

Transcript of a Recorded Interview with Robert R. Blythe, 15 Sep 1986

The following is an unrehearsed interview with Robert R. Blythe. Mr. Blythe is minister of the First Baptist Church of Richmond, Kentucky, a black Baptist church. The interview is conducted by William E. Ellis, Professor of History and Director of the Oral History Center of Eastern Kentucky University. The interview was conducted at the First Baptist Church on Francis Street in Richmond, Kentucky on the 15th of September, 1986 at 1:30 p.m.

WE: First of all, give me your full name.

RB: My name is Robert Richard Blythe.

WE: Where were you born?

RB: Born here in Richmond. Madison County.

WE: What year? What's your birthday?

RB: Nineteen forty-nine, November 5th.

WE: Nineteen forty-nine. Who are your parents?

RB: Richard Mason and Vashti Bradford Blythe.

WE: Vashti. Tell me about that name.

RB: Well, it's a bible name. V-A-S-T-H-I. It's a bible name. I don't really know how my mother got it, but I know that her family was always a very religious and I assumed that's where it came from. It came from Little Esther in the bible.

WE: I'm not much of a biblical scholar but I recognized it from some place.

RB: Queen Vashti.

WE: Oh, yeah. Yeah. Where were your parents from? Were they from Madison County?

RB: Yes. Both families are from Madison County.

WE: What was your mother's maiden name?

RB: Her mother was a Walker. Katie Walker. Let's see, her father was Elias Walker. In fact, the spot where my mother lives right now, the corner of Altima and Steep Street is the property that was owned by my mother's grandfather. So, they've been there for some time.

WE: Now, did both parents grow up in Richmond?

RB: No, my father grew up in the county. In fact, I think at some time, he lived in the Paint Lick area, and another time, he lived in what was called the Grove Hill area, out Moberly, Speedway, out that way. As far as where he was born, I'm not certain. But, I know, he was in the Moberly Speedway area.

WE: He was a farmer?

RB: No, he wasn't. I think his parents were. His father was Henry Blythe and I believe they were farmers.

WE: So, what was your father's occupation?

RB: He was a steel worker for a while in the Harrisburg, Pennsylvania area for a short time and the time that he was here, he was an employee at the Bluegrass Army Depot. The Bluegrass Ordnance Depot it was at the time. He was in the military. He served in World War II. I don't know how many years though that he was in. He died in 1969.

WE: So, when you were born in '49 and he was working at the Ordnance?

RB: He was working at the Ordnance, yes.

WE: What did he do out there?

RB: He was an ammunition handler, and that's all I can remember. He did something with the boxed ammunition that came through there. That's the best I can remember.

WE: We are also thinking about doing an oral history project on the Ordnance facility. We've got some interviews with people that worked there, but it's interesting because that was one of the . . . Back in that . . . In the '40s, especially, that was one of the first job openings for black people in the county for a long time. So, he retired from working there.

RB: He retired working from there because of his health and that was maybe ten years before he died. He had a heart condition. In fact, he died at the age of 52 of a heart attack.

WE: Did your mother work?

RB: Yes, and she works right now at Eastern. She works in the Alumni Coliseum in the laundry room, down in the locker room area. She's been there, I guess, maybe 10 years now, 10 or 15 years. Because she worked 4 or 5 years and then she quit and, I think it was when my father was ill, and she stayed at home a lot. Then, she went back to work there. But, maybe a total of 15, maybe even 20 years total. She's been at Eastern. Now, my mother . . .

WE: How old's your mother now?

RB: Uh, she's 62. Her original occupation was beautician, cosmetologist. She went to

vocational school and she was a beautician for several years here in the city of Richmond. She had her own shop at the house for several years.

WE: Where did you go to school? Tell me about your early schooling.

RB: I started my schooling at Elizabeth's Kindergarten out on East Main where the . . . what's the club that's out there?

WE: Oh, the Maverick Club?

RB: The Maverick. On the right hand side, facing the Maverick, on the right hand side is a little house that I think they also bought. The owners bought. That used to belong to Elizabeth Chenault, better known as Miss Lizzie and she had a kindergarten there for years. I attended her kindergarten for a couple of years and then went to Richmond Junior High School. Now, it was Richmond Junior High at the time I began what is now Telford Community Center. Telford YMCA. When it was a part of the Richmond City School system, I attended there elementary school and junior high. Of course, by that time, integration had moved the high school to Madison High and I graduated literally, 8th grade, in a ceremony there and went on to Madison High four years and graduated there in '67. I went to Eastern and immediately graduated in '71. I went away to teach in public schools in Gary, Indiana, came back and studied one more year, graduate studies at Eastern and then taught in the Richmond City Schools for five years. I went to work for IBM in Akron, Ohio and spent a year in marketing training with them. In May of this year, I completed a four year study - divinity studies at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville. I'm not really through yet. I'm getting there.

WE: My son just started school there this fall.

RB: At Southern Seminary?

WE: Yes. My son is Bill Ellis. He's tall, got red hair.

RB: Bill Ellis.

WE: He sings. He sang in a lot of groups. You've probably seen him around some place. He just got married about a month ago.

RB: I'll be certain to look him up when I get back down there tomorrow.

WE: He's interested in . . . He's working on a master's in theology, but his interest is youth work.

RB: Right. He can get a youth ministry emphasis with youth.

WE: He's very interested in that.

RB: Oh.

WE: So, you're still taking classes?

RB: Yes. In fact, at present, I'm doing a series of tests to complete the profile for consideration for one of the doctoral programs there. I'm not certain what I'll do, but I want to get all the ducks lined up to see if I can be admitted or so.

WE: That's a long way down there.

RB: You mean, miles?

WE: That's 110 miles.

RB: Well, see, I've become accustomed to that now over the past four years. So, that really provides me . . . Well, it depends on how much of a hurry I'm in, but normally, a one hour and 35 minute vacation. It's here I stay quite busy. In fact, more busy than I should, but there is so much work to be done. Somebody has to do it, but I've learned that that somebody does not always have to be me. I used to feel that if I didn't do it nobody would. Now, I've learned that if I was dead and gone, somebody would or it wouldn't get done. So, I've decided to take more vacations and spend more time talking with people.

WE: That's a good philosophy.

RB: Spending it with my friends and doing some things for me. I've spent a lot of my life with commitment to others. For example, this church. I've been a member for about 27 years now. I've done just about everything there was to do here. Sunday school teacher, choir member, musician, now pastor. Just the whole gammut, usher, the whole works. I've enjoyed it, but I've always spent my time, as I said, doing things for others. When I left here in 1978 to go work for IBM. I remember one of the first things I did in the office late one night in Akron, Ohio, was to sit down and write letters of resignation to all of the boards and committees and activities that I was a part of here. That was Red Cross, Kentucky River Foothills. I was a trustee at Pattie A. Clay. Any number of things. They all had to go. I was just over committed. That was the essence of it.

WE: Tell me about . . . Let's get back to your early education. What kind of education did you receive in elementary school through junior high? You had all black teachers?

RB: That is correct. I felt it was a top notch education. In fact, if I compared what I received then to what I think many of the kids in some circumstances are receiving now, the quality of the education as far as I was concerned far exceeded what the kids are getting now. For one thing, and I'm a public school teacher, so I think I can still be objective. But, for one thing, I believe, in the circumstances here now, there's not so much personal interest in those young people as there was then. For one thing, being an all black school, I think, and I'm not alone in this, I firmly believe that the black teachers had a more personal interest. And I felt that what the

teachers then, simply because they had a familiarity with parents on a personal basis. Many of teachers were actual natives of this community and being aware that the opportunities for blacks were just not that many and that if black young people were to make it at all in life, if there were to be successful, they would really have to have something "under the belt", so to speak.. So, I think they gave extra effort to make sure we were good students and at least got our lessons and at least faked it well. Well enough to get through the classes. I think they spent more sleepless nights than teachers now would for their students. I think, not only just because we're black, but recognizing the circumstances of the day and the fact that we didn't have much going for us, not really. And if we were to make it, we'd have to make it on our own.

