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## **P.1. Southern Journalism: Media and the Movement**

Interview P-0011  
Bob Chapman  
7 December 2010

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## **ABSTRACT – BOB CHAPMAN**

Interviewee: Bob Chapman  
Interviewer: Joshua Davis  
Interview Date: December 7, 2010  
Location: Phone interview  
Length: Approximately 2 hours and 22 minutes

Robert “Bob” Chapman is an urban developer based in Durham, North Carolina. In the early 1970s, he helped members of Durham’s black activist community to establish WAFR, the nation’s first black-owned, non-commercial radio station. He also had a hand in several other radio-related projects in North Carolina around that time. Originally from Florida, Bob Chapman moved to Durham to pursue an undergraduate degree at Duke University in 1965. As a student at Duke, Chapman became increasingly interested in community activism, working with local anti-poverty groups and marching in several Civil Rights protests in Durham. He also developed an interest in radio while working at Duke’s student station, WDBS-AM. Chapman describes WDBS as “very political,” offering a platform for students to voice opinions on topics such as marijuana legalization and the Vietnam War. However, the station’s poor AM frequency limited its audience, so Chapman saddled himself with the task of switching the station to a stronger FM signal. After running into some trouble, he eventually negotiated the purchase of WSRC (“Southern Radio Corporation”), Durham’s white-owned, black-oriented station. As media outlets catering to Durham’s black population were limited, the move to sell to Duke was met with strong criticism from the station’s listeners. When an angry and determined Ralph Williams, contacted him in protest, Chapman proposed that they work together to start a new black-owned station. He advised Williams and others in setting up a nonprofit corporation and applying for federal grant money, which the group secured after a trip to meet with various radio industry professionals in Washington DC. With the help of a HEW grant, the group launched the country’s first black-owned, non-commercial radio station, WAFR (“Wave Africa”), in 1971. Located at 336½ East Pettigrew Street, WAFR featured politically-engaged Black Power programming, which included music and news sourced both locally and internationally.

Despite early support from Washington, WAFR’s run was short-lived. Chapman cites music choices, changing attitudes, and poor management for the eventual demise of the station. In 1975, station management fired the board of directors, and Chapman filed a lawsuit against them in response. By 1976, WAFR had ceased broadcasting. Chapman remained in Durham after graduating from Duke in 1971, and continued to work on media-related projects in the area. He helped establish WVSP in Warrenton, NC, another black-owned station, dedicated to community development and justice work. He also

worked to start WTWR, “Triangle Women’s Radio,” but the project never came into fruition. In this interview, Chapman shares his impressions of WAFR founders Ralph Williams, Robert Spruill, Obataiye Akinwale, and Charles Copeland. He also discusses the negotiations that led WAFR to receive funding, and the work behind its organizational structure.

**TRANSCRIPT: Bob Chapman**

Interviewee:	Bob Chapman
Interviewer:	Joshua Davis
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**START OF INTERVIEW**

Joshua Davis: So, like I said, I’m going to start recording. I’m Josh Davis. I’m speaking with Robert Chapman, Bob Chapman. It is December the 7<sup>th</sup>, 2010, and I’m doing this interview on behalf of the Southern Oral History Program. We’re going to be talking about WAFR.

And I guess I ask most people, if they don’t mind, to start by talking a little bit about your background and where you came from and, you know, your childhood, whatever—whatever happened before you got to doing radio.

Bob Chapman: Oh, let’s see. I grew up in Florida and went off to boarding school in Chattanooga, Tennessee, at a place called McCauley, and then got into Duke, not because I was a particularly good student, but my dad had gone to Duke, and the guy who became the director of admissions at Duke was his roommate when he was there. So, that was a nice help to my career.

And when I got to college, I took a great interest in the student radio station, which was WDBS, and that was my main student activity, although I worked a little bit on actually some of the various antipoverty programs that were going at the time. There was a tutoring program and a couple of other things that I got involved with that were connected with Operation Breakthrough in Durham.

And I was in a few of the Civil Rights marches in '68. There was a boycott of the downtown merchants in Durham, and I actually was one of three or four white people that was in a pretty tense situation in a march that went from old St. Joseph's to downtown in, I guess it was '67, maybe it was '68. It may have been '66, actually, the year of the Detroit riots, whenever that was. And the National Guard was out, and there was a lot of tension. So, I got to know Durham a little bit, and—[phone rings] can you hold on just one second?

JD: Sure. I'll turn off the recording, too.

BC: Alright. Just one second. I'm sorry.

JD: No problem.

[Recording stops and then resumes]

BC: Sorry. That was somebody I was waiting to hear from.

JD: Not a problem.

BC: Actually, my wife was waiting to hear from, and I couldn't pass it up.

So, the radio station was quite an experience. I was the manager of the radio station in '68 when we had, when Dr. King was shot, and there was a major demonstration at Duke, which we at the radio station were sort of involved in, shall we say, fomenting, which was called the Vigil, in which the students all went on strike and

started sleeping on—actually, it started out by their taking over the president's house, President Knight.

JD: Yeah.

BC: And I was in the march as a reporter, and we managed to set up a studio in one of his guest bedrooms. And we were really sort of the only link between that demonstration, or the takeover, and the rest of the student body. And by the time we left, voted to leave the house, we were met by more than a thousand other students who wouldn't have known about what was happening inside except because of the radio coverage that we did.

The station was called a carrier current station, which meant that it broadcast through the electric wires of the dorms on 560 AM. It really had a pretty pitiful signal. You know, you had to listen to it on AM radio, and there was a lot of static, and it wasn't very strong. But there were a couple of guys at the station, particularly a man named Evans Wetmore—

JD: Yeah.

BC: Who—I had a knack for knowing how to start things. It just sort of came out through my family, you know, the whole, you know, how you make things happen, how you talk people into supporting ideas, and so forth, and organizing them and starting them. And he was pushing me constantly to figure out a way to get a license for WDBS so that we could broadcast beyond just the dorms. And so, I agreed to do that.

JD: He was an engineer? Or a student?

BC: Yeah. He is an engineer. He actually is now—he lives in Hollywood now. He's fairly well-known in the motion picture industry now. He got several awards. He

restored all the old Fox Movietone newsreels from the 1920s and '30s and saved them. And he's a very focused technical guy. He was an engineering student at Duke.

And he and Jim Davis both had their first-class radio licenses, which is a fairly hard license to get, or it was at that time. And they worked for the station and they were always improving it. It was over in Bivins Building on the East Campus of Duke.

JD: Right.

BC: And so, I approached the owners of the FM station in Durham. It was called WDNC-FM, which was owned by the Rollins family that owned the *Durham Morning Herald* and the *Durham Sun* papers. And I met with Steve Rollins, and we got down to the point of agreeing on a price where we were going to buy their FM. Their FM was just awful. It was a totally automated station. I think—they've changed the call letters since then to WDCG. It was a great frequency. It had a very strong signal. I can't remember how many watts it was, but it was, you know, let's say it was 50,000 watts. It was a powerful station.

And so, I had talked to Chuck Huestis, who was the vice-president for business and finance at Duke and made a proposal that Duke lend money to a new corporation and we use the money to buy the license and the transmitter and upgrade our facility.

JD: What year was that?

BC: Let me think. Just one second. I actually went back and did a little calendar work just to see if I could get my years right. I'm thinking that would have been early '69 or late—that would have been in the fall of '69 probably, or the—roughly.

JD: When did you start at Duke?

BC: I started in '65.

JD: Okay.

BC: Oddly enough, I was out of college for a year. My grades weren't very good, and I spent a year of '68-69 in New York City working for an advertising agency. I was involved in the *Mad Men* scene, which was, by the way, totally accurate.

JD: Yeah.

BC: And my specialty—I worked for a company that was trying to advertise movies to college students, and my specific responsibility, because I had been the general manager of WDBS-AM, was relationships with college radio stations. And there were—I decided that the best models for college radio were the stations at Harvard, Yale, and Princeton, which were WHRB, WYBC, and I think it was WPRB, which all three were self-sustaining nonprofit corporations that had commercial FM licenses, which was sort of an unusual thing. It wasn't totally unheard of, but it was—

JD: Commercial licenses?

BC: Yeah, they had commercial licenses, meaning that they sold ads.

JD: Yeah, right.

BC: Which—because universities at that time pretty much had no interest, if they were private universities, in subsidizing anything. Harvard had a motto, which Duke totally adopted, which was called, “Every tub on its own bottom,” ETOB, which meant if you wanted to do something at Duke, you were welcome to do it, as long as you could figure out who was going to pay for it other than the University.

And so, Duke actually had a study done, the FM, before I got there in like '64, a frequency search to get the license which is now held by WSHA, which could have been a 50,000-watt FM station on the noncommercial band. I think it's 89.1 or something like

that. And the administration turned it down and said, “We don’t want to put money into a pit,” you know, because it was noncommercial. So, we knew we couldn’t get a nonprofit, a noncommercial station going.

So, that was going pretty well, and Steve Rollins—we shook hands on it, and he said, “I’ll try to get it through my board, and I think we can do this.” And then, the bad news was that, oh, a month or two later, he called me back and said, “Our board has turned it down. We’re not going to sell the station.”

JD: Steve Rollins was the manager at DNC?

BC: No. Steve Rollins, R-O-L-L-I-N-S, was the owner. He was a Duke supporter. He actually was the volunteer fencing coach at Duke. And his family, the Rollins family, had started the paper, and the paper had bought these licenses in the ’40s.

JD: The *Morning Herald*?

BC: Yeah.

JD: Okay.

BD: And so—no, the manager was a guy named Frank Jarman, who was pretty much like a living fossil. I mean, he just, he had—I don’t want to say anything negative about him but [laughs] it was like—

JD: He was old.

BD: He was—well, he just had no, not much imagination. But anyway, so—and the stations weren’t that good. They were really awful. WDNC-FM ran just nonstop elevator music all day long from this automation system.

And so, we were left with—we’d gotten up some steam, you know, gotten everybody enthusiastic about having a radio station, and then all of a sudden, there was



none to buy. And I had met a man named Jim Mayes, M-A-Y-E-S, who had put together a group of dentists in Durham to invest in starting WSRC, which stood for Southern Radio Corporation.

JD: Right.

BC: And it was run out of a sort of a, not quite a trailer, but it was a little modular hut out on East Geer Street. [Later in the interview, he corrects the location to East Club.]

JD: Which street?

BC: The FM was like—I can't remember the frequency. I'm going to say it was 1320 or something.

JD: Okay.

BC: The license is still—I think it still exists. But it was a day-timer.

JD: Yeah.

BC: And because it was a day-timer, they bought the FM license, or they applied for and got from scratch what's called a Class C FM license, which meant maximum of 3,000 watts, maximum of 300-foot tower, a 300-foot tower. And so, they would simulcast all day long the same thing on AM and FM.

And it was a hundred percent dedicated to the black community from the standpoint of sort of, you know—it wasn't the kind of soul music that white college boys listened to; it was much more hardcore than that. But then, they had a lot of unusual shows like the daily obituary column, where they would read all the obituaries.

JD: Yeah.

BC: It was an interesting station to listen to. And Ervin Hester was their main DJ.

JD: Yeah.

BC: Ervin L., they called him.

JD: I talked to him a few weeks ago.

BC: Oh, you did?

JD: He's still in Durham, yeah.

BC: He went to work for the TV station after that for quite a while.

JD: Yeah. Yeah, I think he was the first black news anchor in the state.

BC: I don't think he was a news anchor. I don't remember. I think he was more like a reporter.

JD: Okay.

