



THE ALEXANDRIA ORAL HISTORY CENTER
OFFICE OF HISTORIC ALEXANDRIA
CITY OF ALEXANDRIA



Oral History Interview

with

Rosa Byrd, Ellen Nelson, and Tara Casagrande

Interviewer: *Francesco De Salvatore*

Narrators: *Rosa Byrd, Ellen Nelson, Tara Casagrande*

Location of Interview:
Lloyd House, 220 N Washington St, Alexandria, VA 22314

Date of Interview: *4/15/2023*

Transcriber: *Kerry J Reed*

Summary:

Rosa Byrd, Ellen Nelson, and Tara Casagrande reflect on their experiences attending the Alexandria Community Remembrance Project's pilgrimage to Montgomery and Selma, Alabama.

Notes:

Several times during her narration, Rosa Byrd refers to the “Joseph Pettus Bridge” or the “George Pettus Bridge,” she is referring to the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Alabama.

Table of Contents and Keywords

Minute	Page	Topic
00:00	4	Introduction
01:01	4	Learning about the Equal Justice Initiative and the pilgrimage to Alabama
04:18	4	Individual reasons for pilgrimage
06:10	5	Perspectives on Pilgrimage & Bus trip
06:42	5	Experiences during the Bus Trip
10:42	6	Experience at Museum & Bridge
18:00	7	Fiasco at Edmund Pettus Bridge
23:00	8	Impressions of Montgomery, Alabama; Tourism Board
24:32	9	Impressions of National Memorial for Peace and Justice
27:25	9	Story concerning a young women's discovery of a lynched family member
28:42	10	Experiences with racialized society in City of Alexandria
33:21	10	Experience in Selma & Story of two Lynched boys
36:51	11	Symbolism of the Pebble taken from Selma, Alabama
37:44	11	Narrators Interpersonal Relationships
40:55	12	Martin Luther King Event
43:52	12	Martin Luther King Project Recent History

General	Equal Justice Initiative, Pilgrimage to Selma & Montgomery, Alabama; Martin Luther King Project in the City of Alexandria
People	Rosa Byrd, Ellen Nelson, Tara Casagrande
Places	City of Alexandria; Montgomery, Alabama; Selma, Alabama; The National Memorial for Peace and Justice; Edmund Pettus Bridge; Rosa Parks Museum

Rosa Byrd: [00:00:00] Yeah. My name is Rosa Byrd. I'm 79 years old. I'm at the Lloyd House in Alexandria, Virginia. Today's is March 15, 2023. [00:00:16][16.8]

Ellen Nelson: [00:00:22] I'm Ellen Nelson and I'm 75 years old and I am at the Lloyd House also in Alexandria, Virginia. And today's date is March 15, 2023. [00:00:34][11.2]

Tara Casagrande: [00:00:38] My name is Tara Casagrande. I'm 54 years old. I'm at the Lloyd House in Alexandria. And today's date is March 15th, 2023. [00:00:47][9.6]

Rosa Byrd: [00:00:54] What led you, Tara, to go on this pilgrimage? [00:00:58][3.2]

Tara Casagrande: [00:01:01] It's a great question, I've been thinking about that. I received an email. I was part of a group of women that received an email about attending. Someone said, one of my friends said, "I'm going. Who wants to go with me?" And I knew right away that this was something that I wanted to do. I didn't know anything about the project. I didn't know anything about the lynchings. And I just knew right away that for me, learning more about the history of Alexandria and about what happened here in the city where I live, and also I was a big fan of Just Mercy and Brian Stevenson's work. I'd read his book and I really wanted to see what he had done in Mobile, Alabama, and experience for myself firsthand. What about you, Rosa? [00:02:02][61.3]

Rosa Byrd: [00:02:04] I heard about it through Audrey Davis, and I was asked to go. And then another friend from the church sent me the paper and everything about it. I wanted to go. I for years have wanted to go and walk across the Joseph Pettis Bridge like Bloody Sunday. I had a chance to go years ago and I didn't go, and that was the main thing in my mind. Montgomery was a bit okay, but I wanted to go walk across that bridge in Selma, Alabama. The other thing that I wanted to do was to feel how they felt at that time walking across that bridge. [00:02:51][47.0]

