest employer of union bricklayers in the world was an outfit named Plibrico. They did acid brick work all over the world. You know the name. You familiar with it?

ST: No.

AM: They specialize now in acid work. You say, cement kilns, not cement kilns--pickling processes like for galvanizing metal, you know they got to dip it or in a milk plant where you got to keep the acids off the floor. They go in and they install the acid where you put down a membrane that's impervious to the acids. Then you, basically you are laying tiles. But you got to do it just right. What's happening is the brick is protecting the membrane that you install. It's somewhat technical. It's not that complicated. If you've never done it you don't know what to do. That's a big part of the work too. We don't get a lot of it. You do it in paper mills, dairies, pickling plants, such as that.

ST: One other question about sort of the state of the labor movement in recent years and in Birmingham, how do you think the movement for immigrant rights is going to affect the Labor Movement here?

AM: I don't know. I've seen signs. One of my friend, A. D. Thomas, with the auto workers, I don't know if you know A. D. or if you've heard about him?

ST: A couple of folks have mentioned his name.

AM: A. D. is an old friend I got. I've known A. D. twenty, twenty-five years. He was the first black president of the Auto Workers Local over there at Pemco which I think is 80% white union is what's significant. He's a black man and been elected to it. He is very open to immigrant rights and protecting them. I'm duplicitous. I'm ambivalent is a better word to probably use. I don't blame these people. First off, we refer to them as Hispanics or Latinos. They're indigenous people. They've been here for twenty thousand years. We are a long term occupation force, you and I. We've come in here--. First off, we wiped out 90% of them to make room for us. I don't know if you've read about Columbus's debacles down in the islands.

ST: Right.

AM: You probably read the *People's History*. The voices of the people's history--.

ST: Howard Zinn.

AM: Yeah, Howard Zinn. It just--. Las Casas couldn't believe what he saw happening.

Any rate, these people aren't coming up here and taking these jobs because they want to be. I hired a lot of immigrants. We lump them all together and call them Mexicans. I guess 20% of the people I hired were people from Guatemala. Most of them are funneled through Mexico getting here. They think they all pretty much look alike. They have darker brown skin. If they lived in the States, we call Indians which was a misnomer because we're too damn dumb to know that we weren't in India. Actually, I think probably Columbus knew he wasn't in India. He just didn't want the King and Queen to know it. They're here because they have been driven from their land. An example I can give you is first off,

Bechtel went down--. I think Bechtel is wholly owned by Haliburton aren't they, as in dumb Dick Cheney. I won't call him Cheney, he doesn't deserve it. When he learns to spell his name right I'll spell it Chainey. Although that was the name Warren Beatty if he wants. That's an annoyance for my wife. I won't call him Cheney. An example of how this happens is Bechtel went to Mexico and bought thousands of acres of land. These people have been out there on this land for 15,000 years. They were subsistence farmers. That was their skill set. They had done this for 10,000, 12,000, 15,000 years, who knows. They were just so damn dumb they didn't write themselves a bill of sale or give themselves a deed. Somehow Bechtel managed to come up with a deed for this property. They put in a toxic waste dump. And just like any good old American corporation, they didn't contain it very well. All the toxic wastes leaked out. First off these people were driven off the immediate land and the land around it was poisoned. The only thing they could do was go to the city. If you're in a city you can't raise vegetables. You can't raise corn. You can't be a subsistence farmer in the city. I'm thinking you got to have a job. Well, they had no skills. They had no education. All they could do was displace workers in the city that were already working at abysmally low wages. Those workers come to the states.