BC: He could have been. He may have been an anchor. I don't know.

JD: Or first black TV newsman, just in general.

BC: Um-hmm, I'm sure. And so, anyway, I asked Jim Mayes if they would sell us the license.

JD: And when was that?

BC: I'm sure we're up till, ah, let's see. That would have been probably—hold on just one second. Let me look back at my—I'm going to say it probably would have been, again, the fall of—it probably was the spring of '70.

JD: Okay.

BC: It probably was February or March of '70. I know that he called me—actually, I was on Christmas—it would have been right before Christmas, so it would have been Christmas of '69, because I was home for break and I got the call from him, saying that his board had turned down our offer.

JD: Rollins did?

BC: And I was talking to my dad, and I said, “What do I do?” And he said, “Well, call him up and just blow your top. Just get really angry with him, scream at him! Tell him you’ve worked your tail off, and money is hard to—.” Oh, no, what he—he said he wanted more money! That was it.

JD: This is Rollins you’re referring to, or Mayes?

BC: No, this is Jim Mayes.

JD: Okay, and this was around Christmas of ’69?

BC: Right.

JD: And you had approached him? The station wasn’t for sale. You just offered.

BC: No, the station wasn’t for sale. I had an indirect connection with one of the dentists that was on his board, Dr. Willis. Dr. Guy, G-U-Y, Willis was a cousin of one of my dad’s business partners, and so I was able to have a little bit of influence through the owners, although I didn’t know the rest of the owners, but they were all dentists.

And so, anyway, we agreed on a price after I screamed at him, and he stuck to the original amount we had offered, which was \$60,000 for the license. And then, we went up before the board of—I worked on a proposal all spring of ’70. And the Duke board of trustees met, I think it was July tenth of ’70, and they voted down our proposal.

JD: Huh. Wow.

BC: [Laughs] And so I had a—you know, we were going to have this victory celebration. I talked the entire radio station staff into staying over for the summer, because we were going to get this license and get the FCC to approve the transfer.

So, at the time, Terry Sanford had become president of Duke, and he was very much in favor of the idea of there being a student FM station. He was a great guy in just

many, many, many ways. You know, he was always willing to give you enough rope to hang yourself. And he was just very openminded, the opposite of most academics, or any, all academics.

And so, he—the board voted it down, said they didn't think it was a good idea. And I think we had asked for—I think we were asking for \$120,000 or \$125,000. So, I went to see Huestis and said, "We're totally committed to doing this. What if we resubmit for less money?" And so, he said, "Well, the executive committee is still in town," or something.

It was during summer school, which was in July, and I had two courses that I was taking in summer school, and I hadn't done much work because I'd been working on the radio station, and finals were like the next two days away. And so, I went to—we had a wake party, which was going to be the celebration, and I said, "You know, we could resubmit this, but I've got to work on my—I haven't studied at all, and I've got to read all this material or I'm going to flunk out."

And the guys said, "Look, what's the topic?" And I told them. And they said, "Well, if you will work and redo the proposal," which involved all these repayment tables and, you know, it was, you know, two or three days of solid work, "we will go do your studying for you."

JD: Who said that?

BC: All the other guys at the station, Jim Maher, M-A-H-E-R, and Bob Conroy, and Scott Evans, all these guys who had stayed for the summer to run the station.

JD: Okay.

BC: And so, they went to the library, and there was a thing called *Book Review Digest*, and they took all the reading that I hadn't done and they looked up all the books. And then, they read the *Book Review Digest* and boiled these things down to, like, five-sentence synopses of all the books I hadn't read.

JD: Right.

BC: [Laughing] And so, they met me one hour before the final. [Laughter]

JD: Which class was this?

BC: [Laughing] And they literally—I was delirious, because I had finished the redone proposal. And so, they read me the stuff, and I went in and I got an A on the test! [Laughs]

JD: Wow.

BC: It was some sociology course. Or maybe I got a B+, but I got a good grade on it. So, that was a different way to learn.

Anyway, so Terry Sanford intervened. And we cut the number down, I think to \$90,000 or \$80,000 or \$70,000 or something. We were going on mono instead of stereo and, you know, everything. And so, he got the executive committee to reverse itself, and then he said, "Now, tell me how much money you really need." "We really need the amount we said, \$120,000," or something like that. I can't remember; it may have been \$105,000. It was somewhere over \$100,000. And he said, "Okay, we can work it out." And it went through, and I passed the course.

So, we were off and running. So, then the next job was filing for the transfer of the license. And he gave us the name, Terry gave us the name of a lawyer in Washington to help us, who had done the WLBT case in Jackson, Mississippi, in which the Federal

Communications Commission had *not* renewed the license of a local TV station in Jackson, because of lack of community input into their programming or something like that. So, this guy was a powerful attorney, nice guy.

JD: Do you remember his name?

BC: It would take me a while to remember that name, but he didn't really do anything. We wrote the whole application, and we had to do a community needs assessment, which involved interviewing dozens of people. It was a lot of work.

JD: Who was writing that application? You?

BC: Me and—I did all the nontechnical part, and then Evans Wetmore and Jim Davis did the engineering. And we had to find a place to put the tower, also, which was another story. But WSRC let us use their tower for a while, so we actually were able to go on the air from the top of their 100-foot tower before we built our new tower, which was out on Rose of Sharon Road. But I think that was a separate application. That was a separate application to build the new tower.

And so, I sent it. Oh, the guy's name was—no, no, no, that's wrong, wrong name. In the meantime, Huestis had given me a job working for Duke so that I could afford to stay in Durham that summer. And I worked for a wonderful man named Joe Pietrantonio, who had just started at Duke, who was in charge of all the stuff that nobody else had thought about. And he put me in charge of solving the Duke parking problem. [Laughs] That was my summer job, which was a little beyond what I was capable of doing, but I did spend a lot of time counting parking spaces.

And so, we got the application filed. We had to run ads in the paper and we had to announce it on WSRC, Application for Transfer of Control, it was called. And I had been

to Washington a few times, knew some people in the FCC bureaucracy because of my previous work in New York with college radio stations. So, we got this thing filed, and then about—

JD: When was it filed?

BC: I'm going to say it was probably in August of '70, maybe. Let's see, yeah. So, maybe September of '70, maybe—September 15<sup>th</sup> of '70 sort of sticks in my mind. And so, but I think I was—well, it was probably in the summer, because I remember I was still working for Joe Pietrantonio.

And we had a black man named Steve Roberts, who harassed us a lot, who—nice guy. He became sort of a friend after a while. And we ended up—we agreed that he would get a show on the station.

JD: Who was he?

BC: He was—he just sort of came out of nowhere. He liked a certain kind of jazz music—not quite; it was more like sappy ballad stuff. But Steve was a—you know, other than the fact that he was a black man—and, you know, you've got to realize this was a time I think Duke probably had twenty black students at that point at the most. This was the very beginning of that period.

JD: Was he a student or just someone from the community?

BC: I think he was a student at NCC—oh, I know. He actually had a teaching license and he worked out at a school in Durham called the Wright School, which was a re-education school for problem kids in the fifth-grade level or something like that, run by the state. And one of—and Bob Conroy's wife, Liz, worked there, and she knew him. And that's how he found out about it.

JD: About the station?

BC: Yeah. And so, I suspected that we might run into problems because WSRC was a, um, formatted for black community. And I got this call from—probably in mid-August, right after we filed this thing from—oh, actually, Steve Roberts filed a protest petition.

JD: To the FCC?

BC: To the FCC, and he did twenty-one copies of it and—and so, the outcome of his withdrawing that petition was that he got a show on the station.

JD: So, how had he been harassing you? What had he been saying to you before he filed that—?

BC: Well, I was probably overstating. I think it was—my recollection was that we're just, you know, we're sailing along, and all of a sudden, we have this protest petition that he files sort of out of the blue.

JD: So, he had—

BC: I think that may have been the first contact. In fact, that *was* the first contact was when Steve filed the petition.

JD: Did other people in the black community know about this potential transfer yet, or was he one—?

BC: No. Steve was the first one. And Steve ended up being very happy and he withdrew his petition. Then I got a call totally out of the blue from Ralph Williams.

JD: Right. And had you met him before?

BC: No, uh-uh. And so, I was over on West Campus, and I said, "How about meeting me over at the radio station," which was on East Campus.



JD: What did he say to you on the phone?

BC: He said, "We're going to stop you. We're going to prevent you from doing the transfer. We're opposed to it."

JD: Who was "we"?

BC: Ralph—uh, I'm not sure that I really know who "we" was at that point. Spruill may have been—he may have mentioned Spruill. I don't remember. But I know that I—I said to them that we would, we should meet.

JD: Yeah.

BC: And so, I got held up. We had a five o'clock meeting or a six o'clock meeting at the radio station. The sun is up quite late in August, and I got there seventeen minutes late. And there was a sign on the door that said, "We came." [Laughter] That was it. You know, the door was locked. And so, we got started off on a bad, [laughs] on the wrong foot. And so, since then I've always said, you know, "I'll give anybody seventeen minutes." [Laughter]

But so, somehow or another, I dug them up and I said, "Look, rather than preventing WDBS from buying WSRC-FM, why don't you let me start a station for you?" Because I actually had—I was listed as project consultant for WDBS, and I was paid, I think it was a two and a half percent fee, to do all that work—of the total cost. I had a deal with them of some sort. And maybe I didn't, but anyway, that's what I proposed to Spruill and Ralph.

And so, you know, they said, "How would you pay for it?" And I said, "There is a program called the Noncommercial Broadcasting Facilities Program of the U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare in Washington, which grants money to buy

facilities for educational radio stations. And we'll do a noncommercial license, and we'll put in an application to them."

And so, we agreed to work together. And we decided that we would call the station WSCW, I think was the first name, which was going to be Spruill, Chapman, and Williams. [Laughter] But it turned out there was already a WSCW.

JD: Can I rewind just for a second?

BC: What? Yeah.

[Recording stops and then resumes]

JD: Just to follow up on something you said before, now Spruill and/or Williams, did they have the idea of starting a radio station before they spoke to you?

BC: I don't think so. My recollection—and, you know, again you've got to realize this is what, forty years ago, something like that—was that they wanted to stop, and they certainly may have had such an idea. I wouldn't discount the fact that they may have talked about wanting one or something like that. But their plan was not, to my knowledge, to do anything other than prevent WSRC from changing hands and no longer being a black-formatted station.

JD: And had they spoken with Steve Roberts? Or how did they know?

BC: I don't think—well, we had to run ads on WSRC and we had to run ads in the paper.

JD: That said what?

BC: That said, "This is to notify that we've filed an application for transfer of control of this license to WDBS, Inc."

JD: Ah! Okay.

BC: I suspect that would be how they found out about it. I don't know.

JD: Okay, I didn't know about that. Yeah, no, this is actually very, very good, what you're remembering, because everyone else's memories of this kind of stage of the process are very fuzzy. And so, you're—

BC: Well, I was very intentionally trying to stay out of the limelight. I mean, I didn't want anybody to know that I was involved with this, from the standpoint of just—it gave me more freedom to operate if I was never the frontman on anything.

JD: But you had expected that there might be some kind of backlash or some kind of—?

BC: Well, yeah. Logically, when you think, you know, there's only one and a half black-oriented stations in this town that's fifty percent black, and there's five stations, you know, you'd think anybody could have figured that out. And we didn't want to buy WSRC. We wanted to buy WDNC.

JD: Right.

BC: But then, we got into motion and—so, anyway. So, it seemed like a good outcome, which would be to let's have America's first black community-controlled radio station.