WE: Who were some of those teachers?

RB: Oh, my . . . Well, let me start with some of my junior high teachers. There's Mrs. Blythe. Mrs. Lena May Blythe from Berea. Actually she lives on Blythe Court which is where my family came from. She was one of my 7th and 8th grade teachers in, I believe, history and math. There was a Mr. John Freeman. His wife was Margaret Freeman, who was my Kentucky history and social studies teacher. I believe English in 7th or 8th grade was Marion Curry who is a member of this church.

WE: Is she still . . . You might tell me a little bit about these people. Are they still living?

RB: Yes. All of these that I've mentioned are still living. There's Andrew Miller, who lived next door here to the church. He's now deceased. He was a musician of this church for 50 years. He was my 6th grade teacher. He was my mother's music teacher at Richmond High School. Let's see, there was Mrs. Aretha Peace who is now deceased. Aretha White Peace. O.Z. White, the undertaker, that was his sister. There was Mrs. Leotta Mukes Thomas. I remember her. She was my 4th grade teacher. She lived in Frankfort, Kentucky. And I think she is still living. I understand from someone a couple of years ago that she was still living there. She had the prettiest silver hair. She used that blue stuff in it. She was the sweetest lady. She'd kiss us on weekends. I remember my 2nd grade teacher, Ms. Pearsoll, because she lived somewhere else. She got married and she became a Hodges, but the reason I remember her is because every Friday afternoon, we lined up to kiss her as we left class for the weekend. Other members of this church . . . Another member of this church, Miss Ann Turner, who lived around the corner on Hill Street. Ms. Turner was the 1st grade teacher for years, years and years and years at that school.

WE: Is she alive?

RB: No, she isn't. She and her sister, Hattie Turner, I understand were teachers. Hattie Turner died in a fire at the home in fact around the corner. Her dress caught on fire from the heater. Ms. Ann Turner, my 1st grade teacher, had a, oh, I guess it was about a 30-36 inch cane stick, and she didn't mind using it on us. It looked like a little bamboo stick or something. I don't know what it was, but she would . . . The other thing Ms. Turner liked to do was to maul our heads with chalk. She'd take a piece of chalk from the chalkboard and if someone was talking out of turn or whatever, she'd take that piece and ram it down to the skull and just rolled it a little bit. She'd look at us and now, I'll maul your head with this chalk. She would also take the eraser

from the chalkboard and dust our heads with the chalk. But, let's see . . . Third grade, I had a teacher by the name of Mrs. Warren. I'm not certain where she is now. That's most of them. Our principal was Mr. C.G. Merritt who just died, I believe, it was last year. He was our principal there the whole time I was there. In fact, I believe he was a teacher when my mother was there at school. Mr. Merritt had a birth deformity. His middle two fingers were together and I remember many of the students used to, of course, behind the school building and in the bathroom. This was not in his presence, of course, would mock him. Also, he talked with a . . . If I may say so, in a mushmouth kind of fashion, and I remember the students would joke about that a lot and he would chase us down the hall like that and he'd come after us and shake his hands at us. He'd be talking all the time and we could never understand what he was saying. But, that was part of the fun of it in retrospect. That was . . . it wasn't fun for him. It was mockery. But, I mean it was just fun.

WE: Who were your friends in school?

RB: Oh, my. Let's see, before I say that. Let me explain that when I was in school, I didn't have a lot of friends. I believe through most of my school years, if not all of them, I was as far as grades were concerned, either number one or number two in my classes. All of them. And sometimes that kind of separates you when you are around kids sometimes who don't want to study and they know that you do study. The only time that they really were anxious to see you is when it's time to copy some homework or get some answers during a test or whatever. But, as far as real friends, of the early years of school, I don't really recall any . . . any person that I was really close to.

WE: Who was your closest academic competition if you were either number one or number two?

RB: Well, let's see. There were several folks. There was Charles "Chuckie" Payton, Shelia Harris, Delma Merritt, who was the principal's niece, and we are close personal friends to this day. Let's see, those were the closest I believe. There was Gary Huguely, William David Huguely, Iola Warford, Floretta Johnson. They were the closest academic competition. There was Walter Derricks. I'm trying to think of some of those who've left. My first couple of years of school, there was one young man who was extremely bright. We . . . We spent some time together. His name was Jimmy Embry. He has now moved. In fact, Jimmy, I think, became a little rebellious. About 10-15 years ago, he was a part of the active movements and had an afro out to here and I think he now has five children and settled down, let's see, it's either Louisville or Indianapolis. I can't remember which. I believe if there's ever anyone that I felt "afraid of" it was Jimmy. He was a quite bright young man. Those were the ones I think who left the greatest mark with me. Those are the ones I can remember right now.

WE: What were your experiences when integration started in Richmond? How did you react? What do you remember about it?

RB: Well, needless to say, I was scared to death. I'd only been, generally, in my own little crowd, so to speak, and the folks on my street. My street was well integrated. So, being around white folks was nothing new to me, but being in that setting and having white teachers, I was

quite uneasy.

WE: So, that was the beginning of your freshman year?

RB: That was my freshman year, yes, 1963. My fears were soon put to rest. I have a tendency sometimes to lack self-confidence, and that was, I think, one of the things that made me so uneasy. I knew the competition there would be quite different. For one thing, I'd have to try to deal with the social aspects of it, but also try to get my academic stuff done in such a manner that would be acceptable. I remember a couple of teachers in particular who were a great help in getting me acclimated there at Madison High School. One of them was Lois Arthur. She lives out at Bybee. She and her husband, James Arthur. He was my science teacher and she was my social studies teacher. In fact, they've been here to our church on occasion. But, I remember Mrs. Arthur. Well, I was elected to a class office position every year for my four years, student council or class president or something like that. Mrs. Arthur was very instrumental in being certain that I got a fair shake my first year there I ran the election for class officers. If I'm not mistaken, I was president of the class my freshman year. Council member the second and third years, I believe. No, council member the second year and president . . . something like that. Anyway, Mrs. Arthur was very encouraging. I remember one day in class, for example, we had written a paper for something and everyone in the paper had used the expression "different than" which is grammatically incorrect. "Different from" is correct. Mrs. Arthur made the point when she was handing the papers back. She said, now most of you here made an error in your writing. Which is correct "different from" or "different than", Robert? And I said "different than". She said wrong, and I figured you'd be the only person who'd get it right. But she was always encouraging and I appreciate her even to this day. A sweet lady and a good Baptist. But, Mr. Arthur, the science teacher, was a little more reserved. He was a nice man, but I think it was just as difficult for all of them to accept us and to learn more about us as black students. That was a tremendous challenge, I'm sure to them. Some of them really tried. They tried hard.

WE: Did you ever feel threatened during that period of time or were you threatened?

RB: Threatened in what way?

WE: Physically or verbally.

