

Interview with Larry Holt January 27, 1993 by Dorothy Joynes

Dorothy Joynes (Dorothy): This is January the 27th, 1993, Dorothy Joynes, talking with Larry Holt, Lawrence D. Holt, in the Board Room of the Unitarian Universalist Church. And I wanted to ask you Larry, first of all, about your background with Unitarianism, when you joined the church, how you happened to, and your experiences here.

Larry Holt (Larry): OK, first of all, in terms of Unitarian Universalism, that was not the religion of my childhood. My father was a Southern Baptist minister and I was born, as a matter of fact, in the parsonage of the First Baptist Church in Bethel, North Carolina, which I did make...in church did tell a story about... I was born in the front bedroom and at that time you know, you could spit out the window of the bedroom where I was born and *hit* the First Baptist Church, it was that close. My first service that I attended, my mother advised me, I was about two weeks old, and had the traditional Southern Baptist upbringing of spending a minimum of six hours in church a week, which later on people said is why ...as active as I am in the Unitarian Church, this upbringing and the guilt that a lot of the “come outers” have over not spending a certain amount of time in church. But my first experience with Unitarian Universalism was in Greenville, North Carolina. I was working with the Redevelopment Commission there. This was in the late 60’s and there was a piece of property we were trying to acquire, in a Redevelopment project and it appeared that it belonged to the Universalist Church. And, we found that there was, that the Unitarians and the Universalists had merged, and just recently merged, and that there was a Unitarian Fellowship in Greenville, North Carolina... that’s East Carolina

University is there, so I think it was somewhat associated with the University. So I contacted the Fellowship about the property. They had no idea that they owned it. It seemed years and years prior to that, Universalist ministers were touring the south and challenging existing ministers to debates and the deal was, if the congregation agreed with the Universalist minister, then they would become a Universalist Congregation. And one of the ladies that was converted to Universalism at that time had donated this piece of property to the Universalist Church and so that's how it came to be, and when I met with the Fellowship, it was on a Sunday evening and I went into this home... again, my Southern Baptist background, and they're all sitting on the floor, and they had a bottle of wine they were passing around and I said, "Hey! This is my kind of church!" So that was my first real experience with Unitarian Universalism and they took about nine months to decide, not whether or not they would sell the real estate, which they didn't even know they had owned until I advised them of that, but trying to figure out what to do with the money. And so again, that's not unusual. It did set the stage for Unitarian Universalists wanting, or being more interested in discussing something than really taking action, with making a decision.

Dorothy: Was there something special that made you seek out this group?

Larry: At that time?

Dorothy: Yeah.

Larry: Well, trying to acquire the real estate, for the Redevelopment Commission, because it was in a project area that we needed the property. We were assembling some real estate to build some public housing.

Dorothy: So it wasn't discontent, it was just having discovered,...

Larry: Yeah

Dorothy: because of something else.

Larry: That was the initial exposure. And again, when my wife Lisa, Lisa Green, of Norfolk, Virginia, is a 2nd generation Unitarian. And when I would visit her mother, we would occasionally go to the church and again I got a little better understanding of what a *real* church, Unitarian Church, was like. I was very impressed with that and was very interested in their outlook on religion. Again, coming from a Southern Baptist background, in my teens I began to have some real doubts about that. We had a neighbor, I guess I was about 14, 15, years old, ... and we had a neighbor... their child was killed in a bicycle accident and this young man was about 13 years old not much... he was not as old as I am. And I can remember my father saying, "It's just too bad," and he's having a hard time consoling this family because their son was going to hell. And I said, "Wait, a minute. He's going to hell?" And he said, "Well, yes, he is above the age of knowing better and he had not professed his faith in Jesus Christ as his personal Savior and that's what you've got to do to go to Heaven." And I said, "I really can't believe that this young man is going to hell because of this." And we had, ... and that pretty much ended our theological discussions because he felt very strongly that way and I thought it was a bunch of hooey, and so we didn't really discuss religion much more, thereafter. I also had some major problems with the Great Commission and the missionary efforts

of the Baptists and the other Protestant religions and even the Catholics because of what they did to other cultures. I just had a real problem with that. And that sort of brings me to how I got involved with the Unitarian Universalism. Once my children start coming along, my oldest daughter, Selden, I felt that we needed, *she* needed, to be exposed to religion. As a matter of fact, in eastern North Carolina, in Greenville, I went to a Baptist Church and *joined*, the first Sunday I went, primarily to get off my father's church's Book and to get a religious education experience for my daughter. And we were talking about that... and well, I won't go into that kind of detail, but anyway, we moved to Asheville. I was recruited by the then Director of the Redevelopment and of the Housing Authority, man by the name of Wilbur Keene, in 1972. And I began work with the Housing Authority, the city of Asheville, August the 1st, 1972. I also bought my home on Farrwood Avenue, August the 1st, 1972. And about that time, the church here, at One Edwin Place, was nearing completion, or was, for all practical purposes, completed and I believe in September, of '72, they had the first service here at the church. And again, it was a very attractive building, I was very pleased in coming back, in seeing it. My family didn't really come up to Asheville until late October of '72. So, I was getting the house ready for them. It is an older house and it needed some major renovations to it, just upgrading it. I didn't get involved with the church at all until the family got up and then we got settled and actually, the first time we came to church here, was in January of 1973, although we were passing by on a regular basis. And it was very interesting for us to recall that *our* first Sunday was also the first Sunday of John and Patsy Keever, and Tom and Lynn Brightwell. We came and that Sunday, Tracy Pullman was the minister, and he was just so gracious and so happy to see these young people