Ellen Nelson: [00:02:54] I wanted to go, and I was introduced to it by Rosa Byrd. She encouraged me to come and go along with her. I did not know anything about the pilgrimage, but it was one of the most enlightening experiences that I've ever been to. I knew that the Deep South was very controlling and things were happening down there, but to be able to go and see it firsthand was more than informative to me. I saw some things that I didn't believe could really happen and then other things that I kind of had heard about, just a little bit about what was going on. But the one thing that stuck out in this whole pilgrimage to me was the knowledge that people could use the next human being to be a workhorse, for lack of a better term, a workhorse for all that they needed to do. And Rosa? [00:04:16][81.8]

Rosa Byrd: [00:04:18] Well, for me, I knew about the South because I'm older and things have gone bad before and I've traveled across the United States. But even when we visited South, we were tourists. And I know the color of freedom is green when you go to these tourist locations. So I knew that was not the real South that I was going to. When I read the brochure about the trip and how long it would take and 15 hours on the bus was a little daunting for me because I have bad knees. I tried hard to learn how long the Joseph Pettis Bridge was because I didn't know if I could make it. I had asked my husband to go with me, but he didn't. So Ellen was really a substitute for him. [laughing] But I'm glad she went instead of him. But that was the two things that was on my mind riding across. When I got on the bus that morning, we gathered down that Lee Center and there were all people, all ages, young children, older people, other people had canes. I don't know

what word I'm going to use for it, but just that's a mirage of different type of people. And when we got on our but on the busses I, all of a sudden, felt like I was a Corps volunteer. Back in the fifties, I think it was going on the bus trip. [00:06:02][104.2]

Francesco De Salvatore: [00:06:06] What did it feel like for you? [00:06:08][2.4]

Rosa Byrd: [00:06:10] When we first started off settling down and talking with each other. I don't know why that came to mind, but I knew I was safe on the bus. I knew I had met friendly people and were with people I knew. And I had no fear of traveling with that group. One thing I'd like to say, we didn't go to, you know, restaurants and sit down. We went to truck stops. So that helped me feel as though I was a corps person on the bus here. [00:06:50][39.7]

Tara Casagrande: [00:06:54] Somewhat ashamed to admit that with my white privilege, I flew down and I'm very aware of that now. Part of me wishes I would have gone on the bus and had that experience. There was something daunting about a trip that was that long to go on the bus. And I think for people that went on the bus, it was an amazing experience for them as well. I would say the one of the moments for me that I've thought about a lot as a woman is the gynecological art exhibit that we visited. I can't get the vision out of my mind of the horrors that were done to these women and the beauty that was created by the artist. The painting. When I walked into a trailer, the artist had created a painting where she flipped the color of the people in this situation and actually had the doctor sitting potentially ready to receive one of these treatments that he did on black women for himself and seeing the fear in his eyes and just realizing that the black body wasn't honored, black women weren't honored, and the liberties that white men and white society took. And then the way that this artist could turn it into something so beautiful and so poignant that that exhibit haunts me to this day. Ellen, anything for you that you remember deeply? [00:08:52][117.8]

Ellen Nelson: [00:08:52] The thing deeply ingrained in my mind about this whole pilgrimage was the fact that when the boat docked in at the piers to take the slaves off the ships, the ones that did not survive they just kind of drew them in the water. No matter what age, what they needed or what was going on. The ones that didn't survive, they just had the picture. As you walked into one of the museums where they just had bodies or heads of bodies of all ages, all races, all sizes. And to me, that was the the first thing that turned my stomach to the point where I, I couldn't go on through that museum. I just kind of blindly put myself in forward mode and then just maneuvered through the museum and out to the other side. I could not look at anything else because that was so heinous to me. And I guess with my personality in the way I feel about people in general, I was taught by my mom at a young age, "do unto others as you would have them do unto you." And if you could do that to a small child, what would you do to other people? [00:10:38][105.8]

Rosa Byrd: [00:10:42] You're asking me about being on the bus trip, and I told you a little bit about going to the truck stops. But also, when we went there, we all went to different places to eat and not fancy restaurant truckstop type food again. And then we sat on the bus and watched [inaudible] movies. And most of them were I guess you call them race movies. What we saw, just Mercy. We saw what, several? I don't remember-- [00:11:20][38.0]