RB: Yes, there were a couple of occasions, but I guess I could say that the threat was on a racial basis, but I never really felt that. There were a couple of guys, and this one particular guy, two guys that I can think of right now, who were just outright bullies. They just didn't like anybody. Well, something I've never told anyone, I mean, anyone, I mean anyone. But, I remember one day, one of those guys, one of them happens to be an attorney in this town now, but is not the one. This other guy, and I don't know where he is. One day, we were coming down the steps leaving school and I remember, as I started wearing glasses in the 8th grade, and I remember, I dropped my glasses, and I am 99.99% sure that he stepped on them intentionally and broke them. But, I don't know if I could class myself weak. I never was a fighter. Everybody else fought enough for me. I never had any interest in that. I never what it would accomplish sometimes, but there were times when I felt that was the way to get things done. But, this particular guy,

most of the time was very nice, but I really felt that he did that intentionally. I didn't know if he wanted to pick a fight or what, but that was it. I had the glasses fixed and that was the end of that. I had never discussed that with anybody.

WE: What was the reaction of the other black students those first years of integration?

RB: Well, there was a chip on the shoulder, there was a . . . I know they're not going to treat me right, so I'm not going to let them get the best of me, and that attitude. I know they don't like me and I know they don't want me here. So, they're not going to do this to me and they're not going to . . . You know, that kind of attitude. I think, on the whole, though the students themselves received the situation pretty well. We had come from a school where it was emphasized and, it wasn't that black students didn't play in school, in the black school, but education was emphasized. Often times, for example, I remember Mrs. Curry who would say all kinds of things to us, I'd like to feel because she loved us. She'd say things like, uh, she'd look at guys who were just running their mouths in study hall, and she'd say things like, yeah, empty wagons make the most noise. There was one guy in particular, who always found something to get into and I remember she'd call him. She'd say to him, yes, it's cloudy outside.

WE: She sounds like one of my teachers.

RB: She'd say that like I've got mine and you've still got yours to get. But, there were definitely "pets". I was one. The principal's niece Delma was another. We got to do things like run the errands for the teachers. That kind of thing. At the time to pass out the report cards at the end of the grading period, I remember in particular, Mrs. Curry, she would make a public issue of one's grades. I would never have to ask you what grades you got. All I'd have to do is sit there and she would tell the whole class. For example, she'd call names like Delma Merritt, see that class, all A's. All A's. Very good, Delma. Robert Blythe, see that class, all A's. Very good, Robert. For example, she'd say, Bobby Jones . . . you know what I mean. They'd have maybe a couple of C's, a few D's, F's and whatever, and then she'd get back to another, Iola Walker, look at that class. Good student, very good, Iola. It was obvious, but it was fun. It was lots of fun. I just hope that none of those kids were ever scarred by that, because that can . . .

WE: Yeah, it can be pretty bad. Were you an athlete?

RB: No, I was not. The only thing I ever played was the piano. No, I never was. Well . . . Well, since you've taken all my secrets today, there's something I've never . . . I think I only discussed this with one person. I was always so timid except with my brother. My brother's older. Three years older. I used to beat him up all the time. He's the only person I ever fought. Would never let anybody else fight him. That I wouldn't stand for. But I remember one time I decided that I was going to try for one of the . . . I think it was the baseball team or something at Richmond Junior High.

WE: Just a second.

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RB: I've never talked that much in my whole life.

WE: You do every Sunday.

RB: Oh, that's right. But, I remember one occasion when I decided I'd let my guard down and finally try to join one of the teams. I think it was a baseball team. I remember the day that I went to Richmond High for tryouts and a bunch of the guys were sitting around and they were cussing so much, I decided to go home. And I never did after that pursue any athletic team. My background has always been one . . . Well, I'm not an angel, I know that, but I've always had a very deeply religious background. I think it comes primarily from my mother's side of the family. Not that my father's folk were heathens. It's just that my mother's folk stressed that a lot more. It was my mother who took me to church. My father didn't go. My grandmother. My maternal grandmother, I always went with her. I remember on one occasion and this all stemmed from the same thing, but the reason why I didn't join the athletic teams . . . I remember one day, I guess I was about 13 or 14 years old, maybe 15, I remember my father said to me, you spend too much time at church. But, what he didn't realize was, I couldn't help it. There's just something that drew me here. So be it.

WE: What about when you graduated from high school? You went directly to Eastern?

RB: Yes.

WE: Right out of high school. Tell me about your years at Eastern.

RB: Oh, my. Nineteen sixty-seven to 1971. As a freshman of Eastern, let's see . . . I was very honored. First of all, I received a Kawanas scholarship to attend Eastern. In my freshman year, I received the freshman math award for progress in math. I was a math major. That was an extreme honor for me. I remember the teacher who was primarily responsible for that. I believe he came from Estill County which is what shocked me, but I always thought he was a very fair man. His name was Bobby Mayo. In fact, he's a professor at Eastern still.

WE: Yeah, I know Bobby Mayo.

RB: He was my first math teacher at Eastern. I had algebra and trigonometry and I had my first calculus course with him. I've liked him ever since. I liked him then. Plus because the award was just . . . Um, I never was a part of any fraternity. I felt . . . you know, sometimes it's like a dog in the manger, I don't want to eat the hay you can't eat anyway. So, I just figured, naw, nobody else ought to eat it. That's not my attitude really of fraternities, it's just that I didn't need a confined group of people. In fact, I think that has come through my life universally. I have never been confined to a group of people. One of the reasons I studied French was to broaden my horizons and see what the rest of the world had to offer and also to help me to understand that everybody does not think the way I think. I think one needs to learn about other cultures as to keep their mind open. But, I was at Eastern during a period of time when R.O.T.C.

was mandatory the first two years. I was a part of the R.O.T.C. course. I enlisted in advanced R.O.T.C. but was medically disqualified at the end of my third year of R.O.T.C. I had an ulcer and some extensive testing said that it may not be wise to admit me to the program. But, part of the R.O.T.C. course, a great bunch of guys, a great bunch of leaders. Let's see, that was, other than for keeping up with student government activities on campus, and I wasn't really a part of that until my senior year, I was the president of the class of '71. That was a political move though. It wasn't that so many students voted for me, it's that I was the only one who applied to run for the office. That's still okay. That was interesting that year. Of course, that's history now. The circumstances may never be known by all of those who find out that I was president of class of '71, but then, it looks good on paper. Let's see, if I remember correctly, also, in the .

..

WE: Your graduating year was '71?

RB: Yes. Yes. I think that was the extent, except for my sophomore year, because my grade point standing from my freshman year, I was inducted into K.I.E., the sophomore honorary fraternity. But that's about the extent of it.

WE: You lived at home?

RB: I lived at home, yes. I never lived on campus.

WE: Did you work any?

RB: No, not really. Well, let's see, I didn't work work. I had a band at the time. Our band was pretty good but we became quite well known and we got to do a lot of traveling. I became involved with a group in 19--, I guess it was about '68 or '69 or so. I was the oldest member. I became involved from the standpoint of managing the group only, because those kids in the group at that time needed some direction, and I talked to my pastor about it. He said well, here's an opportunity for you to help give these guys and girls some direction. And I thought that may be so. So, we worked together for about six or seven years. We did a lot of traveling. They had a sense of responsibility, a service and some discipline, some things we had to do, some things I would not tolerate if you're going to work with me, and I'm the one who had the contacts, and I'm the one who had a little bit of money. I'm the one who did all the business for them. So, they listened.

WE: What kind of music?

RB: Top of the charts. Pop 40 kind of stuff. A little bit of the Jacksons and very little of what you'd really call the rhythm and blues kind of stuff. It was popular stuff. We played a lot of Eastern fraternities, U.K. fraternities, Transylvania. We were asked to appear on stage before Barry White when he was going to do a concert in Louisville.

WE: What was the name of the group?

RB: The Techniques.

WE: The Techniques.

RB: And we had some great times together.

WE: How long did this last?