coming to the church because at that time we *were* young people. All of us were in about our mid-twenties and had little children and it was something that they were *really*...expressed interest in having us come. A local pediatrician, Tom Dill, and his wife, they were also a young couple, invited us their home that evening for just a little social get-together, and during the afternoon it started snowing, and we were persistent. The Dills lived up on... by the Rose Garden there on Griffin and Boulevard so Lisa and I *walked* to this party in the snow and it was just a fantastic experience. The Keevers, the Brightwells, the Dills, and a number of other families were there, couples were there, and Tracy Pullman and his wife were also there and so that was really our real first taste of the fellowship and the friendship of the Unitarian Church here in Asheville. It was real funny...we were, we had beer and wine and other beverages, and when it was over, as we were leaving, Dr. Pullman came in and said, "Something's wrong, I can't get in my car." And of course, he had had, he certainly had not had too much to drink, a few of us who didn't know him very well, thought, "Well, did the preacher drink too much?" We went out to try and help him and see why he couldn't get into his car and we found out fairly soon that he...with the snow on top of the car, he was trying to get in the wrong car! And he didn't recognize his car with the snow on top of it. So we got him into the right car and he went off and that's a story that we still tell about Tracy. He was very, again, very interested in the young people, the younger families in the congregation and he encouraged us to form some type of organization so that we could sort of support ourselves and attract others. And we *did* that and one of the...one evening we were sitting around trying to figure out what should we call ourselves because by that time we had about twelve to fifteen folks primarily couples, some singles, that were active, becoming active, in the church. This

was in the very early '70's: '73, '74 and we said, "Well as Unitarian, Universalists, UU, let's come up with something with a U. So we said, "Unicorns!" So we were the UUU's and the organization provided a real social outlet for these young people. Most of them had young children we would even reciprocate in terms of babysitting for each other. Tracy was very encouraging and stayed behind us to keep this going. And again a lot of the members of the Unicorns....or this was a major outreach for young couples in our community. A good example of that is Sarah Campbell and her husband Chuck. Chuck was the Director of Admissions at Warren Wilson College and Sarah was a very gifted teacher in, I think it was Reynolds High School, and she taught the Gifted and Talented English students and her students to this day, you know, remember Ms Campbell. Sarah's father, by the way, was Dick Moores, of Gasoline Alley, cartoon strip. Anyway, Chuck and Sarah belonged to the Racquet Club with the Keevers. The Keevers played tennis and this was... Racquet Club was in south Asheville, but Chuck and Sarah were nice folks and Patsy and Johnny invited them to some of our social affairs so they came and joined the Unicorns primarily as... just for a social outlet. It was a good group of young people. And then they decided to come to church. They came to church for a while and Sarah, if you want to call it that, received a call to the ministry. She went to Harvard Divinity School and is a Unitarian minister, has had a church there in the Boston area, in New York State, upper New York State, she was minister of the Unitarian Church in Rockville, Maryland, and is now the minister of First Unitarian in Santa Barbara, California, which from what I understand, she has the largest church of any female minister in our denomination.

Dorothy: When I was there I sent love from all of Asheville to her.

Larry: Ah! Good!

Dorothy: That was my church.

Larry: Ah, OK. But since they've gone... moved to the west coast, we haven't seen that much of them. We have the "hard core Unicorns" as we refer to it, have gotten together...we take a trip to the beach, the Isle of Palms, which is two islands north of Charleston, South Carolina. And I think we are...this, as a matter of fact, I just confirmed the rental of a house this morning, and we'll have five couples, possibly six, if the Candles can join us, spending a week, or a part of a week this spring, there. And this will be our, I think, our fifteenth year, that we've done that. So and that group, and they're scattered from St. Louis to Santa Barbara and some still here in Asheville, but that's the original Unicorn group that started in '73-'74. One of the things that you have in here, and I don't even know if you want to ask me a question, or if you want to let me keep on rolling, the Unicorns... and there's a note in here about a \$10,000 anonymous donation. John Kever was treasurer of the Church at that particular time and this anonymous person came because we were looking at expanding and growing and doing a number of things, and needing the resources. The Unicorns were somewhat the catalyst of this growth because we *were* the younger people, we were the ones having babies, and were assuming a greater leadership position or I should probably say the old guard was allowing us to assume a greater leadership role in the Church. And this anonymous benefactor indicated that they would match, dollar for dollar, every dollar that the

Unicorns would raise, for a fund in the church to underwrite various things, up to \$10,000. We had bake sales, we had a treasure auction, which was a cut above the garage sale. People brought nicer things that they didn't really want anymore, but yet they were very high quality. We had all kinds of fundraisers and this person, and I might go ahead and tell you, was Lisa Andrews, which we did not know until *years* later. Johnny had been *pledged* to secrecy and Johnny is one person that can keep a secret. Not too many folks can, but he did for *years*. He kept that a secret, and only told it with Lisa's permission, under duress, in one of her visits here. She's currently living in the Chicago area. That's where that money came from and the \$20,000 plus that was raised through this challenge was used to pay the initial fees or pay the majority of the architect's fees for this addition to the Church that was built. It paid for the Professional Canvas Director to come because there was some real controversy over whether or not we would have a professional fundraiser come in to help us raise the money to build this addition, and didn't fully realize how polarizing that was until later, but...

Dorothy: How did it polarize?

Larry: Well, we had a number of members to leave the church over it. Their feelings were hurt. We had an individual that had volunteered to chair the Canvas and actually do the work and we felt that that was not in the best interest of the Church. And that family eventually moved on off, and that was stated as one of the primary reasons why they left the Church because we chose not to accept their offer to do it and that they could have done as

good a job. That's unfortunate, but I don't believe that a Church member could have done what we did.

Dorothy: I wondered if it was a philosophical difference.

Larry: Yeah, yeah. I would think that's it. We had a number of folks who still to this day, will say that they resented having to pay a professional to come in, but our annual budget at that time was approximately, about \$50,000... between \$50,000 and \$60,000 dollars and normally on a Capital Fund Drive like that you can raise, I think, one and half to *maybe* two times your Annual Operating Budget and with the capability of our congregation and with the leadership of this Canvas Director...again I *chaired* the Canvas as President of the Congregation at that time, with guidance, and the Director was *never* out in the public, you know, he never did talk to anybody other than our Canvas organization, but we raised almost \$300,000 dollars, which was just...between \$250,000 and \$300,000 in *pledges* over a three year period of time...to be paid over a three year period of time to underwrite the cost of this building, this addition. And that was just unheard of. I think he was shocked. I don't believe we could have done that without that guidance and that direction and pushing us and the persistence of this man who came in here and for about a month worked twelve to eighteen hours a day, seven days a week, doing the background work and getting us to do what we needed to do to pull that off. So, and again, the Unicorn fund was used to underwrite the cost of that so it didn't come out of the Church Budget. But again, that was one of the things that will go down in history as, ... most of us will forget the trauma of it, after it was all over,... but we were having a real hard time with it when we went through that process, but it was

very successful and the end result was everybody was upbeat and very pleased with it and just wanted to ...that folks had to go on off.

