

Interview

with

KENNETH L. MILLER

December 8, 2004

by Elizabeth Gritter and Timothy P. McCarthy

Transcribed by Cathy Mann

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

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SOHP Series: Long Civil Rights Movement

Transcript – Ken Miller

Interviewee: Kenneth Leroy Miller

Interviewer: Elizabeth Gritter and Timothy P. McCarthy

Interview Date: December 8, 2004

Location: Louisville, Kentucky

Length: 2 cassettes, approx. 2 hours and 30 min.

Notes on Transcript: Future researchers should review parts of this transcript against the tape. I was not able to do so because of time constraints. – Elizabeth Gritter, editor of this transcript.

START OF TAPE 1, SIDE A

ELIZABETH GRITTER: This is Elizabeth Gritter and Tim McCarthy interviewing Ken Miller on December 8, 2004 in Jeffersonville, Indiana.

KEN MILLER: You know, I did whole interviews and would go home and replay them and something had gone [wrong] and I had not taped a word.

EG: That's the worst. What's your middle name?

KM: Leroy.

EG: Is there a suffix?

KM: To Leroy, Leroy.

EG: I mean are you like Leroy, III?

KM: Oh, no, no.

EG: What's your date of birth?

KM: August 14, 1948.

EG: What's your birthplace?

KM: Louisville, Kentucky.

EG: Okay. What's your name?

DEBBIE MILLER: Debbie Miller.

EG: Let's see, your children's names?

KM: Erik Miller, E-R-I-K, and Sarah Miller, S-A-R-A-H.

EG: Okay. What are their years of birth?

KM: Erik was born in 1971.

DM: October 23rd.

KM: October 23rd and Sarah was born in 1977, February 20.

EG: February 20, okay.

TM: You're good parents. (Laughter)

KM: I'd better get these right. I sensed I was being tested. Thank God, I remembered those dates.

TM: As long as one of you remembers them.

EG: Yeah.

DM: We always remember those things.

EG: And you're like, oh, now my wife would know.

KM: Yeah, I lucked out. I was sweating bullets on those two.

EG: Your education experience?

KM: U of L, 1970, a bachelor's in, BA, bachelor's of arts, major in history.

EG: Very good.

KM: Yeah. And 1978 master's in education.

EG: Also at U of L?

KM: U of L. Then, in our profession, if you get more college hours, you move up the pay scale. Your dad probably did that. So, I have thirty-six post-graduate hours and all of that, with the exception of six of them, went toward earning a secondary school principal's license. I have that.

TM: That's what my dad did too.

KM: Dad has it too? That's where the money's at.

TM: That's right.

KM: I took six hours at George Washington University in D.C.

EG: Great school.

KM: It was neat. I think Jackie Kennedy went to George Washington.

TM: I think she did, yeah.

KM: That's what they told us.

EG: Yeah, they have that dormitory now named after her.

KM: Oh, they do?

EG: Yeah.

KM: All I remember about that summer is National Geographic and I was selected to go to D.C. and be a part of something they were doing, but the thing that leaps out of my mind even today is there were rats everywhere.

EG: Yeah, right at GW, there still are. I lived there for a summer and there were rats all over.

KM: I couldn't believe it.

EG: It was awful.

TM: Rats never bothered me. I lived in Manhattan. (Laughter) There are more rats than people in Manhattan. If you lifted the island of Manhattan up for about five feet there would be more rats than people.

KM: I can believe that.

TM: You don't see them very often.

KM: They're there.

TM: And some of the people are rats too. (Laughter)

EG: So the post-graduate, the rest was at U of L?

KM: Yeah. Everything is U of L other than George Washington.

EG: Okay. And you were at Jeffersonville, well, you're at Jeffersonville High School now?

KM: Yeah.

EG: You were at, what was the--?

KM: River Valley Middle School and when I was in that uniform as an MP I was at a middle school in Louisville, Bruce Middle School, named for a man who was a school principal.

EG: So when did you start teaching?

KM: Seventy-one.

EG: At Bruce Middle School?

KM: At Bruce Middle School, that's correct, yeah.

EG: And how long were you there?

KM: I was there until '76.

EG: Then did you go to River Valley?

KM: I tried educational sales for two years, '76-'78. I couldn't give the stuff away. I was the worst salesman that ever made sales calls. I was defeated in the car. I mean, if you would accept my catalog, that was good enough, which didn't consummate any sales whatsoever. But I tried that for a couple of years and they were building some new schools here in southern Indiana and I thought this is the time to get out of sales and that's when I went back to the classroom.

EG: So you went in '78 to River Valley?

KM: Seventy-eight, actually '78 I was at Charlestown Middle School, which is in this system, and I was at Charlestown Middle School from '78 to '85. And then I was at River Valley beginning in school year '85 and '85, '86. Eighty-six was when the first space shuttle exploded and I was in my first year at River Valley Middle having transferred there from Charlestown Middle.

EG: You were there just till a year ago?

KM: This time last year I was at River Valley Middle School, yeah.

EG: Okay, so you just started this fall at Jeffersonville?

KM: Un-huh.

EG: Okay. Did you have any military service?

KM: The six years in the Kentucky National Guard.

EG: Okay.

KM: And be clear about this. I was a draft dodger and the way I dodged the draft is I joined the Kentucky National Guard. I always am real clear with the kids about that, because the guys that actually went out there and went to Vietnam and that routine -- that's a whole different ballgame. National Guard, I mean it's like going out

for the basketball team and saying to the coach on tryout day, "I want to be on the team. I want a uniform. I want to be in the team picture, but I sure as hell don't want to go into combat." But how do you do that and get all those things but not? You join the reserves. You join the National Guard. I mean you're saying -- I want to be a second stringer. All of us in the unit were basically college graduates or had a college education. We knew if we could get in that unit, the war was winding down and that would be the way to get out of Vietnam. You know, I mean, and that's what I did really.

EG: And when was that?

KM: Seventy to seventy-six, which was the minimum enlistment actually.

TM: You must have had an interesting perspective on the bru-ha-ha in the recent election.

KM: Well, I'm a John Kerry fan all the way and a Bill Clinton fan. Yeah, I got lucky, and he happened to shake my hand. That lasted about fifteen seconds.

TM: But you felt like the most important person in the world.

KM: It was like meeting Santa Claus. I wanted to grab him by the leg and just hang on like, "Don't go. Stay with me."

TM: I felt the same way. I met him. He came to Boston during his campaign in '92, and I was a senior in college at the time in Boston. I met him and, you know, for twenty seconds, I was in love. It was like my parents talking about Kennedy. It was that meeting-

EG: What, you mean Clinton?

TM: Clinton.

EG: Oh yeah, at AU he spoke the first year I was there. We were going to shake hands, but [he] was too far away so he waved at me. (Laughter)

KM: Did he? He is the nicest person.

TM: He has a remarkable ability to connect with people.

KM: Yes, he does.

TM: It's really stunning.

KM: He roared into this place where we met -- limo, motorcycles, the power of the presidency coming into this big convention hall. But when the daggum thing was over, the band kept playing the president's song. It wasn't "Hail To The Chief," but it was something like that. He was shaking hands with the ladies and men from the kitchen, the custodians shoving the carts. He knew this was their one chance to touch the executive branch, the president of the United States, and he was going to let them have their chance. I thought that's my kind of guy right there.

TM: Exactly. They say that he is always late to everything because he does that. It's not because he has a disregard for someone, whatever, it's that he touching the custodial ().

DM: He's never on time.

KM: Nice guy, real nice guy.

EG: So you grew up in Louisville?

KM: Yeah.

EG: Where did you grow up? You talked a little before I turned on the tape about what your dad did.

KM: Dad was a chef. Mother was a waitress. Blue collar neighborhood over by Churchill Downs. You can mark our lives by Kentucky Derbies. I mean it's just an event here that you--. It was before Ken and Arrow won the Derby or it was before Nashville won the Derby or whichever horse did win the Derby. So I grew up over close to Churchill Downs.

EG: Oh, okay. Did you know any black people growing up or have any contact with black people?

KM: Yeah, I did, through my father. Next time you're in a nice restaurant and the door swings as they bring the hot food out or take the cold dishes in, look in there and you're going to see a lot of minorities. Restaurant work is not highly skilled so you see a lot of people in there that really don't have very many skills. They wash the dishes. They slice up the potatoes and the onions and that routine. Through my father, we would visit black families on weekends. These were people that he worked with and here we would go and we'd play with kids in the yard and they would come to our home. It was kind of an unusual upbringing. My father's from the rural South, from western Tennessee, and so that's my upbringing. Then, as we would go to the store to visit Dad in the kitchen. Stewart's Department Store -- that's what I did the oral history about -- was horribly segregated, horribly. The Jim Crow South was alive and well in that department store, and the African American waitresses could waitress in the basement luncheonette. The Orchid Room was the fifth floor, and it was all white waitresses. Better tips in the Orchid Room, pocket change in the luncheonette. As I would come in to see Dad because I was going to go see a movie in downtown Louisville and I'd ride the bus to Louisville, etcetera, here come the waitresses.

They'd gather around, mainly black females, and they'd say stuff like, "Boy, your son is a lot better looking than you are," or "Boy, he's growing up." or, "Where does he get those looks? He don't look a thing like you" -- just teasing. They were just trying to really say the nice things you would say if you met a co-worker's kids, you know. So, I didn't have any defenses. These women were always so nice to me and I smelled the food of the kitchen. So, that's kind of my background, and, yes, I was around black people at the outset actually.

TM: Now I'm wondering how did your family's white friends or your white friends react to the way, these trips that you would take on the weekends? Was there any knowledge of that? Were there any repercussions? Did people say, "Why are you going to visit those folks?"

KM: If there were, I was not aware of those but in a respect it kind of follows the same line that slavery followed. What I'm referring to there is that white children of slave owners played with slave children. At some point for the female and the male the white parents thought, "Now this is enough. This friendship has to stop here." I don't remember my parents drawing a line in the sand but I remember at some point those trips stopped. I have to think my parents thought, "Kenny needs to have his white friends. He needs to develop in that way."

TM: When was that? At approximately at what age was it when those trips stopped?

KM: I would say they stopped by the time I was in the fifth grade because we moved. We moved to a suburban location out by General Electric, which is on Old Shepherdsville Road and at that point we had moved from the blue collar

neighborhood around Churchill Downs to a three bedroom, bath and a half, so called ranch, the typical subdivision home.

TM: Did your parents change jobs?

KM: They did.

TM: Was there an adjustment in what they were getting paid? Did you move from the working class to the middle class?

KM: No, I mean they're still living from Social Security check to Social Security check. That was our lifestyle. That is the America that I was raised in. That's really one of the reasons I'm here. Report cards were a way to make my parents happy. As I say to students now, "You might not realize it, but your grades are your parents' grades." If you come home with an A or B and Mom or Dad got a tough blue collar job and they really don't care for it, they'll hang on because they're dreaming their dreams through their children. So, as I would come home with A's and B's, my parents would [say], "Oh Kenny, that's great, you are so smart." I was really just average, but that kind of thing helped me bloom. I forgot your question.

TM: You said you moved from a working class area to a more middle class subdivision. I was wondering whether that signified a change in socioeconomic status of your parents or just a physical move.

KM: No, it didn't, no. We were living paycheck to paycheck. Actually, how we could afford the house in suburbia: Dad took on part-time work, and he worked at a country club in Louisville on Saturdays and Sundays and Christmas.

TM: As a chef?

KM: As a chef, yeah.

EG: Was this a working class suburban neighborhood that you lived in?

KM: It was, and most of the people that resided there were assembly line workers at General Electric.

EG: How would you characterize your parents' racial views?

KM: That's a good question. I don't want to glamorize them, and I don't want to use hyperbole. My mother's whole thing was how sorry she felt for black people. I mean I was raised on that -- how sorry she felt for them. My dad was raised in a family that was rampant with racism, the N word was used regularly by all my uncles and aunts.

TM: And you remember that?

KM: Oh, absolutely, and they still use it, those who are still living. Dad didn't use it. It was not used at the house. It wasn't used at the supper table. I think he developed the respect for the people that he worked with. I don't think he saw Kenny in the future and knew he was planting hatred if he used that term with impunity, and so I just didn't hear it. Now, I heard it at school but I was raised in a house that for the time period was relatively free of racism.

TM: Did black folks ever come to your house or did you always go and visit them?

