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Interview with Herman K. Harris

Herman K. Harris

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Herman K. Harris II
INTERVIEWEE

Kenneth M. Nelson
INTERVIEWER

Louise Pettus Archives and Special Collections
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Interviewed on May 7, 1979 and May 11, 1979
Transcription Dates: Tuesday, April 9, 2013 – April 18, 2013

3 Cassette Tapes, MP3, and WAV
Listening Time: 02:21:30

Abstract: Rev. Herman K. Harris II (1939-1988) discusses his family background, growing up in Heath Springs, SC, the Civil Rights movement in the south (Rock Hill in particular), the Freedom Riders, Friendship College, drugs, students in general and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). Rev. Harris was involved in the movement from 1959 through 1964 and was arrested 33 times in the process. He participated in the Freedom Rides and was among those beaten in Anniston, Alabama. He attended Friendship College in Rock Hill, SC and graduated from Morris College in 1964. This interview took place on May 7, 1979 and May 11, 1979 and was conducted by Mr. Kenneth M. Nelson.

Keywords: Civil Rights Movements; Civil Rights Movements – Southern States; Rock Hill, Friendship Junior College (Rock Hill, SC); Freedom Rides, 1961; National Association for the Advancement of Colored People;

Interviewers= Kenneth M. Nelson

Interviewee = Herman K. Harris (HH)

00:00:00 **KN: [begins midsentence]Herman K. Harris the third.**

[tape cut]

00:00:15 **KN: May 7, 1979, interview with Dr. Herman K. Harris II. Tell the listeners something about yourself, your birth place, etcetera.**

HH: Oh, god, [referring to the microphone] I guess I'm supposed to hold this? Okay. Um, well, I'm H.K. Harris II. I was born Herman K. Harris. Um, to the late Mrs. Carrie Harris and Mr. Robie Harris. The reason for my being the second is that there are three or four sets of HARRISES in Heath Springs, South Carolina. It's more than one Herman Harris. So at an early um, age it was thought that I would be Herman K. Harris II. I kind of took up with that name and it has been with me for quite some time. Um, my hometown is Heath Springs, South Carolina, um, [coughs] Excuse me. Heath Springs is located in Lancaster County, South Carolina. It is, Heath Springs, I think, is seven miles from Kershaw, South Carolina, eleven miles from Lancaster, South Carolina, the county seat, and forty-one miles from my door presently. Um, for some reason, I kind of like the title "the ambassador at large" from Heath Springs [laughs] because when, [still laughing] when I, when I came to school, left home for the first time, um, I had never been anyplace. No place but the church, school, played football for two team, on the basketball team for two years; I was on the basketball

team because I was um, well, just fat. Rugged. You know, with a high tempo. One of God's angry children. [Laughs] Um, wasn't, I wasn't good at anything, I don't guess. I didn't play football well, I was just dedicated to the cause and I always played in the hurt linesman's spot. Always started with, is with the, the high school team was new and um, someone was always hurt and I was happy because I got to play. [Chuckles] Um, my childhood was always spent there in Heath Springs and Kershaw County. Um, I am the fifth living child of a family of ten living children. Um, been lucky so far, only my mother is deceased. She passed in '72. A great void came into my life at that time. Um, I came to Friendship in oh, '59 [pauses] '58-'59 as a freshman. I spent two years here and after two years here, I was on to Morris College in Sumter, South Carolina, and um, I've

[pauses, moving machine]

00:04:18 HH: completed my work there in '64, January. Um, while I, I guess you may laugh and say that's a long time. Um, I'm the first, [breaks off, both laughing] It is. I'm the first um, this is no great um, milestone or anything, or feat, but I, I, I enjoy um, telling people or young people, that if I could come from Heath Springs, South Carolina, and make it into the world, um, if not in the mainstream of society or make a comfortable enough life to be able to contribute something back to the humanities, anyone can do it. Um, as I was going to say, um, I am the first of the ten children of my parents to finish high school and go on to college. Um, [pauses] I, I've always been disappointed because the first four didn't finish high school, but they seem to have made greater strides in life than I have. They are all married and have great families. They have very good jobs and they have children and grandchildren, some of them. I never, for some reason, I just told a kid today that, he was telling me that he was a fifth child out of eleven, and I told him, I laughed because he had one more than we did, and his family had one more than we did. And I always worried about my parents not having enough love to go around to children. Um, I think that's enough background on my,

[tape breaks]

00:06:41 **KN: Will you tell me why you enjoy being ambassador of Heath Springs?**

HH: Why do I enjoy being Ambassador-at-Large of Heath Springs? Well, um, [pauses] as I was saying before, Heath Springs is a very small place. Um, as of yet, we haven't worked up to a 1979, May seventh, we haven't worked up to a stop light yet. We still have a caution light and um, people used to tease me about Heath Springs being so small that it only had one sign post, I think. It said, um, they would say why "Heath Springs would um, welcome you to," the sign would say "Welcome to Heath Springs" and it said, "Now you are leaving."

[Both Laugh]

00:07:42 HH: That used to make me quite angry, but now um, I, I play on it a lot. I love Heath Springs and um, I think learning to laugh at myself, laugh at Heath Springs and, and um, the whole situation made me a better person.

KN: Finished?

[tape break]

00:08:12 **KN: This on?**

HH: Yeah!

00:08:15 **KN: Okay. Um, could you tell me what the atmosphere was like before the 1960, 61 sittings took place?**

HH: The atmosphere?

KN: Yeah, the Friendship body, town feelings, etcetera?

HH: I have to go back. Um, [pauses] a little. I remember radio before there were any black people, you know, records, black records being played,

00:08:44 **KN: Yeah.**

HH: Um, or maybe there was Amos and Andy but I, I'm not quite sure if Amos and Andy were played by black people at that time.

KN: Mmhhh.

HH: You know. And um, my parents were very strict. If you didn't go to church, you didn't listen to radio that Sunday afternoon.

KN: Mmhhh.

00:09:08 HH: And so, since we had only one radio, everybody had to go to church. Um, and living out in the country, you could get, I think at that time, one radio station from Charlotte. And that was WBET radio. Um, a radio station from Spartanburg, WSPA, something like that, one from Florence, I've forgotten the name of it, and maybe one from [pauses] Rock Hill. Lancaster got a radio station later. And every Sunday afternoon, it was Strom Thurmond. And Strom Thurmond used to, to talk about black people down to the nitty gritty, you know, 'bout the "old, dirty, greasy." And I remember, I [pauses, sighs] um, then there were, you could, at school, which, you'd see his name, sign on things like um, letters to kids and um, people that'd done something while he was governor once. And um, I think it's all, maybe of all of my modern, I don't want to say, all of my conscious awareness time, of um, of being aware of my surroundings, I think Strom Thurmond has been in the Senate. And um, [pauses] he still had these things, these little radio shows coming from Washington and they were on every radio station. And he talked about black people down, it was very, I, [stutters] I used to feel that how, used to wonder, how a person like that, you know, could be a Senator. And how people could hate people. I never knew, I never could understand how people could hate people.

00:11:18 HH: Um, and I remember the Sunday I was sitting after church listening to the radio and the thing happened about Rosa Parks in Birmingham or somewhere in Alabama. Um, it just seemed that the world was going to come to an end. It was news and they kept talking about it, kept talking about it. But right after that, um, something happened here. Rock Hill once had a um, transit system I think. And the Reverend, late Reverend Ivory, um, led a boycott to black people and they put it out of business, I think. And, but I, since I've been here in town, in the school, and back as an adult working, they've tried many times to have another one but they never could get it straightened out for some reason. Um, but during those, during that time when I was, oh, 11th, 12th grade, these

things were occurring in '58 and '59 and it, I just didn't believe. I believed that being, well at that time it was, we were colored people. You know, we were proud to be colored or, we went through this phase that we were proud, proud to be a colored person. You is proud to be a Negro. You know? There was a short time of being proud to be a colored person. Um, um, you're a Negro, I think from my time of awareness up to maybe '58, when you're working into colored people, that may be backwards, which really doesn't make any difference. Um, after I completed my studies in high school and came to Friendship, that winter,

00:13:25 **KN: Mmhhh.**

HH: of '59-'60, that was my freshman year, I think. And that was the, the sitting started in Greensboro, and I couldn't understand because I didn't, at the time I said, "Well, what is it that we want?" You know? And no one could explain it to me. The next day, we came to North Carolina, well, Johnson C. Smith, um, and that was close to home! It's just like, it was a battle, you know. It was shaping up. And then the kids, I remember them now, um, Martin Johnson, he's a PHD, works at Maryland, somewhere in Maryland. University of Maryland. Um, he was from Westminster or Seneca or some place. He was um, I think he was student body president and um, he was gonna lead the sit ins, um, downtown. Cause it got to Johnson C. Smith, and they said, well, we're gonna have to be the first one here, because we want the world to know that we are aware. But I couldn't, at the time, I didn't understand what we were aware of, you know. Um, then I remember there was the basketball team of um, Arthur Ham. There um, Arthur Ham was not a basketball player; he was a football player, veteran at that, a Korean veteran. Arthur Ham, he was from Eber, Elberton, Georgia. I think that sounds right, Elberton, Georgia. Abe Plumber, he was a basketball player, a *good one*, from Elberton, Georgia. Um, John Wesley Moore, he is now the head basketball coach at Westside High School in um, Anderson, South Carolina. Um, these are the people that I remember very vividly, because they were so outgoing and they were so smart black men at that time, you know. And they just took the lead. I was in the background, I said, "cause I can't go." I recall, all students would be downtown Rock Hill but me. This was in the winter; this was in January. I was, I was trying to work out, in my mind, we want integration. We want our identity. And I was torn between one, the integration. And for a long, I could see, I said, "why, why can't we have separate but equal schools?" But everybody said, "No, it can't be done. It can't be done. It can't be done." Then I, in a way I could see, well I was a youngest, I said, "Well I guess not." But no one could sit down and really explain to me why. And after I went in depth with the whole thing myself, talking, and I talked with a lot of people, a lot of people were just like, well you know, when they start the rolling, it's a good thing that everyone jumps on the bandwagon.