Dorothy: Tell me about We have pictures of you in this room, which is a very special Board Room, and there are other areas also that you might speak about...how it was planned and what it was to accommodate, and how it turned out, the overall planning of it.

Larry: The, you know, the Board room or the Library, it's never really been a library yet because it's used so much. It's not used just by the Board, but by all kinds of organizations and committees. When the building was built, the resources for furnishings were somewhat limited and a number of people contributed various items to it. And in this room where we are now... *it is* a special place...two of our members are no longer with us, Jo and Bob Birdsall, that were very instrumental in the growth of this church. And their story, somebody needs to tell you their story, how they came here and what they did, but Jo and Bob commissioned the building of the four tables that we have here that can be put together to make one smaller table or expanded to really fill the room and provide a lot of table space. They also commissioned the chairs. They were custom-made, custom-made furniture for this room. The table is oak; it's a light oak. It repeats the same color of our trim in the Sanctuary and throughout the Church. Also there's a soft sculpture, which is hung, which depicts the mountains. It's in four panels. Jo picked that out. Jo was a painter. As a matter of fact, she painted scenes very similar to that. I have one of her paintings that hangs in my bedroom that I bought from her at one of our Silent Auctions that is a treasure, to me, that she did that. As I said, it's very similar to that. But she also bought another one, similar to this, that was in the Minister's study which

she...when Jim Brewer left, she indicated that he could take them with him because she had bought those *for* him. Jo Birdsall was on the Ministerial Search Committee, along with me, that selected, or presented Jim Brewer to the Congregation as our Minister. And he was accepted.

Dorothy: Did you find a change in the atmosphere with a new minister? Was this an easy transition? Did you have a personality that spoke to a particular age group or a particular faction of the group, more than the other? How did that...

Larry: In terms of Jim?

Dorothy: Mmm.

Larry: Brewer? Yeah. Well let me start from the beginning. When I came here we had Tracy Pullman, who was a part-time minister. He had retired and came to Asheville and Tracy was a...you've got preachers and you've got pastors. You know the difference. A preacher is an orator. He gets up there every Sunday and just really hits you right between the eyes and inspires you and gets you going. That's your preacher. Your pastor is a very *warm*, caring person who makes everybody feel at home, ministers to those that need assistance, and he just *knows* what you need and when you need it and is there to give that to you. There are a lot of preachers that are not pastors and there are a lot of pastors that are not preachers, but you do understand the difference. Tracy was probably both pastor *and* preacher. He was not an administrator. He was beyond that. I was on the Board when Tracy was minister and the Board meetings would start about 7:30 and

Tracy would sort of amble in about 8:15, sit in the back, not have anything to say unless you had a question for him. Of course, that was pretty much what we wanted at the time. This is a lay-led congregation and that worked fine. When Tracy left, there was a need for someone with administrative abilities and skills because our budget was increasing and we were needing more. The Search Committee at that time wanted more of an orator, somebody that was really going to hit you between the eyes with these thought-provoking sermons and Bill Hammond was selected and he *did* that. He was an excellent administrator and he was an excellent preacher. If there was a fault there, it was that he was not very warm and caring. He was the son of a college professor, and many people described his sermons as a lecture on Sunday mornings. They were extremely thought-provoking, but Bill didn't seem to care that much for children. You know some people, just would rather not be bothered with children and he was perceived that way, although I don't think he disliked children. But he was more a "head" person and couldn't get into the... , you know...he wouldn't sit down and put the babies on his knee and bounce them. And that's not a fault, that's just something that he wasn't into doing. But Bill was here when we did our mammoth Canvas and then we did this expansion and he was an excellent preacher and leader of this congregation. He was the minister when I was the President. I was the President of the congregation for two years and did, during that time, we really got into... did the Canvas and had one of the largest Building..., "Planning a Building Committees." Our Building Committee consisted of about two-thirds of the congregation. Everybody was on the Committee that wanted to be, which is sort of why I think it was as successful as it is. I think the more people you involve, the better your chances of success in any type of church activity because it's...people need

to be a part of it to buy into it. But Bill encouraged that and he was a part of that and then when he retired or announced his retirement, and prior to his retirement, a number of the younger families at *that* time, and at that time, I was not considered, Lisa and I, were not considered one of the younger families at that time, because we'd been here so long. But they were wanting somebody to give a little more warmth, to do... to be more of a pastor. We still wanted the preacher, but we wanted somebody with..., to be more of a pastor. Our administrative-management position at that time was on pretty good firm, pretty good, footing. That was not as great a need as it was when we were looking for, or when Bill Hammond came to the church. And Jim Brewer really emerged from the pack as our top candidate because of his caring, his concern, his very gentle nature. He was very active, as a matter of fact, he was the minister of the Unitarian Universalist Church in Norfolk, Virginia and was minister when my wife, Lisa was there, so she knew of him. He was very instrumental and one of the leaders in the desegregation movement in Norfolk, Virginia which it's been stated that the Norfolk Church, that was their "Golden Age," their leadership role in the desegregation issue there in Norfolk. They closed their public schools down for a year and just sent everybody home rather than integrate. Again, he had some experience there, had spent some time in South Africa and had been... not really had a church since then. He was very active in other organizations and had served as an interim minister on a number of occasions. But, Jim, when he came, brought that warmth and that caring and that feeling that really did relate to the younger families and to the children. He had three children. Jim, while he was at Norfolk, lost a son, who died of some disease. It was a major blow for he and his wife. Their youngest daughter, who was, I think a junior or a senior in high school at that time, she was