KM: No, black folks came to our house. Matter of fact, Dad, until he finally retired, regularly went to Cincinnati Reds baseball games with a man that he cooked with, Joe. I don't know, I guess it was Mr. Smith, but Dad called him Joe so we called him Joe, which is probably not a good idea on our part as children. But anyway, Joe would come and they would get in the car and they would go to Cincinnati and see the

games. It wasn't as generous as black people at our house regularly. That's not the case.

TM: It wasn't just a one-way street though?

KM: It was not just a one-way street. No, it was not.

TM: Did you have siblings?

KM: Yes, I have a brother that's three years older than me, and a sister ten years younger.

EG: What do you remember about the civil rights movement?

KM: Not much, I mean as a history teacher I know a ton about it but as a kid growing up, I remember we were in Tennessee in 1960-61 and I can remember there was an effort by African Americans in Tennessee to integrate the state fair. I remember my uncles and aunts talking about the N's are going to ruin the fair, and it's coming here now. My most prominent memory is 1965, '66, I was a senior at Seneca High School. I was out with a friend just roaming around, drinking beer, looking for girls, and there was an effort to integrate neighborhoods -- fair housing, fairness ordinance. Not the fairness ordinance but it was something about--.

TM: Fair Housing Organization.

KM: Something like that.

TM: I think Suzy Post was involved in that. I interviewed her.

KM: Okay. Dr. King had a brother, A.D. Williams King, who was a minister in Louisville. I think Dr. King could have been in town, but, if it was not Dr. King, it was A.D. Williams King. They were leading a march about fair housing. We were riding around, and John pulled up and a black guy stepped up to the window. John

said to the black guy, "Where are the N's protesting?" But he didn't say the N's. I thought, "John, he's black." The guy said something, and John looked at me and laughed and said something silly, stupid. I can't even remember his remark. But to this very moment I think, "My God, how insensitive<" and yet, I mean at the time I just went with it like, it's all right.

I remember I had Jewish friends at Seneca High School. This is not civil rights movement, but there was a fellow. One night we were invited to play basketball at a guy's house, a Jewish guy's house. His mother fixed snacks and everything, Norman Ambrose. We were taking a break, and Mother brought out trays of snacks. Norman was using the N word left and right in front of the Jewish guy's mother, and I guess she was just biting her tongue but anyway, she went on in with her empty tray. The Jewish guy said to Norman, "You must have been raised in the South." "And why do you say that?" "Well, you keep using that term?" It was the Jewish guy's way of saying, "I'm comfortable with this. I really don't want to start an argument. We are over here to play basketball. My mother just brought out the snacks." But later a Jewish friend told me well it's just a matter of time. If you're going to use the N word, you're probably going to come up with anti-Semitic stuff also and I'm sure that's the case.

So I go back to the N word, Johnny Polio was the guy's name, Italian guy from Louisville. He threw that out there, and I thought, "Gee, my knee." I mean that's not history making but I do remember.

EG: Where in West Tennessee did your dad go?

KM: Jackson, Tennessee.

EG: What county is that?

KM: I don't know. I mean we could look it up in this room, but I cannot recall as a child. But I do remember this now. As we would go to Jackson, Tennessee -- that was every summer vacation -- Dad would get a week or two. We'd go to Jackson. It was Jackson--. Actually, there was kind of a sub town called Bemis. It was a factory town, and they had a cotton mill. The cotton mill owned all the homes in Bemis, and the homes were like real cheap. Well, as you would go into Bemis, there was kind of what now would be called a wetland, but there was a row of I mean cabins that you wouldn't even put your lawn mower in today. The African Americans resided in those and I always remember as a child because we'd normally get there early in the morning. It's still dark or late at night. We'd pull in Jackson at 2:00 a.m. I didn't realize it at the time but there was a thing Dad did, which I thought was all macho-macho. It really was economic, driving straight through. We're going to drive straight through. I always thought that was neat because, you know, we would wake up in the place where we were headed to. The reality of what was going on is we couldn't afford a motel, so we had to drive straight through and Dad was risking everybody in the car about half asleep. It would be after he finished work. So we drive straight through. We'd get there at two in the morning or early a.m. and here would be this row of houses. African Americans, and, I mean, they looked like slave cabins--. They'd have fires in these barrels, these oil drums, and here would be these people. There was no grass. It was mud. I mean now as I look back to that mental image, my God, doesn't this community have any decency? Don't they think: Here's the welcome mat." Well, probably what was going on there was Jackson was real

comfortable with that. You know, here are the black people out on the edge of town and you know how black people are and that stereotype, so to speak. We would drive through, and, as a child, I would just think, "My goodness, it must be cold over there." Jackson, Tennessee, that's a slave state and all that. I mean it was a Confederate state. So that's where he grew up.

EG: Yeah, I've done some work on Memphis. My thesis was on that so that [is why I] was curious what particular county that was, because I know like around Memphis like Fayette County and Haywood they're extremely rural and poor and have a history of race relations being really bad.

KM: Oh, I bet. Racism would thrive on poverty.

TM: Right, right. So does (). That was very funny that we couldn't afford to stop at a hotel so we went through and I thought Dad was just very tough.

KM: Did you?

TM: They were very similar kinds of experiences.

EG: You mentioned too the state fair. Where was that in Tennessee?

KM: They probably had a fairgrounds. We lived there for about four months. Dad tried to get out of the restaurant business, and he was going to throw in with his cousin Vernon and sell car parts. That was a disaster, and we lost everything we had at that point but we lived there for about four months. I went to school in Jackson, Tennessee, public school. In the autumn, they let us out of school for cotton-picking week. Now all that boiled down to was cheap labor and the schools would just close. They would literally close like spring break, and I don't know what the other kids were doing, but I was out in the fields picking cotton. There I am with African

Americans. The difference being I can spend my money picking cotton at the fair. The fair knew to be in town in Jackson during cotton-picking week or right after cotton-picking week. There would be families and I mean nothing had changed since the Civil War. Here were black families that just looked miserably poor with African American babies on the back of sacks that hadn't been stuffed completely with cotton, drinking bottles, baby bottles, mucus, dried mucus all over their faces. You had whole families, mom, dad, the kids and they were out there picking cotton as fast as they could go. When cotton came in -- and it was plentiful -- it sold. You got paid two cents a pound. Now, as the late summer and autumn came on, it bumped up to three cents a pound, because it was sparse and so you had to kind of go around plants that they were picked clean. Now that whole America has changed, and they have these gigantic vacuum cleaner machines on huge tires. They just ride right over the rows and suck it right off the plants. What those people did who supported their families by picking cotton I do not know. They made some kind of transition but what I don't know.

TM: I wanted to ask you, pushing forward a little bit, and talk a little bit.

Obviously, you were a senior at Seneca High School in '65 and '66.

KM: Sixty-six, '65 and '66, that is correct.

TM: So you went right to college after that?

KM: That's correct.

TM: University of Louisville. So you were in college during a particularly tumultuous period when the war was escalating, when the civil rights movement was, you know, changing rapidly and sort of escalation of violence in the northern cities

and the rise of black power and Black Panthers and so forth. So this must have had some kind of impact on you. I'm interested in knowing how. You know, you could talk about your college experience and at the end of that time you went into the National Guard, as you said, as a way to dodge the draft and not go directly to Vietnam.

KM: That's right.

TM: So talk a little bit about those four years with respect to the war and the changes in the civil rights movement and maybe your own kind of changing perspective. You're becoming a man, becoming an adult, trying to figure out your place in the world.

KM: Well, I'll go to my senior year at U of L. I was meeting with my faculty advisor to make sure that I had all the credits and courses lined up to graduate and that very day the black student union was taking over the dean's office. I have to give my faculty advisor credit. He kept looking past me out the windows because directly across the sidewalk was the dean's office. Here's the local news reporters coming in. Here are the cops. The guy that was in the crowd and is at U of L right now is named Blaine Hudson and he's the president or the director of the Pan African Studies.

TM: Right, he's a dean too, isn't he?

KM: Yeah, I guess he is, and there he was. Now, I've sat with him before, some of the other things I do related to history. But I had no idea. I mean I was oblivious. I wanted my faculty advisor to stay focused on: "Are you sure because I can see you're not paying much attention to this paperwork?" History was being made, and I'm talking about my history classes. Bless his heart, he hung in there but

in terms of movements, protests, zip. I just wasn't connected. I mean I knew about Vietnam. I can remember sitting at Seneca High School my senior year and boys talking about Vietnam and "I think I'm going to go in the service" and that whole routine. I'd never even heard of Vietnam. I didn't know where it was and I didn't know what it was about.

TM: You hadn't heard of the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution or any of that stuff at that time?

KM: No, no. As a matter of fact, if you do your homework now in the Gulf of Tonkin, there's a possibility that never even happened.

TM: That's right.

KM: LBJ had to come up, you know, with something to get America moving.

TM: Oh, that was sort of like weapons of mass destruction?

KM: Yeah, yeah. That's exactly what it was.

TM: I mean it was kind of an equivalent kind of public statements, right.

KM: You got it. So I didn't know anything about it. I knew this: my father was a World War II veteran. In the third grade, we had to give a speech, and I stood up. I was so proud of my dad and just veterans. Most of the kids, their dads were World War II veterans. I told the class that I was half German, half Russian, and half Jap, and I said Jap. And yes, that math doesn't work, but I didn't care. I wanted to impress everybody with how bad I was in terms of, you know, these were rough cultures and the guys in World War II defeated them. So, anyway, I just wasn't a protester. As far as civil rights, I was working at a cigarette factory when Robert Kennedy was assassinated. Dr. King was assassinated in 1968. That's when we got

engaged. Debbie graduated from high school, and Dr. King had been assassinated. Louisville exploded in violence too. And actually-

DM: The night I graduated.

KM: The night you graduated there was a curfew and you had to go home immediately after the graduation. She was eighteen.

DM: Because they were rioting in Louisville, the West End of Louisville. So we had curfew the night I graduated and so on the way home in the car was when I got my engagement ring.

KM: How about that timing? That ought to make headlines in this.

DM: I remember all of that.

TM: So that was in April of '68?

DM: May of '68.

TM: May of '68, right.

KM: April '68 is the assassination, but the anger exploded in May in the community. U of K was integrated in '49 and U of L in '51, and there was a lawsuit headed to Louisville. Lyman T. Johnson, who ended up being a guest speaker at River Valley Middle School, of all places. But it was on the way, so U of L in '51, U of K in '49.

EG: Why did you decide to dodge the draft?

KM: (Laughter.) I'm a big chicken.

TM: Is that how you characterize it now or was it how you characterized it then?

KM: Probably I'm more humorous about it now than then. I can't recall that for sure, but she had dated a guy, a fellah named Randy Dye. Randy and I were friends. Randy went to Vietnam and won a Silver Star.¹ Now, I was in my second year of college when he comes back home on leave in Vietnam. It was in the paper, and there he is in his Silver Star. He was a Marine. I was so jealous. I wanted a Silver Star so bad. I mean I was ready to toss college at any second, and I wasn't a real good student. My first year in college I made in my first semester five C's and a D, second semester five more C's and another D. I was pumping gas, working at a grocery store, thinking this isn't for me, and all I was trying to do was hang on til Debbie graduated. She's an only child. Her father worked for Gulf, an upper middle class family. I was lower middle class. The only thing I had to offer my girlfriend and not so much Debbie but her parents was: "Well at least he's in college." You know, maybe he can graduate from college. Maybe he won't. Who knows? But, anyway, Randy got his Silver Star. Randy came to the house one day, and I was washing dishes. This is when he was on leave. I said, "Well, how did you get your Silver Star? He said--. And when I had first seen him that day, there was a big crowd of guys around and it was all macho-macho, but now it was just me and Randy at the house, Randy and I at the house. No, Randy and me at the house?

TM: Just Randy and me.

¹ The Silver Star is awarded to a person who, while serving in any capacity with the U.S. Army, is cited for gallantry in action against an enemy of the United States while engaged in military operations involving conflict with an opposing foreign force, or while serving with friendly foreign forces engaged in armed conflict against an opposing armed force in which the United States is not a belligerent party. The required gallantry, while of a lesser degree than that required for the Distinguished Service Cross, must nevertheless have been performed with marked distinction.