00:17:15 **KN: Right.**

HH: Okay. But I've always been a slow person to really jump on the bandwagon. I'm not a very good follower, and I'm not a very good leader either. I think I'm an individualist that just gotta be, you just gotta show me what is right and what is wrong. You know? I gotta feel it. If, if I can't feel what is right, in that if, in a situation, then I don't mess with it. But um, [chuckles] a lot of people tell me that the reason I got involved was because it was warm and I was, the spring was coming, but it was no. I, I had the time to sit back,

00:17:58 **KN: Uh huh.**

HH: and see people. I, I [sighs in frustration] I could see kids going in down there, I was, let's see. Oh, I wish I could think of the names of the drugstores downtown. Maybe something in mind, like Philips or something. And you could see these kids on TV; they were all upset. The cops were abusive to them, other people were abusive to them, and it, this is, as if. One thing about it, this will make you sure of yourself, you know? But I figured that I had to get my priorities in the right place. Put everything in perspective. I wasn't just going to go out and risk my life um, for a cause that I didn't understand.

00:18:54 **KN: Mmhhh.**

HH: Because I was just from Heath Springs and, you know, in Heath Springs you don't do nothing like that. Oh no! Hell no! You, you just wouldn't, I mean, everything was a novelty. I had a good, Christian, sharecropper family upbringing, you know. But it didn't take me long to get out of that, [chuckling] you know? After I found out. But I, I had all the time, that I, I knew where I wanted to go. But, we was not looking for our identity in this movement. I thought it was to be, should have been the equal opportunities, equal rights, equal justice for all people, you see.

00:19:43 **KN: Uh huh.**

HH: Because in this, seemed to be any dummy would have known that once the integration came, it was gonna be the worst thing for the black people. And I hold now, that integration is one of the, in some situations, one of the worst things ever happened for us. In some situations. Um, and then that's a, maybe that's another story, I probably talk all night on that, but um, just to, for a few things. Look at Emmett Scott. And it may be one of the first public schools in this area for black people. And it's not a god damn thing. I mean, it's a neighborhood center, but oh hell. I mean, you don't, you don't have, the black kids, the black people in this town don't have anything to say, "this is my high school" you know?

00:20:38 **KN: Mmhhh.**

HH: *Mine.* My heritage. You know? It's gone! And it will never be anything anymore. But the,

KN: Go ahead.

HH: But the black people let this happen by being complacent. Not giving a damn. That's what happened; *we* let it happen. Well I'm saying *we* because we were the black people. We are the black people. Um, that's in a lot, um, I see schools where um, my, my hope is this kind of, I have a new faith now. Um, in my traveling and recruiting down in the lower state out east, I see black counselors, black principles, you know, much more, um, many more black administrators in this area. You see? In the Piedmont area. Um, it's, it's, oh, it's a farce, really. We played games, we played *a lot* of games. Games that um, oh, we put a showcase here, put one here, one black person here, one black person here, and that, that's just, I hate to see a showcase black person. And I hope I never be a showcase black person. I, I, in athletics, I hate to say black coach, white coach. I just say coach.

00:22:07 **KN: Mmhhh.**

HH: You know. Um, but the atmosphere at that time, was a very, very strange atmosphere. And you would, you would, I mean it was just, it was just like a movie. Any time you could just feel that the Klan was going to come by. Um, you wouldn't, the kids didn't want to be out, black kids didn't want to be out at night. But our parents always taught us to love one another, trust one another, help one another, love other people. Never lie, never steal, not mess with a white person. Because you would go to jail for that.

00:22:53 **KN: Mmhmm.**

HH: You know? And um, when I saw those things being broken down, I had to really go into some thinking, you know, about that. Because you were, you were, the taboos that Mom and Daddy said. "Don't, don't say nothing to a white person but 'good morning,' 'good afternoon,' 'how do you do,' 'no sir,' 'yes sir.'" You know? Um and I just went "aah, this is a newfound freedom." But now of course, any newfound, any newfound freedom can be so that it annoys another person, you know. I mean, I think freedom in any way should be so in all respects that because I am free, my freedom won't harm another person. But the atmosphere was really, I guess it would be unexplainable for me. It was a weird situation; it was a scary situation for a young person. And I guess much more so for an adult. But it was something that had to be done, and we sort of moved, just had to get into it.

[tape cut]

00:24:19 **KN: Do you, do you believe that um, the sit ins changed a lot of people's minds? The white people?**

HH: The what?

KN: White people's minds. Like people here.

HH: Do I believe what changed their minds?

KN: Well the sit ins, people taking,

HH: Oh, the sit ins! The sit ins.

KN: Yeah, and why,

HH: Well, [laughs]

00:24:40 **KN: Why you are answering that um, was this mostly just Friendship people or just, Friendship people and townspeople?**

HH: Well, um, I think for the first beginning, now I could be wrong. I could be wrong. Because um, like I said, I didn't participate in the very first in January when it first arrived here at Friendship. I didn't participate because I was, my mind was not prepared. But later on, in the spring of the year, when I started, there was a law, you couldn't get anybody to do things. So I recall me, Rufus Gambrel, um, Rufus Gambrel is from um, Anderson, South Carolina. Another guy from Florida, I can't think of his name, and Arthur Ham, I recall many Saturdays, we would be the only one downtown picketing [unclear]. You know. Um, I was going to, if I hadn't have been, um, late for

this, I was going to bring out some material that I, I kept all of those years. Um, pictures taken downtown, the three of us were marching, the four of us. Now in the beginning, there could have been many people, and I guess the novelty of the thing wore off. And, where, I found that there were meetings and you had um, NAACP, excuse me, NAACP people, CORE people, um, SNCC people, um, SCLCS, and I said, SNCC, and Southern Christian Leadership people and come and really explain it. And that's what really made me get into the movement, you know. I got into it, and um, we here in Rock Hill, we marched and marched many, many days. Um, but strangely enough, I never was arrested in Rock Hill. Um, over into the next year, we marched periodically, you know, on and on, on and on. Um, '60, um, the year I left and went to Morris College, that was when I got thrust into the leadership down there because it, [sighs] They were a larger school, they'd, than Friendship. And I was a, um, football player, not a great one like I said, never was a great athlete. Um, and here was something, here was another outlet for me. I think, I was, I was an NAACP member, and um, at that time, the NAACP, young people always felt that it was very slow. That things through court, legally, and nice and neat, but um, to really, to get things going with the CORE people and the young SNCC people. So I was CORE member, I was president of the campus CORE at that time in Morris College. Um, oh, long time ago. And now, I think this was '60 to '61, I guess.

00:28:42 HH: Um, we really um, got involved into the situation down there and that's when um, I think Mother's Day '61, that was the black Mother's Day we called um, [pauses]. That was when the busses burned down in Anniston, Alabama. [Pauses] That was, I was on the Freedom Ride with um, it was just a very sad situation. Very sad. We had to be taken from the bus, many people were beaten. Out of all the 33 arrests and my longest stay in jail, 14 days, sounds like a whole lot now, as I recall, I was hit once. I don't think a cop ever put his, I don't know if, because I was a big person. Huh. A lot of people tell me it's cause I move fast, but I've never been able to move fast. Um, I was, I was always the one that was cursed at. And I could turn and give a good stare, you know, give a good eye. I was hit once, when they beat Jim Peck. Jim Peck was, he was a white guy, the author of the Freedom Ride. Um, they really beat him. And it was, these guys were beating him so bad that I don't, I guess I thought that they was gonna kill him. And I, just some instinct, I don't know, just [pauses] I just stepped in the, stepped in the front of him. And this, this was about four or five guys and this guy said, "Oh, big nigger, step back." You know, so I just knocked hell out of him too, Wham! And I stood there and the cops appeared, you know. Everybody's just, but he was just like a rag. Just like a, he was limp like a rag. And I have pictures of that too.