The guys that are here--. The guys I used to labor with--. I started laboring on these jobs when I was fifteen in the summers rolling wheel barrels and stocking scaffolds. I've known them for over forty years. They can't do these jobs whereas in 1980 when Reagan seized power, the laborers in town were making--and I don't know exactly, I don't see the contracts, everything was pretty much union then. They were probably making about \$7.50, maybe \$8.00 an hour plus they had dependent care health insurance as part of their union contract, plus they had a good pension. These guys were retiring with dignity, between their

pension and Social Security they could live with dignity. They were able to send their children to college on the wages they made. They didn't live well. They didn't live high on the-- . They didn't live as well as bricklayers. They could take care of their families. It was wholesome. By 1996, MasonryArts wanted me, I was their first personnel director. They got after me to hire Mexicans. I didn't have a clue how to do it. I stumbled into them accidentally. They found me actually. Then they just coming and coming and coming by the car loads. I was very careful about all the documentation. Out of all of them I hired I only had one of them ever bounced. We had him caught before the first paycheck was delivered. I photo copied front and back of every card they had and kept all my files. I was uncomfortable about it. I just want to make sure I covered all of my bases. Of course, MasonryArts was after to me to hire these guys to be mason tenders at \$7.00 an hour. In 1980, they'd been making \$7.50 or \$8.00 plus had insurance and a pension. Here they were coming in sixteen years later, seventeen years later, and were reducing their in the pocket paycheck 50 cents an hour, no benefits. Now, sure the laborers who had been with them all along they were paying them nine, ten, some of the best one might have been making eleven dollars and hour. The bulk of them were making eight or nine dollars an hour which was way below where they should have been. Here they wanted me to hire these guys at seven bucks. I shouldn't have done it. I hired them for \$8.00 an hour. I made sure that all the foreman knew that they were making \$8.00, not \$7.00 so that they would pay attention and make sure the people were actually working. Of course, I came to get to know some of these guys. They're human beings just like the rest of us. They're good people most of them. They're here because they are trying to survive. Most of them would take their paychecks

and go to the bank and send a check home or some cash home to Mexico or wherever it was, every week.

I got to tell you this little aside. One of them I got into work at the marble shop down there. He was the one I couldn't get him eight dollars. Seven bucks an hour was the most I could get him at the marble shop. He should have been making fifteen but that's--. You know, when you're working for rats what do you expect. Of course, he was a good worker, interested in what he was doing. He became real good polishing the edges on the stone. Of course, he was probably working sixty hours a week before it was over with. He got two or three raises and he was making eight, nine dollars an hour over there plus over time. Then we had the Olympic soccer come to the Birmingham. Mexican team came to Birmingham and played. He bought some tickets and went down to watch Mexico play. Of course, all these Mexicans down there at Legion Field watching the soccer game. He had this plum job. He was making more than anybody in the whole Hispanic--. I wouldn't be surprised in Birmingham by the weekend paycheck. He got homesick and went home. He took plenty of cash with him. It probably everything he needed to be able to solidify his family situation for him there. I'm glad for him for that. He was a nice guy. I was so glad for him, happy for him.

At the same time, these guys should have been making at least fifteen dollars an hour. Before they busted the unions all the marble finishers that worked for Intrepid were all union. They were making union wage and had health care and had pensions. If you can hire illegal immigrants and frankly, I don't care if they've got a green card, if you have unemployment their illegal. You can not displace a citizen to hire an immigrant. That's against the law. I don't blame these people for being here. They have my compassion, my sympathy.

However, I look at the neighbors and the guys I've worked with for thirty and forty years and they can't make a living at all anymore. I mean, I've got bricklayer friends that had to get out of the trade because of all the Mexican bricklayers coming in here working so much cheaper. It's not a matter of--. Of course, Little George likes to push this bullshit these are jobs that Americans won't do. No. Americans won't do them at that wage. You can't go to work one day and come back and find out, well if you're going to keep working we're going to pay you fifteen dollars an hour or otherwise we got some Mexicans over here we're going to hire. That's wrong. I've got a problem with that. I don't believe in treating--. See this is not a one dimensional issue. It's not an issue. It's a problem. Issues are for blathering about. Problems are for solving. It's very complex but the root of the problem are corporations run amuck. The only thing that we can do to resolve it is get the corporations in check. I go to Greater Birmingham Ministries regularly, the EJ workgroup. I'm kind of the voice to talk the other side of it. I very often have to take a position that I'm not happy with.