KM: I want to get this right, in North Carolina. Randy and me. Anyway, he said it was horrible. "Horrible? You've got a Silver Star. I saw your picture in the paper." He said people rushed at him, a helicopter extraction, the rope ladder comes down, and they're getting out of there. He said they were running at him and he was just shooting people to pieces. He said they must have been on dope because they weren't armed. I thought, "Gee, my knee." I was starting to hear other guys, not just Randy, but weird stories and I thought, "I don't know if I want to get in on that." That sounds crazy. I was so naïve. My freshman comprehensive English term paper was on LSD. I knew nothing about LSD. I mean nothing. I eventually ended up taking LSD and probably everything else that was in that article. (Laughter.) I'm serious. But at that time--.

TM: It's field research stuff.

KM: Field research, man I did it. Oh, I just, I don't know. Oh, you were with me.

DM: I didn't take it. Don't be throwing me in this!

KM: So, anyway, I don't know if that's the answer. I don't even remember the question now, but if that's what you want, it's okay.

TM: So why did you join the National Guard? I mean why did, I mean you obviously wanted to be involved in some way. I mean you didn't want to go to Vietnam. You didn't want to shoot at people on dope. But it definitely wanted to, it sounds like you wanted to serve in some capacity.

KM: I had a friend named Norman, and Norman and I were in college together. Norman joined the National Guard. He painted some picture about, "Well,

there's twelve months a year, you can miss like five months." That was totally wrong. He talked about, "Man, all we do is watch porno movies" -- stag movies I think is what they called them then -- "and drink beer and then we don't do nothing."

DM: On the missing five months, he must have consulted George Bush.

TM: I was going to say this is all very resonant.

KM: It sounded like, I don't know, like a fraternity with guns. Okay, so I came home from the grocery store one night. Dad was up late, and here they were. They were doing the drawing for the numbers, lottery numbers. On that basis, you would be drafted. School was starting to wind down. I thought, "Well, what's going to happen?" I thought about going to the seminary and I have no spiritual calling at all, but they weren't drafting guys out of the seminary. That was it. That was the only reason I was. But that night, I got number two forty-nine and it wasn't three sixty-five. I thought, "Hell, I could be drafted. I've finished undergraduate school." So I thought, "Well, Norman's in that outfit, and they're drinking beer. I've not seen the films, and so I'll join." That was a mistake. That was a huge mistake, because it was six months active duty. Debbie and I got married January 31, 1970. Then I had to go to six months active duty, and we were newlyweds. And one day Debbie takes me down to the Greyhound bus station in downtown Louisville, and I'm headed to basic training. Oh, so what? Well, the so what was I didn't see her for like two and a half months and we had just gotten married. Then it came home, oh gosh, six months of this, which is peanuts compared to the guys that are, you know, the real stuff. But that's how I wound up in it. Norman said and I got two forty-nine, and I thought, "Well, how bad could that be?" So I wound up in the National Guard and daggumit, I

swore in in April of '70 and I get this, the first weekend drill because I didn't go immediately the very first thing to basic training. It took about four months before I actually got my orders to go. Kent State and here are all these guys--. We just joined up and we're seniors in college and we're trying to--. We're walking around and they had the M-14 rifle then, which is real heavy and steel and wood. They hadn't switched to the M-16. The class that weekend--. I didn't have a uniform or nothing. None of us did. There were so many new guys. So, here are the guys. They're breaking down the M-14, and they're oiling the pieces. It was just that I guess Friday that Kent State happened. The drill was Saturday. I thought, "I don't want to be in this." They were shooting college students. I was still in college. I had to finish up student teaching. So the sergeants and all were real gentle that weekend. They didn't holler a lot and eventually once they had us and they knew they had us I mean they screamed and hollered. That's just the way that works, all that silliness. By the end of it, they weren't screaming and hollering anymore but that's just the way it started. They had to get you ready for basic training. As soon as I got to basic at Fort Campbell, Kentucky, all these guys that were there maybe one week ahead of me were in a huge circle. As we were getting out of the bus, they were all screaming go AWOL. I thought, "I'm going to hate this." (Laughter.)

TM: And did you hate it?

KM: At the time, yeah. One day, I fell out in basic training, because I broke my arm here, here, and here. My senior year in high school, I fell off a roof. We were painting houses for extra money. I told all the guys in basic training about the fact I had done that, and they said fall out for sick call. They'll x-ray that arm and you'll get

out of here. They'll throw you out of the Army, because your arm's a mess. So I did. Well, I spent the whole day in an Army hospital just waiting and waiting and waiting. They finally got an x-ray. They said, "We'll give you a profile." A profile is a piece of paper you carry in your pocket, and all that means is you give it to the drill sergeant during PT, physical training, and whatever it says that you don't have to do, you don't have to do. Well, my profile said I got out of pushups. A whole day, I just ate the profile because drill sergeants, "Okay Miller, you want out of pushups? You want out of pushups?" "Well, I can't, my arm." "Okay, well, you take off running." That's what they'd have done. "We're going to run your guts out." So, I just ate the profile.

TM: When were you assigned to the particular situation with regards to the schools?

KM: Well, you could see it coming. At the end of the school year prior to, there was a federal judge that took over the Jefferson County schools.

EG: Judge Gordon?

KM: I think so. There was a superintendent, but the federal judge was mandating this is going to be done.

TM: In the summer of '75.

KM: Is that it, summer of '75? Well, in '74 and I was teaching then, we were watching movies. This sounds absurd, but we were watching movies in which teachers were showing us that it was conceivable that you could teach lessons on moving school buses. So there would be no black kids actually [coming] into the white school or white kids going to the black school. What would happen is that

teachers would get on the black buses, the so-called black buses, and teach lessons so they would have the benefit of a white face teaching a black audience.

TM: On a bus?

KM: Yeah, we would see films. Here would be the faculty and the bus would pull out. The lady's hanging onto the pole, and you can hear her voice is shaking as the bus starts to pull out. You thought, "Oh man, I don't want to teach a lesson like that. That is absurd." You know, the kid in the back of the bus, the back of the bus, you know they ain't going to be paying any attention to this lesson. So, we were hearing stuff like that. Then, the federal judge stepped in and no. I think the Jefferson County schools were trying to come up with anything to avoid, we are going to literally bus this way. I guess the Jefferson County schools at the time were what de jure segregation, you know, '54 and *Brown vs. Board of Education*, all due [deliberate] speed with *Brown II* and all that, but the reality of the housing patterns is--

TM: De facto.

KM: De facto, that's it, that's it.

TM: So you were teaching at the same time you were in the National Guard?

KM: Correct, yeah.

TM: You said you could see it coming. Were you aware of all the kind of activism on both sides or were you aware of the legal proceedings that were coming down the pipe? I mean did you know about the anti-busing groups that had formed and the ACLU and the NAACP and those kinds of folks who were kind of clearly? Yesterday I interviewed, for instance, a woman who was the head of the NAACP or

head of the ACLU, and she was talking about from '72 when they filed the petition.

She was the white parent petitioner and also the head of the ACLU.

KM: Wow.

TM: She was the former because she was the latter. But she talked about from '72 to '75 when the busing started after Gordon gave the order, that there was all of this kind of activism and awareness of rising tensions and you know these coalitions building on both sides of the issue. Were you aware of that or did you just know that something was coming down the pipe?

KM: It's the latter of the two. I knew something was coming down the pipe.

TM: So to speak.

KM: Yeah, me in a bus trying to do a lesson. I did not sense the violent reaction that I witnessed as the community exploded in violence. I didn't see that coming. Maybe it was just that naiveté that I had as when I did my term paper on LSD. I just didn't. I just thought it would happen, because the authorities said it's supposed to happen. But I was caught by surprise by that really, the explosion.

EG: The person I interviewed yesterday too talked about how he was caught by surprise by all the violence. Was that a typical reaction? Did other people you know, were they also surprised by the violence?

KM: Well, once it began to happen it happened in blue collar areas, Dixie Highway and Preston Highway, which are a lot of blue collar workers. It didn't take long to realize oh, these people are feeling that their children are being used in a social experiment. They reacted in a very negative way. The same feelings had to be within the African American community too now. I mean as their children were put on buses

and forced to go to white schools with the idea not that sitting by a white kid is going to make a black kid any smarter, but if a black kid is in a room with a white kid it could very well be that what that teacher is teaching will be the same lesson for both. That black kids would be taught what white kids are taught and in that process the black kids will benefit. It wasn't the fact that they were coming into a school where the population was predominately white and somehow or another that would rub off on black kids. It wasn't that. Black parents were skeptical. I can remember one of the bus runs I had from western Louisville, which is called the West End. I ask kids today and hear, "Why do they call it the West End?" Every now and then you'll get a person that kind of thinks ahead and says western Louisville but actually Louisville ends because of the river. That's the end of Louisville on that side actually. Louisville in a way is kind of a peninsula, and you can stand at the Belvedere and you have water to your right and left. You can't see it to the left but that's your West End. As that group of black kids and the bus driver and (). (Laughter) As we got closer and closer to Jesse Stuart High School, which is Dixie Highway. If you stay on Dixie Highway, you're going to end up at Fort Knox, by the way. As we got closer and closer, those kids who initially were just like kids but there probably was an element in their behaviors that was exaggerated because the kids were trying to maybe impress each other – "I'm not afraid, doesn't bother me."

TM: These were black kids?

KM: Black kids. As I got in the bus that morning in western Louisville, I mean just typical kids in a school bus, and maybe a little more noise than normal because of the nervous energy, but then as we got closer to Jesse Stuart it got dead

quiet in that bus. And the people going to the convenience stores and taking their laundry to the cleaners -- they'd look and I put that in that newspaper.² It was like we had gone into Vietnam or something. I thought, "What in the world?" These are American citizens in this bus and this is their America too. You don't own this place. By the time we pulled into Jesse Stuart, the noise had returned. But I can recall just as, I don't know it was just kind of that area that before we took our left off of Dixie Highway to Jesse Stuart you could just feel an awkwardness. We weren't wanted there and yet that America was as much their America as the residents of the community. It was just an awkward feeling, a unique feeling. I never thought I would feel something like that. I think I said something in the article about I felt because of the green uniform and I represented authority that for just a second green was black. Black was green. My color identified me as "We don't want you around here."

TM: Because you're bringing them here?

KM: Yeah, and I had maybe just a sliver of what it feels to be black in America. I mean I could go home and take the uniform off, and I could blend into that crowd and probably nobody would know who I was. But for a while I couldn't blend into that crowd and I sensed my empathy was with the kids in the bus. They don't want any of us here. Of course, I had a loaded pistol and as that silence, that awkward silence lasted for a while, it was like where's the trouble--.

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE A

BEGINNING OF TAPE 1, SIDE B

² Ken Miller wrote a short newspaper essay for the Louisville *Courier-Journal* about his experience as a national guardsman during busing. See field notes.

DM: ...white people that were for the black people and freedom. Have ya'll interviewed her?

TM: I'm actually going to meet [Anne Braden] tomorrow night. I interviewed Suzy Post yesterday, who was the head of ACLU, who was this white parent. She and Anne Braden were best friends and colleagues for years.

DM: Yeah, that'll be fantastic.

TM: I'm looking forward to it.

DM: That'll be really fascinating.

KM: You got the white mover and shaker in terms of pro civil rights, Ann Braden and Carl Braden her husband. And they tried to drag out Communism.

TM: Right, well, that's how Suzy Post got involved in all this stuff because she came back from college. She went to Indiana and then she went to the University of California-Berkeley, graduated from there. When she got back to Louisville, the Braden trial was happening and the ACLU was defending the Bradens. Then she got active in that trial and then became, anyway, ().

EG: You were saying that if you had taken the uniform off you could do that.

TM: You were talking about the pistol.

KM: Yeah, oh, I'd never qualified that with a 45 pistol. I had with [me] an M-16 and an M-60, you know, a bazooka, which was called light anti-tank weapon by the time I got to it. But we came back. We would drop the magazine out of the butt of the gun, the handle of the gun, and they had sand barrels at the armory. You just push a button, it falls out, and then you round out your rounds. You got to be accountable for all that. But, silly story, one guy decided he would round out every round through the

top instead of drop the magazine out the handle and what he did not know is he had a live round in the chamber. We would walk around in our uniforms. The day was over. The school day ended around three thirty, so it was about four thirty, five o'clock. We'd have our guns and, "Pow, got you," and click. The metallic click of a 45 pistol and you know you put in somebody, got you. Well anyway, this guy, thank God, put a round to the ceiling of the armory. It sounded like the atomic bomb had gone off. Everybody thought, "Oh God, I don't want to see this." We thought somebody was all messed up. He had shot it through the ceiling. They immediately got us all in formation, all in formation. Men, what you see here, leave here. I only told five on the way home, ten people when I got home, and a hundred by the weekend.