Tara Casagrande: [00:11:20] Selma, you watched the movie about Selma-- [00:11:22][1.8]

Rosa Byrd: [00:11:23] Rosa Parks, A different version of Rosa Parks and I don't know who the white lady in front of me was, but she sobbed the whole time. And even though I had seen the movie and the feeling we get from these people that we're sitting with, often times I heard that people talk about their white privilege. Or that they don't feel what we as black people on that bus, we felt. We felt each other. They felt us and we felt them. And the bus was really, really quiet and it was dark. My mind kept going back to what it was like for the people before me. And then we would get out the bus, we would be happy, laughing at this, trying to find the ladies room and getting back to the bus on time. When we finally got to Montgomery, McArthur and Johnson, we had to wait. We made a line from the front door of the bus all the way out, and they walked in with the ashes from our two lynch victims. I think everybody's heart almost stopped beating. It was quiet, solemn. And they handed it to the people from Montgomery. Time stopped for me. Because with all the craziness of this world today, we would transform back. I realize we had counselors on the bus. We had three. Two or three to help us. But I didn't need to go to the counselors. But I deeply felt what was happening. [00:13:35][132.6]

Ellen Nelson: [00:13:38] I also felt a deep, I guess, connection to the stories that I used to hear people talk about when we were back home in southern Virginia. How people treated us at different places. If you would go to a restaurant there, you were not treated kindly. You were always told you have to pick up your food in the back. But the glory of all of this was when I looked around at the crowd of people that were on the bus with us, this young lady and lots of others were people of the Caucasian descent. And I'm not sure what their reasoning for being there was, but it sure made me feel that, you know, they could see what nobody could ever tell them about how cruel the world can be. And also, in a turning point, you could turn around and look at the person next to you. And they were kind, calm, and even consoling at times if you needed it. [00:15:08][89.4]

Tara Casagrande: [00:15:12] Yeah. What you're saying, Ellen and Rosa makes me think a lot about the students from A.C [Alexandria City Public Schools] that were on the trip, and they had their own counselors working with them, and I can't even imagine what they were processing as a group. But we were all aware that we were being changed and hit in different ways. There were times I know personally that I just wanted to be quiet and really process everything. And then there were times when I wanted to connect and really, you know, I remember walking up to your table because I just saw these beautiful women and I just knew something was special about you guys. And I wanted to talk to you, and to get to know you better. And that's kind of been the gift of this trip for me, working together with you on the M.L.K [Martin Luther King] project and just connecting on a human level, because that's what I know we all are. We each had our own journey on that trip. And we ate together down in that restaurant, you know, in those different restaurants. We listen to mayors talk, we walked across that bridge together. We listened to those stories at Selma by those women that experienced it firsthand. And they're not going to be on this earth forever. I mean, those stories. You know her story, sharing about seeing the coverage of how she was beaten on the bridge and how that reporter, you know, she saw footage of her body bouncing up as a young kid. I mean, those firsthand stories will never leave my heart. And they inspire me to stay active and to work towards educating people like myself to understand what's happened, what happens in the world and what did happen and what's continued to happen. I mean, George Floyd also inspires me. I mean, we also have recent history, too. So, that's how I feel. Anything you want to add, Rosa? [00:18:00][167.3]