RB: About seven years. I left town. Let's see, what did happen? I think I did just a little managing in the last couple of years and no playing. I played with them for a while. But, this was during my college years initially. And for that reason, if you'd look at my transcript, you would know that because I became overly involved again during my last couple of years, and I just didn't put that much time to my studies. I was involved in everything that was going on. All these boards and committees and whatever. I was the minister of music here at the time at the church. I was just overextended. I've been told by a couple of friends, very close friends, that it appears that I have a need to be thoroughly immersed in activity. It may be true, but I hope here of late, I have been a little bit more able to draw the line. I know what I can do and what I can't do. I try not to overextend.

WE: We have to do that as we get older.

RB: Yes, we do. Yes, we do.

WE: It's hard.

RB: Very hard.

WE: You mentioned your minister. Who was your minister then?

RB: A.C. Goodloe. He's now my pastor emeritus. He'll be 93 next month.

WE: Tell me about him.

RB: Anyone who knows A.C. Goodloe knows he's a unique character, politician extra ordinaire. He knows how to get things down in any situation. He came from the Perryville area and he likes to feel he's quite a business man. He tells me often times. He tells me that I'm a good boy. He says compared . . . and he doesn't go into gross gory details, but he says compared with a lot of things he did when he was growing up and when he was my age, he said I am a good boy. And I'll leave it at that. He has been probably my greatest inspiration. He has been with me all of my ministerial life. Of course, he's the one who licensed and ordained me here. He is the only pastor I have ever had. Of course, up to the time I was five years old, there was another pastor here at the church, but he is the only pastor per se while I was a member of the church I've ever had. Well, known throughout this country. Very actively involved in the state denominational work, national convention, national foreign mission board. The name of A.C. Goodloe is quite well known throughout this state. He is known also . . . I remember when his

wife died. His wife had told me and me alone what she wanted for a funeral on the morning she died. I stayed with her for a while. The morning she died, he told me now you have to do this because she didn't tell me what she wanted. She told you. I told him okay. I remember what was funny. You see no connection there, but me show you how strange that comes together. When we were preparing the printed program for her funeral and the obituary for the newspaper, he had me to write the obituary, Lena Robinson Goodloe, wife of Dr. A.C. Goodloe, better known as "The Old Republican", quite well-known in Republican circles. You see, that's why I had to go all the way back there to tell you because he has a way of sneaking himself into everything and making his presence known. A.C. Goodloe is described by many as a character and that he is. He loves to talk. I remember last year, at the age of 91 at the time, I believe, he quoted I believe it's Hannibal. Some poem that was extremely long and he quoted it from memory. We were at a banquet. I took him to the banquet with me and they asked him to get up and have remarks. He went on through the noble Carthage and whatever, and he stood 10-15 minutes reciting from memory that poem. It was awesome. That's A.C. Goodloe. I remember a little political maneuver that he pulled to get me elected secretary of the General Association of Baptists in Kentucky. When the state association was meeting here . . .

WE: You mean black Baptists do the same thing as white Baptists?

RB: You mean when a little politics creep in. (Laughter). Yes. He got up in the meeting and he said . . . He walked by me. I was playing a congregational song on the organ. He walked behind me and said, now don't you say anything. And I looked at him, and I thought well, what is he up to now? We had the election of officers. It came time to elect the state secretary. He jumped in and said I'll offer the name Robert Blythe. Somebody said second motion. And then somebody came and said, wait a minute, now, who is he? Because I wasn't that active in the state work, and he said, he's sitting right over there on the organ. And somebody said, well, you know, tell us about him. Is he qualified to be a secretary? He said, well, he's a public school teacher, and blah, blah, blah. Well, is his name on the church's official letter as being sent as a messenger? Well, before the election of officers, a report of the credential committee had been given and it was received as a partial report. A.C. Goodloe, now, you've got to remember. Goodloe, then, said well, the credential committee's report was a partial report. And somebody said yes. A.C. Goodloe said wait just a minute. He walked out the front door of his church, across the street where the old masonic lodge was, where the credential committee was working for the state meeting because we didn't have room here in the church for everybody to be working. He went over there, wrote my name on the letter blank, came back across the street, and said yes, his name is on the blank. And I looked at him, and he said Shh! And I thought I don't want to be secretary. So, anyway, I was 23 at the time and I've been state secretary now for 13-1/2 years all because of the finagling of A.C. Goodloe. I don't regret that. Not at all. It was just one of those things that's good at. I remember at a lot of our state meetings and national meetings, A.C. Goodloe's name was so well known because he'd get up at a meeting, bring up a controversial issue, get folks fighting with each other, arguing across the room from the pulpit to the door, and then, he would sit down and watch it all take place. Then, he'd get up and walk out, shake hands, talk to people, smile, wave, and go on out the door and folks were still fighting and arguing. He loved it. But, I understand his mother was the same way. I remember his mother. She died at the age of 95. I remember attending her funeral in Perryville. But, I

understand she held many a day the floor of the national convention and they couldn't sit her down. A.C. Goodloe's the same way. Folks uptown are afraid to see him come to a city commission because when he brings up something, that's the end of it. You just don't sit him down. When he's through, he'll sit down. He's been a tremendous influence in my life, of course. I traveled around this country to the National Baptist Convention of America with him at the age of 16, 15, because I didn't have a driver's license. I remember the first of the National Baptist Conventions I ever attended in Indianapolis, Indiana, and he talks about that to this day because he says I remember Robert wanted to drive and he didn't have a driver's license, so we couldn't let him drive. He rode in another preacher's car to Indianapolis. But, we've been together for years.

WE: And he's a life long Republican.

RB: Yes. Yes. He lives, eats, and breaths Republican.

WE: How does that . . .

RB: Excuse me.

WE: Go ahead.

RB: One thing he tells me now. Do you realize, Robert, you are the only pastor of that church that has not been a Republican? (Laughter) I won't tell you what I am.

WE: How does that relate to the fact that it seems like the Democratic party has been more pro-black or has had more . . . well, it's apparently had more interest in black people in the last 20 or 25 years?

RB: Well, I think you hit the key right there. A.C. Goodloe is not looking at the past 20-25 years. He has a 90-year perspective.

WE: It's still the party of Lincoln?

RB: That's it. And he'll remind me of that anytime I bring up the issue that, you know, well, they didn't used to do this, and they didn't used to do that, and this is the one. Of course, I remember, I did not know this but I think my grandmother was Republican, for example. That has also been a means whereby some local politicians have had an "in" so to speak with this church. There were some strong Republicans who were ministers of this church. In fact, I think one of the granddaughters of a slave who organized many of the black churches in this county, Madison Campbell, his granddaughter was Republican. I didn't realize how strong it was until an election several years ago when those folks all got their heads together in the church and they communicated with certain people and that was it. That was just the way it was. There were some votes that were almost literally guaranteed, you can't really make votes, but then some folks didn't know you couldn't make them. They didn't know what means you have checking on them, knowing what they've done, and all that kind of things. A lot of folks were just afraid.

WE: Is Reverend Goodloe in good health now? Would he be willing to be an interviewee?

RB: Yes. He's in very good health physically for a 92-1/2 year old. He's up and around and out of the house. His spirit's kind of broken. His wife just died two years ago and the anniversary of that was just a week ago. And I did not realize. I couldn't remember, but I didn't realize the toll that it would take on him on the anniversary on that. I think he's suffering under that right now, but other than being a great deal repetitive in his talking. I guess, I would be too at 92-1/2, let's face it, otherwise, he can remember anything. In fact, he often gets in the pulpit and says, he calls me his pastor now, and I am. But, he says, my pastor says I remember too much, and he does. He forgets nothing. Absolutely nothing. He is remarkable. And some things I wish he would forget.