ST: The EJ workgroup is the Economic Justice workgroup, right?

AM: Correct. I've been involved with them since the '80s.

ST: Sorry, didn't mean to interrupt. Just wanted to clarify what--. You were saying you talk with those folks.

AM: We got one person that comes in and says we got to do this. We got to open the doors for them. It's the only right--. Well, it is only right. I can't deny that it's wrong. No one wants to face the fact that if you're going to give these people the jobs you are going to have to deny these people jobs. You look them in the face and tell them. You tell that person you're going to deny the job be your child or yourself. They are not in that position. They don't have to look that person in the face and say that.

When they built the Lowe's store down here that you passed coming up here, I had a bricklayer friend, John Searcy--. In fact, tell you how good John is. He's not just an average bricklayer. When we had the co-op started here in town, Jim--Lord, I can't say his name now, he was the first vice president of the International Union of Bricklayers. I liked him. He came to town to inspect everything when they were contracting the first job. They were building a medical building out in Hoover. I took Jim out and was showing him the job. I went off to some of the guys. I got to missing Jim. I finally saw him about a hundred feet off from the job just like this just watching. I couldn't figure out what was happening so I went to Jim. "Jim, what are you doing?" "I'm just watching that bricklayer." He said, "Who is he?" I told him. He said, "He's the best bricklayer I've ever seen in my life anywhere on the face of the earth." It was John Searcy. John is just--. He's a great bricklayer, just casual about it. Every time he moves brick is laid, it's laid perfectly. He looks so casual and so comfortable. It's just like he's strolling slowly down the street but he's laid 800 brick in the process. Any rate, John and one of his buddies had gotten out of work. Well, actually they had to quit a job because the checks were bouncing. This was just getting ready to start down here. They came down here and were bringing the foundation up off the footings in the mud. They'd been working two days and the superintendent came to him and said, "Boys I got to let you all go, got to make room for my Mexican crew." That's against the law.

ST: It happened anyway.

AM: Oh yeah. The laws are nice but they don't mean a thing if they are not enforced. When the AMSouth towers got built down in Birmingham, I worked for two months to get a contract on it, that job, on all that marble. A contractor out of Houston had it

and I can't even remember their name now. I finally got the contract signed and we had thirty-six stories of marble and granite to install. One afternoon, about 4:30, my steward came in the union hall and said, "Al, we got a problem. They got Mexican, illegal alien tilers that are setting tile down there in the bathrooms." Well, of course that was another subcontractor, DMI Tile. Just exactly what you'd expect from Jim Isaminger. So I just went down there the next day and I rode the service elevator up the side as high as I could go. About the twenty-eighth floor I started going in bathrooms and I--. You know how some of the bathrooms, you know how in the big building they'll have a main hall and the bathroom with branch out on two sides. A little guy stepped out from the right side mixing up some grout. I started talking to him. He looked like an alien. He had the dark skin. He was small and he had the round facial features. I started talking to him. I know in retrospect he thought I was INS coming to get him. His eyes got big. You'd of thought I turned red and sprouted tail and horns. I kept speaking to him trying to calm him down. Finally, his buddy stepped out from the other side. He had his little margin trowel in his hand so I knew he was a tile setter. I started speaking to him. He spoke a little broken English. His buddy didn't speak a word of English as it worked out. Very clearly alien. Alien workers. So I just calmed them down, didn't want them to get alarmed. In fact I wanted them to stay there and work because I was going to get the INS. I just didn't wait for the elevator. I just went down the steps, went across the street and around the corner to my congressman's office. I walked in. I was furious by the time I got there. I knew all those people I'd helped in Ben's campaign. That's was Ben Erdeich was our congressman. That was before Spencer Backus usurped that position. I was furious. I want whatever papers I need to be signed to be signed. They got illegal aliens over here setting tile at the bank. I want Jim Isaminger in jail before the day is

out. I said, "I'll sign whatever papers you have and I'll wait here to lead the law down to his office so we can make sure we get there because I want him in jail. I want him behind bars."