Rosa Byrd: [00:18:00] Yes. I'd like to add that when we talk about going across the George Pettus Bridge and the leaders of our group they got their permits and everything. And when the buses got into the town, I felt that the people were financially deprived. I saw the voter registration office in Selma, Alabama, falling apart. I'm proud to say if that place was here in Alexandria, the citizens of Alexandria would get together and take better care of the place. It was literally falling apart. Then when we did get together and wait, the damning part for me was we kept waiting for the police to come escort us across the bridge. Six weeks before they knew we were coming. And even I yelled out to our leader, "call the police chief because these people haven't called." She said, "I called him. He wasn't home." And then we waited and waited and they didn't come. And that's the part that, you know, the entire police department, no one came to help us. One white man stopped his car and said, "What are y'all waiting for?" And we told him to cross. And he said, "I'll help you." The poor man was on a 4 lane highway. He had one car and he opened his door and he was trying to stop people. Then the Alexandria leaders, I'm sure it's since came back to them and told him, "please go." We didn't want him to get hurt trying to help us. Then back out there, you talked about how Johnson walked out in the street and they stopped the traffic. They had let people with handicaps like I was and Ellen, the seniors, we were already across the big highway and we could start walking across the bridge first. But then the elder 300 people and children came across the bridge and got on the right side. And we started to walk. That little ledge we could walk across wasn't very wide so we almost had to walk in either single file or two people together. The reason I started walking fast with my limp knees and all is because I knew the children were coming behind me. They move [laughing] and they were going to catch me before I got to the end of that bridge. So I think it was the photographer was the first one to cross. Ellen was the second one, and I'm proud to say I was the third person. They got to the end of the bridge. I didn't get any pictures with my name on the Pettis bridge because it was just a lifetime thing that I wanted to be there. [crying] Thanks. I am the chair of the Martin Luther King Project because I saw people doing a program that had failed, didn't do him honor. So I joined that. And the police still did not come. And anybody that would believe there was just a misunderstanding, we all knew, we're not stupid. They did not want to guide us across. But the men there got us across. We didn't even think about it. You know, I think about it now, but we didn't even think about it that day. We rushed to see the other museums or places that we could see. And we went back to our hotel and we had African-like dinner that night or something. But that feeling for the people, we went there, not just these two people we talked about today and joked about, but I don't want to do anything about the feeling that you got from that end. Our city leaders, I am proud to live in the city of Alexandria. There have been racial problems. We have all sorts of problems. But when you go back and you're staying at a hotel that is so poor. It was a just a regular national chain. But you needed a sweater because it was chilly. There wasn't a store opened downtown that you could go and buy a sweater. There was no gift shop in that hotel. So I believe they're being hurt financially years later from what went on down there from back in that day. [00:23:15][314.5]

Ellen Nelson: [00:23:18] And seeing the the area that we were in and the tourist areas that we went to, I don't remember seeing any just common people walking around on the streets. The only people that we saw were the two guys, the bus drivers and the people inside the the museums that we went into. Very few people did you see and I don't remember, and maybe somebody else did, but I don't remember seeing just people walking the streets like you would when you go down the street in Alexandria. Just to be to think back on the the areas that we went into and we went into several different places, but there were no people there except those that were designated to be in that particular venue. [00:24:26][67.8]

Tara Casagrande: [00:24:32] Yeah, you're right. It was desolate, which made it kind of interesting. And the tourism board was so excited to have us there, which was sort of interesting. Yeah, I'm processing all that right now. I'm thinking about the Equal Justice Initiative, and we're walking into that memorial. So there they have all the names of the thousands, 4000(?) I don't even remember the number, the thousands of people by county that were lynched in the United States. All the information that the Equal Justice Initiative collected. And so you walk in, if I can describe it, you walk in and you see the memorial kind of up on a hill, but you walk up past some statues and then around and the names are engraved in these rusted pillars. But then you start to walk down a ramp and you realize that you are actually walking under as if these people are hanging above you. And that, oh [sigh], that was so difficult. We were all kind of, you know, there were hundreds of us and we were all kind of streaming and moving and you could see the emotion on everyone's face. There was a waterfall, and I will share that you come out and they have the names again, but the pillars are laid like coffins by county, and those coffins will come back to each one of the counties at the M.L.K ceremony. One of the students, I befriended her father, Eugene, and he was telling me how proud he was of his daughter to be on this trip. But I walked by them at one point and she found out that her family name was on one of the pillars. And I can't even imagine that experience for this young woman and her dad on this trip. And she shared the story at the M.L.K ceremony. And yeah, she I think they they contacted their family and they said, "yes, that happened." So she had a real life example. So, yeah, if you want to talk at all to how that experience was for you going through there, I can't even imagine. Rosa, Ellen, and-- [00:27:24][171.4]