WE: While we're talking about older people. Who are some old black Madison Countians that maybe we should interview?

RB: Oh my. Well, it's hard for me to bring a couple of names to the front. I have, for example, several older members of this church. Some of whom are incapacitated in nursing homes and whatever. That's why I felt the sense of urgency to collect some information. For example, the lady around the corner, who's 83, is Beulah Clark. A member up the street is Evelyn Hall, who's about 90. Her husband just passed away, Clarence Hall. A.C. Goodloe at the age of 92. He will be 93 next month. Um, I have a deacon here, Albert Burton, who is 82, 81. He had a birthday last month or the month before last. He's the second oldest deacon. I have a deacon here, Z.B. Irvine, whose wife just died last week or the week before last. He's 84 now I believe, 83 or 84. Let me see, let's step outside our congregation for a moment. There's, uh, Liza Chenault, who's now at Kenwood Nursing Home, but she's 105, and I think now, she's starting to show her age. She didn't for a long time, but I think now she's starting to really slip away. There's Mr. Jim Collins, who's out there who's 100+. St. Paul, for example, has Walter Williams, who is, I guess, 80, no, he's almost Goodloe's age. He's close to 90 now. He still gets around. Oh, those are the ones that I can think of right now. I can't think of anybody else.

WE: Let's get back to your . . . You went to Eastern. You graduated you said in '71?

RB: Seventy-one.

WE: What'd you do at the end of '71?

RB: I went to Gary, Indiana to teach in the public schools of Gary. That was culture shock. That was at the period of time when drugs were just becoming prevalent in schools, and I didn't know what drugs . . . I didn't know what the issue was all about even. I didn't know what the symptoms were. None of that stuff. Of course, in the education classes at Eastern, they tell you now watch for glassy eyes and watch for changes in behavior. Well, I didn't know the kids in the first place. So, I didn't know a behavior change or whether or not it happened. I went to Gary and realized at the end of my tenure there one year - that was by choice - I realized that half of my kids came in stoned everyday, but I didn't know that. But, I taught in the public schools of Gary, Indiana and then came back and did a year of graduate study in French, and then went

to teach in the public schools of Richmond for five years.

WE: What'd you teach? Math?

RB: I taught math and French, junior high and high school. I taught only math when I was in Gary. Gary, Indiana, home of the Jackson Five. But, let's see, when I left the Richmond City Schools, it was following the death of an auntie of mine. A very close auntie, who lived next door to me, the house that I bought that was next door to hers. She died early one morning and an elderly cousin that was staying with her at the time, somehow, although she couldn't see and could barely get around. Somehow, she left that house, walked down the steps, came over next door to my house, and was beating on my garage door with a broom handle at 5:30 one morning and asked me to come over to the house because she thought my auntie was dead. And she was. But, that was a time that I was really about to break emotionally anyway. I was just overloaded almost to the point of exhaustion. Still, again. In fact, I wound up in the hospital. When I got out of the hospital, I took a trip to Europe and spent the time parais a little Francois and resting, and trying to decide what I wanted to do when I got back. I had been offered a job the day before I left with IBM. They said while you're on your vacation, give it a little thought. I did and I decided to try it. So, I went to Akron, Ohio for three years with IBM. I came back from there and spent maybe, let's see, I came back in late August or September. In the meantime, I served as the interim pastor here because Reverend Goodloe had declared his intent to retire that fall. So, in and out, I was in Akron still, but I'd come down on weekends and that's like 800 miles round trip. I'd come down on weekends and fill in for him on Sunday mornings and then go back up there.

WE: You really hadn't had any theological training?

RB: That's right. Just my life in the church and that was it. No formal training.

WE: But you were already, you said, the recording secretary, right?

RB: For the state association. That was really a clerical/administrative position. It wasn't an executive secretary. It wasn't an executive officer kind of thing from which I had to run the affairs because they were actually run from day to day by our office which has a superintendent of missions who supervises our activities. It was in August of 1982 that I began my studies at the seminary.

WE: How many days a week do you go down there? Have you been going down there?

RB: Because at the time, there were no classes on Mondays, I was going Tuesday through Friday.

WE: Wow.

RB: Four years. I've got 100 . . . In fact, yesterday, my car turned 160,000 miles. I bought the car just in Akron, well, I bought it here but while I was living in Akron just before I left to come back here. Left Akron to come back here. I came home, bought the car, and went back to

Akron, 160,000 miles.

WE: It knows the way to Louisville and back.

RB: I'd just get in the car and say let's go. (Laughter) It goes to Louisville. It knows my parking space at the seminary. But, there's something I haven't told you that's also going on in the middle of all of this. Let's see, I acknowledged my preaching ministry calling in June . . . in April of 1980. I was licensed to preach in June of 1980. It was in October of 1981 that I was ordained. That's when you were actually examined, but still prior to any formal training. But, that's our tradition. Our tradition is not based on formal training. It's based on the perception by the congregation that one truly is called. The Lord has truly laid his hands on so and so for the gospel ministry. It was in June of 1981, 1981, yes, that I was married. I am now divorced. Finalized in January of 1984. That is significant because I was in the middle of a separation at the time I began my studies at Southern Seminary. And the pressure of several things . . . One, the pressure of being in the middle of a separation, but also the pressure of having three homes. I owned a house in Akron. I owned a house here, and I had an apartment in Louisville. Eventually, sold the house in Akron, rented the house here, and got myself into one spot. But, then part of my stuff was in the apartment, part was in a storage bin, and part was in my garage here. So, I was still kind of spread out. Finally, I got the stuff out of the house in Akron, brought part of it to Louisville, part of it here, and eventually moved out of the apartment about a year and a half ago in Louisville. I moved here and finally got all my stuff in one place and that helped to alleviate some chest pains I was having also. Two years ago, Dr. Mitchell hospitalized me for an apparent heart attack, no great wonder. Thank God it was not a heart attack I suffered. It was really stress. Symptoms of excessive stress. That came right after the divorce was final and there were some things that happened in the divorce. It was not a dirty matter, it's just that there was a considerable amount of subtle stress or pressure, and I survived it, but only by the slightest, only by the help of the Lord. I guess he just wasn't through with me. But that was an awesome phase in my life. But, that's while the studies were going on. That was significant because the seminary provided an opportunity for me to theologically . . .

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE 2.

BEGINNING OF TAPE 2, SIDE 1

The following is a continuation of the interview with Reverend Robert R. Blythe, made on September 15, 1986.

WE: What about your academic training at the seminary? What have you been . . . You've been going for four years, what have you been doing?

RB: The area that I chose at the seminary was master divinity with an emphasis in pastoral training. My studies were quite comprehensive. There were biblical studies, church history, church administration, actual ministry studies, pastoral care, and counseling, but an overall view of ministry. I chose to spread the studies out over a four year period. It could've been done in three years, but I felt being a pastor, it's only sensible that one should not try to cram too much. The studies, of course, are basically centered around Southern Baptist life. I am not a Southern

Baptist, but I'm in the National Baptist Convention. That's not really a denomination as much as Southern Baptists consider the Southern Baptist Convention a denomination. It's just a convention of black Baptists. We're not necessarily bound by doctrinal tendency. We're more bound racially, traditionally. But, that was the essence of it. It was an overall view of Southern Baptist teaching theology, biblical studies, ministry studies, church history, and church administration.

WE: So, you were thinking very seriously now about you want to finish your doctorate?

RB: Yes, I do. If they'll have me. I can be, for example, DMin, a doctor of ministry in 1-2 years. A Ph.D. in 3-4 years, I think. What I would probably want to do is adjust some things here at the church if I wanted to engage in that kind of study. So, that I have more time to spend there. At this point, it's a matter of preparing for admission to a graduate program in a general kind of way, taking a Miller Analogy test, the GRE, and then, they'll review the entire profile and decide whether or not I should go further there.