JD: You knew it was going to be the first one?

BC: Yeah. There weren't any others. I was sort of a—I mean, broadcasting was sort of my hobby. You know, I read *Broadcasting Magazine*, *Broadcasting Yearbook*, all that stuff.

JD: Oh, so you were plugged into the industry already.

BC: Oh, yeah. And I had been general manager of the station for a couple of years, I mean, so.

JD: Tell me a little bit about DBS. What kind of—I mean, I know it was a college station, but what were you doing on the station? What was being played? What would people—what was a typical day on DBS?

BC: Well, when it was an AM station, it was definitely a rock-and-roll station. I think we had one classical show on Sunday called the “University Hour.” But it was sixties rock, I mean, which is still, you know, you can still turn on the radio and hear what we were playing, because it was definitely classic. And when we went to FM, there was—during my year in New York, I had been very much influenced by several stations there. I had really gotten into the freeform radio that was WBAI, which was Pacifica.

JD: Right.

BC: And I gotten into the progressive rock, which was W—was it MMR? [Note: WNEW-FM] Uh, “Rosko.” My ad agency actually got to know all these guys. Bill Mercer was Rosko, and Alison Steele, the “Nightbird,” who came on after Rosko. You know, this was—we’re talking about 1968. This was the highpoint, in terms of what was called the underground progressive music. And so, I developed some theories about what “progressive” meant, but they were all copied from them. I mean, I didn’t have any creative or new ideas.

Plus, I was living in Florida at the time, and there was a great station in Orlando called WORJ, which totally got it. And it was all about, you know, playing longer cuts and having a progression in the musical experience, so that there was implication in each song of what you’d hear next. And so, you were telling a story over an extended period of

time. You know, and the trick was to try to get the last note of one tune to be the first note of the next tune, so that people listening didn't even really notice that you'd, you know, gone to a different artist.

And so, you know, it was multi-layered, as opposed to standard Top 40, which was what we were trying not to be. I mean, Top 40 was jingles and sandwich format and Number One, One, One, One, and all that stuff. I actually wrote a story about all this—I just remembered—in a book called *The Carologue*.

JD: *The Carologue*?

BC: There was a North Carolina version of the *Whole Earth Catalogue*.

JD: Oh, I didn't know that.

BC: And it came out in—

JD: Really? Huh.

BC: It came out in like 1972 or something like that, or '71, or '73, somewhere in there. And it looked like the *Whole Earth Catalogue*, except it had a brown cover. So, you might want to look that up and see if it's around.

JD: How do you spell that? Oh, I think I just found it.

BC: C-A-R-O-L-O-G-U-E.

JD: This is news to me. I just found it in the UNC catalogue. I'm going to have to check this out.

BC: Yeah, I wrote a two-page story about the whole thing with DBS, and what they did, and what radio was about, like, in the South. And I really—I said something really good about a particular guy who was on a station in Greensboro, and *ten* years later, my phone rang, and this guy said, "Hi. I'm Weldon G. Smith," I think his name

was. And I said, “That rings a bell.” And he said, “Yeah, you don’t know me, but you changed my life. My wife tracked me down because of what she read about me in that story, and we’ve been happily married ever since!” [Laughter] But anyway, so.

JD: Was DBS, was it political?

BC: Very political. Everything we were doing was trying to be very antiwar. We endorsed the legalization of marijuana. We were against the Vietnam War. We were, you know, everything—you know, we covered all the politics. We were against the, you know, when the whole My Lai thing came out. I mean, we were—we actually got—have you ever seen the movie *Born on the Fourth of July*?

JD: Yeah. It’s been a while.

BC: Okay. Well, there’s a scene in there where Ron Kovic gets into the Republican convention in Miami Beach and gets thrown out.

JD: Yeah.

BC: His press credentials were from WDBS. I got him his press credentials.

JD: Oh, wow! Cool.

BC: That kind of thing.

JD: So, DBS was political in both incarnations? As a carrier station, was it also political?

BC: Yeah, it definitely was because of the Vigil. That’s when it all changed. But, I mean, everybody was political. This was the ’60s.

JD: But how did you get into politics? I mean—

BC: Well, just, you know, sort of a—segregation, you know, what’s right and what’s wrong, I mean, how do you explain this?

JD: Well, I guess I'm kind of wondering—

BC: It was during the Civil Rights Movement, and then that morphed—you know, that all morphed into the Antiwar Movement, which was, you know, from a selfish standpoint, an Anti-Draft Movement.

JD: Right. But were you exposed to the Civil Rights Movement before you came to Durham?

BC: I was. When I was a tenth-grader or a ninth-grader, the city of St. Petersburg had a—Dr. King was doing a lot of stuff in St. Augustine, Florida, and the Freedom Riders were out in Mississippi on Greyhound buses. And I remember coming out of the Florida theater, and there was a huge black boycott of the Florida theater that I didn't know about, but there was a giant group of people. And one guy was holding a sign saying, "The first person to die in the American Revolution was a black man," Crispus Attucks.

JD: Yeah.

BC: And all this stuff—I had never heard any of this stuff. And so, a couple of months later, a friend of mine, my best friend in junior high school, and I were down swimming in the city pool, down—it was called the Spa Pool, which was clearly segregated, as were all beaches and pools in Florida at that point. And four or five young black guys, probably in their twenties, walked through the door in their swimsuits, went up to the top of the high dive, and did beautiful dives into the pool. And, you know, the pool was completely full of white people. And it was like, you know, oil in water. The white people just like, *wheeww*, [laughs] they were out, and my friend and I were the

only two who stayed in the pool. And, you know, “What’s going on here? This is crazy!” And the very next day, the city closed the pool.

JD: Wow.

BC: You know? It never reopened. They tore it down.

JD: Wow.

BC: So, yeah, I was exposed to it.

JD: Was your family political at all? Were your parents political?

BC: I think they were more—I think they were not racists. They didn’t use the n-word or, you know, we were taught to be polite. We sort of felt that we had a better attitude toward black people than some of our friends who were maybe even Northerners, you know. But it was a much—they were just, you know, people are people. And we didn’t have any—I remember my grandfather owned a house in Waynesville, North Carolina, up on a mountainside. And the guy who—named Sumter Lowry was a segregationist candidate in the Democrat party for the governor of Florida, and he almost won. And I remember my granddad confronting him about it, saying, “This is totally wrong,” you know. And he was ostracized by the people at the club for doing that. So, a little bit of that ran in the family going way back.

JD: A country club, or what kind of club was that?

BC: Oh, it was just, you know, a small golf club up on the side of the mountain near Waynesville.

JD: Why was that Florida governor’s candidate in North Carolina?

BC: All Floridians of any status in the ’50s and ’60s had houses in the mountains of North Carolina in the summer, because it’s pre-air conditioning. And, you know, it sort



of runs in the family a little bit. I had a great-great-great-grandfather on my mother's side who was killed on the steps of the Georgia capital for advocating a law that would have outlawed the renting of prisoners as a substitute for slavery by an irate landowner. And he actually was sort of a civil rights hero in Atlanta for many years in the black community. So, it sort of came down through the family.

JD: Wow, interesting. So, when you got to Durham and started doing things like joining this black boycott of downtown merchants, how were you received as one of the very few whites?

BC: Well, I had the privilege of being a Duke student, you know. I mean, I could blend in and blend out. It wasn't any real sacrifice on my part, other than the one time we were all standing on City Hall, and the rocks started flying on the front porch. And a guy who later worked for AFR—because, you know, these pickup trucks with German sheperds and Klansmen drove up to the front of the City Hall, [phone rings] and when the rocks started flying [phone rings] a brick actually hit a black man in the head, and it came within an inch of turning into bloody mayhem. And some—the marshalls, who were the, you know, parade organizers, held back the group. And a black man whose name was Ralph—it wasn't Ralph Williams, but he helped on the station a little later on, I can't remember what his name was, Ralph, oh gosh—took me and another white guy under his arm, literally, and we ran through the streets of Durham, and he protected us, and we ended up spending the night in the basement of St. Joseph's.

JD: AME?

BC: Yeah.

JD: What year was that?

BC: I'm guessing that was '66 or '67, whenever the Watts Riots were and the Detroit Riots. It could have even been '65. I really don't remember.

JD: Were you making contacts in the black community? I mean, did you know—?

BC: Well, yeah, a little bit through these antipoverty programs. They were called—I wish I could remember the name of—they actually paid me like thirty dollars a month to be a tutor.

JD: Operation Breakthrough, right?

BC: Yeah, but it had a subset that was called—oh, it was called YES, youth educational services. It was part of Operation Breakthrough. And they recruited college students to be tutors. And I had like a couple of—Ricky Roberts, who lived in Walltown, and another twelve-year-old black kid became like my—I don't know what you call, tutee, or whatever.

JD: Were there other white tutors, or were you one of a few?

BC: Oh, there were probably twenty at Duke. I mean, this was, you know, it was definitely not the prevalent concern.

JD: Yeah. Interesting.

BC: So, anyway, back to where—where were we in the radio chronicles?

JD: Well, you mentioned—and this is all good background. I don't mean to break up the flow of it, but this background helps a lot. You had mentioned that the initial name for the station that was proposed was W—

BC: There were three or four—we had to have a list of names to submit to the FCC. And I think that was one of them, was WSCW, Spruill, Chapman, and Williams.

And the other was WRBG, red, black, and green, which were the colors of the Pan-African flag or something like that.

JD: Yeah.

BC: And I think WAFR was like the last choice, but all the rest were either taken or we couldn't get them for one reason or another. So, the—so, I said to these guys, “Let's start a 501(c)3. Actually, let's start a nonprofit corporation first, and then let's apply for a 501(c)3, and then let's apply for this grant from Washington, from HEW.” And they agreed. We got together, and they said, “Let's check it out.”

So, we rode the bus, we rode the Greyhound bus to—and I'm getting—I also worked with a group called Triangle Women's Radio that was trying to do the same thing a little later on, and I know that we went on the bus. No, we may have flown. I can't remember. It may have not been the bus. But anyway, we went to DC, and we met with everybody. We met with HEW, we met with FCC, we met with somebody at the National Association of Broadcasters, somebody at—oh, and NPR was just getting started.

JD: Right.

BC: And we met the guys starting NPR. It didn't exist yet. And so, we were—the two guys starting it, Bill Siemering, who had been the head of Minnesota Public Radio, and Fred Calland. And they sort of took us under their arms and said, “This is a great idea.”

JD: Who is “us”?

BC: This would be me and Ralph and Robert.

JD: All three of you went up to DC?

BC: Yeah.

JD: Ah, okay.

BC: And so, they said, “If you can do this, we will let you be our NPR station,” because WUNC was not on the air at that point. It had been off the air for ten years.

JD: Yeah.

BC: It was run by the Department of RTVMP, which I would always describe as the place where all the doors are locked and everybody says no. It was a very dead—it like a living—it was like a mausoleum of a place.

JD: Which place? RDNV?

BC: RTVMP: Radio, Television and Motion Pictures Department of the UNC college.

JD: Right, what became the Communications Department.

BC: I thought they had lost it entirely, which it should have been. It was useless. But anyway, they were responsible for not running the radio station. They sort of let it go into the ground, and then they just gave up on it. And so, we were to become the NPR station. So, we got the grant.

JD: The HEW grant?

BC: [Laughing] The HEW grant. And there was a little foreshadowing that went on in my mind of probably—I learned a lot in this deal of things that I probably could have done differently, [laughing] because, and this is—I’ve got to tell you some stuff, and I don’t want it in the book. It has to be totally off the record.