driving, did commit suicide. She died at approximately the same age as her oldest brother, which she never knew because she was born after this brother had died. There was a lot of speculation as to whether she was programmed to think that she was his replacement and that she was to die when he died, the same age that he was. That was a *very* devastating blow to this congregation... to... Jim and I were... I was the Chairman of the Search Committee that brought Jim and we had a *very* close relationship until that time. His daughter was a year older than my daughter and they were almost good friends, not quite good friends. My daughter is still grieving for that. Our relationship sort of split because I think it was very difficult to him to be with me and my family and my daughter, with them being as close as they were. Prior to that time we would go out to dinner together, we would do things together, we would...the kids would keep us together almost on a weekly basis. After that time I don't think we've been in their home but *once*. We're talking *years* and it's very unfortunate. It's created some major problems for Jim, created problems for the Church and things were never quite the same. He was never as warm and caring after that. I don't know whether you would like for me to describe for posterity the actual suicide, how it was done. It was very tragic. Jim's wife, Barbara, found her early morning. She had hanged herself in the shower with a rope that a friend had given to her. The friend, to this day, has not forgiven himself for giving her the rope. It was very tragic. And as I said, those members of the congregation that were here, it was just never dealt with properly. My wife Lisa is a family therapist. She talks about the dysfunctional family, that's one of the main problems that she deals with and she's often described the Church following that as a dysfunctional family. We never did properly deal with that. Jim and Barbara possibly didn't and it was a real low point, I

think, as far as the Church is concerned. The ministry continued. Jim did take a Sabbatical and then when he came back he indicated that he would work another year and then leave, retire. We set about trying to find, I think, a replacement. We never did really get a Search Committee together. He wanted...we didn't really have enough time. We weren't really ready to make another selection. So we had an interim, which was Bill Hauff and he was *exactly* what we needed at the time. Bill was a scholar, he was a preacher, he was a pastor, he was a healer, very dynamic person. Both he and his wife, they were exactly what we needed at that time. Can't say too much good, I can't say too much about them, in terms of the job they did for us, I mean, they were just *excellent*. We miss them terribly. And, they really set the stage that was, that would be, we *knew* would be, very difficult for a new minister to follow. Search Committee was established to find us another minister. They had, I think a real dilemma. They had a hard time, I guess, getting started. My wife Lisa was *on* that Search Committee that found Maureen for us. I think each of our selection processes has involved a very extensive assessment and questionnaire or questioning of our congregation as to what they're looking for and to develop a profile. Now you see us change from needing a preacher, needing a pastor and needing a preacher, and needing a pastor. You just sort of see it go up and down, because it's very difficult for one individual to meet the needs of everybody. So what the perception is at the time, the weaknesses of the minister that you currently have is expressed as something you need in the new minister and you forget the strengths of the existing minister, that may be lost. I think Maureen Killoran was an excellent choice. I think the time was right for a female minister here. I think she brings a real strength...she is very well received by all the members. I think we've had, as in most cases, you've had one or two

that are not pleased, and you can't really find out exactly what their problem is, but the church has grown under Maureen's leadership. We had Charles Gaines, who is with UU Boston on Growth, to conduct a Growth Seminar just two weeks ago which has ignited a fire, that I think will be the beginning point of some major changes in this church. I think we will be forming task forces, several task forces to address the issue of two services, possibly starting another church. We're on the move! And I think this workshop two weeks ago will be looked back on, as January '93 will be the beginning, of a major growth in liberal religion, Unitarian Universalism, in Western North Carolina, primarily Asheville, North Carolina.

Dorothy: It's a marvelous presentation you've given. I'm so glad we have this on tape. There are a few things that we didn't cover that I think since we have the time-line and are important to the history, you would talk about the embezzlement and this could be discussed using names and facts.

Larry: Yeah. The exact time on that came about, I guess, in the mid '70's. And I think Tracy Pullman was here and Bill Hammond had just come and we had a treasurer, by the name of Don Neill. He was a CPA. While he was Treasurer of our Church, he was also Treasurer of the Buncombe County Republican Party. Don was suffering from some disorder, physical disorder, and his wife, Vesta, would bring reports, or call and say that he would not be able to attend the Board meeting. So for almost...and Don had been the Treasurer for probably three or more years. He was Treasurer when I first came to the church and I *knew* Don and he was a very pleasant person and had no reason to believe that... OK, in terms of the Don Neill issue, Don would not give us records. He couldn't find them. He indicated that he had

moved his office or changed, rearranged the office, and couldn't find our records and a number of people went out to try and help him see if he couldn't find our records and he never could produce the records of the Church for really the last year or two years of his term as Treasurer. And what we ended up having to do, is, (and we began to suspect that there was something wrong), actually in going and getting Xerox records, copies of records from the bank. We were able to document at *least* \$10,000 in checks that he had written to himself, not as a reimbursement of \$99.95, but \$500 dollars or \$1,000 dollars. So anyway, we did file in civil court, we turned our information over to the District Attorney. He chose not to move on with it. We chose not to go on with it because that would be a more public process. And we felt that it would be very embarrassing to have front page news "Unitarians" you know, ...and that gets back to, I guess our perception in the community. We didn't really want to have this made a public issue so... and we wouldn't get any money if he was convicted and was sent to jail and he was ill at the time. We did get a civil judgment. He pleaded no contest. He was..., he did admit to at *least* the \$10,000 dollars that we knew of and we were awarded a judgment in that amount. In sending the sheriff out, to check on his property, he had absolutely nothing in his name. It was all in his wife's name, including the real estate and so although we did have the satisfaction of having him admit to being guilty, we did not receive any compensation whatsoever. But..., and again, that was not a very public process in this congregation or in the city of Asheville. It was handled very discreetly. We chose to do that at that time for a number of reasons.

Dorothy: And your position in the community is something that I'd like to have you mention, too.

Larry: OK, I think the Unitarians, as individuals, in Asheville since really our beginnings,.. we have been very active in civic affairs, in organizations. The Church, in and of itself, had not been as identifiable with specific issues as it is right now. During the '70s there was a concerted effort to get the Church, in and of itself, more involved in some of these issues.

