

This is an interview with Ms. Elizabeth Brooks, conducted by Beverly Jones in Chapel Hill, N.C. on October 2, 1974, and transcribed by Pat Faherty.

Beverly Jones: Miss Brooks, I know that you were one of the leaders in the first foodworkers' strike, beginning February 23 and ending March 21st, and I'm glad that you have consented to help us in regard to writing the history of the foodworkers' strike and since you played an instrumental part, I know that you will be able to give us a lot of information that we need to fill in some gaps. Where were you working when the strike began?

Elizabeth Brooks: I was working in Lenoir Dining Hall in the Pine Room.

B.J.: How long had you been working there and what type of position were you in?

E.B.: I had started there in September of '68 and I was just working all over the place, I really hadn't been given a specific job. In fact none of us had at the time, and we just done whatever come to hand.

B.J.: O.K. Now the strike that took place February 23 didn't happen out of the blue. What things had been going wrong with the management and the workers that you felt that something, a strike, would settle some of these complaints?

E.B.: Well, like I say, none of us had been given a job description or either just station places to work. They felt like they were just kind of using us by having us to do men's jobs when the men, some of the male help, were out, so at the same time, our checks were being shortened and we had begun to notice on several checks and some of the ones that had been there longer than me had gone back years before and had come up with checks that at the time wasn't right. They were cutting us short on our checks.

B.J.: Why weren't any of these complaints ever solved? Did you ever go to

the management, and if you did, what did they say about it?

E.B.: Yes, we first went to our supervisor, and talked with him about it, and he told us that it was coming from Payrool^l Department, that we would have to talk with them. We made several individual visits to the Payroll Department and we didn't accoplish anything, and then we decided that we would talk with our Head Director whose name was Mr. Prillaman. This was done in the beginning with individual visits. It didn't get us anyplace. So along about that time we talked with the black students and Preston Dobbins advised us to go as a group and ask for a meeting as a group. So we done that. We had at least, I guess, about three meetings with Mr. Prillaman and we never accomplished anything. He was, kind of, had this way of sort of ironing things out, smoothing it over and then as we got a little more persistent, he began to make promises and this went on for quite some time and he never kept any of the promises.

B.J.: Do you recall any individual meeting which you had with Mr. Prillaman and what was the outcome of that?

E.B.: Yes, when I was hired there, they told me that I would be on Temporary Payroll for ninety days. After ninety days, if my work was satisfactory, then I would go on Permanent Payroll, which would mean for me a raise, and benefits like sick leave and vacation time, and this sort of thing. So I was there ninety days and I didn't see any change. No one approached me about this, so I went to my supervisor and asked him about it and he told me that he would send a recommendation up to Mr. Prillaman, recommending me to go on Permanent Payroll. So I assumed that this was done, but about two weeks later, I hadn't heard anything from it, so I went back to him and asked him about it and he said that he had sent the recommendation up. So then, at that time, I decided

to go up and tak¹ with Mr. Prillman about it. So I did, I went up, and he met me and I told him that I had been told that after ninety days I would go on Permanent Payroll, which I hadn't heard anything from, and if my work wasn't satisfactory, I wanted to know, and if it was, I wanted to get on Permanent Payroll. He told me that Permanent positions came out of Raleigh, and at the time, they were all filled up, and I would either have to wait until someone that was on permanent payroll quit; he assured me that I would be the next person in line to go on the permanent payroll. So that didn't really satisfy me because I hadn't been told that in the beginning, so I told him that I just wasn't going to work, because I didn't feel that I could work under the conditions. Then, right away, he just told me to go down and have my supervisor send up a recommendation and that he would put me on the permanent payroll. Which I did, and I carried the recommendation back up to him myself and it wasn't very long before I saw results.

B.J.: How did the other workers react when they found out that you were put on a permanent basis?

E.B.: The other workers were very upset. When I had mentioned in the beginning that I was going up talking with him, they didn't want me to go, because he had a name of being kind of tough and he had given the other workers the impression that he would just fire them. So they were all afraid and were begging me not to go up and bother him, because they thought that he would fire me. So after I did go up and they saw the results of what had happened, they began to start whispering to one another and saying, "It's not fair, I have been here for two years and some have been there for three years, and I'm not on permanent payroll and she's been here only nine months and he's put her on

permanent payroll." So at that time, I talked with them and I told them that what they were saying to each other wasn't going to help. But what they needed to do was to go up and tell him, let Prillaman know their feelings the same as I had and it probably would help.

B.J.: Did any go to see Mr. Prillaman about getting on a permanent basis?

E.B.: Quite a few went. Some went and some would not go because they were still very much afraid of their jobs. But some did go, and there wasn't any results from it. And that's along about the time that we started to get together and of course Preston Dobbins helped us very much, told us to go as a group.