JD: Okay.

BC: Do you mind? Do you mind?

JD: Now, should I turn off the recorder?

BC: Turn the recorder off.

JD: Yeah. I'll turn off the recording right now.

[Recording stops and then resumes]

JD: Yeah. When did you—?

BC: Okay.

JD: When did you get the license?

BC: We got the license—we got WAFR on the air, broadcasting, before we got WDBS on the air, broadcasting. I know that.

JD: Yeah. I think the date I've seen is September of '71.

BC: That's right.

JD: For when it went on the air, but—

BC: No, I think DBS went on the air—I think I looked this up. I have DBS signing on on May 17<sup>th</sup> of '71.

JD: Well, that's what I also saw in an article online about DBS.

BC: And I know that we actually had AFR licensed and built before DBS went on. It may have been that we got our license for AFR before—

JD: Yeah.

BC: Before DBS got its license. But basically that was my deal with them, is I'll get you a station before we go on.

JD: Well, what kind of station—did you know? What were they planning about what kind of station it was going to be?

BC: I stayed out of that pretty much entirely.

JD: Yeah.

BC: My theory was: Give them the very best facility in the world. And we really stretched that money. We had a carpenter who was a black Muslim named Blonnie Fonville, and he built the whole station for \$10,000, just put his love and sweat and tears into it, and he was a superb craftsman. And we had been able to rent from a guy named Ben Perry, who ran the Redevelopment Commission of Durham, the second floor of a beautiful building, which was the Prince Hall Masonic Temple on 336½—which we loved that ½ because it gave us a little cache on all our grant applications—336½ East Pettigrew Street, and we had the entire second floor. It was an extremely well-built building. It was all masonry steel with hollow tile walls for all the rooms and plaster. So, we had to go out and [0:54:39] all this hollow tile, or lots of it, and lots of places it didn't.

But I was so proud of that station, because we were directly across the street from the rail yards, and several times a day they would hump a train, which meant that they would roll an empty train into a parked train to couple it, and it was the loudest sound you can imagine, like *Ka-Boom!* You know? And our design goal was to build soundproof studios, and you couldn't hear a murmur. They were perfect! And we built a nice control room and a beautiful studio room and then a production room, a transmitter room, we had three offices in the front. I was sort of—I really only worked there for a few months, you know, just to get the kinks out, because I was also running DBS.

And anyway, so we got the grant. Jim Davis did the engineering. Evans tended to want to overbuild everything, and he got IBM to give us this floating floor, computer floor, so we had a second—on top of the actual floor, there was this real contraption, where this second floor that's on all these posts that have screws so that you could pick up the tiles and lay the wires under it. And he got General Telephone, GTE, to donate an

entire telephone switch—[hammering in background] Hey, Bob!—which he wanted to have—he was always on the edge of being *the* latest, coolest of all. And so, he wanted to have it so that you could have this panel where you pushed a button and everything rerouted through this telephone switch. And so, there was a whole room with this giant switch in it that he was working on.

And then, we had excellent equipment, Gates equipment. We had a board called the President, which was like six feet long, and it was very impressive. And then, Evans went—after I left, he went and bought even better equipment, McCurdy. I think they got another grant from HEW maybe to buy some more equipment later.

JD: And he was also an engineer for the station, like a secondary one?

BC: He actually worked for the station after—he came back to Durham. He had worked for, I think, PBS in Washington, helping them get going. He worked in L’Enfant Plaza at their main place at some point. And I think he came back to Durham and worked at AFR for six months or so, but they fell out at some point.

JD: Is he a white guy or a black guy?

BC: He’s white.

JD: Okay.

BC: I noticed in the *Ebony* magazine, they showed a picture of North Carolina’s only black first-class [0:57:48] engineer.

JD: Yeah, that guy, Roosevelt—I can’t remember from the article, but, yeah, I saw that.

BC: I don’t recall ever meeting him, but I disassociated with AFR. We fell out at some—later on.

JD: Yeah. I know that guy wasn't involved at first.

BC: No. No, he wasn't. The people involved were Charles Copeland, who called himself, who used an African name of Obataiye Akinwale.

JD: Yeah.

BC: Obataiye Akinwale; and Don Baker, who was Shanga Sadiki; and then there was a real nice guy who used the name Baba Femi.

JD: Yes. Tell me what you can remember about him, because he's one of the fuzzier characters I haven't gotten as much detail on.

BC: He was sort of medium build, not very tall. He was a real philosopher. He really understood—he was very much into land loss by black farmers and, you know, he related a lot of things to land. And he did a *beautiful* show. It was really just sublime, a jazz show. Oh, gosh, what was his given name? I can't remember.

JD: No one can remember that. That's one of the things I'm really trying to find out because—but that was the name he went by.

BC: It was two names. The last name was Baba Femi.

JD: Adewole, I think.

BC: Yeah, that was it! Adewole Baba Femi. That was it.

JD: Was that his actual name?

BC: No, no.

JD: But he never told you his real name or he—?

BC: No, I knew his real name, because I did the books and I had his W-2 forms.

JD: Ah, okay.

BC: But I can't remember it right now.



JD: Was he a student or what was his—?

BC: I think virtually all these guys were connected in one way or another to NCCU. Ralph had been to NCCU Law School. I think Spruill was a graduate of NCCU, I believe.

JD: I think he was, yeah, by that time.

BC: And so, we put together a board of trustees, which you had to have. And we had Lee Noel, was one of them. He was a black man who owned the Noel's Overhead Door Company, which was over on Ramseur Street; Bill Bell, who at the time was working for IBM and was not—I don't believe he had been elected to the County Commission yet. He is now the mayor of Durham.

JD: Right.

BC: I think Karen Rux was on the board, who was—she had a theater two doors down, which originally had been the Regal Theater, and she had renamed it the Your Own Thing Theater.

JD: Yeah.

BC: And it had a fantastic mural inside it that an artist, a local black artist had done for her, and it had been firebombed. So, I think right when we were doing AFR, somebody tried to burn it down, and she got a lot of press for that. She was invited to speak to this conference of radical political types out in Estes Park, Colorado, and she gave a speech which just set the group on fire. And there was a magazine in those days called *Ramparts* magazine, which was just sort of—

JD: Yeah.

BC: And they did like a five-page feature on Karen and her speech.

JD: Really?

BC: But she was in bad health. She smoked a lot; she was overweight. And I don't know really why—Karen was on a good path, and then all of a sudden she sort of—I don't know what happened.

JD: Yeah. So, what was the theater like? What do you remember about the theater, about her?

BC: Well, she had, I think, wanted to have community performances there, but their grants ran out. I remember they had—the projectors were still in the projection booths, and there were miles of film lying around on the floors. And a lot of this film was of the black community in Durham, shot by a guy out of—this guy had ridden around Durham, and he would do like these 35mm newsreels of local businesses and stuff.

JD: Wow.

BC: And I think we swept all that up and gave it to somebody who was supposed to take care of it, and I believed it's been saved by somebody. I can't remember who it was.

JD: It would be great if you could [laughs] figure it out.

BC: [Laughs] I think if you look—I think there's actually on the web there's some of that film you can actually watch on YouTube now of people, black business on Pettigrew Street and Main Street and Fayetteville Street, and I think that came from the stuff that we swept up. There were just miles, because people had gotten, you know, vandals had gotten in and, you know, just thrown the stuff up in the air.

So, Karen was on the board. Who else was on the board? Ralph and Robert and I, or me.

JD: I have a list of the board members here I could read you.

BC: Oh, yeah, read it to me. That would jog my memory. It depends on what vintage the board was that you're reading from, though.

JD: Well, it doesn't say. I don't know if you've ever seen—there was this guy named Paul Vandergriff who wrote an MA thesis that compared WAFR and WSHA at Shaw.

BC: Really?

JD: It came out—I can email you scans of it.

BC: That'd be fun.

JD: And it's from after AFR went off the air, and it has a copy of the board members in the appendix, but it's undated. But I'll read out who's on here: Ann Atwater.

BC: Anna Waller?

JD: Ann Atwater.

BC: Oh, I think that would have been after my time.

JD: You're on here actually.

BC: Well, then, okay. I know that I knew Ann Atwater. I didn't remember her in that context.

JD: Yeah.

BC: I remember there was a thing in like '67 called the "charrette," which was held at Ann Atwater's house and got written up in *Time* magazine, which was, you know, black and white community coming together. And that was the event at which C.P. Ellis, the Klan guy from Duke, came and got to know Ann Atwater—

JD: Right.

BC: And they became friends.

JD: Yeah.

BC: And I was at those meetings and got to know him, I mean, her, and I got to know also—who else? Lavonia Allison was very active in those meetings. So, go ahead. Okay, Ann Atwater.

JD: I mean, one thing I think I've learned about the board of trustees is that some people really participated and some were there in name only, and so—

BC: Yeah, that's definitely true. And I don't really remember her participating. I could be wrong.

JD: Yeah, so that may be case. Miss Goldie Berry, the Organization for Community Action.

BC: Goldie Berry?

JD: Yeah.

BC: She, I think, was the bookkeeper.

JD: It says sec—well, yeah, it says she's the secretary by day.

BC: Yeah, she was a very nice person and she kept a classical set of books, with a handwritten general ledger, or actually general journal, she called it. [Laughing] And I actually learned how to—because she quit at some point, and the station needed to file its reports, and I came and took all of her books—this was a couple of years later—and taught myself bookkeeping from what she had done. She was an excellent bookkeeper.

JD: Yeah. Well, there's actually a bunch of names on here. What I could do, I—

BC: Keep going. I want to hear more.

JD: Okay, I'll just read off the names straight through: John Crosland, Operation Breakthrough executive director.

BC: Right.

JD: Leonard Davis, comptroller for Operation Breakthrough.

BC: Okay.

JD: Dr. Jacqueline Jackson, assistant professor of Psychiatry, Duke University.

BC: I really remember her a lot. Yeah, we actually had meetings in her basement.

JD: She was white or black?

BC: Black, if I've got the right woman. I could have confused her with somebody else. Go ahead.

JD: Winston Kennedy, grad student at UNC.

BC: Okay.

JD: Emma Jane King, director, Youth Development Corporation.

BC: Okay.

JD: Howard Lee, mayor of Chapel Hill.

BC: Howard Lee was actively involved. He was actually involved with me on the lawsuit. Okay.

JD: Kwame McDonald, who did the show with Mary McDonald, his wife.

BC: Yeah, I remember Kwame, a tall guy.

JD: Mr., or Dr. Jack Price, professor of Sociology at Duke University.

BC: He's still a friend. I'm kind of friends with his son, but yeah.

JD: Mrs. Naomi Rogers, administrative assistant, Youth Programs, Operation Breakthrough.

BC: Okay, I remember her.

JD: Mr. Eugene Rogers, student.

BC: Eugene Rogers was the guy who saved me at—I said his name was Ralph. It was Eugene. That's how I ran into him later on. Okay.

JD: Interesting. Okay, Karen Rux.

BC: Yep.

JD: Daniel G. Sampson, professor of Law, North Carolina Central.

BC: Okay.

JD: Mrs. Mary Semans.

BC: Yeah, well, she never came to the meetings, but she did write a few checks, small checks.

JD: That's what I heard. And, interestingly, Ralph Williams talks about this guy, John Herby Wheeler, who was—

BC: John H. Wheeler, he was at Mechanic and Farmers Bank, Mechanics.

JD: Exactly.

BC: Great guy!

JD: Yeah.

BC: I got to know him very well later on.

JD: And he brought—he got Ralph in touch with Mary Duke Semans.