TM: And now it's on tape.

KM: And now it's on tape. (Laughter.) The parents were counting on us. You know, if my time rolled around, I think I could chamber a round in that pistol. I know I could with a 16, but you know that awkwardness of, "What do you do if somebody comes out of the woodwork and challenges the driver?" and I was on the periphery of that with a guy and his Confederate flag and the other. Did I tell you about the bus driver or the getting gas?

EG: Un-uh.

KM: We gassed up one day. This was during the busing thing. We pulled into a gas station, and this lady always got her gasoline at that particular station. The man came up to the door, she pulled the thing, and the doors opened up. He said, "I

can't help you today. You're going to have to leave." This is where she always fueled up. And what was the problem? He said, "I'm being watched."

TM: Female bus driver?

KM: Female bus driver. He said, "I'm being watched." She said, "Watched by who?" He had received a letter that day from the Ku Klux Klan and that they would not be real happy if he was providing gas for Jefferson County school buses. He said, "I'm being watched and you'll just have to go on." You know, do I chamber a round? Do I faint? I mean I felt kind of like Barney with one bullet in my pocket. I don't know what to do with this weapon, so I mean--. But I remember the day we went out on those buses.

EG: But what did you do?

KM: Just looked at him and looked at her and nothing. We got gas some place and the storm blew over.

TM: Was the bus filled with children when you pulled up to the station?

KM: There was no one in that bus.

TM: Just you and her?

KM: Just me and her. There was the thing they weren't going to give us live ammunition. Some of the older soldiers, the sergeants and stuff, there was a big wait a minute. "We're not going to go out there representing authority with empty weapons." There was almost, "We're not going." In other words, we're going to disobey orders if we don't get ammunition. So there was a big walk-in room where they had it all stored. They went in and got the big wooden cases, busted it open, handed out the magazines, said fill up your magazines. But the point being, maybe the

lights on the snake's going to go to the walls, behind the bookcase. Hatred's that way. If you put the spotlight on it, it pulls back real fast.

TM: Or if you stand up to it.

KM: Or if you stand up to it and that show of strength, all the bullets and the guns and the nightsticks, it backed off. I mean it didn't disappear. It just takes on a different form. I attended a class at San Diego State with our daughter, and we were looking at slides. This was an African American history class. There was Whitney Young and A. Philip Randolph and a young Dr. King. It looked like the golden age of civil rights. Well, it was, but it was because they were dealing with overt racism, black and white water fountains, black and white swimming pools, black and white neighborhoods. Now that that's gone, where'd the snake go? Well, it's covert racism. It's cold phrases. It's a certain look in the eye. It could appear in here where I would take black students and not let them sit near each other. You know, that kind of stuff and it's kind of harder to get at that.

TM: Or you put some white students in honors classes and black students non-honors classes.

KM: You got it. You got it. And that's the way it can appear now.

TM: Right, right. You know I'm interested--. I mean there are so many questions to ask. The first I think I want to ask you is could you take it? When did you start? I mean I'm interested in how you balanced. You said he usually goes away to teach but in the mornings he was going away to ride these buses. Obviously, you couldn't do both at the same time. How many days a week or days a month or days a year did you ride the buses as National Guardsmen and how many days were you

officers thoughts were, "We've got a couple of guys that aren't qualified with these weapons." I was one of those guys. You know, we've got kids on these buses. As we would get to the schools, we would spend the day on our last run at that particular school until the afternoon and take them home. We were in the hallways, MP outfits, loaded pistols, eating lunch in the lunchroom.

DM: They looked like guerilla warfare. That was my wake up call to it: He would go out in the mornings. Instead of going to school, get in the car and going to school, well, he's going to go guard the buses and guard the kids. And I wasn't thinking that much. I was going about my normal routine with our little boy and everything until one afternoon -- and this was right at the beginning -- I'm cleaning the car or something back of the house, and he walks down the driveway. He had gotten a ride that day, and he walks down the driveway. I mean it was like here he is in this uniform, blousened over his boots with these bullets with this 45 in a holster and I'm thinking, "My God, he's getting on a school bus like this." I mean that was my wake up call to the whole situation. I had just kind of, you know, you see it on TV, read it in the paper, but oh my Lord, it's like he's going to fight a war like you'd see these guys on TV on Iraq or something going out.

TM: Or Vietnam.

DM: Or Vietnam, right.

KM: But the show of authority was significant. If that authority looked strong just appearance wise, regardless of training, then maybe the bad guys, whoever they were, would back off. It would have been a mess, but that's how hatred -- it's like a snake. If I come in this room tonight and there's a snake out on the floor, if I turn the

teaching and how did you negotiate that? That's the first question I'd ask you and then the other thing is take us through a day as a guardsman on those buses.

KM: First question is I was on those buses for about two weeks and then I went back to school and just became a regular classroom teacher.

TM: And this was in September of '75?

KM: Seventy-five, that's correct, and the storm just blew over in terms for the need for National Guardsmen. Evidently someone higher up the chain decided the show of force is not necessary. We're up and running now.

TM: So it was the initial month of school that they had the guardsmen on the buses?

KM: That's it. Actually, and I'd have to check newspapers and things, but I don't think the National Guard was assigned to do that just as a matter of fact. Meaning after the riots on Preston Highway and Dixie Highway, it was at that point that the governor thought we're going to need to activate the Guard to force this home. It wasn't a done deal that we would be riding the buses. But I had a new principal that year -- actually he was in his second year -- and the first year with the new principal he and I did not get along very well. We ended up better than we started, but then I got a break. Here came busing and he was a very conservative man, so conservative that one day in class he told me confidentially that he felt rock and roll music was a Communist conspiracy. I mean he was dead serious, and this was important to him. Anyway, he didn't like me much after the first year, but, man, when I came back after riding those buses, he treated me like the king of England because I knew the inside

story on, you know, what was it like out there. "Kenny, and you tell me," and I didn't see that coming but he thought--.

TM: Did they give you the month off? Did they give you that leave time?

DM: They had to.

KM: They had to. I think the plan was I didn't make a profit. I might have had to give the National Guard check to the Jefferson County schools, and I got my regular paycheck.

EG: How did you feel about having to ride the buses?

KM: I was excited, because I felt I was in on something. Prior to the bus thing, we'd had a tornado in Louisville. In being a part of that, you really felt useful and significant. So now, here comes the bus thing, and it was like we were going to use the training. I mean sitting in the armory and watching movies. We called them "what if" classes. We did, and "what if" meant--. Because we would go to a weekend drill and that was once a month in a "what if" class. So, here we are, and we had to watch a film about how to handcuff somebody. Well, we weren't handcuffing anybody. We weren't handcuffing anybody. So the sergeants would teach, and it would be like, "Okay, what if a guy comes up to you in a bar and hits you?" How are you going to get your cuffs and what if he's got a friend? So we just called the whole kind of learning "what if," meaning they're not going to turn us loose.

Now I've got to tell you this because I did it. This is horrible, but when I was in the National Guard about the second year, six years in there, there was a guy in our unit that I didn't know this but come to find out he was wearing a wig. He was in a band and he had long hair and I had no idea. His hair was military regulation, so I

thought, "Gee, I want long hair. I want long hair." Well, long story short, by the time I got out of the National Guard, they had totally collapsed. They let us wear wigs. They let us wear wigs. I had Helga of Helsinki, Helga of Helsinki. You'd take your hair and put it in a stocking or something, and your wig would be over this way. I mean it was a mess. But when you had where you lined up for a roll call and they did inspections, you'd have all your hair shoved under your wig, and the officers they hated us. I mean the officers just hated this.

DM: (Laughter.) There's many a joke in our family about the wig.

KM: Yeah, my mother, yeah, she didn't take any of this seriously.

TM: It's a drag show. (Laughter)

KM: Once in summer camp, you had seventy days [of] summer camp every summer, and we were doing karate. And it was a () karate class because it was just, "Monkey see, monkey do." You know, like the Three Stooges and that routine. So, the sergeant in the karate class said, "Look, it's hot out here" -- and this was summer, summer camp -- "Everybody take off their wigs." "Are you sure on that?" "Everybody, it's my class. I'm telling you, you can take off the wigs." Well, I had long hair. I had that silk shirt, those platform shoes, *Saturday Night Fever*, John Travolta, everything. All right, and then, all of a sudden, there was a powwow over by one of the jeeps. Then the officer, no, we're not taking these wigs off. We're at summer camp at Fort Knox. If the provost marshal comes down the street and sees this, this could be, you know subdrufused. This could be a Communist plot right here on Fort Knox. So as we went through busing now, we had our wigs. We had our wigs.

TM: Wow, now did you--. Go ahead.

DM: I hadn't thought about that when you were doing busing.

KM: Well, we would take them off.

TM: Yeah, that's interesting.

KM: Soon as we got on the buses and got away from the officers, we'd take them off. You'd just take your hair and you'd comb it back. The kids could care less and everybody had long hair. They didn't think a thing about it. So, as you waited at the high school and you ate the lunch at the high school, you had your wig stuffed somewhere. It looked like a dead squirrel or something. Like I say, I had Helga of Helsinki, and I was considered one of the best wigs in the unit really. It was beautiful. It was beautiful.

EG: The things we find out.

TM: I know, wow, that was an unprecedented moment.

KM: The attack of the clones. (Laughter)

TM: You said that you were excited because you knew that you were going to be part of something.

KM: Yeah.

TM: What do you mean by that? I'm interested to know. I mean you obviously said you knew it was coming down the pipe, you understood what this was about. You knew that it was transformative or it was going to have some deep impact on the community and perhaps the nation. Did you feel like you were participating in something that was particularly a civil rights thing or did you just feel that this was important kind of in your bones?

KM: It was more of important in my bones like everybody's going to want to know what I did. My parents would be proud. It was all over the news. It was all over television. In terms of participating in history in that, not at all. In terms of my upbringing and Mother saying, "I feel so sorry for these people" -- that was not my feeling. It was if anything "I'm using these people as a crowd scene for my heroism," whatever that was. And no, it wasn't: I'm involved in a just cause and the Battle Hymn of the Republic and His Truth Is Marching On. It wasn't anything like that. It was how long is this going to last? I hope for a long time, because I'd like to get out of school for a whole year if I can. And we ain't doing nothing. I mean we're at school. We're walking around, and we look cool. The high school girls thought, "Oh, look at these guys. They've got guns and stuff." I hadn't been out of high school that long. The guys were looking at us like macho-macho. It was all ego. It wasn't my heart in the right place, so to speak.

TM: So you thought you did it because you were excited about participating because you thought it was important and heroic but not necessarily because you thought it was right and just?

KM: That's it, yeah. That's what I said.

EG: Looking back is your view different now when you look back?

KM: Yeah, sure it is.

EG: How do you look back at it now?

KM: Well, in a selfish way. I mean when you guys contacted me, I thought, "I did something historic?" Yeah, yeah, I knew it. I knew I had. It just took a while for the word to come back. I like now to identify myself with [it]. because I'm a

history teacher. I risked my life to help the schools. Bull cheese. (Laughter.) I didn't even know how to fire the weapon. I didn't risk, and I didn't think of myself as risking my life. So, I'm just trying to jump on board, grab a hold of somebody else's bravery. The true story there, in my opinion, [is] the people and, especially African Americans, that put their kids on those buses hoping--. It was kind of like the Million Man March. The word went out, "I want a million men in D.C." But there was an element of hope and vulnerability. What if on this day a million men don't show up? What if two thousand men show up? We'll look foolish. For the men who all over the country and in disparate locations got on Greyhound buses and in airports and headed to D.C., there was a hope that something good would happen. It happened. Now I think the capital that Louis Farrakhan earned for the Million Man March was just squandered. I can't think of anything that happened in a constructive way, a positive constructive way, as a result of the Million Man March. But it's those parents who were putting those kids on those buses, those were the brave ones. I mean our children weren't going through that. Our daughter wasn't born at the time. They were dreaming the American dream in bizarre sort of way that if there's a place where there is a neutral zone in America it's got to be a school. If it isn't a school, where is a place in this country that we can go feel that we're on level playing ground? I mean that's the whole premise behind public schools, that something good can happen here and the cycle that your parents went through, in my case a waitress and a cook, we could break the cycle. Education is a dream factory, and so those are the heroes that risked their kids, dreamed dreams that it would hold together and it did.