B.J.: So would you say it was the Black Student Movement itself or was it Preston Dobbins himself that was helping you before the strike took place?

E.B.: Well, in a way, I guess you can say it was the Black Student Movement. But we confided in Preston. We kind of seeked him out from the others and he would carry our problems and actually information from him, and of course, I think he and the others. . . Well, from time to time the others would come in and give us information, and we appreciated it. But I don't know why we just kind of looked like, you know, we would seek out Preston.

B.J.: What did Preston have going for himself?

E.B.: Preston was very much known on that campus at that time and he just seemed to be just a person that was looking out for things like this that was happening and he could talk to you and really make you aware of some of the things that you really had been overlooking. And he really gave us a lot of courage.

B.J.: Was Preston ever involved in any meetings that you had with Mr.

Prillaman. Did he ever go with you when you met Mr. Prillaman?

E.B.: He did not go with us to any of the meetings until after we went on strike.

B.J.: Who decided to take a list of grievances? Was a list given to Mr. Prillaman before the strike or during the strike?

E.B.: Preston told us to sit down and make a list of the things that we wanted, to put it on paper and one person present it to him. So we did. . . that's what we done. This, of course was done; we did present a paper with a list of grievances on it and of course as I've said before he made some promised⁵ that he never kept, and I think the list that we presented with him was the last meeting. We done this at the last meeting before the strike.

B.J.: What particular event or events, to you, triggered the strike?

E.B.: Well, one of the events, I know, which brought on the strike was the firing of one of the employees. And this was done and we felt that for no reason at all. This was because she refused to lift heavy trays of dishes through the conveyor belt, which was real high. So they had fired her; this was a young lady. They had fired her, and so we kind of felt that if they were going to start firing the ladies because they refused to do this, then it could be anyone, not only one person, but eventually come around to just about all of us because not any of us had any intention of lifting those trays of dishes. Another thing that happened on a Friday before the strike took place on Sunday, was our supervisor had this way of when a person didn't come to work he would just tell another person to work their counter and the counter that the presently^{5 was} working on. So on a Friday afternoon, the girl that worked next counter to me didn't come to work, so he just came up and told me he wanted me to work that

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counter which I did. So later on in the afternoon when things got quiet I told him to ask one of the boys to clean the counter up that night, and so he just told me, "Go ahead and do it." I did not do it. I didn't say anything to him, didn't tell him that I wasn't going to do it, but I just didn't do it. So when we were getting ready to leave, he called me and he asked me, he says, "I told you to clean the counter up." No, he says, "I asked you to clean that counter up today," he says, "next time I'm not going to ask you, I'm going to tell you." So I told him that it made no difference to him, because it wasn't slavery time anymore and regardless of what he told me, I still had a choice. I could do it, or I didn't have to. So this was something that added to the strike because he was getting very well, I don't know just the right word to say for it, but what he would do, he would stand back to the back of the room and he would just watch over us like, he made us feel like that we were, you know, just being watched at all times. And we done, well we knew that we were really not. . . that we were really performing on our jobs because sometimes we would serve seventeen-hundred people in a matter of about two hours and , I think there were seventeen of us. That included the cook, the cashier, the boys that cleaned out the trash, that included everyone on our shift. And we really done some work, and we knew that. But he would just stand there over us and watch us, and just, you know, made us feel like that we were just like a bunch of slaves. And so these are some of the ^hthings that we really, the feelings that we were getting from it. Plus the point that each week, our checks were being shortened. And nothing had been done about it. And this is some of the things that we went to Preston with. And he helped us reall^y to. . . well, we knew what we wanted,

but we just didn't know how to go about it. We didn't know that you have to do things as a group. We were just thinking about individuals, and that's no good, so Preston helped us to see this.

B.J.: Could you tell me who was the young lady who was fired?

E.B.: Dorothy Ann Stephens. She's from Durham.

B.J.: Are you given a chance to try to appeal firings?

E.B.: Well, that was one of our grievances, that she be re-hired.

B.J.: What about some of the individuals, in regard to. . . I think you said there were about seventeen that were involved in making the plans. What would you say certain individuals. . . how long had they been there, that was involved in this group? Who had been there longer among the group of seventeen?

E.B.: I think Mary Smith had been there the longest, and her sister Esther had probably been next longest, and that probably was running something like three to four years, or maybe four years for Mary. Anyway, the others, we had others that had been there three years and some had been there around two years. I think I was really the one there that had been there the shortest time.

B.J.: O.K. Were there any problems, any dissension within the group itself, you know, maybe in regard to leadership, or any problems that you had internally?