[tape cut]

00:31:00 HH: Um, as I was saying, it was just, he was just like a rag. He was beaten so brutally that um, I was just; I had never seen anything like it. And I was afraid to put my, I was even afraid to give him assistance because I, I just, it just looked like to me that his head would drop off, you know. It was just so bloody. [sighs] Did I get ahead of the story?

00:31:31 KN: No.

HH: Okay, okay, well, um. Is this going to be involved in the, here in Rock Hill, this [unclear] Here in Rock Hill or the whole, my whole involvement in the movement?

00:31:46 KN: Your whole involvement.

HH: My whole involvement in the movement. Oh yeah, that's, I can, hell yeah, okay. Well um, well I guess I owe Friendship and Rock Hill the...whatever for getting me started in the movement. I was in the movement from the spring of '60, or '59 I guess, to '64. During that time, I was arrested, um, 33 times and my longest stay in jail was 14 days and that was in Sumter while I was a student at Morris College. Um, I participated in the Freedom Ride, in '60, '61. That Freedom Ride was from Washington, D.C. to New Orleans, Louisiana. Um, Ivor [Jerry] Moore, a friend of mine from, a student at Morris College, um, a girl Mary Moultrie, and I, along with James Farmer, we picked up the Freedom Ride from there and went on to Anniston, Alabama where they [pauses] burned the bus, the Greyhound bus. You see, there was two, each, well, [pauses] Let me try to explain this if I can recall. There were a group of people on the Greyhound bus and a group of people on the Trailways bus. They were tested, you know, how were the, the depots at town, each stop. Where could you sit on the bus, you know. Where were you permitted, where was a black person permitted to sit? You know. Um, the white people would go to the back, the black people would get to the front, you know, they were travelling with two different groups and they were just testing. And there was some very hairy situations, um, with the, um, I think that my first stop, my, my first door where I stayed. And incidentally, this is the first time that I have recalled this, I believe, in my life. The, the Freedom Ride, the trip on the Freedom Ride. The stops. I think the first stop, overnight stay, was in Augusta. After leaving Morris College, it was in Augusta at Paine College. Um, we stayed there for a night. And I think it was on a Saturday, I don't, I don't recall. Had to be on a Saturday, because we left there, down through Athens, Georgia, to Anniston, Alabama. And that is where the Greyhound bus, tires were cut, all that was just messed up, just, oh, mutilated a whole bunch of people. Oh, it was, it was a very terrible scene. And um [clears throat] when the Greyhound bus pulled off down in Alabama, I mean out of the depot in Anniston, Alabama, they had already cut the tires. When the bus got out of town, um, the tires just went flat. The people filed out. I don't, I don't know if it was the Klan, but so what? You know. It happened.

00:36:00 **KN: Mmhmm.**

HH: And um, it was a, was a sit, you were here and these people were coming and they hate you because you are sitting on the first or the second or the third seat on a bus. You know? So *damn*, can you really believe this? You know. And, and now,

00:36:23 **KN: This is what's going through your mind?**

HH: At, at this time, yeah. You know? This, I mean, I'm in America, you know? And I'm an American. And I have always, I have always been proud to be an American. But after that day, [pauses] to see the Confederate flag and the American flag, balled up and beaten over people heads, you know, burned, and the Confederate flag raised, I have never been proud of either one. Because why should I be proud of this, you know? Why? I'm not a very, I, now I believe, I believe in forgiveness, love. I believe in the Lord God Almighty. But, I'm not a very patriotic person. And I don't think I ever will be a very patriotic person anymore. I don't hate; I have the right to hate, but I don't hate.

00:37:48 HH: Um, the story goes on, from Ala, Anniston, Alabama, we had to be, well the, the people along the bus, the Greyhound bus that was burned down, um, met by car and taken on to Birmingham. Some of them had to go to the hospital and every place. There's a whole bunch of mess; they refused them and they waited on them a whole bunch of ways, on the outside, and all over. But they finally got to Birmingham, to Fred Shuttlesworth church and home. Reverend Lee, Reverend Fred

Shuttlesworth. Um, incidentally, he retired this year. I saw it in some magazine someplace. And the, the, the Trailways bus pull up, they saw with all, all the commotion at the bus station was closed, they had to go on. So the bus driver got off and went around, and it was just like a signal for him, for, after he got off and went around, that there was a magnet. 30 or 40 men got on and beat up all the white people. [pauses] Oh, it was a shame. It was a, you know, and I think, now that I wonder, I said, "Lord, why did this happen?" And everybody said, "Don't ask God any questions."

00:39:20 **KN: Why did they beat up the white people, was they part of the thing with y'all?**

HH: They were, well, some of the white people, see, I've forgotten the name of there was a doctor,

[tape warps, cuts]

00:39:33 HH: Um, there was a, um, a folk singer. Forgotten, oh gracious, I, maybe I shouldn't have forgotten him because he, [laughs] he was one of the, being from Heath Springs, he's one of the, I think he was the second gay person I ever seen in my life. [Laughs] I shouldn't have, I shouldn't have forgotten this guy because he used to, he used to, it was amazing to see this gay person sing folk songs every night. And he, um, after, it comes to my mind, after he was in New York. And he would sing um, civil rights fight songs and he got beat up at a night club. All that comes to mind, but anyway, forget that. [Laughs] Um, the people on the [pauses] to answer the question, the whole group on each bus, you know, they were, they were already tagged all the way down from Washington to New Orleans, they knew, they knew who was there, who got here, who got off here, who joined the group here, you know?

00:40:45 **KN: Uh huh.**

HH: So they knew. They knew. And usually, if a white person got on the bus, they'd know, he or she would look here, and strange, and as soon as they got to the next stop, they'd get off immediately. You know. And we would um, the Freedom Riders would remain or go in an test, say, two or three would go in to test the bathrooms this time or test the eating counters out this, you know, and two or three next time. So the routine went on. So they, everybody, everybody knew. Everybody knew. It was well-planned, they had it all down. We had a good plan and they had a good plan. Um, we finally made it to Fred Shuttlesworth's church also. And um, that's where I met him. Or did I, I may have gotten ahead of the story. Anyway, I met Martin Luther King in Atlanta. And Atlanta is not as it, [laughs] On the second stop; I got to the third stop before I, I omitted the second stop. And after Paine College it was Atlanta. Yeah. Augusta, then Atlanta.

00:41:57 **KN: Mmhmm.**

HH: Um, I think maybe Augusta was Thursday. Atlanta was um, Friday. And as we were treated with the, we ate at Pascal's, and we met Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. [Pauses] And I wondered, I just, I just wondered about the whole situation. I wondered. I really wondered, I really wondered. That was James Farmer, at that time he was leader of, leader of CORE, an upstart black leader. There was um, Martin Luther King, and I was looking upon these people. But I, little did I know that, how history would turn out, you know. Um, we stayed in the Y [YMCA] in Atlanta.

00:43:16 **KN: Mmhmm.**

HH: And I think that next stop with that Sunday, that Mother's Day Sunday, we left for Birmingham. That's the way it was, okay, that's the way it was. Yeah. Um, the Monday [pauses] we couldn't get out of um, Birmingham by bus, because the guys walking around with the little cases, like um, you know,

00:43:50 **KN: [Laughs]**

HH: they had bombs planted in them.

KN: Mmhhh.

HH: And this bus driver refused to drive, and this bus driver refused to drive, and this bus driver refused to drive. So we on our way and decided to catch more busses. And this bus driver refused to drive, and this bus driver refused to drive, so we held up the whole thing. So he says, "alright," James Farmer, he got [inaudible mumbling] Got us all together and um, and some man from, some reporter from the Afro-American paper, he and I go into it.