TM: What about the black kids on the bus? The buses that you were on were all, I assume, black kids being bused to previously all white schools.

KM: That's it, yeah.

TM: Tell me a little bit about those kids. Were these kids you saw everyday for a month?

KM: Couple of weeks.

TM: Did you get to know any of them? I mean you talked about they were giddy and nervous, anxiety or nervous laughter or whatever at the beginning of the bus and then there was this dead silence, I love it, on Dixie Highway and then as they're playing in the parking lot of the school there was a kind of a surge and the same kind of nervous energy that was at the beginning of the trip. I'm wondering did you ever talk to them about what they were experiencing? Were they all rambunctious or nervously anxious or were there differences? I'm trying to get a sense of what they kids themselves were experiencing and how much interaction you had with them.

KM: Yeah, it's a good question. I didn't get to know anyone on any of those buses. It wasn't a given that you would have the same run each day. That could change and you could have a different group of kids. I remember trying to maybe mimic the kids in playing off the whole situation. No big deal, don't worry about it. I can recall one of the afternoon runs, because I was taking a group of black students back home to western Louisville. There was a lot of action going on in the back, guys beating on the windows and this and that. I moved to the back of the bus and tried to become more the schoolteacher than the military policeman. "Guys, let's cool it." There was in that specific situation if you have, and the bus drivers I had were white

females. Well, the white female is probably setting a bubble on does she really want to drive this bus this day. I mean bus driving, 2004, today, Jeffersonville High School, is a tough job. The kids are rude and crude and everything else. Now you've got a white female dealing with a group of kids that the energy is off the charts as they posture, "nothing bothers me," as the bus is parked in front of the high school. As we go back through that kind of the tunnel of hate, so to speak, it got quiet again. As we got closer to home it got loud again. So the point is I'm in the back of the bus trying to keep everybody, "Come on, calm down, no big deal," and that routine. In a way, I'm trying to be the schoolteacher thinking, "The bus driver doesn't know do I even want to pull out of here with the kids behaving that way." If it was a typical day at Jeff High and the kids were behaving that way, the bus shouldn't move. It will get quiet on this bus or we're not going home. It will get quiet on this bus or I'll use my radio and I'll call into the service center and we'll get somebody in this bus. They have to do that for safety and stuff. But in terms of getting to know someone, probably that seed my mother planted, "I feel so sorry for these people," there was an awkwardness probably on my part to admit, "Isn't this ridiculous? All you're doing is going to school and I'm on this bus with a gun." But then that opens it up to, "Well, if there's a ridiculous element to this I had become for a moment the representative of white America," and I didn't want to be that representative. I really did not. So rather than engage a student in: "How do you feel about this?" or "How did your school day go? Did you run into any incidents where you were reminded of race?", I just kept to myself that way.

TM: Did you ever have to intervene or did you hear about or witness any incidences where kids were scared or where the victims are targets of some kind of intimidation or physical violence? Did you ever have to intervene?

KM: I didn't see it or didn't witness it. I did not.

EG: So, you didn't ever have to use your gun?

KM: Nope, nothing like that, thank God.

DM: Did you tell them about the flag on the cement truck?

KM: I told them about that I think. I told ya'll about the flag on the cement mixer?

TM: No.

KM: We had dropped off a load of kids. We were headed back from black Louisville to white Louisville, from the West End to the East End.

TM: These were full buses for the most part?

KM: Oh, yeah.

TM: So they were full, fifty kids on a bus?

KM: Yes, as we would move out. On 264, which is the Watterson Expressway, I don't know if ya'll have been through the tunnels over there by Seneca Park since you've been in Louisville, but anyway, the bus was empty except for the driver and me. I was sitting in the front right seat and here comes this cement mixer. There was a Confederate flag on the belly of the cement mixer and the flag was enormous. Maybe it's gotten bigger as the years have gone by. I don't know. But it was a Confederate flag. The guy was going sixty and the bus driver was going sixty. She looked at him and he looked at her and he starts to bring the cement mixer over

toward us. She goes off into the emergency lane a little bit. And I'm thinking, "Oh, God." Then, he flips her off, flips her the bird, and then sneers, laughs, and goes on. It was an empty bus. There were no children on the bus. That was tense for a second or two, thinking, "Oh my goodness, what is this guy going to do?"

TM: Now did you ever talk to the bus drivers and did you have a particularly unique experience in that all the bus drivers you dealt with were white women? I'm wondering if that was common.

KM: I'm sure there were male drivers. Just somehow or another, I wound up with white females. But yeah, I did have an unusual, not unusual but silly--. The bus driver, I can't recall how I would end up doing it, but we would gas up, go to her home. I think there was kind of a graduated elementary, middle, and high school when you go make your runs, and so she had some time to kill. So here we are at like seven- thirty and she's got thirty minutes to kill, and so we would go to her home. I would sack out on the couch, and I would literally go to sleep on the couch. Sometimes I wasn't sleeping. But anyway, and here's her family getting ready for school. The kids -- they had a teenage daughter and a son -- were eating cereal and Dad was dressing up and going to work and Mom was driving the bus. They knew I was there. Sometimes I would fake [being] asleep simply because it was awkward. Here's a family going through the motions of starting another day, and here's a total stranger. It never dawned on me at the time, but I think what was going on there maybe was the family felt safer if I was with the family -- that well, "We've got this bus out in the driveway here. And we got these idiots riding around," they thought. I never, you know, the guy with the message you're being watched--. So, maybe the

bus driver felt safer and the family felt safer. I don't know that, but it was awkward because I would make eye contact with the kids and I was a teacher and it was like for them I would think who in the heck are you.

TM: I was thinking about how did it affect your teaching after you went back? Did the school that you were working in was it influenced by busing? Were there black kids who were bused into the school?

KM: Yes.

TM: The school was Bruce School?

KM: Bruce. It was racially balanced.

TM: How did that affect your teaching?

KM: That's an excellent question. I quit by the middle of the year. I quit. Race had gone from on my list of priorities, one to ten, ten to one. I have never experienced such a year in my life. Everything was racially significant. If you had black and white-- You don't have black chalk, but if race was mentioned in some way or something came up that maybe connoted race in some way -- "Do you have any black markers, Mr. Miller?" -- the whole class gets quiet. It was not the normal school. I was in my fifth year as a teacher and all of a sudden race was on the tips of everybody's tongues and it was superficial. It wasn't what I wanted, and I thought, "I've had it. I don't want to go any further with this." That's when I got out and got into the sales position. I thought, "I'm going to put this behind me and move on." As I said, I was not a good salesman, got back in school, etc. But, for me, maybe it was the start of that year, it had just somehow or another drained my batteries. But by the middle of that year, I'm going in to see the principal after Christmas saying, "I'm

resigning." I didn't say race or anything like that but I can recall how I had been so comfortable, it just didn't seem important. There is an initial African American community called Newburg and Newburg goes back to-- At one time it was referred to [as] the wet woods. It was property that a slave owner, man's last name was Hundley, had given to some African American female that had nursed him through a sickness, and he felt it was useless property. Well, that became the foothold for a suburban African American community called Newburg. The school where I taught was right by Newburg, so I mean we were racially balanced and it seemed fine and the kids were comfortable.

TM: So before busing your school had been racially balanced?

KM: That's correct, and there were others in Louisville that way. But again, that's de facto. It just happened that way.

TM: It just happened that way because of the children's patterns of living.

KM: So by the middle of the year I just thought, "I'm not comfortable, I'm moving on," and I did.

TM: Why was that? That's interesting to know that the school that you were teaching in and you had been teaching in was racially balanced and you as a teacher had experienced that. So the busing situation obviously, how did that affect your school having been racially balanced prior to the busing order?

KM: Remember the new principal I told you and then I came back and how much he liked me and everything? He was racist with a capital R. I mean he was really-- He was racist, and I can remember being in his office. This was before I'd resigned my contract, broke my contract, and one day the Newburg bus came in. It

went to the Newburg community. And so the preponderance, if not one hundred percent, of the occupants of the bus were African Americans. I was telling him something about something. He said, "Goddammit, here they come now." Honestly, you could hear the whole noise level in the atrium part, the lobby part of the school, just go up. It's just kids. It's just kids and silliness, but I mean he was extremely aware of that. I was the guy--. Because of my experience in the National Guard, I worked the loading dock in the morning and afternoon as kids come in on buses. I worked the loading dock. The straw that broke the camel's back for me is as the kids would line up and wait for their bus to pull up to their line, it's the end of the day, it's typical kids and school discipline but long story short. I can remember buses coming in and kids would run to the bus. They wouldn't maintain the integrity of the line, and they would grab a hold of the windows. They would grab a hold of the rearview mirrors, and it would be like something you would see in a third world country as peasants are hanging onto the public transportation to get out of town. I would watch that. I would think, "That's it, that's it. I can't continue to try and hold together America in my classroom. There's got to be an easier way to go to work, come home, feel productive," and, in that year, I felt anything but productive.

TM: And you felt like there really had been a change? I mean the composition of your classrooms had not changed but the dynamic of the classrooms changed?

KM: That's correct, yeah.

EG: What was it like going back into teaching?

KM: The best year I've ever had is the year I went back. That was in 1978-79. That's when Larry Byrd took Indiana State to the NCAA championship. They were undefeated and lost in the last game.

TM: That's right, to Magic Johnson and Michigan State.

EG: I was born that day. (Laughter)

KM: You're kidding.

EG: I'm not kidding. That was the greatest day of my dad's life and now it's on tape for history. I was born in the morning. Michigan State won at night.

TM: That's fantastic. I have that picture of the two of them guarding each other.

KM: Yeah. Did Dad get to see the game?

EG: Yeah, he watched it that night.

KM: He did? Oh, my goodness.

DM: That's a great story.

TM: And this was at Charlestown Middle School?

KM: Charlestown Middle School in Indiana. That was my first year back after trying to sell stuff for two years. There's the Charlestown ammunition plant. It appeared in the late '30s, World War II, the Dupont family. It made gunpowder and artillery shells and all that. They were building the brand new Charlestown Middle School but it was not ready to go for that year and so when I returned to the public school classroom it was a factory building called the Change House and you could find the Change House, this is Highway 62, the big one out here by McDonald's, not the one that Jeff High is one. If you just go out Highway 62 you just follow your gates

and gate five was the entrance to the so-called Change House. And it was nothing but shiny concrete floors and about seven foot tall metal lockers about that wide and you literally made your classroom space by shoving the metal lockers into a rectangular or square pattern. I was the new guy that year. They'd already been there for one year at the Change House. And my class was at the end of a row of locker made classes but right on the other side of my class was the wood shop. And they cut the boards and they make their jewelry chests and nobody can hear anything I'm saying. It was the best year of my life because the expectations were nil in that environment. We're just treading water until the new school is open. I was eager to get back in the classroom, and I tried some creative things. The teachers that had been in that environment for the second year had quit, this is ridiculous. And it was ridiculous. Those kids were probably penalized in terms of their education. But I loved it. I absolutely loved it and I was just like a bird out of a cage. I was a horrible salesman and I was pretty good in class and I was back to what I wanted to do.

TM: And what was the racial composition of that school?

KM: Good question, about five black kids.

TM: Five black kids?

KM: Five black kids.

TM: Did you teach any of them?

KM: I had one girl in the sixth grade, and Charlestown, southern Indiana, was vibrant with racism. As a matter of fact, this is a free state, going back to the Northwest Territory and there could not be slavery in any state sliced out of that and there were five states that came out of that and Indiana is one of those five. And

Indiana kind of embraces that as its progressive approach to race relations. The reality of Indiana: In 1850, the constitution was revised, and Indiana passed a law that no black person could move to Indiana. A free black could not move to Indiana.

TM: And the Klan has its origin in Indiana.

KM: That's right. The largest Klan membership was the state of Indiana.

TM: Currently, I think as well. The Southern Poverty Law Center, I think, issued a report a year or two ago, and I know that they said organized white supremacy groups, whether it's the Klan or other kinds of groups, have one of the highest concentrations in Indiana.

KM: I believe it, yeah. I do believe it.

DM: They still have rallies around here.