E.B.: I don't quite understand you.

B.J.: Were there any problems among the group itself, in regard to leadership roles, you know, who should do this and who should not do that, any problems like that?

E.B.: No, we didn't have any problems because the fact that the most of them ^e knw what was happening and they wanted something done about it. But when it came down to just speaking, they just were shy and wouldn't speak. So

I for one have always been willing to speak up, and Mary Smith is the same way. So we just would sit down, all us would get together, and everyone would agree to, you know, whatever we had at hand, and we would say, "Well, who's going to present it to Mr. Prillaman," or "Who's going to present it to the University?" or however, and most of them would say, "Well it either has to be Mary Smith or Elizabeth Brooks, one or the other because they can talk the best," and this type of thing is where the reason we were more in the leadership position.

B.J.: Could you tell me, when did you decide together as a group, and when did you decide to strike? I know the strike was on that Sunday. Was it . . . what day did you get together and decide to talk about it, what plans had you made if you made any plans before Sunday came up to strike.

E.B.: Well, this may sound a little crazy, but we had, like I said, several meetings with Mr. Prillaman and we had talked about things that we wanted; we had at that time presented him with a list of grievance on paper and we hadn't had any results but we hadn't said anything about a strike. We wasn't sure in what way to go about it. So on Friday, when he came up and demanded that I work the second counter and after he told me, in the way he told me, about cleaning up, when we all got ready to go, we went outside and kind of stood around in a little bunch and we said, "We got to do something about this." So we found Preston before we left. And we told him that we had to do something, that we wanted to strike. But we did not know just in what way to do it. Because on a Sunday afternoon, that was Friday night and we had Saturdays off, on a Sunday afternoon we came in at four and we would be the only group in that building that was open on Sunday and we just didn't know how really to go about it.

So Preston told us that, well, he says, "If you're going to do it, and going to get results, you gotta do it in a normal way. The best thing that I can see is to come in on Sunday and set up as if you're going to work, because if he knows that you're not going to work, then he's not going to open the doors anyway. Come in, set your counters up as if you're going to work, and leave the rest to the black students." He said "We'll get the publicity out, and at 4:00 when he opens that door, we'll have everything waiting." So we done this. We came in on the Sunday, and set our counters up, and everybody was standing there ready to start serving when he went and opened the doors. And when he opened the doors, the thing just teed off; we walked out from behind the counter and everybody just sat down.

B.J.: What about that Saturday? Did you ever have conversations with other foodworkers? With Preston on that Saturday because you were off that day?

E.B.: Not on that Saturday. But on that Sunday, Preston told us to come early, and we were scheduled to open at 4:00 and we always were there at 3:30, and so Preston asked us to come early so we could have a meeting with the black students. So we came in early, I guess something like 2:30. They had a place set up, I think it was in Manning Hall. We had a meeting with some of the students, and I think some of the white students also before we went into work. They had really got things planned out, because they had gotten to most of the students that we were going to strike at 4:00. Be at the Pine Room at 4:00, and I think that almost all the students on campus knew that we were planning on striking. And so they just then said, "Don't back down." They just kind of encouraged us to do it.

B.J.: What did the students do when they rushed in?

E.B.: When he opened the door at 4:00, it looked like there were about three or four hundred students outside. And they all came in, and they lined up around the counter and they took trays as they come in, and they just began to bang on the counter. Just stand there at a steady pace, just banging on the counter. And we had of course walked out and sat down. And Mr. White who was the supervisor at that time was the only manager, supervisor in the building and it almost frightened him to death. (Laughs). So he turned around and he came back to where the group had sat down, the group had sat down together, we had a table, we all planned out where we were going to sit, and so we had all sat down around this table. So he came back down the hall there, and he looked at us and he said, "What in the world is going on," and so somebody said, "We are on strike." And he began, he says, "Mary Smith, Mary, come back here to the office, I want to talk to you." So Mary was like a mother to the group in the Pine Room, she was the oldest of the group in the Pine Room, and I'm almost sure she had been employed there longer than any of us. So the person was hired there, whoever the supervisor was, they always gave Mary the instructions to train them. So then once she would train us, if we ever needed any further information, we would just go to Mary for it. We didn't go to them for it, because Mary really had trained some of the supervisors and some of the managers. So they had this feeling, and they thought, I think, that maybe if they could talk to Mary, she maybe could come back and say, "We're going back to work," and we'd just go back to work. So he asked for her to come back to the office and so I told him - I didn't let Mary speak - I just spoke up and said, "You can't talk to Mary in the office, you'll have to talk to all of us." And so he just turned around and walked back to the office. And he called in Mr. Prillaman who was the Head Director. And he has a real heavy voice, and I think that's one of