Rosa Byrd: [00:27:25] It bothered that young lady and her father. That is my grand niece, that young lady, and her father told her when she saw the name, the family name, when they saw the town and the county, he said, "yes, that's where they're from." And so that made it even more so for her. And I was glad that they invited young people to share their experience at the Martin Luther King program. I don't think it was a dry eye in the place when that young lady spoke because she got so emotional. And the other young man, the gentleman with her was patting her on the shoulder. So, I think when we get back here today, we laugh, we can't remember anything. But when you start talking, it comes back. But even when we left and came home, there was in the parking lot, you know, late at night, a lot of hugging and going on, and the people that flew, I don't think you missed anything except you weren't looking for a bus rider, so I'm sorry. [00:28:37][71.8]

Tara Casagrande: [00:28:41] Well, yeah. [00:28:42][0.7]

Ellen Nelson: [00:28:42] Well, as for bus riders, we're also enlightened, I think, even though I am African-American, to walk among all of those pillars and look at the different people that had lost their lives. Probably some of them for doing something that they were not supposed to do, but for others, just being alive and being in the wrong place at the right time. The fact that they need to be eliminated from life was just hard to think about. My mind asked this question, so I have to ask it. How could people [pause] be so inhuman that you could mistreat or just take another person's life and value it at almost less than you would the animals that used to do the work that humans could not do. And I just want to say that I'm so glad that I've learned from that pilgrimage, and from meeting the people in the city of Alexandria and other places that I go. Hmm. [crying] Not all of them, but not all of us are as cruel and inhuman as that was. And it makes me feel like we have not gotten there yet. But we are on the straight and narrow path to someday become, as Dr. King would say, not judged by the color of our skin, but the contents of our character. I try not to think about the heinous things that I saw. But it's very hard to think that I live in a city and I have to be honest,

I still get angry sometimes. Because the first experience that I had with slavery and race relations in Alexandria was: I worked for the city for the Alexandria school system and we took a group of children down to the docks in Old Town and the teacher was explaining things to the children in a term that they could understand. But then it hit me. All of a sudden I'm here in this place and people could mistreat people like that. I've learned, thank God, for being with people that are of a better descent than their parents. I have learned that some of the people that were adults now that they did not know that what their parents taught them and how they were raised was the proper way to treat people. So I have learned that you have to treat people how you want to be treated. If I walk up to you and I say, "excuse me, can you do this for me?" It doesn't matter that I am black. It doesn't matter that you're brown, green or purple. But the fact is to always be mindful of how you treat other people. [00:33:09][266.9]

Tara Casagrande: [00:33:21] I'm thinking about the story of the two lynch victims that we heard and the soil collection and what happened. These are two young boys that they really didn't do much wrong. I mean, they didn't they were innocent. They maybe touched a white girl, borrowed a shovel. I mean, just such a mean, stupid thing. And the people that went, they knew once they got in a little trouble. I mean, the groups of black people that went to try to protect them, the one boy that they hid him in a barrel of fish and water, I mean, because they knew something terrible. And it's not like these two lynching victims just kind of died. A white mob went and sought them out. They hadn't even had a fair trial. And they before even being able to have a fair trial, this group, you know, grabbed them, and dragged them, and beat them, and they yelled for their moms. You know, we know this story. Lynching now, to me has a much deeper definition. I didn't understand it, but now I do. I realize how horrible, horrible that is that these kids were younger than my sons and they really didn't do anything wrong. But it was white anger and hostility and dehumanization of an entire group of people because of the color of their skin. And it makes me really sad. I'm thinking right now about the rock, the pebble, that I actually have in my bag here. You've got yours, too. I'll pull it out. We were so one of the women in Selma. We were sitting kind of in the projects. I mean, we were standing as a group in this park, in this public housing area, and our tour guides were amazing. They got us with some of the best people in Montgomery. There wasn't anyone around but tour guides and us. But when we were in Selma, they want to build a park in the projects. They had a terrible little crappy park and she had us all lean down and pick up a tiny little pebble. And we held it in our hands. And for me, I don't even remember what she said. But for me, it's a reminder of the responsibility I have to share my stories of what I experienced that time in Montgomery and Selma. It's a reminder that that activism, we all need to work together now, not just black people, but white people too, and that we all have a responsibility to make it a better world in the future. And that starts right now with me. And that pebble will always be with me. It's a little piece of Selma that I carry with me every day. Do you want to say something? [00:36:50][208.3]