WE: Well, I told you, last year, I did my dissertation at U.K. and then I finally got a book published on E.Y. Mullins.

RB: I noticed that.

WE: I've really gotten off into other things since then although I continue to have an interest in religious history. We had a 300 level history course last fall that was really just a study of religious history or the history of religion in the United States for about the latter 19th century to about 1940. We had 35 students sign up for that. And we'll probably offer it again some time in the future, but it was . . . We were surprised we got that many, but there were, oh, about, I guess, two-thirds were history majors, but we got serious students from other disciplines who took that as an elective because they were either interested in religion or a couple of them were in sociology and just one or two people were just interested in the religious aspect. But, I've gotten off into some other topics. I'm very interested in the Southern Baptist conflict that's arisen over inerrancy and I've got a final I keep that keeps getting wider and wider on that topic.

RB: In the course that I'm taking right now. I'm only taking one. A course on Denominationalism in America, a comment was made last week by the instructor.

WE: Who is teaching that?

RB: Bill Leonard.

WE: Yeah. I know him. I don't know him well. I just met him.

RB: But maybe it isn't such things as inerrancy in women in ministry, but are the real issues so much as maybe some other things that are underlying and those that are just points in which we can start to break away from others. I wonder often times if folks really understand what, for example, the inerrancy issue really is all about. I think sometimes they are just issues that arise

and we hang our hats on one or the other and then the fire grows. It's going to be interesting to see what happens.

WE: How do you feel or how have you reacted to being in a dominantly white seminary, especially, a Southern Baptist seminary which is . . . ?

RB: Which has a history, first of all, of touching on the issue of slavery? A funny feeling. A real funny feeling. But, you know, I was very disillusioned when I went there because I made the assumption that everyone there was Christian. That everyone there loved the Lord and loved God's children and blah, blah, blah. I made that assumption. That ain't necessarily true. There are some folks there, all of us have problems. Even, you know, those who are saved and on their way to heaven, and however you want to . . . Even those folks have problems and have not yet overcome all of those things in their past history. That's the only way I can rationalize the way some of those folks feel on that campus. Because it's quite obvious there are some folks who still can't quite accept me because of my race. Some folks really have a problem. There are some folks who are genuinely struggling with it. I mean genuinely, because maybe in their own history, they've just not had the contact. So, they're really trying. I cherish the opportunities, which are numerous, to spend time in my room, one on one or two or three just in little group talking because I think there is where . . . and I'm not out to win folks, but I think it's there that folks can gain the kind of information and the experience that they need to understand some things. So, I really appreciate the opportunity of that. But it's a funny feeling. I don't know that the Southern Baptist convention has ever formally apologized. Maybe it's not necessary. I think it is. Maybe they don't want to because they don't feel there's anything to apologize for. But, I mean, for the position taken, if they feel at this point that it was not an appropriate Christian position. But, then there are different bodies here now. I don't know that can be approached not really. But it's a funny feeling. I'm just grateful that I've been able to do what is required of me there. So that no one can say well, he's not academically qualified and doesn't know how to deal with people. He's not socially qualified, or whatever. I'm glad I've been able just to make it.

WE: Are there other black students there?

RB: Yes, there are several American black students but also there are a lot of African students there, and some island students, black students. I believe African and island blacks were accepted there before American blacks. But, there were several . . . the number continues to increase as more black churches and more black church people understand the importance of having not only a "called", so to speak, preacher, but also a trained preacher, and then secondly, not only in the case of the preacher, but in the case of ministry in general. Appropriate training can only help, we hope. There are those who still have the attitude that if you go to that liberal institution, you'll come out polluted. There are folks who feel that way, and not only black folks. There's a lot of white folks who feel this. Some institutions are so liberal, they can only do harm. But, the number of black students is increasing as awareness of the importance of an education, a good one, held an important part.

WE: Tell me about your members here at this church.

RB: In what way?

WE: Well, size.

RB: I was reading both in your book and in Madison County's book about a number of folks who were around here. There were hundreds and hundreds of black folks on this spot years ago, but our membership now, the best we can get it narrowed down, because of bad records we kept over the past 34 years, about 350 members. We have an active membership, I'd say of about 225. Our members come from every aspect of the community of course, but I understand that it's not always been . . . Well, it has in a way, but folks who are permitted to come to before an activity of the church have not always been from every aspect of the community. In fact, I understand that the First Baptist Church is the first church in every sense of the word to the point where, I guess, maybe the folks who are members here had affiliation with the upper class white families of the community and if you didn't come from certain families in this church, you were really snobbed here and it hadn't been all that long ago. Other folks in the community knew that. Folks in other churches, many folks would not come to this church because they knew they'd be looked when they came in and all kinds of things. But . . .

WE: That happens in white churches, too.

RB: That's why I said the first church, in every sense of the word. But our members here are involved in many, many different ways. For example, there's a lady here who writes the Notes and Notices column register and have done so for many years, even back when it was called the Colored Column.

WE: Lucy Munday?

RB: Lucy Munday.

WE: Would she be a good interviewee?

RB: Oh, my Lord, yes. Miss Lucy is like me. That's what we call her, Miss Lucy. She's like me. She loves to talk. She did a presentation, for example, at the bicentennial celebration of faith. The young man, John Black, who did the presentation here, did the script that I wrote.

WE: What's he do?

RB: John is an engineer at IBM in Lexington.

WE: Does he live here?

RB: He lives here. In fact, I've got a meeting . . . And he's also a chairman, outgoing chairman of the trustee committee. He's chairman of the finance committee right now. And he's got a little problem and we are going to talk about it at 6. But, he's a young man. John's 30 or 31. John was one of my students when I was a student teacher with Ms. Wade at Madison High,

algebra. But, we have several IBM employees here. Some of them have been with IBM for 15 or 20 years. We have faculty members of Eastern. Gwendolyn Gray is a member here. A lifelong member. Her family lives here. Kara Stone.

WE: She was a colleague of mine.

RB: Well, now, she's a member. She's a member on the roll here. She is not an active member. Let's see . . .

WE: How about young people? Are young people active in the church?

RB: Very active. That is the most active group probably we have in this church at this point. And I think for several reasons. One, because I spend a lot of time with my young people wherever they are. And I mean wherever they are. I do special things for them a lot of them. I have a nephew who's here. And he is ring leader of sorts, but I spend a lot of time with him. I take him on retreats and when they have things like that, I don't send them. I go with them. I always have my hands on lots of tickets to Eastern's games and I give them to them when I know they want to go. I do things with them in the community, spend time at their school, in their school activities with them, with their ball games... to the extent that a lot of their friends who are members of other churches call me Pastor Blythe. Let's see, we take our young people, I take them . . . For example, back in June of this year, I took them to New Orleans. Of course, they loved that. Our National Sunday School Convention met in New Orleans. So, I took them. Last year, our National Sunday School Convention met in Denver and I took five of them, four or five of them along with some adults. This year, I took seven of them, and they love that. So, they know, it's just like the Santa Claus feel. He knows if you've been bad or good, so be good. I watch them all year. And they know that. And when it comes time to go, and next year, the convention goes to Dallas, Texas, and they know that I'm going. They may not get to go, but they know that I'm going and they know that if they're on my good side, I'll take them along with me. The church provides the funds. But, somebody has to do that. Now, that's a task that I don't think we have a choice at. I think our generation will be held accountable if we don't provide for these young people what was provided for us by the generations before us. And that's one of the reasons why I spend so much time with them. Where are they to be trained, at home, except by us here. So, for that reason, we do lock-ins with them. I have folks come in and speak to them, show movies, give them refreshments, and invite other kids from the community and that kind of thing. And somebody has to do that now because the challenge to them, I think, is much greater than the challenge ever was to my generation. The challenge to try to be something, and be somebody, and to do something right in your life. I think the child is extremely weighted down. Drugs are running and flowing too freely. Too much available to them. The sex issue is just in their faces. They're bombarded with it. So, somebody's got to spend some time with them showing that there are alternatives and that the choice is yours, but there are alternatives. Hoping you'll make the right choices. So, our young people, and we have some workers who spend time with them. So, that's really to their benefit, I believe.