BC: I don't doubt it.

JD: Yeah.

BC: I'm sure that's true.

JD: Mr. J.C. Scarborough III, general director—

BC: “Skeepie.” “Skeepie” Scarborough, and he was very active. He came to the meetings. He was a big help. He was also in the lawsuit.

JD: Okay, I’m going to ask about the lawsuit later, so I’ll mark that down.

BC: Okay.

JD: Maceo Sloan, senior vice-president, NC Mutual.

BC: Yeah. He didn’t come to the meetings, but he was helpful.

JD: And then, Robert Spruill, Ralph Williams, Mr. Lonnie Wilson, coordinator, Operation Breakthrough.

BC: Okay.

JD: And then, you’re listed as the last name, acting secretary.

BC: [Laughs] Okay. Alright.

JD: So, yeah. Well, when did you realize what the station was going to be about? I mean, you said you weren’t involved in the programming or the planning, but—

BC: I think Obe was the program director, as I recall.

JD: I think so, also, yeah. But when did you get a sense of what the station was going to be like?

BC: Well, I was hoping it would be what it was supposed to be, which is a public radio station focused on Durham’s black community, playing music that wasn’t available elsewhere. And it did that to a large extent. It played a lot of jazz. It didn’t play any blues that I know of. I had a few concerns. When Ralph first got on, he started playing a lot of—he had a show, and it ruffled a lot of feathers, including Jim Mayes from WSRC, because he started playing Moms Mabley. And it was, you know, against the rules of the FCC at that point to play stuff that used the words that were in all this stuff—and Redd

Foxx stuff, Redd Foxx and Moms Mabley. And he really—Ralph just really got a kick out of doing this. And that caused a lot of concern, and I think they pulled back from that.

JD: Yeah.

BC: I don't know if anybody else told you about that at all.

JD: Well, what I've heard more often is that supposedly on the very first day, the very first broadcast, maybe someone on the air briefly introduced the station, and then they played the first two Last Poets albums uncensored, back-to-back.

BC: They did.

JD: And those albums are very explicit. [Laughs]

BC: Yeah, they did.

JD: Wow.

BC: I mean, that didn't bother me that much, because we were playing, you know, late at night on DBS, we were playing—I can't remember the names of the artists but, you know, some of the stuff which was [laughing] was fairly, was just [1:11:57] stuff. We were trying to be an underground station, maybe a year or two later than that.

JD: Yeah. That was also middle of the morning, I think,

BC: I know, I know.

JD: So, were you there for the very first broadcast? Or do you remember the very first—?

BC: I'm sure I was. I mean, you know, that was the deal I had, was to put them on the air and help them. And so, I'm sure—yeah.

I know that [laughs] Davis actually fired, at my insistence, fired the transmitter up before the antenna came in. [Laughing] He built an antenna out of coat hangers, and it



was like sparks, like, you know, it was a pretty impressive display in the transmitter room. So, we were on the air a little bit before then for tests and stuff.

JD: So, you—

BC: There's a funny—can I tell you a funny story?

JD: Yeah, please.

BC: The question became, "Where are we going to put the antenna?" And so, I came up with the idea, or maybe Evans did, I can't remember, "Maybe we can put it on the roof of the building."

The building was an extremely stout building. And at the same time, we had built the—and so, I guess DBS must have actually been on the air because I had built the tower for DBS and I knew the tower-building company, Piedmont Communications. And we could put the tower—the building was, let's say, forty feet wide and a hundred and twenty feet long, or a hundred and fifty feet deep, maybe a hundred, whatever. That sounds about right, maybe forty by a hundred. And so, we could get two of the guy wires anchored to the parapet of the building, but you need three guy wires to hold up a tower, to put the tower on the corner.

So, the only place we could put the tower would be two buildings over, which was the roof of the Biltmore Hotel. And the Biltmore Hotel was about, I'm guessing, five stories, four stories tall. It was, you know, from the days of segregation, it was one of the few options when black people came to Durham.

JD: Right.

BC: And it was owned by Nathan Garrett's father, named Doctor Garrett.

JD: Nathan Garrett, who founded the Foundation for Community Development?

BC: I think it was UDI that he founded.

JD: Okay.

BC: And so—and he’s an accountant. I think he may still be around. His father was the pharmacist, but he was known as Doctor Garrett, who ran the drugstore that was still in business on the first floor of the Biltmore Hotel. And on the other side of the lobby was the Green Lantern restaurant, which was great soul food. And so, he said, “Okay, I’ll let you put the wires, as long as you don’t damage my building.”

What we didn’t know, and I went up there with Ben Wall from the antenna company, we didn’t know that the fourth floor of the building was a fully functioning cat house, [laughter] and each room was occupied by a different girl, who were—several of whom were white, maybe all of them, I can’t quite remember—but they were in lingerie. [Laughing] And my eyes just about popped out of my head! You know, I’d heard about stuff I’d never—I didn’t imagine this actually existed. So, we had to—for days on end, we had to go up to the fourth floor, wave at these people, and say, “Don’t mind me. I’m just going [laughing] into the closet and going up on the roof.”

JD: Wow!

BC: [Laughing] It was a fun experience.

JD: Interesting. Not what one would expect.

BC: What?

JD: Not what one would expect, huh?

BC: No. At my age, at the point, I was thinking, like, “Whoa!”

JD: Yeah, no, that’s funny.

BC: I guess I was twenty-four. I was—so, anyway.

JD: That's interesting. It sounds like you were aware of what the station's mission was, and you were in support of its political mission.

BC: I was totally in support of it. You know, I wanted it to be accepted by and important to the black community.

JD: Yeah.

BC: I think I made some huge mistakes. One—if you want to deal with that now, I could tell you.

JD: Yeah, sure. Please.

BC: One is I made a completely erroneous assumption that assumed that any black person spoke for all black people. And that was, you know, I made the assumption that Ralph and Robert were representative, and making a deal with them was the same as making a deal with the black community. And so, while I had this idea—we called it the Community Radio Workshop, Incorporated.

JD: Right.

BC: I had this more participatory idea. My sense was that Robert, and I don't want to speak ill of the dead, but it sort of went to his head that he's in charge. And, you know, at some point or another, he fired the board, and that's where the declaratory judgement lawsuit came in. And the—I think—they developed a theme which seemed to me to be way too commercial and too nonpolitical. It was this whole thing; they would have these marathons that were called the "Sound of the Changing Times." And it got into much schmaltzier music, much more what I would call middle-of-the-road, you know, ballads, you know, love songs, just schmaltz.

JD: R&B, or kind of—?

BC: No, no, just crossover schmaltz, in a lot of ways, you know. The R&B thing never was big on there. To my recollection, it was jazz, because it had more of a sophisticated air to it, and then it sort of morphed in—it was sort of moving into sort of a higher-class, I would say higher-brow would be a better description, self-concept, and getting away from politics and getting away from—I mean, I don't think they ever played any blues on the station, to my knowledge, and not that much R&B, very little rock. Great jazz! I mean, they were solid in that category.

But this “Sound of the Changing Times” thing sort of—to me, sort of the last hope that it was ever going to survive was when they had the Miss WAFR contest. [Laughs] And it involved sending in photographs of yourself, you know, head shots, and Robert Spruill got to pick the Miss WAFR. And the grand prize was a free trip to Africa—with Robert Spruill. [Laughs]

JD: Wow.

BC: [Laughing] You know, which is not sustainable. I'm sorry.

JD: When was that?!

BC: This would have been right at the end. This would have been in the last year, year and a half, whenever that was. I don't even remember when that was, to tell you the truth.

JD: Did they actually make a trip to Africa?

BC: Whether they actually went or not, I do not know. I do not know. But I do know that's a true story. I do know that there was a Miss WAFR. And, I don't know, it seemed to have strayed from, you know, sort of the '60s movement idealism into—you

know, but again, it wasn't my station. I think the mistake was, in structuring the board, that we didn't have a mechanism to truly hold the staff accountable.

JD: So, that's another one of the mistakes you were referring to?

BC: Yeah.

JD: Hmm. Well, what—?

BC: I hope I didn't pop your bubble here.

JD: No! No, not at all. I really—no, these are good stories. One thing that's been very unclear to me is what was the role of the board? Because everyone says it was something different, but what did the board actually manage to do? Because what's interesting from what I'm hearing from you is that there were people on the board who were actually involved, but how were they involved?

BC: Well, it was a nonprofit, so we had to get grants. And I know that we got a \$50,000 grant from the Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation, or it may have been the Mary Reynolds Babcock Foundation, but I believe it was the Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation. So, it was important to have a broadly representative board that had standing in the community. So, just in terms of credibility, it was important to have a board.

And when Mary Semans said that she would be on the board, that—although she sponsored virtually every liberal civic cause in Durham's history. I mean, she's just been so good about that over the years. But, you know, it opened doors for us where we could get in to see—you know, and Ralph and I and Robert would drive to Winston-Salem and meet with these foundations.

And so, I think the role that the board *should* have had should have been to elect or appoint the managers, and let them run the station, not control it in any way, but hold

them accountable and be prepared to fire the managers if the station was straying or not succeeding and hire new management. And I think that when it started floundering, the reaction—my feeling was that the board needs to step in and come up with a solution, and it may be replacing the management.

And the opposite happened: The management fired the board. And then, in my opinion, it was operating illegally—you can't fire a board.

JD: When did this happen?

BC: You know, I'm guessing this—when did the station finally sign off? Did you determine that?

JD: I think it's 1976.

BC: I'm guessing this was early '75.

JD: Okay. So, you were still on the board, huh?

BC: Well, I thought I was.

JD: At least, officially you were?

BC: Right. And so, we got a lawyer. This would have been—there was a Duke law graduate from Hawaii. What was his name? Trevor somebody, and he had a—and his classmate. Her name was Byers, and they took the case for free. And we wrote up a complaint and we served it. And I remember that when Ralph got served, he refused to take it, and so the service came back from the sheriff, saying that it was served by throwing it at his feet, [laughs] which I thought was sort of humorous.

And so, we didn't really make any progress with this suit.

JD: So, you were a plaintiff?

BC: I was a plaintiff, and I think I got at least a half dozen of the other board members to be plaintiffs.

JD: Who were the other plaintiffs?

BC: I can't say. I know if you went to the Clerk's office, you could find that lawsuit. They save them forever.

JD: Yeah.

BC: If I had to guess, I think Bill Bell was on our side. I think Howard Lee was on our side. I really can't guess of any others. Maybe Lee Noel was. I can't really remember. Of course, Lee's name didn't come up on that list that you read me.

JD: No, it didn't.

BC: So, okay.

JD: So, what happened?

BC: Well, what happened is it just sat in the court. Nothing happened because I really wasn't—we didn't have any money to hire a lawyer. And I met a lawyer named—what's his name? He's a well-known character; he's the poet laureate of the city of Hillsborough. He owns He's Not Here saloon in Chapel Hill. What's his name? Mike Troy!

And Mike said, "Well, I can tell you how to win the suit." And I said, "How?" He said, "Get a default judgement." And so, he filed a paper to call the question, I guess it is, in other words, schedule it. And they didn't respond. And he went down and had the Clerk of Court give us a judgement that we won.

But at that point, it was too late. I mean, we didn't win anything because there was really nothing left by that time.

JD: So, you said the station was floundering because the music changed. How else was the station floundering?

BC: No, I can't really say that. I mean, the music was not—it wasn't for me to say that it changed. I think sort of the attitude changed. It went from being a community, civic, freeform, experimental, community asset to "we own this thing, and it's ours, and we're playing music that we like." And, you know, so the news went down. It just—in my opinion, it morphed away. You know, it still had great stuff. The jazz was still great and so forth. I mean, there was no question about that.