Dorothy: When we turn the tape over I would like to have you tell me some of the issues that the church addressed at this particular time. We're going to fast forward right now.

Side two and we're going to finish talking about the Unitarian Church and then I'm very interested in what you're doing in the community.

Larry: OK. In the photograph that you took earlier, I was looking at a plaque. It's from the Red Cross Chapter here in Asheville. The Unitarian Universalist Church has been very active in their blood donor program over the years. This particular plaque was presented to the Church this past Sunday and Bruce Larsen, our President at this time, presented it to Bob MacPherson, who has been the unofficial Blood Drive Chairman, for years and years and years. Bob has almost single-handedly been the driving force on this and it's with some pride that we accept this because in terms of the amount of blood that's been donated by members of this Church, we are one of the leading churches in the city and I believe we were the number one donor. Number two was First Baptist Church which has probably, you know,

twenty times the number of members that we have. It sort of gets to some of the social action that we have in this church. This is something we have felt strongly about and have actually shed blood over this (pardon the pun), but we have donated a lot of blood to the Red Cross. The issues that I would reference in the '70's and it was fairly difficult, I think the gay issue was something that we didn't want to take a public stand on in the '70's, because we had a number of older members that were very....it was something that we didn't really talk about because, openly, because there was a great divergence of opinion there. And one of the premises of our Church is that we agree to disagree agreeably. So, on some of these issues, when it got to where we could not disagree agreeably, we just would drop the subject. That was one of the reasons why people that were interested in these particular issues would do their work with local organizations and create organizations and committees to deal with these particular issues, but the congregation as a whole would not take a stand on these issues. I think we began to have problems. Of course, integration was something that we were very insistent about. We felt the rights of all people and opportunities being available to all people regardless of race, color and creed and we were very active in that area. It's interesting that we have very few minority members. We have had more in the past, but one of the problems we had is when a black family comes into the church, we just scare 'em to death. We just are all over them, welcoming them and wanting them to come back and "What can we do to make you feel welcome?" And I have a number of very good friends in the black community that say, "You guys just, you know, overwhelmed us. We're not used to that and we felt that we were being treated as royal guests and we really were uncomfortable with that." So again, that's one of the problems we have and you can observe it today, if we have a minority

family that comes in we just fall all over ourselves trying to be accommodating and we need to be able to treat them as we would any other visitors and not make such a special effort. One of these days we'll learn that.

The, I think the Vietnam issue, was something that... were you talking about a Vietnamese refugee that came in? Vietnam was a... I won't say a polarizing issue in this Church, but we did not have a consensus. I think we all felt that morally it was wrong, but there was a... the patriotic need that we had to support our country, was there. So, we had folks that thought it was wrong and were participating in marches and sit-ins and we had other people that said, "Hey, I'm an American and I just... I won't be out there supporting the war, but I'm not going to say anything publicly against it, to denounce my country." And that was in the '70's and we worked through that. I think we have come a long way in terms of the Gay Rights issue. I think we have in our Covenant, in our By-laws now, we have added sexual preference as one of the things that we very openly say is not something that we are concerned about, the sexual preference of our members, or anyone. We have provided space and organizations and a lot of support for the Gay community in Asheville. There is a very large and growing Gay community in Asheville. They do feel comfortable here. I would not go so far as to say that this is a Gay church. We still have a number of folks that are not totally...do not fully understand that life-style. But again we are accepting and I think we're making more of a public statement as to our willingness to accept all people. So that's one of the things that now we're very open about and I think a lot of that can be... you can look to the persistence of Pete Tolleson, as... who is a Unitarian minister, is a member of this Church, and is very concerned with Gay Rights and has made, has kept that in focus

in this Church, as something we need to be very vocal about, at least be very public about our position on this issue. We still have some folks that are... as I said, are...have some questions, but we are ...I think... we've reached consensus that this is something that we believe and want to make a statement about. Also, the Unitarian Church most recently has been one of the leaders and a meeting place for the Pro-Choice groups in our community. A number of their services and celebrations of the Roe vs. Wade decision have been held in this congregation. Maureen has spoken quite eloquently at these meetings and has brought us a lot of recognition and new members that were not really into the religious life in any church and they have found through that, that we are a very open-minded group, not only in terms of the pro-choice stand that we've taken, but our stand regarding homosexuality and the other issues. They have found a comfort-level here that is adding to our growth. Again, I think in the past, where we were not willing to be as vocal, now we are. Our perception in the community is that not only is the Church itself a very open congregation, willing to accept people where they are, but I think a lot of the members of this church have been...are perceived as very good people, very caring people and are in positions of leadership in our community. Patsy Kever was recently elected to the Board of Commissioners, the County Commissioners. There was a smear campaign the Saturday before the election on Tuesday linking her to homosexuals, by virtue of her statement that she does not discriminate against Gays and did not think that they should be excluded from anything because of that position. The fact that she was elected, and I think was the number three vote-getter, indicates that our community, as a whole, is beyond that or at least making some progress getting beyond that. Again, Patsy was..., a part of that smear was that she was a *Unitarian Universalist*, and possibly in

years past that might have been grounds for not voting for her, but now people understand a little more what it is. It's not the big bugger-bear, that a bunch of heathens down here on the corner of Charlotte and Edwin Place that possibly a lot of people thought we were because they just didn't know anything about us.

Dorothy: I'm so glad we have this. This is an historic tape. Very, very good. And of course you coming from *your* job and what *you're* doing, have the other side, the city side of all of this. So can we talk about your being invited to come to Asheville and your job, what you're doing, what you found?