WE: Is your role now different than the role of, let's say, Reverend Goodloe 20, 30, 40 years ago in the black community and in Richmond, Madison County?

RB: Now, that's an interesting question, now. In the county, in general, I'd say no, it's no different. In the black community, I think . . . you see, I've been involved in politics here. From 1973 to 1977, I ran in a city election for the city commission. I lost in 1977 by 11 votes incidentally in the November election. But, Reverend Goodloe . . . I think Reverend Goodloe's role is different from mine in that he had to spend his time . . . Well, his time was spent during an era in which a lot of doors were not open for blacks in this community. So, I think, really he had a lot of behind the scenes work to do to get opportunities for people that they ordinarily could not get. My role is not so much that as to encourage folks to use the opportunities that are available to them, and I think we're falling short in that area. There are a lot of doors that are open. I believe they are closing, and they probably are. It's my task to encourage our young people to use these doors that are open, our older citizens to take advantage of many of the governmental programs that are available to them, but not just those. Also to encourage the black community to encourage it's church to create it's own programs for the support of it's own membership. One of the things the black church did 40, 50 years, they provided their own social programs to help out it's members. So, I think that's our task now is to help to create some programs to help our members. Such things as tutoring programs. We have a meals program here on the weekends to supplement the program that is carried out by the senior citizens center. They carry meals everyday to shut-in folks Monday through Friday and not on national holidays because the center is closed. Well, we provide a weekend meals program. Saturdays and Sundays, we send meals out to those that are shut-in folks. Primarily to those of our congregation, because if we got into an all out program, then, we've really got . . . It's not a matter of the money. It's a matter of the organization. So, we confine it to our own members and to members of sister churches. I think that's our role these days. To encourage folks to become involved in politics, to encourage them to register to vote, to encourage them to help take care, to encourage them to get an education, to encourage them to work hard, to seek out employment opportunities for them, to encourage them to take advantage of those. I think that's where we are now. But, those opportunities were not available 40 or 50 years ago. So, I think Goodloe's task, his role, was considerably different in that way.

WE: So, how did he work to, you say, get jobs for people or opportunities, how did he do that?

RB: Politics make strange bed fellows. Just by his connections, by his political connections. He was able to make phone calls for folks and he was able to get folks out of jail. Sometimes, he was able to get certain legislation passed by the city folks or, if not, to get some kind of relief from the legislation that is passed. When you have the council and mayor form of government, it was easier to work some things than it is through city manager, the mayor, and the commission. But, just by his connections and by his politics, he was able to get some things done.

WE: Was he sort of a buffer between the black people of the city and the white people of the city?

RB: I think a buffer and a filter, yes.

WE: A filter, I like that.

RB: I heard that term used the other day and I thought about it and it stayed with me all weekend. A filter, hmm. Yeah. Both ways, I think.

WE: Well tell me . . . What you were talking about were the very practical day-to-day life of people in the church. Tell me about the spiritual life of the church.

RB: Spiritual life of the church. I think this church has been through a spiritual low during the period of Reverend Goodloe's ministry and that's the only one I can look at first hand. Not because of him, per se, but because as he got older . . . In fact, when I came along, he tells me to this day if I ever hear it again, I'll know what came from it. But, he tells me to this day that the only reason he was able to bow out gracefully leaving the ministry of this church was because of me. The truth of the matter is, I know that. You see, I came along during a time when there were some folks in this church who literally wanted to throw him out. He was 87. They said he was too old. The young people were leaving the church. The old folks are tired of him. He gets up and he talks about everybody from the pulpit. He talks about things he has no business and they'd get up in church business meetings in a very nasty fashion. "I want to offer a motion that the pulpit be declared vacant." You see? He realized that at time his pastoral ministry in this church had really come to a close? Folks would not accept him any longer and had I not . . . No, not me. Somebody else would've done it. But, then, I was the person, I think, and I think by destiny, I was the person designated to get him out of here before they burned the walls down around him and to let him do it with dignity, because we had one of the, if not THE finest retirement dinners and banquets in the Keen Johnson Building, you know, the Johnson Center on Eastern's campus. One of the finest that has ever been held there. I had folks from everywhere. I had the congressman and the president's office represented. I had the governor's office. Our national convention, state convention, local convention, his political friends, the mayor. You know, everybody. Folks from his home in Perryville, Danville, Lincoln County, everybody that had ever touched Goodloe's life. His sister, I had her come down from Washington, D.C. His nephews and nieces. Grandchildren. Everybody at that dinner. And had he not been able to go in such a flame of glory, they would have thrown him down the steps. And I have not forgotten that.

WE: I've heard that from other folks.

RB: Have you really? Oh, my. I hope not. I thought I was crazy.

WE: No, no, no. It's sort of general knowledge.

RB: And some of those same folks are still here right now. So, I know who they are, and there's one of them occasionally that wants to play these games with me and I'm not going to play the games with him. Let me say this, and this may sound rather pompous, but I am not going nowhere. That man will go before I do. I know. No, I'm not going to play that game. I'm not going to have the church abused in that way by some of those people. That's the other side of it. Some folks also would very quickly abuse this church and think nothing of it, and I won't have that done. It'd be over my dead body. And it may well be. The one thing that I found necessary. The first thing I found necessary when I came into this church as pastor was, first of

all, to try to restore some kind of fellowship among the members. The folks were at each other's throats and thought nothing about it. And I felt that was the first area we needed to work on. It wasn't finances or anything like that. It was fellowship. And I could see members at least giving a semblance of wanting to be in fellowship with each other.

WE: How did you do that?

RB: How? The greatest tool and/or weapon that the black Baptist preacher has, of course, is the pulpit. Not to throw darts at you as an individual, and to do so, if necessary, but more so to preach in an overall fashion about the things that we must be about. And then through individual pastoral conferences and one on one counseling sessions and be present and making our presence known in group meetings at the church, and making sure that the groups of the church were not individual churches. What has happened in the history of this church was this church was made up of a whole bunch of little churches. Groups that held their own treasuries, had their own memberships, and they told the church what they were and were not going to do. And there were several of them. Some folks called them clubs, but there's an expression I once heard a preacher use that some of us had become so club oriented that we have literally "clubbed Jesus out of the church", and that's almost what had happened here. We lived for the club and the convention. And Reverend Goodloe and I really think this was part of his calling here. Reverend Goodloe was very successful in destroying every club in this church and they hated him for it. Literally. There are folks who went to their graves hating A.C. Goodloe because he came in and tore up our church. That's the way they perceived his ministry. I really think it was a necessary evil because that was doing more to tear up the church. Because the clubs were very exclusive. If you were not certain people, you could not become a member of this club. I don't mean by age group. I don't mean by interest in the church. For example, some folks had an interest in the education aspects of the church and some folks had an interest in the outreach ministry of the church. I don't mean by those standards. I mean if you didn't come in the right blood line, you couldn't be a member of certain clubs, and that did more to tear up the fellowship of the church. Of course, you couldn't be a part of our activities. So, I really think it was necessary, by God's design that A.C. Goodloe would, as they put it, tear up their clubs. Because they were using it as ways of keeping folks out of the church.