Rosa Byrd: [00:36:51] When you told me about your pebble, I don't care mine every day, it's in the little place where I have my jewelry. We were like 300 people there that day. But we were each to get a pebble because it was representative of how many people that had made that walk, the thousands of people that had made that walk that day. But I think today, you know, we're talking about this and it does bring it all back to the forefront. But I am still, you hear me talk about Dr. King, but I still believe in the dream. I still believe in his dream. [00:37:41][50.3]

Ellen Nelson: [00:37:44] And as Rosa said, I also believe in that dream. I believe that people can be, or learn to be kind, acceptable, respectful to anyone that you come in contact with. If you just

open your heart and your mind and you think about no matter how much you have or how little you have, it does not hurt or cost you anything to be kind to someone else. And if each of us could just take that little pebble that we picked up in Alabama and. Pass it in kindness or peace to someone else, that it would be a multitude of greatness. [00:38:45][61.5]

Tara Casagrande: [00:38:49] Okay. I just want to say that I also believe in Dr. King's dream. I really, really do. I'll never stop believing it. Because of you two. You helped me to believe. [00:39:04][14.7]

Rosa Byrd: [00:39:05] You're helping us to believe. [00:39:06][0.3]

Ellen Nelson: [00:39:12] Tara was one of the large group of people of Caucasian descent that reached out to us. We were sitting at a table eating breakfast. She came down and she said, "do you mind if I sit with you? Is anyone sitting here?" We invited her to join us. And from that day, she has brought nothing but kindness. Whenever we approached, she had a smile. Love, hugs. Doesn't matter where you are. It's just that we need a lot more Taras in the world. And we need a lot more kind people in this world. With all that comes from the inhumanity that our people were forced to live in. We need more Taras. We need this. [00:40:18][66.0]

Rosa Byrd: [00:40:20] That's the time. What's that noise? [00:40:21][1.7]

Ellen Nelson: [00:40:22] Okay. Could be me. [00:40:26][4.6]

Rosa Byrd: [00:40:28] Okay. [00:40:28][0.0]

Francesco De Salvatore: [00:40:30] Because I know that now that Tara is also working on the M.L.K, that they're helping with it in partnership. So could you describe the M.L.K event? What is it? [00:40:39][9.8]

Rosa Byrd: [00:40:42] Oh, you should do that [laughter]. [00:40:46][3.5]

Tara Casagrande: [00:40:50] We talked about Jerry [laughter]. [00:40:51][1.4]

Rosa Byrd: [00:40:55] Oh, my God. Well, I have to back up a little bit and tell you, and I don't want us to keep talking all day, but the Martin Luther King program was 50. This was a 51st anniversary. It has been a large and small group of African American people working in conjunction with the city to have these programs every year to reenact the part of Martin Luther King to bring it to the forefront. When COVID came, we didn't have money, this committee, and what we did each time was send out donation letters to all the churches in the city, black, white and everything. This is just really my fifth year on there, but it's only been four chairpersons. The city helped us very little. I can't remember the 500, but the-- [00:41:56][60.6]

Ellen Nelson: [00:41:57] 5000. [00:41:57][0.0]

Rosa Byrd: [00:41:58] No, no, we just got 5000 people. [00:42:01][3.9]

Ellen Nelson: [00:42:02] That was 5000. [light-hearted argument over figure] [00:42:03][1.3]

Rosa Byrd: [00:42:05] But anyway, when COVID came we could no longer just, you know, go to somebody, who would let us use a church. We got a little bit of food, we had singers, we had ushers bring us in and everything. Well, when COVID came along, we had to start doing it with technology. And to have technology, you need money. So, then we had to go online and I said, "God sent me angels." He'd sent me a little angel named Natasha. She knows how to produce programs in movies and whatever. God sent another angel named Samia. She can do all of the computer work, too. And I told Tara on this trip that we needed to have a website set up. And she said, "Jerry can do it." So you see where I fell in love with Jerry? [00:43:09][64.5]

Ellen Nelson: [00:43:11] She gave her husband to us. [00:43:11][0.7]

Francesco De Salvatore: [00:43:13] Who is Jerry? [00:43:13][0.0]