Larry: OK. I am a planner by education and when I was completing my studies as a planner and looking for a job, I was advised they didn't hire any planners without experience. The old catch 22: how do you get experience unless somebody hires you? I went with an intern program with the Department of Housing and Urban Development, back in 1967. HUD was, Department of Housing and Urban Development, also known as HUD, had recently been created from some other departments in the Federal Government, FFHA, and a couple of others that were brought together to deal with housing and urban issues. So I'd been working with the Redevelopment Commission and Housing Authority in Greenville, North Carolina, primarily in the redevelopment side as a real estate acquisition specialist, disposition specialist, and was contacted by the Housing Authority here in Asheville, the summer of 1972. They had a project identified as NCR 48, that's NC for North Carolina, R, redevelopment, 48, this was the 48th redevelopment project in the State of North Carolina,

which was the *largest* redevelopment project in land area in the southeastern United States. It was a real monster. Should have been about three different projects, but again, when you're drawing boundaries, it's hard to stop. You say, "Well, this is blighted, let's include it, this is blighted, let's include that," so it was a major, major project in terms of land area. It had somewhat stalled and I think the person who was managing that had left. I was given the opportunity to come to Asheville to primarily work with that project and I did come here in August, 1st 1972. Now I think it's important to note that the Housing Authority and the Redevelopment Commission of the City of Asheville were merged in 1970. That is of significance. It was the only... one of the few Housing and Redevelopment entities that were merged in the state of North Carolina. The significance of that is with the Housing and Community Development Act of 1974, which pretty much put all of the categorical grant programs, Model Cities, Urban Renewal, Open Space, water, sewer, just a whole gamut of Federal programs were brought under the Federal Community Development Block Grant umbrella. Now that was during the Nixon Administration. The objective was to bring all of these programs and put them under one program and pretty much turn it over to the cities and let the cities decide where they wanted to spend the money. The philosophy was, in the original legislation, was that the cities would be weaned from Federal dollars over a five year period. And that the cities would also make the decisions for whether to continue Model Cities, or Urban Renewal, or Open Space, whatever. As the dollars would diminish from the Federal side, the cities would take over, and put their money in to care out the programs that they chose. Fortunately, or unfortunately, depending on how you look at it, Congress had seen fit to continue the

funding of the Community Development Block Grant Program far beyond the Nixon Administration. But it did take the place of these other programs. Model Cities was a *soft* ware program, when I say soft-ware, it was Meals On Wheels, it was neighborhood organizations, to try and consolidate, organize communities to deal with their problems. It was not a brick and mortar program. It was more a touchy-feely organization, feed the elderly and the handicapped and transportation programs, that sort of thing, or a counseling program. Most cities sort of got out, and again, Model Cities was included in the Community Development Block Grant umbrella. So cities were able to choose whether or not they wanted to spend their money on those kinds of programs.

Dorothy: How does this fit in with the Land Of The Sky Regional Council?

Larry: Land Of Sky Regional Council is one of the... known as a COG, Council of Government. State of North Carolina is broken up into four county regions, or regions based on population, and you have the Land Of Sky is also known as Region B. Beginning with Region A, in the far western part of the state, and each..., and there, ...I'm not sure how many regions they've broken down to, but Region B is a four county region. And rather than being known as the Region B Council of Government, they named themselves Land Of Sky Regional Council. So that's where that comes from.

Dorothy: That's an umbrella also, isn't it?

Larry: Umm... Well, to a certain extent. It's...they deal primarily with the state. In this area they dealt with the Appalachian Regional Commission for

funds and the Federal government and various other programs for dollars. The city of Asheville is the only Community Development Block Grant Entitlement City in Region B. The other Community Development funds are funneled through the state of North Carolina and the Land Of Sky Regional Council, acting as agent for its member communities that are not Entitlement Cities, can apply to the state for funds for community development-type programs. They do that in Region B and they've been...but it's a very competitive program with the state because if you consider all of the urban, all of the smaller cities, towns and the rural areas that are competing for a fairly small amount of money from the state of North Carolina. It's very competitive and they're not funded on an annual basis. Most communities said they've not been able to develop a staff capacity to do the kind of redevelopment or community development programs that the city has been able to do as an Entitlement City. As such, Land of Sky has been in a position to contract with different municipalities and units of government within the region to perform specific projects.

Dorothy: You use the word "entitlement."

Larry: Right. The Entitlement came about through a hold-harmless formula back in the initial legislation in 1974, whereby the Feds came up with a formula based on the amount of money you had for Model Cities, Open Space, Urban Renewal etc., etc. and came up with this figure. This was your Entitlement. You would get x number of dollars the first year. I mentioned the five years, the weaning process. This was to decrease by 20 percent each year, over a five year period to where the Feds would be totally out of the business and the cities and the states would take over. And again, the monies

have kept coming. Congress has continued to appropriate funds for these programs. But if you were over 50,000 in population and you had met a threshold of expenditures or a number of funds, and utilizing these Federal dollars, you were considered an Entitlement City and you would get on a formula basis, a certain percentage of the dollars allocated from the Federal Government. And again, the small cities, the ones that did not have the 50,000 population or had not participated within a certain number of years before the Housing and Community Development Act of '74, were just left out in the cold. They had to apply on an annual basis to the Feds initially, and then to Raleigh, when it was turned over to the state government to administer that program. So that's what I mean by Entitlement. The city of Asheville was very active in Redevelopment, in Model Cities and these other programs. Their Entitlement was pretty good and the general Community Development allocation for the city since 19.., let's go to say maybe 1980, has been between... a little over a million....between a million and a million and a half dollars per year, which has been used for a number of programs and projects. Now, to get back, I came here to work with the East Riverside Redevelopment Project. It was a *major* redevelopment effort and I guess the main roads running through this would be Asheland and McDowell Streets, South French Broad Avenue. South French Broad Avenue historically was the railroad community in Asheville. The French Broad..., the big homes were owned by the engineers, the conductors. You had the minority areas, some of them were better and some of them in a pretty sad state of disrepair. This is where the Pullman porters lived. When I came to Asheville in 1972, within a year or so I had met a dozen retired Pullman porters. They were very well-traveled, very articulate, *magnificent* people. I just thoroughly enjoyed talking to them and some of them were

very hostile, because of having to kowtow and serve during their working life. Some of them were very open and gracious and wanted to share their experiences. So it was an interesting difference there and these individuals lived in this community. Some of the worst housing in Asheville was located in the East Riverside area, place called Boll Weevil Hill, and down around the depot areas was a place called Dead Valley, Lyman Hollow. This was some of the worst housing you could imagine; it was in Asheville at that time. This property was acquired by the Housing Authority acting in its capacity as a Redevelopment Commission at that time. This was a conventional Urban Renewal Project.