WE: What did you preach about yesterday?

RB: What did I preach about yesterday? My subject was what to do while waiting for the clouds to clear. I went back to the Noah, Genesis account of Noah and the Ark, after the rains and the rainbow and the covenant symbol. And the fact that in our lives, you know, one of the things that has to be clear to the neighborhood of black congregations preaching like things that happen including . . . or those that deal with struggle and what to do while waiting for the struggles to end. Although that theme is not so important to many folks now as it was 100 years ago, and even 50 years, and even 30 years ago, 30 or 40 years ago, or 20 or 30 years ago, the time of Dr. King and so forth, his work. That theme still is important to all people because there are . . . It may not be the racial struggle, as such, but there are struggles in all of our lives. Our church just lost three members in two weeks. Three deaths in two weeks. That's hard on a pastor. That's a struggle for me because I was close to all of them. Two were elderly and one was a 53-year-old

woman who died with cancer. That's a cloud. That's a struggle. I talked with one parent during a dinner after one of the funerals. Another parent who just had a problem with her 11-year-old child and "put him out", so to speak. Put him out. And other family members became involved and I had conferences with all of them individually. Not telling anyone that I talked with the others to see what the problem was. Trying to stay out of the . . .

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RB: . . . Because I spend time, and I don't . . . Of course, because I'm away four days a week, I don't spend as much time as some of them would like for me to spend with them one on one personally in the family situations. I spend a lot of time personally with my people. And when I come to that pulpit on Sunday morning, I don't have to talk about Schweitzer or Kott or any of those folks have said. I know what my folks have been through. And I'm able, maybe not so well, but I'm able to look at a scriptural passage to relate it to its own setting and time to draw out of that hopefully something that will help those folks. The mother who is worried about her daughter who's out prostituting and I know that to be a fact. See, I know my kids. I know what my kids are doing. My kids will come and tell me what they are doing. You know, the mother who's got the problem with the child that she put out because a neighbor told her that he did something and she wouldn't believe what he had to say. I know the Eastern students who come. I know many of their personal situations because they tell me. I know many of them are home sick. I know many of them are struggling to eat everyday. Just to make ends meet, and they don't meet. I know members of this church who have in their hearts, I don't think so and so ought to be a member of this church. There's still some of them alive. I know my own mother's struggles. The fact that her son is the pastor of the church and there are folks who do dirty things to get at her to get to me. See? So, I know all of that when I come on Sunday mornings. That's one of the reasons why I cry so much in the pulpit because I look at these folks and I know all of these things are going on. I know the senior members of this church who dearly love me, who genuinely love me, who love the five minutes I may spend with them a week, just five minutes, who just love it. So, I know all these things. And when I come on Sunday morning and preach from while waiting for the clouds to clear when I can bring up personal circumstances without calling names, they know that I know, but that their struggle also is similar to the struggles experienced by many others. So, we have choices of staying . . . Now, this is where you kind of bring it home for black folks. You talk about Daniel in the lion's den, that he trusted in the Lord. You talk about the boys in the fire . . . The Hebrews in the fiery furnace and that they trusted in the Lord and the Lord still delivered, and He emphasized that just like He delivered the children of Israel out of bondage in Egypt, he is still delivering us from whatever circumstances try to bind us. So, what do we do then while waiting . . . You're getting a review of the sermon or a synopsis. What do we do then while waiting for the clouds to clear? Whatever the clouds may be. You remember the scriptures say that, for example, We can endure for a life of joy that comes in the morning. Do you remember? Those that wait on the Lord shall renew their strength. Isaiah says Walk and not be weary. Run and not faint. Mount up with wings like eagles. That's what you tell folks. That's the way you do what they call it at the seminary. Preachers who like to hear as Dr. Joe Thompson. Black sermons. You bring it home in a way that black folks know. You talk about that. What you do while waiting for the Lord to clear the

clouds. You be willing to step off the ark because he says so and be willing to trust that the land is dry enough. You come out of the ark and trust Him for whatever is to come. Amen.

WE: What are you going to do next Sunday?

RB: Nothing. Funny you should ask. I'm not going to preach next Sunday. I will make a few comments, but I won't preach because Sunday is women's day and I've invited a seminary comrade, and friend, and student, who is the niece, a woman, ah . . . a niece of one of our members and she is going to speak in the Sunday morning service.

WE: What is she studying for?

RB: To be a missionary. So, she's going to speak as a missionary woman. I'm looking forward to that.

WE: How do you plan your sermons? Where do your ideas come from?

RB: Alright, from many, many sources. I may, for example, center my sermon around the Sunday School lesson which I did on Sunday remembering that many of my members don't come to Sunday School and that I could do things with the sermon that I don't do . . . that the teachers don't do in their classes. I can take the sermon one step further in application. So, sometimes I would use the Sunday School lesson as a basis for the sermon. Sometimes I would use a circumstance that the church is involved in. Sometimes building a program and so forth. Sometimes I will use . . . What I really wanted to do Sunday was to talk about healing. How the Lord is able to heal wounds because the church is wounded. Not only the three families that suffered the loss of a family member but also the church losing three of its members is wounded and need to be reminded every now and then how the Lord heals wounds. Sometimes, we'll take, for example, a special day. If it's a special day, then I'll use something that is applicable for that day. Many different sources. Sometimes something that just seems to be burdening me down. Something that has been on my mind all week, I'll use for a sermon. I have . . . not many times, but I have changed my sermon spur of the moment on Sunday morning, from what I intended to do all week to something that really is more pressing.

WE: So, black preaching is different from white preaching?

RB: Not necessarily. Uh, you know that's something I bothered me about Dr. Thompson, my preaching professor in the seminary. What he called black sermons. I know what he means and he really means it complimentary, but we try to explain that preaching is just preaching. We declare the same gospel, Jesus Christ, as white Southern Baptist preachers would proclaim but we proclaim it to a congregation whose struggle may be a bit different and therefore, we do what . . . who was it? Dr. Manuel McCaw who is a black home mission board Southern Baptist. He's director of black church relations for the Southern Baptist Convention home mission board. What he calls "blackonizing". Take that stuff that we learned in the seminary and as Kevin Cosby, pastor and former graduate of Southern Seminary, black, and pastor of St. Stephen Baptist Church in Louisville, as he said, you take what you learn and then dip it in chocolate.

So, it isn't so much that the preaching is so different, but it's applying, preaching in such a manner as folks can understand realizing that your congregation is black or predominantly black. And I say predominantly because we have several white students and occasional white faculty members from Eastern who are in our congregation. Friends of my kids come. White friends. So, we're not just preaching to a black congregation here. That's the other challenge of being a pastor here. That's an awesome challenge, too. To be able to preach in such a manner so that anyone can relate to. So my task here is killing me. (Laughter). It is. Then, to be able to promote the kinds of programs for the community that can also draw the community together. We have the largest black congregation here. I think there's no congregation that is any more in touch with the community than this in many different aspects. So, we have quite a ministry challenge here. Quite a challenge. My primary role, I think, right now in this church is not just preaching but it really is what Southern Baptists promote as being the mission of the pastor preacher. That is, equipping. It's my job here now to raise up some folks who can carry out the leadership as required by the demands of this congregation and this community. I think my job is to teach to prepare leaders and that's really what I'm about right now. Is trying to get some other folks to help me do this job.

WE: I want to thank you for talking to me today.

RB: The pleasure's been mine. I told you things that have been classified material . . .

END OF TAPE 2, SIDE 2.