ST: It's Izenringer.

AM: Isaminger, I-Z-E-M-I-N-G-E-R I believe.

ST: He's the contractor?

AM: It's called DMI tile. He was the contractor. Basically, what he did. He filled the void after the largest contractor in the state bankrupted. He'd always been kind of a marginal player for years. He was always shady operation, just scummy. My daddy had to deal with him when he was BA. He was in and out of business. Once Daniel Tile bankrupted, now Daniel Tile set 65-75% of the tile in central Alabama, even residential and commercial. It didn't matter. They did it all. They couldn't manage the money. After he and his partner split up the company--and Mr. Porter was a nice guy. I felt so bad for him. Any rate, that's another story. Isaminger had all these illegal aliens. Anyway, I said I'll sign the papers that I told you. I'll lead you down there. They shuffled around. Finally, someone said, "Well, we really can't do anything but we'll report this to INS in Atlanta. Maybe in a couple of months they can send someone over to investigate." I said, "Bullshit. The job will be over in two months. I want this guy in jail today. We've got police. We've got sheriffs. We've got federal marshals."

This was not too long after they had passed that tough immigration law back when Reagan was still in office. I don't know if you remember all the blather that went on about it. I listened to Reagan, "Well, we can't control our borders but we going to do this and we're going to put the burden on the employers." This was when I fell out with Tom Brokaw. He came on and pontificated about this tough immigration law every night on

television and 6:00 in my living room. He didn't tell me that they weren't putting any money in it for enforcement. He had to know that. That's his job. Reagan obviously knew it. The whole population was scammed on this.

Basically, these illegal immigrants set all the tile in AM South Towers down there. I don't blame them once again. They're trying to survive. They've been driven from their homes and their families to come to a foreign country where they are not wanted and try to survive. It's tough. The only people you can get with are people like Jim Isaminger, corporations. Nobody wants to address that because that is a very daunting problem. Of course, now we've got so many that've come in. I listened to something the other day that said 10% of all the jobs in the country now are taken up by illegal aliens. What I am reading, in fact Kevin Phillips, I'm sure you read Kevin Phillips. He saying that real unemployment is in excess of 20%, despite of the fact that we have historically low numbers. We don't count everybody. That's something else I learned, your real unemployment is in excess of 20%. If you send all the illegal aliens home we're still going to have 10% of our people unemployed. This was by that deal that George Meany agreed to in '45 at Bretton Woods, New York where they basically institutionalized high unemployment. You can't do this for three generations and not create a permanent underclass.

When I was down there at Masonry Arts one of their main problems was keeping qualified mason tenders, just a colossal turnover. They had a colossal turnover because they didn't pay them anything. They treated them like dirt. It's hard work. It's dangerous work. They're not paying them anything anyway. Most of these guys are driving old ragged cars that might get them to work, might not get them to work. They can't depend on them. When we built Shade Valley High School over here, they had ten more laborers on the job than they

needed just to take care of the absenteeism. If everybody showed up to work on the same day you had ten people you didn't need. Of course, when you not paying them but seven or eight bucks and hour you--. You know, where's the trade off. They got after me to hire, I need to build the labor pool. When I was interviewing, I ran a lot of ads. I was interview twenty-five people everyday for just basic mason tender jobs. I designed a training program for it too, a good training program which actually, measurably one of the jobs we had down in Pensacola where we had an isolated situation. It picked up productivity significantly. The problem is we didn't have foreman that would make sure that the program was implemented, that these guys were doing what they were trained to do. The laborers finally acknowledged to me too that until they were treated properly they weren't going to do what they knew to do anyhow. They didn't need to be trained. They already knew, which is almost an insult to them when I was down there trying to train them. Where I was going with it, I was down there interviewing all these guys and the bulk of these people I was interview were young black men between eighteen and thirty. I had guys late fifties coming in and guys even younger, sixteen, seventeen coming in. The bulk of them were young black men, eighteen to thirty. They had made a noble decision to give up all the freedom that they had and go out there and do hard, manual labor. Most of them had never held a job. They weren't even a statistic until they were either a crime was committed against them and they were killed or injured or they committed a crime. They just didn't exist essentially until they became a statistic. What became very clear after a while was if there had been a federal program that would pay every bit of their wages they still weren't affordable to hire because I couldn't depend on them. They might be and work. They might not. Sometimes to no fault of their own because they don't have good transportation. We don't have a mass transit system that