KM: Yeah, every now and then in Louisville, they'll go to the courthouse, especially the University of Louisville campus and that routine. But as I saw in an ACLU movie, the judge, the judgment of free speech is not how we behave when we hear things that please us.

TM: It's how we behave when things we disagree with.

KM: Disagree with and are we willing to protect that, yeah.

TM: Are we willing to protect hate speech we hate.

KM: That's it.

TM: That's great.

EG: River Valley, what was the racial composition of that school like?

KM: I'm speculating the African American population was between fifteen and twenty-five percent, something like that, yeah.

EG: So did you have to confront these racial issues again when you were at River Valley?

KM: No. I mean race was prevalent in this environment today, in this building today. It was prevalent there but not in the same way that I was experiencing it the year I let go in Jefferson County. This Lyman T. Johnson fellow, who integrated U of K and then U of L, I went over and picked him up one day and at the end of his civil rights unit I brought him to River Valley. That was my first year at River Valley, by the way. That's the year the space shuttle exploded.³ And it was at the end of the year. Chronologically, we're moving through American history and here comes the civil rights movement. So we did a unit on that, and I got Dr. Johnson, and I got to school. I had a teacher cover my class until I could get back to school. He lived in Louisville. I'll never forget when we came to the front doors of River Valley Middle School. They were on break and kids were moving here, there, and everywhere, to get to their next class. Well, he was blind, like Stevie Wonder, sunglasses and he had a cane. And he slipped his arm underneath my arm, and we walked through a sea of kids moving to classes. It was like something out of Jane Pittman as she goes to the water fountain.⁴ The kids opened up. It got awkwardly quiet. They didn't know this man. Now the kids in my class knew that he was on the way, but they just saw that cane and those sunglasses and an elderly man. So, he went in and gave a really nice speech and did a nice job. Then, I began to invite him to other classes. I taught at a small college in Louisville called Sullivan University. I taught there for twenty-three years. I taught American history and American government. Dr. Johnson would

³ He is referring to the Challenger space shuttle explosion.

⁴ The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman is a book and movie.

come there. He ended up with four honorary Ph.D.'s. Yeah, and he was a mover and shaker locally in the civil rights movement and I'm sure other communities have them also.

TM: Yeah, we know the status.

EG: Did your experience riding the buses-- Do you see that as having had any impact on you teach American history?

KM: I think so, yeah, but I wouldn't be able to identify that. The thing that is probably not good and I think probably it's evolved in terms of my own personal chemistry. Where probably at the very seat of my approach to race, slavery, civil rights movement, teaching, is the phrase, I feel so sorry for those people. And that always is, I just try and be extra compassionate, extra empathetic. I mean I'll get angry at a black kid as quickly as I will a white kid. As I've said a million times, I would throw Jesus out of my class if he was disrupting it.

TM: Or if he was turning water into wine. (Laughter)

KM: Well, no, I might hang onto him for a while there.

TM: After school, you mean after school.

KM: Hey, we could get together on how'd you do that. But I'll discipline them. It's important that you relate to the kids in a genuine way regardless of who they are or their backgrounds. But probably in me is kicking around the phrase, I feel so sorry for them.

TM: Do you feel sorry for them?

KM: Good question. Yes and no. I mean knowing American history, let me pull a little lesson on you two. Okay, you're in downtown Detroit now. You're in the

bad end of Detroit. You're in Baltimore and you're in the bad end of Baltimore. What are you seeing and why are you seeing that? What do the faces of the people look like? How did we get from here to there? Here comes to America the Middle Passage, basically an agricultural people. If they weren't agricultural people, they were going to become that in America. Now how do we equate in 2004 an agricultural American with an urban lifestyle? Listen to rap music. What do we hear in there? Why is that an African American musical style coming out of those cities? So I have a larger perspective than that blue collar upbringing, but it's still never left actually.

TM: Do you feel sorry for the white people knowing that history and knowing what you do now having that broader perspective? Do you also feel sorry for the white kids?

KM: Here's what I feel about that: I am now encountering a generation that has been raised on the "I Have a Dream" speech. The good news is they know the speech. The bad news is teachers haven't moved far beyond that and it's distorted. The black kids know that more so than the white kids and if the black kids know it, certainly the black parents do. It's not a monolithic leadership. We have had many leaders, male and female. What's transpired is white teachers are comfortable with Dr. King. Now he's a minister. Malcolm X, he's popping up now but slowly. And I forgot the question, what was it?

TM: Do you feel sorry for the white kids?

KM: Oh, okay, in the, "I Have a Dream" speech. Here's what's happening. The black kids have gotten just as good at racism as the white kids, maybe even better,

maybe even better. And out there in those halls the black kids hold court. They prevail. Now in an organized structured classroom that can go away, depending on the quality of the teacher. It can surface in the classroom also. But where we're at that I see is we've raised a generation of white adolescents that basically have been taught love thy neighbor, judge people by the content of their character, not by the color of their skin, and yet that's not the America they're encountering. They're encountering a group of black adolescents that are angry, and I'm not for sure they even understand why they're angry as their parents or grandparents would. I'm not for sure they understand. But there's a racial tension to this school.

TM: What's the composition of this school, racial composition of this school?

KM: I'm going to guess that River Valley fifteen to twenty percent still prevails here. And so you have white kids that are angry because their teachers have misled them in that if you think Dr. King is indicative of the feelings of the students you're setting beside, you need to rethink that. That changes from student to student. There are introverted black students. There are nerd black students. There's the whole gambit of personalities, but it seems the personality that owns the halls is one that many white kids struggle with. They're intimidated by the black kids and I think maybe black kids could sense that, those that go down that road. There are others, you know, they're just like everybody else. We didn't create this America we operate in. We have inherited it. As a result of the contradictions of our history, you would have never thought we would have gone into this new millennium dragging racism along, but it is alive and well and we cannot put that behind us.

TM: Do you think all of those efforts with the civil rights movement and Martin Luther King, civil rights movements, the desegregation acts, the busing in the 1970s do you think all of that was for naught? I mean what's the legacy of that and how do we look back and see them, particularly somebody like you who has seen it from a personal variety of dimensions? How do you make sense of it? You talked very eloquently and, as a historian, [I] appreciate the way that you talked about history and sometimes teaching a history that's a generation behind the reality of people's lives that are learning the history you're teaching. I think that you're right. I think sometimes that that's what we're up against. So how do we make sense of the history so that this generation can understand what the limitations of it were, what the achievements were, and kind of a balanced approach, not a glorification but also not a denunciation and dismissal of all of that struggle?

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE B

BEGINNING OF TAPE 2, SIDE A

TM: And very open minded and tolerant and compassionate and all of this stuff and you have black kids are like, "Don't be that way to me."

KM: Yeah.

TM: It is an interesting dynamic but I think you're right about that.

KM: We're ready here?

EG: We're fine, go ahead.

KM: This will be a curve but so be it. I don't know if I read it or heard it somewhere, but '54 separate but equal--. Somewhere I read recently last year that if the court had seen to it that the schools were separate and equal that that might have

been a better avenue for America than the road we took. And the line of reasoning being possibly black adolescents, black children need to get a sense of who they are and how they got here, the whole American history thing, the way the culture operates today, and then begin to encounter white America. Something in me says that's not a good idea. If the only interaction black kids have with white kids is the garbage man and the kid behind the counter at McDonald's and Ron Artese beating up somebody at a ballgame or Jackie Robinson who was an out and out American hero, I don't know that that's adequate. If there's a chance we can get past the stereotypes, etc., maybe it's while they're still young. But I was listening to the idea if the court had made certain separate but equal, maybe that would have played out differently and there would be a confidence in African Americans that you find in many, but it changes from personality to personality. It seems like the younger kids are angry and their anger is racist and it's black racism. I mean there's just no doubt. I mean white racism is alive and well but it seems like I guess as white America taught black America this, this, this, well, black America learned those lessons well. And now if you're going to pull the race card, watch this. I'm going to trump you on that one. And that is an element of our culture now and I never saw that coming. Dr. King's dream has clearly not come true. And black and white kids are judging by skin color and not the content of character.

TM: And they're doing that equally?

KM: They're doing that equally and how the heck did we get into this?

TM: Yeah. In this Civil Rights Commission testimony you hear over and over again anti busing people saying that their objection is not to integration. They don't

object to that, most of them. I mean certainly they're aware that they're on record and that they're on historical record and legal record and governmental record and so forth. So they're aware of that. So they say it's not integration, it's the forced busing. It's the force of having to put your child on a bus and send your child to a place far away whether you're a black parent or white parent, and that's the problem. That's the grievance. It's that. But isn't that a function of the fact that people have to live in some cases in very segregated and distant places from one another? And so the only way to achieve desegregation in a place where black people live in one place and white people live in another place and those places are pretty far apart is to bus them. Do you think it's the forced nature of the busing and the distance that people have to travel that is a grievance or is it integration that people are upset about?

KM: It's integration, yeah. The phrase I remember at the time taking graduate classes moving towards my master's: I can remember black guys saying and correctly so, "It's not the bus that bugs the white people; it's who's in the bus that's got them angry." I would endorse that. I think he had it correct.

TM: So the anti busing people you would characterize as being racist people who are opposed to the integrating of busing?

KM: Let me be clear here. I am a racist. Everybody I know is basically a racist. I'm figuring you two guys are but probably something inside you is happy right now, no I ain't. But here's where I'm coming from. In a culture that is permeated with racism, from the barbershop to the church house, racism is a mental disease. Well, just like real diseases, if you go into areas where people carry the agent that causes the disease you're probably going to ingest some yourself. I might have a

dormant case of racism. But what happens to me when somebody pulls in front of me in the intersection tomorrow and it happens to be a back guy? Do I drop all the way back to racism? So, I'm very open with the students in college in this classroom: "I am a racist." But the thing about my racism is like any physical illness to get over it first of all I have to acknowledge that I have it. Then, I need to seek help. So I am at that stage with my racism, but it's in me. I have not been able to avoid the germs.

TM: What do kids say when you say that? What do parents say when you say that?

KM: They follow along.

TM: Because that's got to be a fairly rare articulation.

KM: It is, but there's a truth in it. I mean it's my fumbling effort to kind of find common ground. But, now, here's the bomb. This is going to go off in North Carolina. I can see it now. Our daughter is twenty-seven, and I planted the seeds of racism in my daughter. I didn't do that in my son, with my son. I didn't do that because I thought he's a male and he'll be able to handle himself okay with this topic. I didn't. But with Sarah I started to plant the seeds of racism. And, specifically, what am I talking about here? "I don't want those black guys calling this house, Sarah. If a black guy asks you out, you're not going with him, Sarah."

DM: We sent her to a different school.

KM: Sent her to a different school. We converted to Catholicism and I was not raised a Catholic, but we were going to pull her out of public schools.

DM: Erik went to this school. Sarah went to a private Catholic school.

KM: That's right, our son went here and Sarah went to a Catholic school. I had seen frequently at River Valley Middle School black guys attempting to become boyfriends to white girls and that's normal. But I would hear the lines, "You don't like me because you're racist." "No, it's not that." This is the white girls saying it's not that. "Well then, prove it. Give me your phone number." I thought, "Wait a minute." When my daughter comes to this environment I don't want her vulnerable to that. I could have selfishly used my daughter to prove how un-racist I am. "Date all the black guys you want, I don't care." I did care. I did care. But I know the reality of my behavior is that I planted a seed of hatred that came into full bloom. My daughter now, I mean she'll use the N word. I mean she'll use it in a laughing way, but still I planted that seed. Now here's a guy that's mush ball liberal and yet I'm admitting I was not comfortable with my daughter dating black guys.

TM: Why not?

KM: I did not want her to be a metal on some fella's chest. In this environment, it's been my experience that for the white girls that date the black guys as soon as the break up appears, here comes the next black guy. And then here comes the next black guy. And then there's, I don't know, some thing of she's receptive to black guys and it just seems like it goes down hill from there.

TM: But you wouldn't say the same thing against white guys if she dated a white guy and they'd break up and another white guy comes in, you wouldn't see it the same way?

KM: No, I admit that. Un-uh, I agree and it's my racism. I'll just lay that out there for all to see. It's interesting. I mean if you believe anything I'm telling you, if

Sarah dated a black guy today and it's probably going to have to be the "Guess Who's Coming [to] Dinner," Sidney Poitier, super doctor, that wouldn't bother me. In a way, if she could slice out the doctor or the pro athlete, yeah. But if Sarah Miller at River Valley Middle School--. Who knew? I mean where is this going to go? My racism came to the forefront, and I put my foot down.