Plus, VSP came on the scene, and they were more political at the time, and they sort of took the thunder of AFR.

JD: Well, one thing—I think this is the case, and you can correct me if I'm wrong. But from what I understand, VSP was in the planning stages by '73 or '74, and it actually went on the air about a month or two after AFR stopped.

BC: That may be right. That may be right. "Voice of—" VSP stood for something.

JD: "Voices Serving People."

BC: Yeah, okay, right.

JD: Tell me about VSP and how—you said you were involved a little bit about it.

BC: I was only involved in helping them find the, I think maybe the frequency, recommending engineers. One thing I did do is I went up to Warrenton and met with Valeria Lee and Jim Lee, and they asked me to help them pick a place to put the transmitter, to put the tower.

JD: Yeah.



BC: They were going to build, I think it was a five-hundred-foot tower. It was a pretty good tower.

JD: Yeah.

BC: And so, we looked and looked and looked. And Valeria said, “Well, we have a farm in my family. You can go out and look at that.” And I went out and looked at that. And the Lee family was having a family reunion at the time, which was very interesting. And I took a big white rock and I walked out in the middle of the field. I said, “Build the tower here,” and I dropped the rock on the spot, and they did. So, that was sort of as far as I was involved. It wasn’t really very much. I think they called me for advice.

JD: How’d they get in touch with you? How’d they know to contact you?

BC: Well, I think it was well-known that I was in radio in Durham and was involved in interesting stations.

JD: You had never been in touch with them before?

BC: No, I had no knowledge of them. I know Jim very well now.

JD: Oh, okay.

BC: And I know Val a little bit. But in the meantime I had gotten a job with two women to start Triangle Women’s Radio, WTWR, whatever it was going to be. And it was Celeste Wesson, who now is the head of NPR in Los Angeles, and Chris Carrol. And they worked at DBS, doing the women’s show. And I said, “You know, the license of WUNC-FM is coming up for renewal. Let’s do what’s called cross-file on it.”

And so, we set up a corporation and filed on their license. And all they had to do, because FM stations had no minimum operating requirements—you could keep a license without operating it, if it was educational—all they had to do was just file one piece of

paper saying, “We want to renew this license.” And I remember Wes Wallace, I believe it was, somebody from UNC, driving they claim at over 110 miles an hour all the way to Washington to get it time-stamped in at the FCC at 4:59. So.

JD: Huh.

BC: But that led to—that scare led to Bob Gwyn starting an organization called Friends of WUNC.

JD: Oh, so let me just get this straight: Your cross-file prompted WUNC to rush to renew its—

BC: Right.

JD: So, if they had not gotten it in under that deadline—

BC: We would have gotten the license as Triangle Women’s Radio.

JD: Okay. Gotcha. So, this Friends of UNC Radio group started?

BC: Bob Gwyn, who gets absolutely no credit in the history of WUNC—but he was a professor, and I think he wanted it that way; I think he was, again, somebody who didn’t want to be in the foreground—started this organization. And they raised the money and they got the station back on the air and they hired Fred Calland and they hired Gary Siemering [Correction: Gary Shivers]—both who we had met on our trips up to NPR; they were both from NPR—to run the station. And Gary ran it for twenty years at least.

JD: Huh. Interesting.

BC: That’s off your topic. Sorry.

JD: No, no, this is good. I like this broader context because—[laughs] I don’t mean to sound unenthusiastic over the phone. I’m just—there are so many different strands of the story that every time I talk to someone, I discover a new strand, and that

makes the story more complicated but also more interesting. And so, this is all good background and side stories. And I had never even heard of this Triangle Women's Radio before. So, that never went on the air, did it?

BC: No, it didn't. It didn't, but it filed a full application with the FCC.

JD: And did you listen to VSP much?

BC: Yeah, I liked VSP. I was really sad that it didn't survive. It was in a terrible location for reaching, you know, much of its audience. I mean, most of what it covered was empty farm fields.

JD: Yeah.

BC: But it was nice to have. I liked it. And, by the way, WSHA is a great station these days.

JD: Yeah, I've tuned into that a little bit, mostly NCU, actually.

BC: NCU is a *fabulous* station.

JD: Yeah.

BC: As far as I'm concerned, they're doing as good as any public station in the country, running the Pacifica news, I think is just a big service, and they have a lot of community related programming, and I love the gospel show on Sunday morning.

JD: This lineage of public radio stations in North Carolina is actually quite fascinating, because virtually every one has some connection to another one.

BC: My sense is that we have some of the best radio in the country here, with XDU, XYC, NCU, SHA. KNC has gone from being a horrible to being a good station.

JD: Yeah.

BC: But my son, on the radio, he only listens to WFMU.

JD: Oh, right.

BC: That's what I'd like to see more radio stations be like.

JD: Sure.

BC: That was my dream for DBS, was that kind of sub-theme that you carried for—you know, interwoven themes.

JD: Yeah, I know exactly. What do you remember about the programming on VSP? Like, how did it compare to AFR, and just what do you remember listening to or enjoying or not enjoying?

BC: My recollection is that it was mostly jazz and, you know, jazz is wonderful. I mean, some stuff is a little hard for me to listen to if it gets into atonal, and, you know, there's some hardcore stuff, but generally I love jazz.

JD: Yeah.

BC: It didn't—I mean, it had the disadvantage that you had to go to Warrenton to work there.

JD: Right.

BC: And so, it was hard for them to get a lot of staff, and I'm sure they didn't pay them. So, it always sounded—there was a little sense that it was a marginal operation.

JD: Hmm. What was the political content like, compared to AFR?

BC: Well, I—clearly, it was, you know, in favor of the right issues from the standpoint of fairness to black people and antiracism and all that, but I don't really remember any specific political programming on it.

JD: Okay. Gotcha. Yeah, I think the connections between these two stations are very interesting. At first glance, there isn't a lot of connection, but it seems like almost

every person I talk to had some contact with someone from the other station. There were DJs who appeared on both stations.

BC: That's true.

JD: Walter Norfleet and, I think, also Donald Baker had a VSP show, I think.

BC: I bet he did. Walter had a wife named Linda Norfleet. She was involved in something regarding both stations.

JD: She was supposedly a professor in the English or maybe the Speech department at Central.

BC: Oh, that's right! And so, she ended up being sort of the faculty sponsor for NCU.

JD: Okay.

BC: That's sort of, I think, maybe what happened.

JD: Yeah, that's interesting. It's also an interesting story of how—most of the people who worked at AFR, at least the founding members, had strong Central connections, but it sounds like it wasn't until the station was about to die that the University took any real interest in it.

BC: Which is wonderful. I mean, that's where it should be. And they've just done a marvelous job. I mean, I think that's a truly great station.

JD: Yeah.

BC: I almost never hear anything on there that I wonder why they did it.

JD: Yeah. No, I enjoy their programming, especially on Saturdays. That's always—

BC: [Laughs] Well, Jim Davis is utterly unique.

JD: Yeah, his show is great, and Howard Burchette's show is great. And, yeah, I've always enjoyed listening to those. Let me ask you: Do you have a few more minutes to talk, or how are you doing for—?

BC: Oh, yeah. I set aside the whole morning for you.

JD: Okay. Well, great. It's just helping a lot. One thing I'm kind of curious about is—tell me about the programming on DBS after it went FM. What was the programming like? Was it still progressive?

BC: Oh, yeah. It was more of a rock station, a little bit more of a Top 40 station when it was DBS, but when it became an FM station, it decided to be the best progressive rock station in the country. I mean, it just—it really—and it had some terrific program directors. Bruce Babski was an absolute genius and took it all very, very, very seriously. And, you know, it did a lot of fun stuff, too. It did the "National Lampoon Radio Hour," and the women's show, and Conroy always had a political show on Saturday. And it had a lot of humor. You know, it varied. George Graham, I never liked any of the music he played; it was always too shrill. But, you know, everybody's taste is different.

JD: What kind of music was that?

BC: Oh, he liked Emerson, Lake and Palmer a lot and, you know.

JD: Ah.

BC: But generally it was the icons of late '60s-early '70s rock, I mean, you know, Rolling Stones and the Beatles and, you know, Crosby, Stills and Nash. And then, a pretty good smattering of the outliers, you know, Captain Beefheart and on and on and on, and then a lot of live stuff. We did live—my big thing was live. I loved live. And so, we did whole festivals, where we would broadcast them live from start to finish. And we

broadcast the Eno Festival, the Bicentennial Eno Festival, live from start to finish. We had a thing called “Homegrown” in the main quad at Duke that we did, “Live from the [Bluebird] Cafe.”

And then, I did a show on Saturday nights that was, you know, a lot of sound effects, basically, explosions and multiple things. [Laughter] I used to dangle a microphone out the window of the station and out into the field, and people would come by and sing, and a lot of musicians in the studio. It was very much modeled after a show in New York which was called “Radio Unnameable” on WBAI.

JD: On the Pacifica station?

BC: Yeah.

JD: Interesting. Now, the station was called DBS as an FM station also?

BC: And we also had a classical hour every day, the daily concert, which was—it was way too highbrow. I mean, it makes W-whatever it is, uh, CPE—Copeland, Procopio, and Ellis—WCPE, sound like a Top 40 station. It was *very* highbrow classical. And it sort of—people kept wondering, “Why are you trying to play all this obscure stuff?” And Cabell Smith did it, and that was his taste. And what else did we have going?

JD: Did you play jazz at all?

BC: There was a jazz show. I think Steve Roberts may have done it, or Shanga did it. I think it was Sunday nights.

JD: Wait, wait. Did Donald Baker have a show on DBS?

BC: For years.

JD: He had a show at the same time on DBS and on AFR?

BC: Yep. [Laughs]

JD: Ah! Okay. And Steve Roberts is the guy who filed the complaint, and he had—the result, the compromise was he got a show.

BC: Right.

JD: And he took you up on that offer?

BC: Oh, yeah.

JD: But he was never involved with AFR, was he?

BC: No.

JD: Okay. But he kind of laid the groundwork for—well.

BC: He was sort of a sideshow, I think.

JD: Okay. And the station when it was FM was also called WDBS?

BC: Yes, WDBS, same call letters.

JD: Gotcha.

BC: Parentheses (FM). If it's dash -FM, that means it's part of the call letter. If it's parentheses, it's just to let you know that it's an FM station.

JD: Okay, interesting.

BC: And I think WAFR was also parentheses (FM).

JD: I've seen it printed both ways.

BC: Well, I think, you know, there's the official FCC way and the—I think the official FCC call letters were WAFR.

JD: Okay. Now, you mentioned that Terry Sanford helped with DBS. Do you think he helped at all with the AFR process?

BC: [Pause] I don't think so. I think we may have talked to him about it at some point. I know, and I sort of remember his maybe referring us to Ken Pye, who I think



picked up the phone and—I think I probably took Ralph and Spruill to meet with Terry. I'm not—this is coming back, but I remember we—if I had to guess, it was a very brief meeting. And he said he'd talk to Ken about this, and Ken's office was right next to Terry's. And I remember Ken picking up the phone while we were in his office and calling, I think, Bill Archie, who was the head of the Reynolds Foundation, and saying, "You need to talk to these guys." So, I think they were some help in that regard, you know, a referral maybe.

JD: Okay. Interesting. You know what's interesting about this is, in the research I did on the background, you know, the Public Broadcasting Act was passed in 1967, and—

BC: Was it that late?