means anything. They might take an interest in work. They might not. They might learn something and get better. They might not. They didn't know how to work. It's not their fault. We're into the third generation of people that don't have a clue what it's all about because we maintain high unemployment for such a long time that we've got a segment that's been left out. This has gone on for sixty years now. We can't wash our hands and walk away. This administration can wash its hands and walk away. That's the temptation. Bill Clinton was happy to do it. Welfare reform. By the way, Bill Clinton is not a liberal. He's a compassionate conservative. He'll destroy your livelihood but he'll feel bad about it. He'll give China favored nation trade status so we can lose ten million jobs but he'll feel bad for you. Lordy.

ST: I realize we are--.

AM: I'm sorry.

ST: No, I don't want to take up all your day. I was going to ask you a couple of--.

AM: I've got all the time you want. Really.

ST: I was going to ask you a couple kind of wrap up type questions. First of all, I'm curious you have a son. He is about to go to med school, right, you were telling me earlier.

AM: Yeah.

ST: So this will be the end of the bricklaying tradition in your family, right?

AM: Right.

ST: Did you ever encourage him to keep the tradition going?

AM: No. If I had had a clue that Ronald Reagan could ever get elected to office I would not have kept it going. I didn't intend to keep the tradition going anyway. I would

have stayed in school and finished my PhD and I'd have stayed in academics. Before Reagan, you were never going to get rich laying brick. I was content. I could live with it. I didn't mind being working class. It suited me fine. My younger brothers, they couldn't stand it. Leon, my younger brother, he's executive vice president of McWane. He's making over a million bucks a year, I guess. I don't know what he's making. I'm sure with the job he does he has to be making in excess of a million a year. That's what he wanted to do. He's earned it. He worked his way to the position. He did it honorably. It was never a doubt in his mind he was going to work for a living or be an executive somewhere. He was always going to be an executive. My youngest brother, the same way. I recognized, when I was quite young, that I wasn't willing to do what it took to be an executive. I tried to be a business person but I don't have the aptitude or the mental tools for it, the willingness to do what it takes. It's just those things are not that important to me. I don't like the value system that you have to adopt to operate in the milieu that's been created. I make waves or bitch at other people about it. There won't be anymore bricklayers behind me.

ST: How do you feel about that?

AM: [Pause] Well, I don't know that I really care. It's just as it is. I guess that's probably some of the possibly Buddha influence that I've had over the years. It's just a thing. It's all illusion anyway. It's just that you've got to be able to live with what's here in such a way that you can begin to recognize the illusion or maybe accept the illusion. That's rather ambivalent I know. But, what they hey.

ST: What would you most like your son to remember about your efforts with the union here and your larger economic justice activism in the city?

AM: I don't know. I've never thought about that. I've got a good boy. He's got a good heart. He tries to do the right thing and he does the right thing instinctually. I got to tell you a little story about him. When he was nine. He could count to twelve when he was eighteen months old because he picked it up from one of the books I read him. He had a number book. We didn't know he could do it until he just did it. He could say his ABCs when he was twenty-four months old. He just picked it up listening to older kids. He's smart. He could read at a very early age.