00:44:27 **KN: Mmhhh.**

HH: We were here in this very small living room of this [laughs] um, of this black minister. And um, they were calling all over the place, and I was at awe with what was happening; they were talking to um, Robert Kennedy, the um, what do you call him the Chief, no, Attorney,

00:44:52 **KN: Attorney General.**

HH: Attorney General at that time. And they were talking to him, you know, and you could hear him talking and, and, I was like, "Well, I'll be damned. What have I gotten myself into?" You know? And um, so in some burst of faith, we got on, it was my first time flying. [Laughing, unclear] TWA. [Laughs] I'm laughing because, as soon as we got on the plane and got it on the runway, there was a bomb scare. And, I had to get off, well, everybody had to get off. See, the, the Freedom Ride was supposed to have been by bus, from Washington, D.C. to New Orleans. But, um, after the incidents in Anniston, Alabama and we had to fly out of Birmingham to New Orleans, you know. [Laughs] I got off and it was just, everybody had the tickets and stuff. But this was all happening, and you know, you have to follow me, because I was this young, dumb, um, black male that didn't know anything about life, and I'm flying. And um, I only, for some reason, I only had the cover my ticket. And they was gonna hold up the line for this. And I remember saying, "Well, he wouldn't have been in this line without, um, this um, this cover for this thing, if he had not been on the plane." And having, having this young person speak up to this ticket agent, which had thought he was all this macho, you know, white man. And that's the first time, cause all the other times I never said a word. I never said a word. All the times back up in Rock Hill and again I never said a word. The time I was hit in Anniston, I never said a word. Because I feared that if I said anything, it would be my anger bursting forth. You know? And so, here was this guy's spoken up, and I said to myself, I said, "Damn, this is my classmate, you know. This is my classmate coming to my aid." But being inarticulate as I was at that time, I, I didn't know what to say, you know. And he kept on forthing and, I asked him, I said, "well, how is it possible for me to get this?" You know, "You saw us all, we all came here together." And that was the first thing I said, the first statement I ever made, all during the Freedom Ride, all during the sit ins, after all those arrests and being in jail, you know. Um, they finally let us back on another transfer airline. No other airline would take us out and I

don't know who got us out on it but anyway, we got into New Orleans and we was met by the FBI in New Orleans, you know, which was, the FBI in New Orleans was Ku Klux Klan. The FBI, anywhere, anywhere they [sings unclearly] they were there. All, I don't trust the FBI. I don't trust them and I have my reasons for not trusting them. Okay. Um, we were met, you know. They took us to, I think out of frustration, I had never smoked, but my, the young Ivor Moore was smoking. And to get off the airplane after that ride and all of this happening, [chuckles] um, and not smoking, I just said, "Give me a cigarette." You know. And coming down, so one of those guys said "Put that cigarette out." I said, "For what?" He said, "This is jet fuel" and something like this, you know. And then one of the, one of the other guys smoking, I said, "Well, this dude is smoking." He said, "This man is FBI." But I said, "That means his fire is less than mine or greater than mine? He can control his?" That is the second thing I said to the um, opposing group of people. [Laughing]

00:49:42 **KN: Uh huh.**

HH: Um, the Klan, that's what it was. Um, and these people, I don't know who they were. Um, some black people met us. The first night we stayed at Xavier. Which is a,

00:50:00 **KN: [inaudible question]**

HH: no it's a black college. It's a black Catholic college in New Orleans, um, Xavier,

00:50:07 **KN: University?**

HH: Yeah, yeah. So we stayed there. And um, oh, we were the, we were the thing of the campus then, you know. These heroes. Um, and we had to make the rounds of the classes and the seminars and speaking. But I never, I never felt that it was one of the things that, well still I just wasn't into it at that time. You know.

00:50:40 **KN: Who was you speaking about?**

HH: Um, explaining the trip and what the, um, what it was all about. What occurred en route from Washington to New Orleans. Wherever a person joined the move, move, I mean the Freedom Ride, that's where he would pick up and take it on in, you know, explaining it. Um, and after staying around in New Orleans for a few days, making the rounds of the churches and the clubs and the schools, um, Ivor and I moved out, off the campus because the university was getting feedback, you know. Or static, or whatever. We, everybody moved from the campus, went out to private homes. I remember, we were in this bed, and Ivor had gone and taken his shower or bath or *whatever*, been such a long time. And, because the next morning we was going to be going out. Um, hmm. And as soon as I got in the bed, the whole bed fell.

[Both laugh]

00:51:54 HH: The whole bed fell. That was the highpoint, and the lady said, "well, just let it stay, because the mattress is high enough to have you off the floor." And she explained, she had a little boy that was a devil of a child, um, as I recall. He was about five or six years old or something; I don't think he was in school. And he was spoiled to the core. She had had this, this was her second child, and she was explaining to us this was her second child. Her oldest boy was out west in college and she had gone 16 years or something with the other kid before having this little spoiled one. And he was

allowed to run all over the bed and all. [Chuckles] The next morning, it was, New Orleans was fascinating in this way, um, it was, it reminded me of the way books say things are and which you know they are not. You understand?

00:53:17 **KN: Mmhhh.**

HH: Like, all—

[crosstalk]

00:53:20 HH: Well, um, [pauses] If if, if I can, it reminded, it would seem, you just didn't see, you don't believe that you would see, at that time, I believe it was 50- or '60-61, people were still like, many, many, many years behind, you know. Um, and, I, well, I, our people were many years behind. All in the rural, and even in Mississippi, it took, I guess it took that simplicity in those people to really come forward. I don't recall very many people in New Orleans or the state of Louisiana, because Louisiana is, oh my god, if you ever get in jail in Louisiana, they tell you you'll never get out. You know? And nobody ever, and it was our purpose not to go to jail in Louisiana while on the Freedom Ride because it was, you know, um, um, it was heavily klan-ish. It was um, Louisiana is setup on parishes or some situation, and when they put the cling on you there, you just don't get out of jail, you know. So we decided no one would go to jail in New Orleans. And we had no confrontations in any kind of way. When the university, um, started to receive static we got out of there and then we all went our separate ways, like. Because two people had to go back to New York to do a TV show, James Farmer had to go and explain something in Washington, and then Ivor Moore had to leave because his grandfather had passed. Um, and that left me to fly back to um, Columbia alone. And I had never flown, I had to change in, well, alone, I mean that's my second time flying. And um, I said, "I'm not going to be able to fly back. I'm not going to be able to make these changes," you know? [Laughs] As I recall, it was a major task for me to fly from New Orleans to um, Columbia, South Carolina. But I made it. I stayed over, there was a layover in Atlanta, and I was just treated royally by the SNCC people, you know.

00:56:05 **KN: You had no incidents going there? No people recognized you as being part of the Freedom?**

HH: Um, coming back?

00:56:12 **KN: Yeah, by yourself flying?**

HH: Um, no! It was just a little old black kid flying, [laughs] you know? And um, I, I think it was going back, it was, I was on a southern airline, some kind anyway. Had to make these changes. And it was the most noisiest thing. That's what I, but I got back and I, I didn't know how to get to, I was supposed to go to Benedict College, go to some dormitory, I forgot which one, make a telephone call and wait there. So I did that. And finally, I don't know how I got there. Honest, I don't know how, and I know I didn't walk. But I don't know how I got to that dormitory. [Pauses] I don't recall. Anyway, well, after arriving back, after the Freedom Ride, um, there was a lot of, all the students, you know, went different ways because school was just about out, um, I think after returning, um, school was out. I really don't know how long I, you know, I um, I would have to read up on it, I don't know how long I stayed on the Freedom Ride, I don't know how long it was. Maybe it was a week or two weeks altogether or something like that. I'm not sure. Um, and I had to make speeches,

which I wasn't accustomed to. But it brought me out and I really started to try to come out of myself, and try to contribute something to the humanities in writing, that's when I started. Well I was writing, I think from maybe, well trying to, from way early high school and um, I hid a long time, because people used to feel that if a man wrote poetry and especially a football player, a big person, was gay or something, you know? And hell, I didn't want to be gay. And I didn't um, I didn't want to be tagged or classified as that.

00:58:50 **KN: So what'd you do, hide your poetry?**

HH: Well I, yeah. [Laughs] You know, I'd write at night, you know, in secret. [Laughs] Yeah, I wrote under, well I'd say, as a kid, "incognito" [laughs] for a long time. And um, um, after the Freedom Ride, I didn't give a damn, you know? Because I had something, I felt I had something to say. And um, my, I had to find a way to say what I wanted to say. And with all the rhyme and schemes and all the mess and way that I had been taught, you know, from literature down from the years, through white poetry and white literature, Oh! I didn't want, I couldn't, I just, I just didn't want to do it that way. I rebelled. I wasn't gonna do it that way. It was just like walking around in a suit and tie when I didn't want to, walking around in a tuxedo going to a formal or something when I didn't want to. I said "F-it, I'm going to do it the way I wanna." People told me, "You'll never get published this way." And um, not boasting, I don't have to, but um, and as a student of the Bible, um, Jesus, God, they beg of the people to cut away from the, to give up from just being proud, too much pride will kill you, of course. So I, I don't have to boast. But there was a time, oh, '74, '75, '76 in those days, I was the most published poet in the state of South Carolina. But I never boasted about it; I didn't give a damn. It was something I wanted to do, and it's something that people said I would never be able to do and that I did. You know?

01:00:49 **KN: Mmhm.**

HH: And anyway I don't call myself a poet, I just, I write. Whatever comes forth, I say it, you know. And um, I don't write for other people, I write for myself anyway. And if a person or persons happen to enjoy one of my books then good. Good, good.

[tape cut]

01:01:15 HH: [Laughing] Well, um, [chuckles] I'm laughing because, um, it's not funny. It's not funny. Dr. Rubin who was the president, Dr. Rubin and I [inaudible, muffled microphone] He wouldn't let anyone expel me from school because he was afraid to. And he was afraid to because I was a hot commodity.