EG: Do you regret that?

KM: No. I do not. No, I mean the mixed race child, the America I know, how's that going to play out? You know, I wish to God that it would play out okay, but the America I know, it's not going to play out okay.

TM: So you see it as a pragmatic approach?

KM: I guess.

TM: As well as a racist one?

KM: Yeah.

EG: Do you have friends who are black?

KM: No. I don't have any friends who are white either. I don't have any friends. (Laughter) I don't. I don't have any friends. I mean Debbie and I are empty nesters now and I love her so much that all my friendship desires--. I mean I have people that I am friendly with, but we don't eat with a couple on Saturday night. We don't go play cards with a couple. I don't golf. That's just where we're at.

TM: Do your kids have black friends?

KM: I don't know.

DM: Sarah did, yeah. I mean when she was in elementary and middle school, yes, and basically just at school.

TM: This was before she went to the Catholic school?

DM: Yes. Once she got into the Catholic high school, no.

TM: Okay.

DM: They had their group and it was all white.

TM: And Catholic?

DM: And Catholic.

KM: Our son's basically that way also.

DM: But now the whole family's Catholic now because our son converted before he married his wife because she was Catholic and we're all Catholic.

EG: You converted though to Catholicism because of the racial motivations?

KM: No. We had put her in a parochial school, and here were statues of Mary and statues of everybody.

DM: I was leaning a little bit towards Catholicism. I had started attending a Catholic church, and I really liked the Catholic religion. So I started kind of pulling. Like with Kenny, I would say, "Well, you know, we're talking about we want Sarah to go to Catholic high school, this would be really good." Of course, I was starting to pull her into it too. Now our son, at that point, he would have nothing to do with religion, period.

KM: No, he was: "Anarchy rules. It's a scam."

DM: Now, I mean, like I said, he converted on his own. I mean his wife told him, Beyonce, at the time said, "You don't have to do this." But he wanted to and their faith is so strong. It's, of course, a couple of years ago we lost our first

grandchild. She was stillborn. And if they hadn't had that--. I mean that pulled them through it.

KM: Now I'm Jewish.

DM: Oh!

KM: Yes I am. I was born in a Jewish hospital. My mother, who is adopted, by the way, has started calling me her young Rabbi. Here's what's pushing me towards Judaism. A, you got to know the Catholic guys were hitting on everything moving, and I smell a rat to high heaven going on here. But B, Christ, the Son of God, now wait a minute. How in the heck, I mean he was raised in a culture that looked for a Messiah. If Christ would have popped up, pretend like the Messiah had popped up in 1122 in New Zealand and never heard jack squat about Judaism and Christianity and could have made a case--. It just seems all too convenient to me that a guy comes out of a culture that's saying these very things and says, "You know what, it's me." What! So now, I'm starting to become skeptical and Mother's been calling me her little Rabbi. When I grew this (his goatee or beard) actually is when she started that. I thought, "Well, what does she know that I don't know?"

TM: That's interesting.

KM: No, it isn't, go on. (Laughter)

TM: I wanted to ask you, I had one other question and then I don't know.

EG: I just had one or two.

TM: Okay. I'm interested--.

EG: You've been really generous with your time and we appreciate this.

TM: Yeah, we appreciate it.

KM: Thanks, thanks for listening.

EG: Very candid.

TM: You made a statement before. You and I are from similar kinds of backgrounds actually and some similar kinds of values that you have articulated my family has too and sitting in a classroom makes me think of all this. You made an interesting point about class before that the folks who were on Dixie Highway, who were looking at the bus with great anger and so forth and the people who were the Klan people and the people who were protesting, the anti busing folks, acted as if they owned America and you talked about them as blue collar people. Not all obviously of the anti busing folks were working class people and blue collar people. There were lots of white collar folks and middle class folks who were also opposed to it. But assuming that there was a significant contingent of working class people who were opposed to busing. I want to take your statement about how they felt like, you said they don't own America. They acted as if they did own America and they didn't own America. I'm wondering whether or not you think that the kind of racism that is bred among working class people and blue collar people, who in many ways have closer, more intimate working relationships with black people, they work in the kitchen, they work in the factory, and on the loading docks. All my family works with black folks in these kinds of positions and yet they're much more racist than my parents and I are who have college educations, master's degrees, and so forth. And I'm wondering if that racism you think is bred there and maybe disproportion ally is a reaction to the fact that they act like they own America but they really don't own America and that's the problem. They don't own anything, just like the black folks.

KM: Whoa, what a question. Good question. Yeah, I think probably the less power you have, economic, political. There's a thing I used to do in classes. If you were back at home, wherever that is, and you got a phone call and Mom got locked up today, shoplifting – "Oh no, it's going to be in the newspaper." Would either one of you two be able in your hometowns to drop back into some political power that maybe could just shuffle this under the rug for Mom and we could, you know, "Let's don't go to the paper with this, no arrest records, mistakes. She's on this new medication. She didn't know." And the point: My skepticism, I know that's true. If I got in trouble tonight, there's somebody I could call and maybe they know somebody who could call somebody and that routine. There are probably people out there that don't have many people to call and they feel manipulated and used and abused and that America is a reality and it's always been there. The founding fathers called them the giddy multitude, the electoral college, and these illiterate people don't have the right stuff to pick a president.

TM: The motley masses () called them.

KM: Yeah, okay. So, yeah, you're probably right. There are people that feel powerless and maybe their line in the sand was well, you're not going to do this. Clearly now, American racism has existed for as long as it has because of an element of: "Well, at least I'm better off than you are."

TM: Right and because you don't have any access to that power, you take it out on the people who are implicating the decisions that the power brokers make that affect your life. The Boston busing story is all about working class Irish Catholic folks in South Boston who hated the working class black folks in Dorchester and

Roxbury because they were forced to be bused into each other's schools by the white waspy Brahmin liberals from the suburbs.

KM: Yeah, there you go.

TM: They hated that, but they didn't know where Wellesley or Weston or Newton were, but they knew where Roxbury and they knew where South Boston were and they knew who lived there and they hated each other. So, they threw rocks at each other because they couldn't get to the people who were making the political decisions that actually made them come in contact with each other.

KM: Well said and that lesson needs to be out there. I wish I could teach it. I wish I could say it as well as you did because there's something to learn from that. There's substance to that.

EG: You said that initially [your] motivation to wanting to ride the buses was that you thought people would see you as a hero. Was that the case? What was people's reaction to you?

KM: Just some adults wanted to know what it was like and so I kind of had the stage for a second or two. But no sooner than my story got out and they were coming out of the woodwork in the newspapers and other men and women in the National Guard. So the limelight, the spotlight was short lived. So it didn't last long.

EG: You mentioned ostracism from people on the streets, did you feel that from anybody that you knew?

TM: Friends of yours?

KM: Good question. No, no. One time I had a friend that went through all that with me, a National Guard friend, and he said, "Kenny, the trouble with you is

that you cheer for everybody." I mean I thought [that] was an insightful analysis of my personality. When I taught at Bruce Middle School, I played basketball on Tuesday and Thursday nights in the gym. I had keys. We had a black teacher at the school, Robert T. James. Slim is his nickname. Slim lived in a black section of Louisville called Smoketown, not the West End, but anyway Slim would bring his friends. He taught school and I'd have guys I knew and we'd choose up and play basketball.

DM: He had dinner at our house a couple of times.

KM: Yeah, came to the house. I mean Artie knew who I was and how I was and so, what was your question?

EG: If you felt ostracism from--?

KM: No, I didn't, no. My friends basically at that time were people in the Guard and they had been out there participating also. But I wouldn't want a friend that the breaking point on a friendship is am I comfortable with African Americans. I would question the quality of that kind of friendship and it might be best if you tell me all the people you're uncomfortable with up front so as we go deeper into this relationship, if I choose to go any deeper, I want to know this up front. I want, there's a spark of God in all humans and I know that. And in terms of if you're friendly, then I'm going to be friendly.

EG: You said too that part of your work was patrolling the hallways?

KM: Yes.

EG: If you could just describe that a little bit.

KM: At the school during busing, we would just go down the hallways. Kids would be passing to class. I'm sure the teachers in those environments were as happy as they could be. I mean we have fights in the halls here and we have verbal confrontations and teachers have to go to those, especially the male teachers. Well, the particular high school I'm thinking of as I share this with you I'm sure they felt the tensions. I mean it was not a normal school year start and so those teachers knowing, well, there are MP's. We have one cop at Jeff High, one cop. He's here all day long. Well, this high school had fifteen and they had jeeps out there and they had pistols, nightsticks. We were identified as police and so the teachers got a break. I think the students got a break just knowing there's authority present and so today's going to work out okay. Now what happened in that school after we packed up and went home, did the same feelings prevail? I doubt it. I hope I'm wrong but I doubt it.

EG: So there weren't many fights that you had to break up?

KM: Didn't break up any. Did not break up any. I mean in my public school career I've broken up a jillion, mainly middle school boys. But as I was dressed up as an MP, no, and that would have been a mistake on the part of the combatants because we would have moved in hard. We would have done what we were trained to do. God knows where that would end. I mean you're supposed to use a nightstick and hit on fleshy parts of their legs and hell, we'd have come in just like baseball players because I mean at that point you're going to, I guess, react to violence with violence and the only difference is we're the good guys because we're in the uniforms and you're not.

EG: So order was maintained while the MP's were there?

KM: Absolutely, yeah.

TM: Did you have any friends who were opposed to busing like people that you hung out with that you were acquaintances with, worked with, had dinner with?

KM: Oh, yeah, yeah. Well, there were guys in the Guard that opposed busing.

TM: Who were on the buses?

KM: On the buses and they were not happy about it at all but they knew the chain of command and what their mission was. I imagine 1957 Little Rock, Arkansas, and we're getting in Bill Clinton's backyard here, I'm sure there were men from the 101st Airborne that were called out by Eisenhower that didn't want to do what they had to do but luckily our system of acclimating Americans held and there was a higher authority than just the individual belief on this thing.

TM: How many guardsmen were there who were there involved in the busing that you knew and what percentage of them was opposed to busing? And were there any who were like, yeah, this is the morally correct thing to do? This is justice. This is better for America.

KM: Let me tell you. This is true. This is true. We had one black guy in our guard unit.

TM: Out of how many?

KM: Three hundred and some how or another he had a story, Freddy Johnson, he played basketball with us on Tuesday and Thursday nights at Bruce Middle School because I went out of my way to be friends with Freddy. I felt sorry for him.

DM: There you go feeling sorry.

KM: There it was. There it is. I felt sorry for Freddy, but it got so bad for Freddy Johnson in that guard unit that one night at summer camp he barricaded himself in his room. The white guys who were screaming drunk were throwing beer bottles. We're going to get you, lynch you. And were they kidding? He didn't know. He didn't know. But I mean that was a part of the dynamic of that unit. Freddy came to play basketball one night at Bruce Middle School. He was a foreman trainee at Ford, a white collar job, and he had his briefcase and I'll never forget this. He had his gym trunks and stuff to play basketball, but it was a briefcase and there was a lot of empty space. In the briefcase was a great big pistol and six bullets rolling around. Freddy wouldn't take any chances and I don't blame him. The America Freddy knew could turn on you just like that. There it was. I thought, "Damn!" He was packing heat. I have taught with teachers in this school system, African American teachers, that had weapons in their trunks because they don't know as things spin out of control, you know, "Who's going to help me? Where's the blood if it happens out there by some farmer's field and so I have to have a weapon."

EG: And your position on busing at the time?

KM: Uhhhh. Beavis and Butthead, that's what I'm doing to you. (Laughter) I wasn't for it. I wasn't against it. I didn't really care. I had the African American students and as far as the noble cause that would lead America to a better America, it didn't even cross my mind. The unit was activated. I got out of teaching school and so I didn't have to grade any papers.

TM: And you were young. You were twenty-two.

KM: And I was young.

TM: About twenty-seven, yeah.

KM: Somewhere in there, yeah.

TM: What do you think about now? Do you think it was a benefit or a hindrance?

DM: We talked about this last night.