JD: It was that late. Well, there was something called the Educational Television Act that was passed in '62.

BC: Right. But noncommercial stations existed back into the '50s.

JD: They did exist, but I think, from what I understand, in the mid '60s, noncommercial stations were kind of floundering. Most of them were carrier stations, their audiences were very small, and people involved with stations at major universities wanted to expand their role. And the same thing with educational television. And the Carnegie Foundation—

BC: Yeah, Terry was on that committee.

JD: Exactly. And he was one of the ten people on the committee that did the whole report.

BC: Right.

JD: Another person on that committee, interestingly, was Ralph Ellison.

BC: Was who?

JD: Ralph Ellison, the author.

BC: Oh, yeah.

JD: So, that's—so, yeah, he must have been well-acquainted, like you said, with the whole—

BC: My wife worked for Terry, and she showed me all the stuff that he got from that committee at some point. She was packing it up to send it to Duke Archives. A big part of her job was packing stuff up and sending it to the archives, because he had just so much stuff.

But this is a *total* aside, but later on, I met a man in Raleigh named George—oh, God, I had his name just a second ago—Probst, P-R-O-B-S-T. And he was working for an agency in Raleigh that my film and video company was doing some work for as a consultant. And George had run a radio show at the University of Chicago called the “University of Chicago Roundtable,” which was sort of the “Charlie Rose” show of its day, and it was broadcast on, I believe, NBC every Sunday. You know, Sunday morning there's a lot of stuff like that on the commercial networks, radio only.

And George told me the story that he was in Washington at the hearing in which the educational bands were set aside. And I recall that being in the early '50s that they set aside whatever it is, 88.5 through 90—

JD: 1.9

BC: 1.9, right. And he said that he raised his hand during the—he was testifying, representing the University of Chicago, and he raised his hand during the hearing and

asked for a clarification which led to those bands being set aside. And he told me the story much better than I'm telling you, but that it was just like a parenthetical afterthought, you know, in the legislation, and the legislation got changed to drop that in.

JD: Yeah, well, apparently, originally the Public Broadcasting Act was going to be called the Public Television Act, and it was—

BC: Yeah, there you go.

JD: And it was an afterthought to add radio.

BC: Yeah.

JD: And, yeah, it's kind of funny how arbitrary it can be to—

BC: Right.

JD: Really change the impact of legislation. Hmm, that's interesting. Well, what was your musical background? I mean, I'm just kind of wondering a little bit about your youth. How did you get into music and into radio?

BC: I was never into the music or programming side of it at all. [Laughs] I always had great programming directors and I was into the overall management, how-do-you-get-this-done, project side. In high school, I was a member of the ham radio club, and I always, you know, loved electronics. But I really came at it more from the political and—you know, if I could do a radio station, I probably wouldn't play music, you know. I'd play more like WUNC is now. [Laughs] I mean, I love good music, but I have no talent. I have no musical talent.

JD: Interesting. So, you—from the beginning of when you got involved with radio, did you recognize its political potential?

BC: Sure.

JD: Because not everyone did. A lot of people didn't.

BC: Yeah, well, the Vigil proved it to us. I mean, when that thousand people met us when we opened the doors on the president's house, it proved that there's a lot of potential power there.

JD: Yeah. Just as a side note, there's a book, maybe you've seen it. It's called *Liberalism, Black Power, and the Making of American Politics*.

BC: No.

JD: I can send you a citation. It's by this guy named Devin Fergus. It's all about North Carolina, and there's several pages detailing the Vigil—

BC: Oh, neat!

JD: And all the process at Duke. I mean, there's a chapter on Malcolm X Liberation University. There's a chapter on Soul City. There's a lot on Durham in it. It's interesting.

BC: Well, if you send me that citation, I will immediately go on Amazon and order it.

JD: There's another one called *Our Separate Ways* by Christina Greene that's about women and protest culture in Durham.

BC: Oh, neat!

JD: And that has lots of stuff on Operation Breakthrough and, you know, lots of stuff on Ann Atwater.

BC: Uh-huh.

JD: And then there's one more book I'll send you a citation for that just came out, UNC historian and Duke historian, Bob Korstad and Jim Leloudis.

BC: Oh, I've got that book. Bob's a friend of mine.

JD: Yeah. So, that's the—

BC: About the North Carolina Fund.

JD: Exactly. And that's the newest one. But I'll send you the other two citations.

But what was it like—you said Howard Lee was pretty good. How was he involved with the board?

BC: Well, he—I believe he worked at Duke at the time, and he got elected mayor of Chapel Hill in the early '70s, and we were trying to pick people who had standing in the community, clout. And he came to some of the meetings and was always willing to do what he could. You know, he always took my calls. I still know him. He's in the Utilities Commission last time I talked to him.

JD: So, it's interesting because the way it's been described sometimes is that there was an inherent tension between the young guys who managed AFR and what could be best described as Durham's black establishment.

BC: [Laughing] Yeah! No kidding!

JD: From the start, though, it sounded like there was tension there.

BC: Well, when you start playing Moms Mabley and Redd Foxx, the phones start ringing. I'm sure Jim Mayes probably called John Wheeler, and John Wheeler probably called me. I don't know, I can't remember.

JD: What was your sense of the community's reaction? What was your sense of people in Durham's reaction to WAFR?

BC: [Sighs]

JD: I mean, there's a lot of different reactions.

BC: I always hoped that it would be—have a more profound effect than it probably did. I mean, I always was thinking, you know, this—I really never gauged the reaction. I'm sure that WAFR probably never showed up in the ratings. But then, again, I don't think the ratings counted if you were noncommercial, so what does that mean? I think everybody had their own issues on a daily basis. And I think, you know, a heavy station that's thought-provoking isn't necessarily what fits the bill for people who are just looking for some entertainment.

JD: Right.

BC: You know, and so I think, you know, I think there was a—you know, they—Ralph and—although, I think Ralph maybe sort of got out of it. I think maybe it was more Spruill.

JD: He did. He got out of it at some point.

BC: Yeah, I think Ralph got out maybe a year or two before the end. And I think he had his problems with Spruill, too. I don't know. I have never talked to him about it.

But let me just think. I remember the trip to Washington. We drove to Washington. And the reason I know we drove to Washington is that on the way back from Washington, we stopped at the federal prison at Petersburg. And Robert went in and tried to have a word with his brother, who was in federal prison as a draft evader.

JD: Wow.

BC: Robert was from New Bern.

JD: Yeah.

BC: And his brother—I said, “How did this happen?” And he said, “Well, when the draft notice came, he just threw it away. And when they came to get him and said,

‘Why didn’t you respond?’ he said, ‘Screw you!’” You know, “I’m not doing it!”

[Laughing] He was just an absolutely upfront “No way!” So, they threw him in Petersburg.

JD: Wow.

BC: And so, you know, that’s interesting.

JD: I mean, an interesting and kind of sad but also impressive bit of background was that Spruill’s parents had both died, and he had essentially raised his younger siblings, apparently, from a very early age.

BC: Wow, I didn’t know that.

JD: Yeah.

BC: He didn’t say much. You know, you had to pry it out of him. The whole thing about his brother, he would never talk about that. You know, I would have never known about that if I hadn’t been in the car. And I liked him a lot; he was a very charismatic guy. He was attractive. He had a good sense of humor, you know. He was a very appealing person. And I feel like ten years later, I read about him in the *Wall Street Journal* that he got involved in some kind of major deals up on Wall Street. I can’t remember what they were, though.

JD: What was it like working with him?

BC: [Pause] I never had any trouble working with anyone at WAFR, I mean, because we understood our roles. I didn’t have anything to say about who was on the air or what was played or—you know, my goal was let’s see if we can build this thing better and get better funding for it, you know. So, my sense was that until I dropped out of the

scene we had pretty good relations. I don't remember anything bad going on, other than, you know, I was still technically on the board, and when he fired the board, that lawsuit.

JD: Yeah.

BC: But, you know, who knows? That was a long time ago.

JD: What was Williams like? What was it like working with him? Or what if—?

BC: Well, Robert was suave. He was very articulate, good—Ralph had a good sense of humor, too. He was a bigger guy. I mean, you know, but they both were big men.

JD: Yeah, Spruill was supposedly 6'5".

BC: Yeah.

JD: And Ralph Williams was bigger than that?

BC: He was heavier.

JD: Oh, okay.

BC: Ralph—he wasn't given to sparkling conversation. [Laughter] You know, I think he may have graduated from law school, but he never either took or passed the bar. He was married to a woman that had a lot of influence on him named [Kee 1:59:37]. [Kee] was much more hardcore than Ralph was on a lot of issues, and I think she was more of a very self-sufficient person. And I think—I think Spruill was more of a leader. Ralph was more of a character.

JD: Yeah. Yeah, I got the sense that they played very different roles on the radio station. I mean, that's based on things you've said, on what Akinwole said, on what Ralph Williams said, on the way the press described them. I mean, there's other articles



I'll send you copies of, and they cut different profiles even, you know, in things that are written about them.

BC: Yeah. I got a sense that Ralph was fairly fearless, you know, that he was a strong man and, you know, you noticed him when he came in the room.

JD: Yeah. Interesting. And what do you remember about Obataiye Akinwole?

BC: He was more of a technocrat, you know. He was a smaller person, more thoughtful. I had relations with him later because I had also—during the Bicentennial, I had done the initial restoration and saving of St. Joseph's AME Church. And we set up this thing called the St. Joseph's Historic Foundation, which I was a founding board member of, and at some point he was hired as the executive director of that group, a position which I think Jim Lee had later—Jim Lee's son, I think, now has.

JD: Marc Lee?

BC: Yeah. So, I don't think he was—I can't remember. I think the board members liked him, he was a likable guy, the organization survived. What can I say?

JD: Yeah.

BC: A nice fellow.

JD: It's interesting. He said, when I was speaking to him, he said something along the lines of, "Some might disagree with me," but he thought that WAFR probably couldn't have happened without your help in the planning stages.

BC: Well, based on what I've just told you, you can see how that's pretty clear.

JD: Yeah, no, I mean, I'm agreeing with that, too, but I think he made a point of emphasizing that.

BC: But my deal with them was that I was background.

JD: Right.

BC: I never took any credit for it. I never wanted any credit for it.

JD: Yeah.

BC: I never got interviewed. I never—you know, I was a hired consultant. I mean, that's what I said I wanted: "I want to be your consultant. This is your deal, not mine."

JD: So, what were you doing? Okay, when did you graduate from Duke?

BC: '71. Well, I got my diploma in June of '71, but my last classes were in the fall of '70.

JD: So, what were you doing, just a little bit of background, in the rest of your life? You were managing DBS and—

BC: I was just looking for projects, you know. I had a job with Duke for one year, other than that summer job with Duke. Some friends of mine and I set up something called the Duke Media Center, which was in existence for three or four years. We built a recording studio in the Music Building, we built a film laboratory in the old Chem Building, we had a film production unit, we had a very small-scale television thing going. And the two guys who ran it with me were Andy Berlin, who's become an extremely superstar guy in the ad business, and Joel Smith, who is a film guy out in L.A. now. And so, I had that job, and that paid me. And then, I went and ran the station, and then I started out as just an independent consultant. I've just done projects all the rest of my life. I've just done things that interest me.

JD: Well, this community stuff, too, I mean, were you still involved in activism? I mean, you mentioned working for the St. Joseph's Foundation.

BC: Yeah. But not—I never really got into wanting to be in a group that had meetings.

JD: Yeah. [Laughter] That's understandable.