[Both laugh]

01:01:45 HH: I was a fool, but um, you see, this is what I try to get young people to do now. In order to fight while in school, you gotta keep your grades up. That's what I did. Before I made a move, I would make sure my grades was hot? You know, I wasn't gonna do anything until I completed my work. When I got my work in, I could go out and demonstrate, or to a meeting, or make a speech, you know. And I wasn't gonna go unless in my work, you know. So Dr. Rubin knew this, and then all the instructors and other people knew. They, I, I, I, they really, I can't, I really don't know, but they were afraid of me. They just let me go on and they kept tabs on me, like they would send different people to see where I was at this particular time. "Oh, we just checking on you, Herman Harris,

where are you?" Um, anyway, back at, you know, the campus maybe a thing or two or something. No, I had made a speech. I was probably there, this was maybe two weeks following the return to the campus of Morris College in Sumter. I made a speech down in Charleston and the [pauses] was um, one night, um, through the week. I don't recall what night it was but it was a fantastic, it was, there was so many people, you know. I'm always, I'm afraid of crowds, I can't, I go instead. There was a group of people, it was one of these churches where you have a long three aisles and then you had the rounding balcony up there, you know? And I was making this speech and a guy would, you know, gesture, and the young people would say, "Yeah!!" and I was, I was getting into it, you know? So I, God, I said, "What am I doing?" You know? I said, "Well, just hold on, wait a minute now, let me finish!"

01:04:15 **KN: Did they give you information on what to speak on, or would you just a, elaborate on what was happening or,**

HH: I was just of the experience, that's what it was all about. I was just elaborating on the experience.

01:04:33 **KN: The experience, the culture,**

HH: No, no, no culture because I hate it. [Laughs] I am, I have the really first-hand experience of the Freedom Ride from Morris College, Sumter, South Carolina, to New Orleans and back. And that's what I, I did that for practically all summer. But anyway, um, after returning from that, I was, all the kids was going on, there were maybe three or four men on campus, you know, it was a small campus. At that time Morris wasn't very much um, larger, larger than Friendship is now. And um, so I was out working, I work, previously I was getting telephone calls, about bombings and this and bombings and this, and um, the ones that are telephone calls aren't going to fight me. But you get a few telephone calls saying that "When you step out, it's going to be this, it's gonna be this, it's gonna, this gonna happen, this gonna happen." That is a frightening thing. You know, can really get to you. I, I just slow down, you know. Before prior to that you know, all the other people would get them; I never had any myself, so it didn't bother me. But it really got to me. Um, that Saturday afternoon when I got, I think I was going out to the store. It was night. Spring. [inaudible] And then um, [sighs] It was in the dark, or the semi-darkness because the campus didn't turn the lights on campus at that time like it is now and they wouldn't turn, in the summer time they didn't have it lit up like um, like a regular school, you see. This guy went up and came, I saw him, but he just came up to me like, [slapping sound] that, you know. And just, oh, so the, at first I just thought it was somebody playing. But I was pushed and just, oh, um, it was just [sighs] it's incredible, I guess, you just can't, you just can't explain, it's an incident that maybe will never really be explained perfectly well. Um, but I can't, you know, being um, 20, 21, at the time, um, I just couldn't see myself being kidnapped. I'm, somebody grabbing me, you know, taking [inaudible, grime?] and beating me, stripping me, see, see this "K" on my arm?

01:07:28 **KN: Uh huh.**

HH: Now these were great marks. [Pauses] These were great marks. As I've got [inaudible], grown out, this cut, [pauses] I don't know if I was left for dead or, or what. You know? It was, it was a great moment. I mean, not a great moment but a tr-traumatic moment in my life. I don't think I could ever explain it.

01:08:00 **KN: This was your senior year?**

HH: No, this was right after the Freedom Ride.

KN: So you was what?

HH: What do you mean, I was what?

01:08:08 **KN: Status.**

HH: Oh, I was still a student at this time. Yeah, I was still a,

01:08:12 **KN: Senior?**

HH: Um, I was a junior. Yeah, I was a junior. It was, and um, I stayed under, oh, I guess I, my mind, you know, just really tripped. I just wasn't, I just wasn't Herman K. Harris II, you know, for a long, long time. Because many things I just didn't, just, I just couldn't put into place. You know? Many things. I just couldn't put in place. And um, I'm, I guess, I have attempted to tell this to many, many people. I once wrote a, in the, the first time

01:09:08 **[tape cut, mic moving]**

01:09:16 HH: Well, um, the point. Um,

01:09:28 **[movement still]**

HH: Um, the point, um, I, I, I went to a, I was invited to the tri-centennial, the South Carolina State Tri-centennial Literary Workshop. Um, Grace Freeman, um, Dr. Freeman's wife, um, was also at the same workshop. James Dickey, um, was hosting the workshop, I think. Well at least the portrait segment part of the workshop.

01:10:02 **KN: Mmhhh.**

HH: And um, there were 23 or 21 um, poets and um, 21 fiction writers or something like that. Um, there were 2 blacks in it. Some guy named Cooper Smith; he teaches in Spartanburg I think, Spartanburg or Greenville, and he lives in um, in Gaffney. Um, [laughs] I, I remember, I remember this quite vividly. The first thing when we all got there in the room, and I looked, and I said, "oh." At that time, um, I was a, this was in '69, '70, and I had returned back to Friendship now as a, um, a instructor. Well, put a period there. I came to Friendship um, September 5, 1964 as an instructor. And um, my last participation in um, marches and sit ins were, I think the Moultrie lady or someone had gotten killed in Alabama or something like that, we marched down to the post office and mailed some letters. And, it dawned upon me that I had to, that I was an adult and I had to have a job. I had to work, I had to provide for myself, and I had to eat. So, my activist days were over. Now, and, in, okay, back to the, the, we're trying to explain the kidnapping and the whole sit in demonstration, um, through or in poetry. I did in that shop, in about a 9 or 10 page form. And James Dickey read it, you know. Um, and it was a terrible situation for me to go through, because there were certain things that I had to say in the poetry that, like you'd, look around and see these elderly ladies, like Ms. Freeman and other people, and this kind of poetry was shocking the hell out of them. You

know? And like, well, what, I think the line was in, [sighs, frustrated] be quiet, [sighs] and something, or something, to what, oh, cut his balls out. And James Dickey had to read that. And um, cause he, I guess he thought it was, I don't know if he was trying to, you know, play up to me because I was the only black person in the, um, seminar or what, you know. Um, but, I, I kind of felt that James Dickey would be above certain things, you know. But still, he cracked a drawl [mimicking] just like um, and he made a play on this, just about this. [Speaking inaudibly, mocking the drawl] "So we got something here I'm going to read, and I want everybody to hear this." [back in his normal voice] And people, oh, gosh, gosh, gosh. You know, and they were getting to know me from all sides, inside, and all, and I never gave it to them in any way. I never did. I never did. Because, and at that time, you see that picture up there? That was after the um, with the bald head?

01:14:13 **KN: Uh huh.**

HH: I used to get a haircut every two weeks. And people were afraid of me because I was this big dude with this skinny head, you know? The Caesar. And I used to go to these dashikis [ethnic African robes] you know, because I was getting into um, '69, '70, I was proud to be black.

01:14:34 **KN: Uh huh.**

HH: You know. And um, I was a young professional person and I was pushing my blackness, you know, my new discovery of me and um, of my situation. So I, I went through this whole conference. Um, I was invited out by the line poet this once. And there was this little dude, little white man from Charleston, originally from Ireland and the, [taking on a (bad) Irish accent] he was disturbed because, he can't understand how he would choose to read a black man's poetry first. Which was not very good poetry; there was no rhyme, no nothing. And um, he couldn't understand how a black man could be, could feel, that to be comfortable allowing white people, you know,

01:15:43 **KN: He was one of your critics.**

HH: Well, he was a, I guess he was in his, maybe late 70s, and he was, well they had all kind, I mean all ages there in the workshop. And oh, it was a, they tolerated him at the party and they tolerated me. So he and I took the party over, you know.

01:16:05 **KN: Mmhmm.**

HH: He was scorning me because I was black. And I was scorning him, telling him that he was going to Hell because he was a white bigot, you know?

[Both laugh]

HH: And um, and everybody was just around and they were laughing and they just said, "Oh, give him a chance. He's an old man." I said, "But look at me! Why, how could he just hate me? He believes in God. He's gonna die and go to Hell because he hates me. He doesn't know me; I have never done a thing to him." And I said, "Does anyone else here hate me?" [Pause] I don't hate anybody. I don't hate the people that um, um, really put the scars on my body. You know? I don't hate them. I think, like I said before, I have a right to hate, but I don't. [Sighs] Hate causes you to do things that you wouldn't normally do and then, hate is just like being a crook. You gotta be smart to be a damn crook, you know? And um, I don't have the time to hate. I don't have the time to hate. I

have other things, I want to contribute, to contribute to the humanities and in contributing to the humanities is the only way I see that we can really serve God. That is the only way because contributing to the humanities in the way that, the Bible is the only way. And I, I don't want people to just say that um, H.K. Harris II um, lived. I want them, I want people, I want my name to be written up on [pauses] the wind of time. I want, I want, I want it to be so that people will know, generations unborn, will know that I lived and contributed to the humanities. It was a, in the process of being a God-fearing person. I, I, I, I doubt very seriously that I can love everybody. There are a lot of people I don't like. I mean, I don't, [sputters] there's no use in trying to dress it up. You don't like, don't say you don't like them, you don't like their ways. But you've got to be a very astute person to be able to step, separate ways from the person. You know? His actions have caused me great harm. You know? Says, I don't, I don't want to be around that person, you know, but the ways that you go through, just hating and hating. I, when I say, "I hate," that, that is my discrimination. You know? Because I reserve the right to pick and choose who I want to associate with. You understand?