KM: Something has gone horribly wrong in public schools, horribly wrong. And it is my belief as a history teacher that what has happened is not the fault of a black student I have today nor a white student. What has happened is the civil rights movement has come to the classroom and how that plays out is everything instead of race sensitive is rights sensitive, everything. If you're going to get a kid in trouble, black or white, you better file the Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution, due process of law, and you'd better be sure everything is documented. You better not grab a hold of a kid. I'm fifty-six. When kids misbehave when I was in school, man, I whopped them, pow. They'd come back in wilted and everything heard the sound, so they knew don't mess with so-and-so. You're not going to do that now and I think well, because we have black and white students together you're crossing a bunch of lines there. Anytime now that there is a discipline problem that involves a black white person -- and there are African American teachers at this school -- but if it's black white, race is in the air. Race is in the air. Now hopefully both can steer past that and just look at what happened here. But I think now we are so rights sensitive that we have thrown in the towel on academics and we're hoping, you know, the college people can get this mess straightened out. If they can't, the cops can. I mean you can't come in a room like this and not know, "My God, these kids are slow."

TM: And it's all the kids?

KM: It's all the kids. It's all the kids, and I mean it's ridiculous. My wife was in here today early. I wanted her to come here for this for you guys but you saw six kids just come in and quit, just lay their heads down, they're gone, they're gone. I mean this class has about three hundred in the senior class, back in the ninth grade, this school. Approximately a hundred and fifty will graduate. Hundred and fifty will drop out. They'll just let her go. We're in this superficial environment now where – "Don't use your temper at me to make me pay attention to you. Don't tell me to turn around in that seat. Don't tell me to sit up in that chair." Okay. So here's my mindset. For the kids who are reaching out for help, I'm going to grab as many hands as I can, black or white. For the kids that have quit, if you're not going to reach out and try, then I'm going to have to cut you loose. I honestly say, "Well, when did this public school environment begin to appear?" I graduated in '66, we were learning. But my whole career in terms of a classroom teacher has been dumbing down, dumbing down, dumbing down. And an A is what I say an A is. A lot of the A's and B's are really compromises to stroke the egos of kids that could become discipline problems. "If you'll pass me, give me an D." "Okay, okay." But you're thinking, "Gee." You've got kids that will come up – "I want to be a veterinarian." Middle school -- half the kids want to be veterinarians. Maybe three will actually be veterinarians. You're thinking, "Veterinarian! You can't even spell. How in the heck do you think in the eighth grade you're going to be a vet. You're already giving that up now unless you change everything." Does that relate to busing? I don't know. All I do know is that it's a shock. It is a shock. We are so far off the mark in terms of the

product we're turning out. Our son teaches in college in Baltimore, and he's getting discipline problems in his classes now.

EG: So what do you think has to be done about it?

TM: Also, the parents role in all of this. I mean when I was going up my parents were teachers. I would come home and bitch about a teacher I had and I was getting no sympathy from Mom and Dad. And that I think has changed too.

DM: Oh yes, definitely.

KM: Yes, that's true too.

TM: My father said that if he were ever to teach again it would be in an orphanage.

DM: I just retired as an administrative assistant in elementary school. I was there twenty-two years.

TM: My mother was an elementary school teacher. She just retired two years ago.

DM: One of my principals said we don't have a student problem. We have a parent problem.

TM: That's what my father says and that was why he got out.

KM: They're skeptical and resentful, and they had a bad experience.

DM: You know, and this No Child Left Behind thing is driving me crazy.

KM: It's political rhetoric. It sounds fabulous. I agree that would be the perfect world.

TM: It would be wonderful.

DM: It'd be wonderful if we could take them all and pull them up, so to speak. But you can't do it. I mean a complete family, so to speak -- Mom, Dad, the kids. The mom and the dad interact with the children and they read to them and they take them places on the weekend and educational trips where they're together and the parents are actually coming to school and participating in the field trips and the plays at school and they're concerned about the children's grades, that's a minority anymore. It really is.

KM: Yeah, it is. That's correct. Open house night I might have had, and I have five classes of World Civ, three to five parents in each class. If you have the AP honors, you'll fill it up. They'll fill it up, but the regular old classes, two or three parents and sometimes it ain't the parent. It's mom's boyfriend or dad's girlfriend and the kids now will throw that out there. I remember when I first started teaching I would just go red in the face when a kid would say "my mom's boyfriend" or "my dad's girlfriend." I'd think, "I can't believe you said that." And I was not comfortable. Now it's just like, "Okay, I got you, I understand."

DM: We have actually had family disputes, I guess you could say, like the Hatfields and the McCoys at a parent conference. You'd have Dad and his girlfriend or new wife and mom and the boyfriend or new husband and they're fighting.

TM: Who have very different philosophies about the child?

DM: Oh, we've actually had fighting where I mean the principal had to go to the office and call the police in. It was ridiculous.

KM: Debbie had a panic button under her desk directly to the police and the school board, and they could get authority there quickly.

DM: Yeah, because I mean it was just, like I said, it's just the minority anymore if you have the picture perfect family, so to speak. And what you said about the way the parents look at teachers and view teachers, totally different from the way we were raised. Like you said, if you were saying something against a teacher you didn't get any backup on that. No, the teacher's right. Well now, I mean we've had parents tell us, "I hated school. I hated most of my teachers so that's probably where my kids are getting it."

TM: My father when I was very young I remember this vividly said that there are four types of people who are always right; your parents, teachers, cops, and referees. He said -- because I was a sports kid and he was basketball coach and basketball coach -- "They may not always be right but they're always right." I can remember the first time I played for him, and he was bitching at a referee, and I turned to him. I was on the court. I was the captain of the team. I turned to him like, "Dad, he's right," like that. My father was like, "Oh, you son of a bitch." (Laughter) How do you like them apples!

KM: I think the most useless occupation in America is a referee at a professional wrestling match. Seems like the whole thing's out of control from the start and they're useless.

TM: That's the objective.

KM: Chaos.

EG: So I just have two wrap up questions. Do you have anymore?

TM: I'm all set, I think.

EG: Okay. How would you assess the impact of serving as a National Guardsman on buses has had on your life?

KM: It's been a very positive one. It is a source of pride in the sense that because I've become a teacher of American history. The question that's in a movie or something, "What did you do in the war, daddy?"-- that question. I wasn't in a war but I can backdoor it with, "Well, I was in the Army." Kids don't know enough to say what kind Army are you in. I mean I'm very clear. I was not in Vietnam and draft dodger and that whole thing, but today I brought in my MP patch and I showed them my MP patch and I was so proud of my MP patch. Basically I was just trying all macho-macho, so don't mess with me today. So I showed them my MP patch, and it was really good. Actually, it was the thing that probably kept our marriage together. What I'm saying there is we dated in the '60s. [When] we started dating, Debbie was fourteen and I was sixteen. She's fifty-four and I'm fifty-six. When I graduated from college, everything had basically come too easy and I mean I had the background I described but it seemed like it worked. I had a college degree. I was a schoolteacher. We bought our first home. Here came a healthy child. The one thing that kept me towing the line was I got to go to guard drill every weekend, once a month, not every weekend. I've got to go to summer camp. I knew that, you know, I am a responsible person and I have to stay that way. In those early '70s and Debbie knows I feel this way about that--. I hate the '70s. I hate the '70s. The platform shoes, and I had it all. And thank God, I didn't end up screwing up everything in the '70s. I mean there was dope around. I mean there was everything around that you wanted, and I had just been kind of a naïve guy coming through and now all of a sudden, "Oh, that's what LSD

does." I had no idea. It was the National Guard, you got to tow the line. Probably it was God's master plan, "Kenny, we'd better put you in a military unit because you're going to come unglued otherwise."

EG: Is there anything else that you'd like to add?

KM: Ya'll got any free seats for the North Carolina basketball game?

TM: You're not the first person to ask that.

KM: I told the students all day today these people are--. Michael Jordan played for North Carolina, and "Oh, really." I said they might be early today and they could come as early as two o'clock. I had a kid up here saying, "Mr. Miller, it's five till two. Mr. Miller, it's two." (Laughter)

TM: And we came in, [and the secretary called you and] said, "There are a couple of parents here to see you."

KM: Yeah, I knew it was you all.

TM: I said, "Do we look that old?" I said it would be one thing if this were in elementary school.

KM: I knew it was you all. I was hoping you would come in at two because the class was starting to come unglued and if ya'll had come in they'd have gotten quiet like, you know, "Ya'll got any tickets on you?" (Laughter)

TM: Unfortunately it's hard enough for us to get tickets.

EG: Yeah, it is.

KM: So that's it. That's my story.

EG: I just have a few proper words so I can get the correct spelling. So I'm going to leave [the tape recorder] on just to ensure accuracy. Right away you said Kenny (). Sometimes I can't read my [handwriting].

KM: Kenneth Leroy Miller.

EG: I might have to call you.

KM: That's fine. No problem.

EG: Stewart's Department Store. How do you spell Stewart's?

KM: All right, it's a possessive, Stewart's.

EG: Okay, is it S-T-E-W-A-R-T?

KM: Correct.

EG: Old Shepardsville Road, is that S-H-E-P-A-R-D-S-V-I-L-L-E?

KM: I think it's one L. Is it two L's or one?

DM: It's two L's.

KM: Two L's, there you go.

EG: Norman Ambrose, is that A-M-B-R-O-S-E?

KM: Yes, it is.

EG: And Johnny Polio?

KM: Polio, P-O-L-I-O. His dad ran the biggest booking joint in downtown Louisville, and we used to go clean it up in our senior year at Seneca. They had dice tables and everything. It went all over a city block, nudes painted on the wall. I mean this was just a vice. The cops had to be in on this one. And to get upstairs and this thing went all across the buildings at street level. You know, just a little bitty staircase and you'd have thought it must be an attic up there. Un-uh.

EG: And Bemis or was that one of your references to Bevis and Butthead?

(Laughter)

KM: Oh, Bemis, B-E-M-I-S. It's still there.

EG: Is your name with a Y or an IE?

DM: IE.

EG: Okay. Randy Dye?

KM: D-Y-E.

DM: I dated him. That's why he said that.

KM: Yeah, gee, he made it to North Carolina? He got the Silver Star. He earned his trip to North Carolina.

TM: Now I know why you wanted to be like him. (Laughter)

DM: He's a total loser. He was. He was. He ended up, well, I guess Nam messed him up. He came back drinking and became an alcoholic, drinking heavily and got in a fight in a bar. The guy knocked him backwards off the barstool, and he ended up with a head injury. I mean it was just--.

KM: And his dad had some kind of illness, something that's genetic that aged, white hair and frail body like at forty or something. And Randy now at fifty-seven or something but we saw him at thirty. At thirty, he looked eighty. And I don't know if the hit on the head accelerated or whatever. That's horrible.

EG: Fort Campbell, Kentucky, that's where your basic training was?

KM: For Campbell, Kentucky.

EG: Was that where you were when you were two and a half months away, is that where?

KM: Yes and I went on to Fort Sill, Oklahoma, S-I-L-L. Geronimo is buried at Fort Sill, Oklahoma.

EG: Who is?

KM: Jeronimo.

EG: Jesse Stuart High School, is that S-T-E-W-A-R-T?

DM: No, it's S-T-U-A-R-T.

EG: Hundley?

KM: Hundley, that was the plantation.

DM: Yeah, that was who owned Newburg.

KM: Oh, yeah.

EG: Okay, how do you spell Hundley?

KM: H-U-N-D-L-E-Y.

TM: Oh, right he was the slave owner who owned the land that gave the land to his ().

KM: He gave it to the Tevis family, T-E-V-I-S.

EG: And Charlestown was an ammunition camp?

KM: Plant, ammunition plant, which now is six thousand acres. The government has cut it loose, the Congressmen, and it is right on the Ohio River. It's right among interstates and train tracks, and it is prime development. It will explode in Grove.

DM: And we live out there, yes! (Laughter)

KM: Lee Hamilton was coach here of the 9/11 committee and he cut that loose from the feds.

TM: I like him.

KM: Yeah, he's a good one.

EG: Yeah, he's very good.

KM: If Kerry had picked Lee Hamilton and that would have countered Dick Cheney as the wise old man, that chemistry might have worked better. Might not have. I don't know.

EG: Freddy Johnson, is that?

KM: Freddy Johnson.

EG: F-R-E-D-D-Y?

KM: Yes.

EG: Okay and Johnson?

TM: Johnston, T-O-N?

KM: I think it's-

DM: It was just Johnson, J-O-H-N.

EG: Okay, good, that's all I have.

END OF TAPE 2, SIDE A

END OF INTERVIEW

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