BC: There seems to be a lot of that around: "Let's have a meeting." And also, I had the privilege of being—because I had the radio station connection, I could go to the demonstrations. and when everybody got arrested, I didn't get arrested, you know, that kind of thing, because I had a dual role.

JD: Yeah, because you were covering it.

BC: Right. There was a big sit-in in the hospital for Union 1199 that wanted to organize the hospital workers, and everybody got arrested in the room except me, that kind of thing.

JD: Wow, yeah. Interesting. Well, this has been great. I appreciate you taking the time.

BC: Well, I'm delighted that you are focusing on this. It's a real interesting story, and it seems like you're putting a lot of effort into getting the facts down.

JD: I'm trying to.

BC: Yeah. And I'm—I don't have any desire for you to emphasize my role. The point of the station had nothing to do with me.

JD: Yeah.

BC: It was a defensive act on my part, because I was really solving the problem of how do I get WDBS on the air. [Laughs]

JD: Yeah. Well, I don't think—you're not going to be in the foreground. But, to be honest, everyone I've talked to about AFR has brought you up. So, I mean, I think there's a need to mention you.

BC: Good! Well, feel free. Anything I say, I'm just telling you what I think and I'm happy to stick by it.

JD: Yeah. If this isn't too tedious, I was going to ask—I didn't want to interrupt during the interview. I have a list of names and I wanted to go over the spellings with you, for the record, the transcript.

BC: I'll try. I can't promise.

JD: Well, any that you can help me with. Okay, Chuck Huestis.

BC: It was Charles B., and I'm almost sure that it was H-U-E-S-T-I-S.

JD: Okay. And, you know, your hunch will help me, too, because I can do some research online, also.

BC: It could have been H-E-U, but I'm almost sure it was H-U-E.

JD: Okay. And Frank Jarman?

BC: He was J-A-R-M-A-N, I believe, with one N.

JD: Okay, good. Wetmore, W-H-E-T-T-M-O-R-E?

BC: No. W-E-T-M-O-R-E. One T, and no H.

JD: Okay, great.

BC: Wetmore.

JD: You mentioned the location of WDBS's tower.

BC: Yes.

JD: What was it?

BC: It was on Rose of Sharon Road, four miles north. And ultimately, WDBS got sold to become Foxy 107 [WFXY].

JD: Right.

BC: And they're still out there.

JD: Okay. Rose of Sharon Road. I just missed that.

BC: Urban contemporary.

JD: Yeah, right.

BC: You know, and that—it's just ironic, and I never have thought of this before. But if you've ever listened to Foxy 107—

JD: Sure.

BC: My concern about AFR might be summed up that they were moving a little bit uncomfortably in that direction toward the end.

JD: Yeah. Well, what's interesting is that when WAFR went on the air in '71, they were—kind of one of the big things that was happening in black radio is that community groups were more and more challenging the licenses of white owners.

BC: Right, right.

JD: And that seems to be, you know, a national context that AFR was part of. But what was happening by the second half of the '70s was that there were increasing numbers of black-owned stations, but the rise of FM changed what a lot of black stations were doing, I think. It changed what a lot of radio stations in general were doing. And the rise of disco kind of changed black radio a lot.

BC: Yeah, sure.

JD: And so did the rise of crossover and—

BC: Yeah, well.

JD: “Beautiful music,” as they called it.

BC: What’s that?

JD: There was this format called “beautiful music.”

BC: Oh, yeah.

JD: And I think WDUR was the Durham representative of that by the late ’70s.

BC: Okay. Was that an AM or FM?

JD: That was an FM station.

BC: That would have been—that’s what WDCG became, and that would have been—that “beautiful music” is what that automated WDNC-FM was way back when. I call it “elevator music” or “roop-dy-doop music.”

JD: Right.

BC: But it’s not quite that bad. It’s more like—it’s excruciating for me to listen to. It reminds me of you’ve got a singer, and you’ve got his foot in a vise, and you’re tightening it up, and he’s wailing. [Laughter]

JD: That does sound painful.

BC: I hear a lot of that when I walk into offices, you know, receptionists listening to it. It just really drives me crazy.

JD: But, yeah, it seems like that was kind of an odd period of flux for radio formats.

BC: Yeah. Well, they had to sell ads and, you know, that was the point.

JD: Where was—you mentioned the WSRC location, and I missed the street name.

BC: It was on East—I said East Geer, and I was wrong. It was on East Club.

JD: East Club, okay.

BC: It was in a sort of abandoned CCC camp, you know, these lean-tos, almost, that had been put up during the Depression. It was a very low-rent little place they rented back there.

JD: Interesting. Joe Pietrantonio? How do I spell his name

BC: Pietrantonio. P-I-E-T-R-A-N-T-O-N-I.

JD: Okay. And the Wright School. Was that W-R-I-G-H-T?

BC: Correct.

JD: Sumter Lowry? How do I spell the last name?

BC: Sumter Lowry? How did that come up?

JD: Well, by now, I've forgotten, so I'll look it up.

BC: Wait a minute. Oh! He was the candidate for governor on the segregationist ticket of Florida in the '50s.

JD: Oh, yeah, I can look that one up.

BC: I think it was S-U-M-P-T-E-R L-O-W-R-E-Y, but there may not have been an E in the end, and there may not have been a P in the first name, so you're going to have to look it up. [Correct spelling: SUMTER LOWRY] But there is a—in western North Carolina, there is a monument on a mountaintop called Mount Lyn Lowry, which has this huge cross on it. That was his daughter, who was my age, who died of leukemia. He was a political force to be reckoned with; he would have been like the I. Beverly Lake of Florida.

JD: Yeah. Okay, I can look him up. That won't be a problem.

BC: Oh, he ran against LeRoy Collins in that primary.

JD: Okay. Now, the founders of NPR, or these early guys. You mentioned—I think you called him Bill Siemering or Gary Siemering.

BC: No, Gary—oh, gosh. Bill Siemering, William Siemering, S-E-I-M-E-R-I-N-G [Correct spelling: SIEMERING]. And Gary—oh, gosh. It wasn't Siemering. It was—Gary's the one who came down and became the program director of WUNC, and I'm sure if you looked at the WUNC history on the Web, you'd find his name.

JD: Okay.

BC: And Fred Calland.

JD: Right.

BC: Oh, no, wait, there was another. We met Fred Calland. He didn't come to North Carolina. The first station manager for WUNC came from NPR, and he was there for ten years, along with Gary. Gary Shivers, S-H-I-V-E-R-S. Gary Shivers.

JD: Okay, I must have misheard that.

BC: Yeah.

JD: And Calland, C-A-L-L-A-N-T?

BC: C-A-L-L-A-N-D.

JD: Oh, okay.

BC: I think he stayed at NPR, but he's one of the people we met with up there.

JD: Okay.

BC: But Siemering was the program director. His claim to fame was—he's also not got any public recognition, but he created "All Things Considered," and he worked there for like two years. He came down to Durham and spent a week, living in my



apartment, visiting WAFR. He came twice! I remember having him down here twice. And then he went back, and I assume—you know, Minnesota Public Radio is a big thing. I think he ran that. He went back to Minnesota, and I believe he started American Public Radio, because he felt NPR wasn't doing everything it should do. He's quite a guy, but he's been written out of the history of NPR, even though he started it.

JD: Interesting. Wow, there's a lot of history here.

BC: [Laughs] But Bill was a good—he was a guy that I could call on any time I had an issue or a question.

JD: So, why was he coming down to AFR?

BC: Because we were their only black station. We were an NPR station. We ran “All Things Considered” every night and we ran a lot of other stuff from NPR.

JD: From the start?

BC: From day one.

JD: Oh! Okay, I didn't realize that. I mean, I heard you mentioning it, but—

BC: Now, I don't know that—when UNC came back on the air, I don't know if we—I think we both did it. I think both stations were running it there for a while.

JD: Interesting. Blonnie Fonville, the guy who helped renovate the—

BC: Blonnie, B-L-O-N-N-I-E F-O-N-V-I-L-L-E.

JD: Okay.

BC: And he was a member of Muhammad Mosque No. 34, I believe it is, in Durham, and a very diligent guy. He only ate one meal a day and got me to read Elijah Muhammad's books about *How to Eat to Live*, and we talked a lot about the importance of bean pies.

JD: Interesting.

BC: Great people! Really nice people, and they did a—it was a crime that that building was knocked down.

JD: Yeah, I know. It's a shame that all that stuff was torn down. Ben Wall, who was from the antenna company.

BC: Ben Wall, W-A-L-L.

JD: Okay.

BC: They were Piedmont Communications.

JD: Okay.

BC: They're still in Durham, and they build towers and sold two-way radios.

JD: And Lee Noel?

BC: I think it was N-O-E-L, like the First Noel.

JD: Great. Just a few more. I appreciate you holding my hand threw this. Lavonia Allison. L-A-V-O-N-I-E.

BC: Lavonia, L-A-V-O-N-I-A A-L-L-I-S-O-N. She is sort of the—she's been the president of the Durham Committee on the Affairs of Black People.

JD: Oh, right.

BC: For like forty years or longer. She's a real force to be reckoned with in politics.

JD: Someone named Byers. I've forgotten who that was since then.

BC: Joan Byers, J-O-A-N B-Y-E-R-S.

JD: Okay.

BC: And a guy named Trevor, T-R-E-V-O-R, who had gone to the Punahou School in Hawaii. I know he talked about that all the time. He probably was in a class with Obama.

JD: Oh, right.

BC: No, I'm sure he's older than that. They took on the lawsuit pro bono. They didn't charge us anything to write up the suit. But I think maybe Trevor ended up—I think Joan bowed out at some point. I think she sort of handed it to him. But they would be listed on the suit, I think, if you ever are able to get that out of the Clerk's office.

JD: Well, I'm going to call them and try to do that, yeah. Some way or another, I also want to try to dig out the FCC application.

BC: I'm sure they're there somewhere, probably in some big warehouse in Virginia.

JD: You don't have any written materials on the station or any recordings, do you?

BC: I really don't think that I do. I could look around a few places, but I think it was before I was saving anything like that. I really don't.

JD: I think Obataiye has a lot of it.

BC: Oh, good!

JD: And I'll send you some stuff I have, too.

BC: Wonderful!

JD: Yeah. Just a few more. Celeste Wesson.

BC: C-E-L-E-S-T-E W-E-S-S-O-N.

JD: Okay, that's how I had it written.

BC: And she is the bureau chief of NPR in L.A. at this point, I think.

JD: Yeah, okay. Chris Carrol.

BC: C-H-R-I-S C-A-R-O-L. [Correct spelling: CARROL]

JD: Okay, that's good. And Bob Gwyn from UNC.

BC: I believe it was G-W-I-N-N. It could have been G-W-Y-N-N. [Correct spelling: GWYN] I'm sorry.

JD: That's okay. I'll check that. Bruce Babski, B-A-T-S-K-Y.

BC: B-A-B-S-K-I.

JD: [Laughs] Okay. It's good I'm—and Ken Pye.

BC: K-E-N P-Y-E. He was the chancellor of Duke.

JD: Oh, right, exactly. Okay, I should know that. That's in one of these books I was telling you about. Well, you know what? I think we got it covered. [Laughs]

BC: I think you've gotten a hundred percent of everything I remember. [Laughs]

JD: Yeah, that's great.

BC: I have no more recollections whatsoever!

JD: Yeah. No, that was great. Let me—

BC: Did anybody have any photos of the inside of the station? Have you—?

END OF INTERVIEW

[Recording ends at 2:21:05]

Transcribed by Sally C. Council