01:19:28 **KN: Got it.**

HH: Um, and that is my way of hating, I guess. But I wouldn't let that person carry me down. I wouldn't die and go to Hell for that person, you know. Um, I would step aside, if I saw the person. The person needed this or needed that he could get it some other way without bothering me. You know? Um, I wouldn't, I wouldn't harm a person that I distrusted or disliked unless that person was trying to do bodily harm to me. To me rather. Um,

01:20:11 **KN: Back to the story?**

HH: The, the um, [sighs, pauses] Well, coming back to Friendship and the recall the first day of our arrival, it was like, [pauses] Just going around in a, to me, in a great, on a great carousel. I ended up back where I started. But, I tell, I tell kids sometimes that coming from Heath Springs to Friendship, I travel, travelled, three, it was only three steps. But in those three steps, it was three million miles.

01:21:19 **KN: Those steps being?**

HH: I left Heath Springs, I came to Rock Hill, I went to um, Sumter, and I came back to Heath Springs, I mean,

KN: Rock Hill.

HH: Rock Hill.

01:21:40 **KN: Uh huh.**

HH: It, it's, um, I studied creative writing at the university of California. I've been to many workshops, you know, summer workshops. And I feel that all of the education I have, I don't think, the way I feel, none of it is dearer to me than the first two years that I received at Friendship College because those two years, I learned more than I had learned in my entire 18 years of living. And I learned so much it frightened me. I didn't believe that one was capable of learning as much as I did. And to go through, like, come back, and be able to, I came to Friendship to really, because when I was, as a student, when I was at Friendship, playing football, we had three coaches. And I

said, "I could get back and coach football. I'm going to give it some stability. I'm gonna stay."
[Pauses] When I came here, I don't know, I had it real hard. Like room and board, \$300 a month, and I worked hard. And the second year, I was Director of um,

01:23:56 **KN: Not the student center?**

HH: Men. No, no, not the student center, I was Director of Men. Um, I was director of White Hall, I was teaching Physical Education, at that time, 7 classes um, a week. I was also coaching basketball, coaching um, football, track, and baseball. And, as I look back upon '65-'66, '66-'67, '67-'68, those were some tremendous years for me. Um, I was a young man and I had drive, but to think, as I think of those years, the pay, all that work, work you know? Um, it was really just came back for me a few weeks ago. I was in, anyway, South Carolina, recruiting, and this coach is resigning this year, returning to um, the private sector of business. He's going to Carolina Power and Light, \$6,000 a year more on his salary, a company car. And he turns and he looks at this, oh, coach. He's been coaching for 30 years, fantastic football coach, track coach, and he says, "Now you see that coach, whatever? He doesn't even have a pot to piss on." But he has a great record, and he would live in infamy. I looked at him, and I looked at the other coach, and um, I turned back to the guy who was talking to me. I said, "Well, I'm going to be that same way. I'm going to be just like him. I can see it." And I really meant that from my heart. Um, now in ways I won't be because they was, both the guys was white. Um, this old man had coached for years. Kids loved him. But he has a nice home, he's comfortable, he, he is enjoying his last few years of teaching and coaching and that is um, what I'm trying to do. Contribute to society, the humanities, and enjoy it.

01:27:14 **KN: And at this time, this was Friendship Junior College. Not Friendship College as it's known now. Was [inaudible] president then?**

HH: At what time, when I was back here?

01:27:24 **KN: Yeah.**

HH: Um, yes. Dr. [inaudible name] was president when I first came. Yeah. I, I have served three presidents; Dr. James H. Gouldlock, Dr. S. L. Evans, and now the present, Dr. Charles W. Petress, um, from Axton, Virginia. [Laughs] Um, to, okay, to, to go back to the story, um. I was offended by the young coach talking about this old coach because the young coach had only coached for six years. And I didn't have the time to go in depth with him, but it's more to life than money. Now, I, I realize that it takes money to do anything that, frankly you want to do in life. But it's more to life than riches.

01:28:36 **KN: [Inaudible statement]**

HH: Yes. Well, everyone, well, I don't know about everyone because I am. I wouldn't give a damn about being rich. I don't want to be, I don't, now these are things that I don't wanna. I wanna live free, and I want, I wanna leave a print on history. That's what I want. I wanna, I wanna, when the history books are written in the future, I don't want to be like um, George Washington Carver, locked into books, history books that I studied, you know, the white history books. A half of a paragraph on George Washington Carver, Booker T. Washington. Now I will never be as great as those men; I would never care to. I don't give a damn about that. But, I, when history's written, I want, I, damn, I. The way I feel about aiding and helping young people, um, now a days, well,

damn. I'm gonna be a book, you know? I'm gonna be the book. I'm not going go to be that half a paragraph, or the name listed here. You know? That Herman K. Harris II, 1939 to something. You know? It's going to be *the book!* That's what I want it to be. And if it's not that, it won't be my behalf, it will be on the writer's behalf, because he was too dumb to research, you know? He was too dumb to research.

01:30:31 HH: Now, um, back to the early years of Friendship. I went through, from '60, I think, well knowing, I had committed myself to Friendship. I knew that I never would make money at Friendship, I knew that. And I never bickered over salary. People have called me in and said, "well, Coach, what do you want?" Or "I have recommended this for you." And I said, "Okay, fine. Thank you." And go on out, you know? Always sit and chat on something else. Um, sure. I owe people, I have bills. I'll never be rich. The thing that I want out of life, and I would love to see, I don't mean a utopia, I, I want people to respect others. You see? I mean, you don't have to go around, you could do, live so that you are respected. One's life, one's work, should be respected and give off the rays of what he or she is all about. And if one can't respect a person for his work, or if one work does not speak credibly for, or credibly for any,

[tape cut]

01:32:44 HH: ...willing to sign his or her name under, behind, or beside, or on top, of his her or work, then, they're not worth the salt that's in their bread. You know? Because, and I think it should be that, there used to be a commercial on TV that I, maybe one of the only commercials that I used to really enjoy. This, well, this man would show, or this person would show this, you know. And he or she would sign their name on it because they had worked on this part or this car or whatever that was being assembled. You know, that, I thought was really good. Um, but in working and coming up through the years here at Friendship, I've seen a lot of apathy in our black people. Saw West End go away to nothing; they don't use it. Saw Ms. Godfrey's go away. I saw the emergence of neighborhood centers and still they're not a part of what they should be. Um, I know people won't think well of me for saying this, but damn I haven't been, I've never been thought well of and I don't do things so people will think well of me anyway. I just do my work, I do my job. I think, [sighs] marijuana came on the scene at the wrong time for black people. Now I'm not saying that the Stokely Carmichaels and the Rap Browns, the Eldridge Cleavers, [all members of the Black Panther Party] all those people are the great things that happened to blacks, but they did open the way. Well, the NAACP would have gotten up there too, but it have been, would have been 15 more years behind it, you see? That was a time that I used to love to fish. And I could just reach down and grab a chicken and just take its neck off, or head off. But now I can't stand to see anything die. Run over something in traveling and it hurts me. I can't even, I can't even stand to see a fish be out of the water to die. But um, you know, in the statement, that in war, and in love, all things are fair. It's cruel. But you don't get anything from life. Nothing is given to you worthwhile. You know, you gotta fight for everything. Every worthwhile breath of air you got to fight for. It is imperative to life to fight, even if you just, well I don't know if you've ever seen anyone about to drown or drown. But in that, in a situation like that, that's the way that life, all of life, is. It's precious. And all the goodies that, that's out there for you, now integration gave us everything, to a certain extent, but the jobs, you see?

01:37:23 **KN: Mmhhh.**

HH: You, what's the heck, the right to have the right to go to any restaurant, any store, any movie, any place that anyone else is going. You're making \$7-10,000 a year, and the next person is making 17, 15, 17, 20, 19. How is less, you have more to provide for, he has less. You can be, as they say, overly qualified. You will still make less. We are, black people are still the first to um, be the first in everything. The last to be hired, the first to be fired. And until people, I mean people, everybody, learn priorities. There will be hate. But you know, and you can, you can put this down and put it in your pipe and smoke it any kind of way you want. After a while, there may not be no respectable race nor color. Creed, no nothing. There's just gonna be tests. If you can't pass the test, you don't get the job. You don't get the job. I meet kids every day now, interviewing. Counselors that let them go, they, one guy for instance, I met, 9th, 10th, half of the 11th grade who was, he was in industrial arts courses. Then he decided he wanted to [inaudible] he doesn't want to go to college. Then he's messed up, he can't go anywhere. You know? There's all over the place like this. Um, we don't care. But in order for um, a cohesive, coexisting society to be maintained in proper order, people there must be charity of the love type. There must be.