Our tradition was that I would read to him every night before he went to bed. I guess he was about seven or eight years old. He was getting a quarter a week allowance or fifty cents, I can't recall but a little bit of allowance. Very goal oriented. He could tell you how many days and weeks and days before it would be that he had enough money to buy a particular video game, including tax. He could tell you what he was going to get. One night as we went back to the bedroom, we'd lay down and I'd read to him. One night, he rolled over and he said, "Daddy will you help me give all my money to the poor people so they can have some food?" I knew how goal oriented he was so I said, "Make sure you want to do that and if that's something you want to do I'll help you." Ultimately I kind of sloughed it off. A couple of weeks later he looked at me and said, "Daddy aren't you going to help me do this?" I just felt like a turd. I said, "Sure, tell you what. Go get a pencil and paper and I want you to write a note to Greater Birmingham Ministries telling them who you are and how old you are and how much money you have and what you want to do." He did. He came in here and he was sitting down writing his note. He had it finished and he said, "Wait a minute." He jumped up and he ran back in the bedroom and he came back. He remembered

where he had another thirty cents stashed. He scratched his stuff out and added the new numbers.

ST: He was determined.

AM: Yeah, he really was. I took that money down with the note to Greater Birmingham Ministries the next day and those people just bawled. Then a few years later, several years later when he was in junior high, he was trick or treating right here in the neighborhood with his two best friends and they got down to the Pinebrook neighborhood down here. There was a jack-o-lantern on somebody's front porch that had been carved out with a candle in it. Walker wanted to bust that jack-o-lantern. Then Scott wanted to. Benjamin said, "No, there's a kid in there that that's his lantern. He's going to be broken hearted in the morning. You can't do that." He tried to talk them out of it. They were just insistent that they were going to do it. He said, "Well, if I can't talk you out of it, if you're going to do it I'm not going with you anymore." He walked off and left his two best friends and came straight home. Didn't tell me about it until the next day. This is his natural instinct. I don't know that he needs to remember what I do, just keep doing what he does. I warn you that I'm a doting daddy.

ST: Sounds like you've taught him well.

AM: Well, I didn't teach him. He just--.

ST: He just picked it up.

AM: That's who he is.

ST: Is there anything that you would want to bring up or talk about today that I haven't asked you?

AM: Probably but I don't know what.

ST: Well, I sure appreciate you sitting down with me today. You've been really generous with your time.

AM: Glad to. I enjoy this. I love to talk about things like this anyway as you can tell. I just would just love to see something actually accomplished.

ST: Maybe thirty years from now things might look a little different.

AM: That's a long time to wait. I don't think we have thirty years. I really don't. I think we have pushed the world to a tipping point. Ecologically, I think we're there. I think spiritually, I think. When I say spiritually, I don't mean some superstitious thing. Have you seen the movie *What the Bleep Do We Know?*

ST: No.

AM: Oh, you should find a video store and get it. It's quite interesting. Or maybe read the book, *The Tao of Physics?*

ST: No. I haven't read that.

AM: They are both very interesting. If you get a chance, the Capra book has been out since the '70s. It's good. The movie is more quick to watch and it's fun. Marlee Matlin plays in it. It's hard to find. It's not a run of the mill movie. In fact, some people don't like it. Main thing is it raises questions. It raises thoughts. I'm probably more Buddhist in my world outlook than--. I don't think Christ taught what we say he taught. I think he would be very disappointed if he saw what we call Christianity. I think we had a bunch of people that were--. None of his contemporaries wrote the accounts of his ministry. I think that most of the people that were writing this didn't really get it for the most part anyway. They were trying to justify or trying to sell Christ's ideas in the light of a more traditional Jewish culture. Trying to justify it with prophecies, which unfortunately reduces Christianity and

the teaching of Christ to superstition. I think that he would shed tears over that. I think probably what Christ taught and what Buddha had to say were probably very close to the same.

ST: Very similar.

AM: Yeah. We'll never know.

ST: Thanks again.

END OF TRANSCRIPT

Transcribed by Karen Meier, October 2006