Dorothy: Was this similar to the one that was around Woodfin?

Larry: That was a *civic* Redevelopment Project, NCR 13, the 13th Redevelopment Project in the state of North Carolina. The civic project was for all practical purposes a total clearance project.

Dorothy: Mmmm.

Larry: The only...and it was the ...a lot of residential structures... the Thomas Wolfe home was in that area. And that area was made up of a lot of residential structures like that. They had been exquisite, single-family residences, the turn of the century, most of them built between the boom. Asheville had a period...when the railroad came, in really 1890 or late '80's and the boom time for Asheville was 1890 to 1930 when the stock market crashed. Most of the things, the development about and in Asheville was during that period. During that period the population of the city of Asheville

was doubling every ten years. And right in the Census there, in 1930 and 1980, the difference is less than a thousand. So just think about that--the difference in population....I've got a 1930 atlas which showed the population of the city of Asheville about 50,000 population. Population based on census data in 1980 was about 50,000, less than 51,000. So during that...now there's a lot of fact, but not a lot of reasons for that, but the boom time of Asheville was between 1890 and 1930. The Civic Redevelopment Project, these houses, people that lived there, the owners had died, their children in most cases, had died, and we're dealing with grandchildren, that were collecting rent. These had been chopped up and subdivided. Well, originally they were single-family residences. As Tom Wolfe's mother did, when she didn't have that big a family, needed the money, she rented it out as a boarding house. Now when she was dead and gone and nobody in the family wanted to run a boarding house, they sub-divided it into apartments. Of course, the first generation out would take care of the apartments. The second generation out had no connections at all to the home and sort of let it go, turned it over to a rental agent and said, "I don't care how it looks, just get the money." Two or three generations down the road you're looking at some severely dilapidated, deteriorated structures that were about to fall of their own weight. That area was designated as a *blighted* area, in terms of the state statute. The majority of the property was acquired, razed and that was contiguous, or part of the central business district. We're talking about... on this growth thing, we talked about the Unitarian Church. The First Baptist Church, which was designed by Douglas Ellington, that's one of his biggies, the only property they owned was the footprint of that church. They didn't have the first parking space, didn't have anything. As a part of that Redevelopment Project, they *quadrupled* their land to expand their

facilities, to put in the parking, and based on just thinking through this process with Charles Gaines, if it had not been for the Civic Redevelopment Project, the First Baptist Church in Asheville would have been a dead church and would have died in the '70's. It allowed this...this Redevelopment Project provided them the land to expand their parking, to build their education space, their gymnasium, the whole deal. The YMCA was built on that Project land. The Health Department, that was on Redevelopment Property. What's currently the Radisson, has been the Landmark, the Quality Inn on the Plaza, and Radisson, who knows what it'll be next, but that was our second ..., we have three skyscrapers in Asheville, really four. Battery Park, built by Dr. Grove, the Jackson building was built by L.B. Jackson. Actually L. B. built his before Battery Park. Again those were the high-rises. The B B & T Building, was the Northwestern Bank Building, then the Radisson. Those were our high-rises and there's a question as to whether or not we need to pursue anymore of those tall buildings because Battery Park's OK, the Jackson Building's OK. The other two I wonder about, but that's a personal aside. But there were some people that really wanted some high-rise buildings in Asheville and they were persistent, were able to put those together. But that's a part of the Civic Redevelopment Project. George Beverly with Beverly... now it's Beverly-Hanks Realty, and it was Beverly-Grant, George Beverly was, is, a major mover and shaker. He was the major developer in the Civic Redevelopment Project. He bought and built, bought the land and built the building where Southern Bell has its office up there. He built Executive Park One, Two, Three, Four and Five, in that area which is pretty much where the old David Millard School was located. The State, the Department of Transportation, came through with the Charlotte Street extension, which prior to that time

Charlotte Street just sort of came and stopped at College Street. But it provided the land for the Charlotte Street extension, which eventually *Valley* Street, which was the historic Black neighborhood, and part of the Black commercial area, Eagle Street and Valley Street. Now we have Charlotte Street that gives you a good north-south alternative for fairly rapid transit from the south end of town to the north end of town, which sort of bypasses, slightly, the Hendersonville Road, Biltmore Avenue, Broadway, Merrimon Avenue, Weaverville Road. Same road has all those names, which is confusing to visitors, but that's one of the things that we do in Asheville. We change our street names as we go over a little hill. Anyway, the Civic Redevelopment Project was in full tilt when I came here and one of the things that I was charged with, the first job that I had assignment was to develop the demolition contract documents for the David Millard School which, it, that was a *magnificent* building. I had the plans that were actually signed by the School Board members at that time, when it was approved. It was a major undertaking to get that thing down. It was extremely well-built and the materials were just exquisite, but that's the way it happens. And we did close out, the Civic Redevelopment Project was closed out in 1976. That was a part of, as a matter of fact, our mayor at this time, Ken Michalove, was working with the city as a Federal Programs coordinator and he and I, back in '75, went around peeping in sanitary sewer manholes and storm drain manholes to measure and come up with the amount of infrastructure that was put into the Project because that was a Conventional Urban Renewal Project which required the city to come up with one third of the cost of the Project. And the city did that by putting in utilities, underground utilities there and so we were..., our task was to verify that they were actually put in the ground and to measure them and give dimensions. So, that

→ was my first meeting of Ken Michalove and that's been a long time ago and we still reminisce about those times. Another thing about the Civic Redevelopment Project is it's the only area where all utilities are underground. A part of the plan was that C P & L and Southern Bell put their lines underground so in that particular area everything is underground. And we've not had Council to mandate, probably for political reasons, that utilities in our other areas be put underground because it does cost a lot of money. Little cartoon I wanted to share with you there.

Dorothy: May I Xerox this?

Larry: Sure. Keep that. The cartoon is of two older men on a bus, riding down the street, and they're chatting and the comment one of them makes: "Lived in this town 75 years. Seen a lot of changes and fought every one of them!" So ... I can tell you who these people are.

Dorothy: That's what you have every day, isn't it?