01:40:29 **KN: But they say charity begins at home and a lot of our home lives are broken.**

HH: Well, that's true. Um, I think I mentioned earlier that I worried about my parents not having enough love to go around. But I could see the love that they had for the family, for each other, for the kids. I guess I was selfish; I wanted more love, I wanted to be told that "I love you" and that never happened, you know? Um, even charity beginning at home, sure. I think the Bible says everything um, will pass away but this will last. I guess the greatest of all virtues. But I think in being a student of the Bible, you have to take it, you have to interpret it in the time in which one lives. If, you gotta have respect. If you don't respect yourself, then how can you respect another person? If you hate, then how can you respect anybody? If you're taught to hate, how can you respect, how can you love another person? I mean, if heaven is the way I visualize, the way we have been taught to see it, there's not gonna be very many of us in heaven. Or are we in it now? But if we're in heaven now, I'm gonna tell you, um, I'm very disappointed.

01:42:51 **KN: You been here 15 years, you started to explain some of the type of jobs you had. You know, before we get on into the present time,**

HH: Mmhmm.

01:43:03 **KN: during the 15 years you've met different types of students from all walks of life,**

HH: Oh Christ, [laughs]

01:43:11 **KN: Have you um, do you discourage those that are, come to Friendship, you taught em, or they was playing for you,**

HH: You mean do I discourage them or encourage them?

01:43:27 **KN: Discourage them as far or do you encourage them or discourage them as far as, if they show signs of maybe following somewhat the same path that you did with the Freedom marches?**

HH: Mr. Nelson, um, [pauses] I wouldn't be so naive as to feel that I'm going to find people like my class or my generation, because each generation is a generation in itself. But I think that each generation should at least try to improve on the other. It shouldn't transgress, you know, because the generation before paved a certain way. You either improve upon it or see that it's so wrong that you've got, you've got to go in another direction, you know? But to, I was going to go on this earlier but I deviated. I think um, drugs had a lot to do with our people recently. The drive that was there in the late '50s and early '60s for us is not there anymore. Now I'm not saying that all the young people are going to drugs, I'm not saying that. I'm not saying that. I'm saying that they are much more complacent than um, we were. Um, I have met, I have talked, worked with a few young people. But they have been poets, each one of them, and maybe three or four years in intervals, where they seem to have lived out of their time. You know? But athletes, you know, athletes of my time was, they were involved. [Pauses] But nowadays, I, I, I hate to think of Robert Hays, what happened to him. Um, the quarterback that played up at,

01:46:48 **KN: Pittsburg?**

HH: Gillham.

01:46:53 **KN: Yeah, Pittsburg.**

HH: Well I know I'm mentioning black people because if any young black would hear this, I would hope that it would aid them in some kind of way. Um, I have seen our people go from, from say, when I was in high school, there was a boiling point; they were boiling. But they were afraid. They were afraid to move, but they were boiling. You could hear the NAACP. [Stutters] all the kids, and you hear them say, "Well, Mom and Daddy say we got to pay our membership fee." But they wouldn't even let the kids go because they figured the kids might say something, might get back. You know. And they said, "It's time for us to join that thing again." It's all generations. But you've got your boiling point and we boiled. And then that, we spewed over, what that, in that so-called finding our identity, I think we did more harm to um, um, our contemporaries, than we did good in many ways.

01:48:33 **KN: Elaborate a little bit?**

HH: Well, they don't have anything to call their own. Um, churches are going back into churches, school systems are going back into white school systems, um, here's a black, white kids graduating from the same high school, and they say oh, "this is my high school" and you look and you see what, where, where? I have so many, in working as a teaching, I could tell the transition. '69 and '70 was a complete transition. The students then started to, that motivation in young black people was shrinking down. You know, from '59, no I'd say from '61 to '64 was at its peak.

01:49:40 **KN: Mmhmm.**

HH: Then it just went down. Then, um, [pauses] I, I really don't know. I've had great athletes. Athletes, basketball players. They come in fired up, ready to go. But before the first semester is over, they cease to be a great athlete. It's so complexing. They're so happy with um, being able to be in a purple haze, to be in, in a illusion, you know, that once in a while [inaudible]. He loses his direction, he loses sense of direction. And I don't know, I really don't know. People don't speak on it, but it was something that happened on this date this past summer. No, last summer past, um,

there was a traumatic, dramatic thing. A coach somewhere in the lower state, I don't know where it was, resigned because of, couldn't get the kids to run like he wanted. And the next day, somebody else resigned because the kids was, everybody smoked marijuana. I was at some schools, and they said yeah, from the sixth grade on up, you know. But to cripple a child, I don't believe in the death penalty, but to harm a child, I think a person should be put to death. I really do, I really do. [Sighs, pauses] And that could be, I could be totally wrong. That's one man's opinion. But I been down there to become a judge. I been down there to become a judge. Um, and I think that this, drugs that, black people. Black crime upon blacks um, has hindered us recently more than anything else. So we're after a bunch of crabs, we don't, we don't care for the other one, one neighborhood or one around, going up and reaching out, becoming, doing something, you know? And how I feel about Rock Hill now? [Pauses, sighs] The town, I'm far removed from it, I don't know. I know very few people in Rock Hill. I have very few friends and I, it had to be another time. I think I would, after another forty years, you know, I could give an assessment of how I feel [chuckling] about Rock Hill. But Friendship, I have faith in Friendship. Dog gonit, I love every grain of sand that's in, surround it, upon it. Anything that the administration tell me to do, I try to go out and do it, do it as hard as I possibly can. I love the place because it is a place that [pauses] fills a void where other schools could never do.

01:53:55 **KN: You say you can't elaborate now on um, your feelings about Rock Hill.**

HH: Right.

KN: Do you feel that um, because Friendship College students, yourself and others that you've mentioned, want to take,

HH: Mmhhh.

KN: have taken part in the Freedom March and the sit ins that um, this has left a bad taste in people's mouth about Rock Hill as far as Friendship College is concerned.

HH: Well I, in, in, in ways I guess so, you know. Um, they're, and to be specific, people that, inner thought, they have possessed power, they can do things to harm you and do nothing to harm you, can do nothing and still harm you. You understand?

01:55:00 **KN: Mmhhh.**

HH: Um, with a town this size, I meet people practically every day that are going to Winthrop College that have, that will say to me, "You from Rock Hill, Friendship College? I went to Winthrop, I never heard of that. Where is it?" You know?

01:55:22 **KN: Mmhhh.**

HH: And here is a fine person, specimen of a human being that finished school in '76 and she didn't even know what Friendship was. I said, "now I don't know if that is," in, in that conversation with her, I said, "does that really speak well of you?" You know? She says, "Oh, no, I, you know, but I just," she says. Well, I'll tell you, she was from Winyah High School. Winyah High School, Georgetown. I've forgotten her name, I can look it up, but it's, it's, what's the use, you know? She

went to school here for four years and went back to do her master's and um, she never heard of Friendship. I think that must be an awfully dumbass woman, you know that?

01:56:25 **KN: Mmhhh.**

HH: You just got to be. It just got to, all of this that is taking place in history, you know? I mean, if, if, if it was recorded proper. I mean, they have ignored it, but that's, that's, I said, "Miss, you are, with these kids sitting in here, you shouldn't say that." You know? Well, I, I think that yeah. With Friendship being here since 1891. Friendship was the first school in this area for black people, um, private. Well, private or public, for black people. I remember reading when I was doing, on a committee doing a study about Friendship, um, through its history. Um, the school board met and gave Friendship \$25, voted to give them \$25 a year to aid the black students. And over um, maybe 5 or 6 year period,

01:57:39 **KN: Uh huh.**

HH: they voted to give them \$50 dollars, donate them \$50 to aid. I said, well I'll be damned. Now, this, this is in old banners, newspapers of Friendship College, you know. And they got it, you know, probably a big article, "The school board, Rock Hill School Board, District Something, had voted to give," and um, the last one going through this history, the last one which was maybe about... From the first time, the \$25 spans from maybe 7, 8 or 10 years. But they were, had gotten to \$125 or \$175 dollars. You know? And Emmett Scott wasn't even in existence at that time.