Rosa Byrd: [00:43:14] Her husband. She just said Jerry could do it. And when she went up and we got together, we met at a restaurant on Washington Street here. He set up a website for us. Then, from needing the website, we needed a place to collect money. What did you call it? What is that he called it? [00:43:38][23.9]

Tara Casagrande: [00:43:39] He put a donate. He put a donate button, and we collected through online donations that once you you made it into a 501c3 in a nonprofit. So you did all that work. [00:43:51][12.1]

Rosa Byrd: [00:43:52] We did that work, its just in these last two years that we did that. So when we did that, this last program again, McArthur. We needed a place to have the program. We've always used some church. I walked in to the Masonic Temple, I had a meeting and I just looked around, white people all way up top. Everybody in there is a mason, and they're all just white. And I know who built that, built that place. And I said to myself, I wanted to have the meeting there. The first time they said the fee is \$5,000 to rent that place. McArthur, that you know, said he would work with us. So he got it down a little less, and I went to a friend of mine in Delray, she's white, that I know she does a lot of stuff in Delray. I said, "I need to talk to you because I don't know how to do all this stuff." She said, "No, they didn't need to charge you that." So we finally got it for \$500 and then we had to reach out to people. Jerry did that. She helped to do that. The Lady in Delray helped us to get money from donators in the city, so we got money to pay for the place. We had already paid for our own nonprofit setting. So this year what we wanted to have, I didn't want that place. It hosted 375 seats. I did not want it to be people here in there because it's been like that in small churches. We didn't have big crowds, but I went home and I came back. There was parking places at the program. We had tried to save seats for the ministers to march in in congregation. I had to go and tell the mayor that he and his people had to move [laughter] because there were 18 ministers in the hallway that didn't have seats. When we stood up to sing, "Lift Every Voice and Sing", I can tell you, I cried all three till they got to the last because it was exactly like I wanted. I don't care what went wrong till we got to that point. Two angels, that was the devil, family angel over there, she came to do the tables for us, to pass out the programs. And other people helped us, too. But these two would be the closest to and it really that is what this program got. Now, I'm getting old. I'm going to be 80 in June. I know I can't do this much longer, but as long as God surrounds me with the angels, I will be there to be the heart of that program. Because I want the young people, the young people like you, that you weren't told anything about him in school. And we marched to get his holiday. I didn't ever give you a tissue, baby. Never, ever. [laughter] But we want to get this back.

Maybe we can get more people believing in the dreams, because that is the one thing that fell off of the program. And we were getting fewer and fewer people. They used to have these ushers. It was start when they were little, kindergarten first, the cutest little things in their dresses. They would come every year to the program and when they got to graduate, we would give them money. And I've been thinking about working with Spring to Action in Alexandria, just so we can get the young people back and have them not just so we can give them money, but so they can learn, and get the feeling. Something is missing in our children. Some of them, not all of them, we know that. But there's something going on with young people today, you know, with the drugs and the killing and the guns. Is something missing? And maybe it's just the belief in the dream. A dream. It doesn't have to be Dr. King's dream, but people need to be able to dream like you do. You know, you've just explained you have a dream yourself. So we have to do something. And that's all I can say. That's the end of my story. And I thank you for allowing us to come down here today. I'm glad you thought of all three of us coming instead of doing it individually. [00:48:52][300.2]

Ellen Nelson: [00:48:55] I also want to say that I believe that if everyone working together would become more vigil in the lives of young people at the very young age, down in kindergarten and ages where they can remember and think of what you say to them. I was working with a young lady when I was in working in the school system, and I believe that based on what I taught that little girl, that she is, wherever she is, she's doing well. It was so hard for her because she was born of a parent that had a drug addiction. It damaged her brain, but she still had a desire to learn. And I said to her, "Are you sure that this is what you want to do? It is going to be very difficult. But you if you want it, I'll try to give it to you." She said, "I want it." I taught that young lady to take the alphabet, starting with the lowest rung of learning. Learn the alphabet, then learn the vowels and on up through the ranks of what you do to learn how to read. And the day that she learned it taught me that we all can learn from one another if we just take the time to put the effort in. And that is where we need to go back and start from to teach humanity, love, and respect for one another. Thank you. [00:50:55][119.8]