Larry: Yeah. Yeah. When you really get down to it nobody from Asheville has ever done much here, with the exception of George Beverly. They've all been from out of town: Dr. Grove, George Vanderbilt, and well, right now, Don Martell, Roger McGuire, the movers and shakers that come to Asheville and say, "Gee, this is a place I'd like to live." There's a lot of opportunity here. And they come and they bring their energy and they bring their money and have made Asheville what it is today. If we had relied on people that were born and raised here, with the exception of a few folks, we'd probably still be a...just a crossroads town.

Dorothy: What is the thrust now, to get more tourists, more retirees?

Larry: Well, that gets me into another thing. The 2010 plan is a plan that was developed..., it was a planning process that involved as many of our citizens as were willing to participate in that process. It looked at 2010, where we want to be and how, what do we need to do to get there. This document is on file. It is...there is an evaluation, made on an annual basis by the Planning Department, the City of Asheville, with all of the governmental, public, private entities that have input and are doing, responsible for a portion of the 2010 Plan.

Dorothy: Who is in back of that?

Larry: It was the city of Asheville...that really that put that together, the Planning and Zoning Commission of the City of Asheville.

Dorothy: Well, the pages of people who were involved in it really crossed the whole section about that.

Larry: Oh yes. That was by design and as I said, any citizen in Asheville that wanted to participate in that process, and it was about a six month process, actually longer than that, but the citizen participation input, anyone that wanted to participate was invited and encouraged to do that and an awful lot of people did. I've got the original 2010 Plan and I've got the Annual Updates on file. I've also got a copy of a 1925 Plan of the City of

Asheville that I would be happy to show you that is a *magnificent* document. There not very many of them around. I happened to find one.

Dorothy: Well do they get implemented?

Larry: Yes. As a matter of fact, and the whole philosophy of the 2010 concept was that... to do some long-range planning for the city and that any decision that's made by the Planning and Zoning Commission or City Council is done with the 2010 Plan in mind so that you're not doing things that contradict what we've reached consensus on as far as where we want to be in the year two thousand ten. It is a planning document; it's a blueprint and it's not followed as closely as it probably should be, but it is, for elected officials, it should be, *the* blueprint for the growth of the city of Asheville.

Dorothy: Does that have anything to do with the...

Larry: OK, UDO is the Unified Development Ordinance. That is a... well, if it is ever put together, will be a document that will give developers in the city a guide-form to follow in developing property and real estate in the city of Asheville, and really in the metropolitan area which goes beyond the actual city limits.

Dorothy: There's several groups, aren't there? there's the Discovery Asheville....

Larry: Asheville-Buncombe Discovery, yeah.

Dorothy: How do they work together? Or how do they work into the 2010 for instance?

Larry: Well, they were actively involved in the preparation of the 2010 Plan. Asheville-Buncombe Discovery was involved in that...they are helping us stay on track, in terms of quality development.

Dorothy: And what is their purpose?

Larry: They are... they do research. They provide I guess, they are keeping us aware of our history and our future directions.

Dorothy: It takes money. What is...

Larry: Well, it's a membership organization. I'm a member. I send them my \$25 a year, and Roger McGuire, was one of the "Daddies" in that. I think the Western Carolina Foundation provides some resources for it. Karen Fields is the director, is a super lady, very dynamic...

Dorothy: I had lunch with her. Yeah.

Larry: And she and I were in Leadership Asheville class together. Leadership Asheville is an excellent program. I think we have our 11th or 12th class going through right now. I was in class 5. Served as President of the Leadership Asheville Alumni Association several years back, which... there's an interesting story there. We won't get into that right now. But, all of these groups are trying to mediate, if you will, between the folks that

perceive themselves as the pro-growth and the no-growth people. The pro-growth people think that the Sierra Club and the Coalition for Scenic Beauty and these various organizations are no-growth and are trying to impose undue restrictions on development, private development, in the Asheville-Buncombe area. The Coalition for Scenic Beauty and the Sierra Club and the others perceive the Council of Independent Business Owners, alias CIBO, as these real estate developers and business people that are going to come in and do whatever they feel is necessary to make a buck, regardless of what impact it has on the community and the quality of life we have here in Asheville.

Dorothy: What about the ordinances for signs? Do they ever get...?

Larry: That's a part of it. And really, I think CIBO was born as a result of the sign ordinance, because of the funding and that sort of thing, and I really don't want to get into *that* because that's,...I have some very strong feelings about that. But again, I think Asheville-Buncombe Discovery and some of the other organizations are trying to mediate between the folks that are perceived as no-growth and pro-growth because we really all want the same thing, when you really get down to it. It's just that some folks have hard time sitting down and talking together and realizing that they really both want the same thing.

Dorothy: There are pro-growth groups?

Larry: Well, they perceive themselves as pro-growth, pro-business. I guess that the logging industry in this area, they consider themselves pro-growth. It's good for the economy. We create jobs, to cut down all our trees.

Dorothy: How about Chamber of Commerce? Where do they stand?

Larry: Chamber of Commerce, is also walking the line and I think is one, I perceive them currently as one of the mediators. Steve Holt is the current director. He is a very talented individual and is helping to get these groups together so that we are not in open conflict, but we are working together to achieve. We're looking for the common denominators here. Asheville-Buncombe Discovery, Chamber of Commerce, at this point in time is, I would consider them one of the mediators.

Dorothy: And then Leadership Asheville, that's under the University?

Larry: It's a joint venture between the University and the Chamber of Commerce. That's how it started and it's that way now. So it's an excellent training program. They also have Leadership Asheville, I guess, and a Seniors' Program, which is also excellent. Alph Canon and Cissy Stevens, Alph, was I guess, the "Daddy," and Cissy the "Mamma" on the Leadership Asheville Program. Both of them are no longer with the program, but it is an excellent program. I recommend it to anybody as the best way to really get to know Asheville, what it is, its history, and where it's going.

Dorothy: A lot of people working together.

Larry: Oh yeah.

Dorothy: You've been generous for your time and I really appreciate it. I'm going to give you one of these tapes for your family, so thank you very much.

Larry: Thank *you*!