01:58:27 **KN: Mmhhh.**

HH: You know. Um, so I'm saying, with the history, the historic value in this school, people, when I say people I mean all, black, white, Indian, all. You know, green, blue, purple, all that mess. Um, should not, should be aware of Friendship. That's dumb, that is dumb, dumb, dumb on um, an educated person's part to know of such valuable history in this town,

01:59:07 **KN: Mmhhh.**

HH: not written down, not recorded in any place. Who's fault is it? And somewhere you get the answer to that and there'll be a lot of wise people, you know, be a lot of wise people, and then Friendship wouldn't be the way it is now. It would be a better junior college than it is. It be a, our buildings would be, our plant I should say would be beholden to gaze upon. Um, we would have a greater um, academic structure, um, but no, I guess in certain ways what's the use we have of the things? We have other schools. But, this school fills a need that no other school. Friendship is unique in its being. And I don't give a damn what nobody says, I don't care how or what he or she has or who are them. Who they are. Friendship is unique in its being and if you look, anyone would care to look, take the time to go back over its history, they can see, and see the great people that have, you know, gone through this institution and gone on and made it in life. Oh, you take now, um, we've had students that've gone to universities practically in every state in the continental United States. We've got doctors, lawyers,

02:00:55 **KN: A former pro basketball player.**

HH: Yeah! Oh, secondary former pro football player.

02:01:03 **KN: Mmhhh.**

HH: You know? But nobody pays any attention to this, you see. Um, Friendship has a great history, really. And I love it. And there, when you talk about the God that I believe in, Friendship College, then, you got to reckon with me. Cause I've given 15 years of my life to this institution. I've poured my life into it and I've done all I possibly could to make it into a better institution. I have, and it has been good to me. It has permitted me to coach, instruct, direct, write, um, even raise hell, be controversial, and even to be lazy, you know? I love to work, but I'm lazy in my way. And I, I don't like laziness. But I'm lazy in my way. I love to sleep.

02:02:21 **KN: Mm.**

HH: I eat too at the wrong time. I think of all the things that um, I would put X by, or an asterisk by, it would be my eating habit, which may not play any part in my history, and which may play a tremendous part in my history. And I, I said that to say this, because I would not want to wind up with a stroke, heart attack because, you know, eating something at the wrong time.

02:03:07 **KN: Uh huh.**

HH: And they say, "Oh, he died because of, he ate a ham sandwich at midnight,"

KN: [Laughs]

HH: You know, "and he had this massive stroke, or he had this heart attack and went on in to glory. Or hell." Um, [laughs] I was laughing, I don't guess it was funny, but it was a situation that someone said, I was in Lancaster at a place, and someone said, "Oh, she looked just like Mama Cash." She said, "No, I couldn't look Mother, Mama Cash." Said, "Why?" Said, "Mama Cash is dead!" Said, "Oh, well that's alright, she used to sing good."

[Both laugh]

HH: Said, so then this black girl said, "Well, she's dead." "Of course she's dead!" the white girl said. And I said, "Well, um, um, but she was a great singer." "What's the use of being a great singer and um, being that fat and being so dumb to um,"

[tape cut]

02:04:04 **KN: This interview with Brother Herman Kard Harris II, poet, teacher, coach. This is a story of one of the Freedom Fighter's life and his continued struggle to help his people. It has been an honor, since August of 1971, to know Brother Harris, who is neither a bigot, racist, or an oriole, a black man with a white mind, but an individual who has stood up for his rights and since his conscious awareness days, helped his brothers and sisters. I hope that any black student that listens to this tape will learn something from this man, like I have, and it will help them and white people to better understand each other. Thank you.**

HH: [laughs] Well, I don't know, I'm gonna tell you, I don't know what to say. I think the moral of the story is what's the, what's the reason of being great and ignorant at the same time? But I've

always said to the, you know, all of us gotta have our little vices. And I guess Mama Cash little vice was the late night snack, which is mine. If I have any great vices, as who I am, as I am, where I am, like I am, it's eating late at night. And by being obese, by being one, with high blood pressure, and all, that could keep me from contributing to the humanities um, as I have wished to. I think that's the ultimate.

02:06:05 **[tape cut]**

02:06:11 HH: And all of this, the whole whatever of minutes or seconds, hours, I wish for everyone to know that I am who I am, as I am, a human being that's not a bigot. Um, if it's anything that I do dislike, it is a person that we call two-faced: a bigot, a liar, and a thief. All my days, I have been taught to be upright and stood fast in that which you have been taught and believe, but realizing that in the turning, one will deviate. Now, I have been known to [microphone hit] espouse off the top of the head, hard-headedly and all, but in all of my trivialness, I can say, I, I, I can say that I know, that I understand the ways of the world in its normalcy. I shall be truthful to the end. I will not be bigot, will be a bigot. I, I, in normalcy, I don't see how I can hate. I shall not hate. And as long as I am of sound body, mind, and have all my faculties, I shall wish to contribute to the humanities, not for gain, only for the betterment of people. Because I realize, I realize that anything at all, when I die, there's nothing I can take with me. There's nothing I can take with me. Friendship College has been one of the greatest forces in my life, besides being conceived, born into the world by, to Robie and Carrie Harris, to Mr. and Mrs. um, Harris, Robie Harris. I think Friendship College is one of the greatest things that's happened to me. I have seen death many times. I have known joy, I have known victory. I have dined with Martin Luther King, Fred Shuttlesworth, um, Reverend Abernathy. Many people won't recall, but the Freedom Fighter of all times here in the city of Rock Hill, the late Reverend Ivory, I knew him, knew him personally. I've met many great people, but what does that say? What does that say for me? What can I say? What, what is it, what has it done for me by knowing these people? Many of these people were in the, were in the arena for glory, success, for money. When I look upon, I look at black people today. Oh, I understand that there are many people filling and playing many roles. Roles are to be filled and played by those people are, may, let me retract that. We play and fill many roles. Now, many of us play roles that we don't wish to play. And then there are quite a few of us that play roles that other people don't like to see us in. Now I think that all of my relatives, all of my friends, and most everyone I know would give at least a right pinky finger to see me married. Really!

02:12:30 **KN: Not me!**

HH: Would really [laughs] to see me married, they worry me. But there are roles for every part, see. In his writing, I think to the, where somewhere in it, I'm um, well I know Paul mentioned that he wished that all men were like he was, single. But he realized that the world had to be replenished, restored with people. And the only way that the world can be restored is men and women um, well, but I won't say sexually, because nowadays you can take sperm and [claps] do it and then put it in, so, okay. But you still gotta have a man and a woman, right? Um,

02:13:26 **KN: Unless you use a test tube.**

HH: Um, um, [pauses] If one is playing a role honestly, his life. There are a lot of people that really want to be rich; there's nothing else but the dollar. But then there are others, others of us, that try to live out a good life, try to aid other people, try to say, we try to put ideas into young people's heads,

try to put iron in their backbone, try to, if there is a crook in a path, and we know we gotta go up that path, we'll kind of hew that path out for our predecessors, you know. No, that, predecessors is before, right? Well, um, for, for those that will come after us. [Laughs] You can strike that out, or forget it. Um, I think that the atmosphere of '60, of '59, '60, '61, '62, here in Rock Hill and on this campus has prevailed, has lingered on. People, um, in authority, has not forgotten because of this fact: you tilted my ivory tower, you tarnished the walkway to my tower. Wherein this had never been done before and um, I may have stated before, and if I haven't, I'll restate it, that I, I really believe that nowadays, things may begin to break for this institution. If so, I hope they break in the proper perspective. I hope, I pray that all people can live, learn, forget, and forgive. I understand deeply that what is mine or what I thought was a privilege and was a right of no one but myself and my next door neighbor or my neighbor down the street trampled on it. It was something that I may have fought for, would have died for at a time. But the years have gone by, we've been scarred, our scars and wounds have healed, and it is, it's time now for men and all of the past and going forth, you see? Going forth. I think that people authority here in this city and the surrounding area should be aware of the history of this institution. And I wish that in some little way, that this will enlighten people. Um, scholars, you know, so they will do, do studies about this institution and contribute because there are historical sites on this campus that just only need developing. The things that I have seen and been a part of in my lifetime, to really go back over in forty years, is remarkable.

02:18:02 HH: I would like to mention one thing that I guess no one will ever think of. Because I've been in many circles and they say, "Oh no, I have never heard of that." I, as a child, I remember Brim Bread, and no one ever remembers Brim Bread. No one remembers um, Sugar Stamps. No one remember um, Shoe Stamps. I do. I have come a long way. I have a come a *long* way. I recall, once upon a time, hearing and sitting and listening to Martin Luther King in privacy. And then for some reason me made the great speech. I have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord. [Pauses] I have not only seen the glory of the coming of the Lord, I have been a part of the glory of the coming of the Lord. You understand? I've been a part of glory of the coming of the Lord. I'd not, have not have only wanted to stand that rock where Moses stood, heck, I've stood there. I have not only seen the Promised Land. I've been there! I've been there. I've been there. But now, this is an interview for 1960, '61, and um, I hope it to be a interview that, [sighs] will have covered, covered entirely '59, '58, '59, '60, '61, '62, '63, '64, in my activist days and up to this day, um, of May 11, 1979. All in all, I want to be known as a peaceful person who wishes to live in peace, leave a print in history, and die free. That is, that's all I want. That's all I want.

02:21:30 [tape cut]