the reasons employees were frightened by him. So he came in there and he yelled out, "Mary Smith!" He didn't come up to the table, he came only so far: "Mary Smith! I want to speak to you!" And so, I told him, "You can't speak to Mary Smith, you have to speak to the group." He said, "Mary," he called again, and so she told him, "Mr. Prillaman, we're a group now and so you'll have to talk to all of us." And so he turned around and he went back to the office and he called Branch from Raleigh. And it took Branch a while to get there, and in the meantime the students were talking, newspaper reporters were talking with us, and photographers were snapping pictures, and we were just pointing out everything that had been kept in for all the months. And so Branch finally came in and he just didn't know what to say. And he says, "Well, what do you all want?" We told him, we said, "We want a meeting." We have been asking for a meeting. We have had meetings with Mr. Prillaman and that didn't do any good, and so we asked for a meeting with him also. But we had never gotten an opportunity to speak with him. We also earlier had been to Raleigh and talked with his assistant, which at the time had told us, listened to our problems real carefully, and told us that he would be back with us by mail and let us know what they could do about it. And we hadn't heard anything from any of them since. So when he came in, wanting to know what did we want, we told him we wanted a meeting and we wanted them to know what was going on because we didn't really think the people in Raleigh knew what Prillaman was doing. And so he says, "Well, we'll have a meeting." So the seventeen foodworkers went into one of the rooms and we asked the students to stay on the other end, and so we sat there and talked with him and we made plans for a meeting the next day with Branch and Prillaman and some more of the higher officials out of Raleigh. And after

then, we went, we left. And of course, the black students had a place in Manning Hall waiting. And we went over there. And they helped us get our list of grievances back together. And then we decided just who would present them and we kind of had some questions to ask too. So we got this together. And at the same time we had decided we would form a picket line because see, the Lenoir Hall --this was just the Pine Room group-- and Lenoir Hall was one of the largest dining rooms. And the folk that worked in there was off on that Sunday, but they would be coming in on a Monday at 5:00 to open up. So the black students and there were lots of white students also, and we decided that we would start the picket line going the next morning at 5:00 in hopes to get to the workers before they got in to open up the Lenoir Hall.

B.J.: Did you or any of the other workers ever see a University procedure for non-academic employees, a copy of this?

E.B.: No, I didn't.

B.J.: Let me find out something about you. Where are you originally from?

E.B.: From Caswell County.

B.J.: How long have you been living in Hillsborough.

E.B.: I've been living in Hillsborough since '49, that's about 24 years, I believe.

B.J.: Have you ever been a leader before?

E.B.: No. In fact that was my first job. Because I have nine children. And before I had never worked, anyplace other than home and I had gone to work because my baby was in kindergarten, and all the children were in school and that's why I was working the second shift. Because in the mornings I was home with them to see them off to school, and then I had a chance to cook for them and then my husband would be with them in the afternoon. So that was my first

real job.

B.J.: I see. Were you active in any community organizations, or the church or any of the schools?

E.B.: Well, I had been active a little in the P.T.A., but really not as a leader. I would just help prepare different foods and I helped as each one would come up in school and their class would need help for something. But ^hnoe of it was like leading and things, mostly preparing different things that they needed. Let's see. . . no, at that time I wasn't very active in anything.

B.J.: Did you ever participate in the civil rights struggles, or were any of your children ever involved in those?

E.B.: No, not at that time. Now, since then, I have become more active. in a lot of things. But at that time, when my children were small, I had never participated in anything.

B.J.: How did you become so active in the strike?

E.B.: I think what really triggered me off, I had been raised that you do what you say. And my father was just real strict. And if he promised you anything, or he was supposed to, he done it. And if someone promised him something, he just didn't stop until he got it, or he would find out why. And I think some of this maybe did come from there. When they first hired me, telling me the different things about the job, and the Permanent Payroll schedule after ninety days, and this type of thing, and then after I got there and I found out that there were so many of the workers there that had been there two and three years and hadn't been on permanent payroll, and we were checking our checks each week because they were being shortened, I just End of Side One always asked questions and tried to find out why. I had to have an answer.

It - someone had to let me know. You know. I didn't only ask about the things

that were happening to us, but the supervisor any number of times, how did he like my work. Because really I worked hard to make the position. And to me, I'm a person, that anything I do, I like to advance. I don't like to just stay in the same thing. It bores me. And I've got to move and do something, you know, kind of reach a level. So, you know, I thought he was really giving me great compliments on my work and everything, so I just couldn't know why they were not giving me a better position.

B.J.: How did the other workers respond to the strike? In the other cafeteria halls?

E.B.: At first, we tried getting in touch with most of them, and a lot of them we had to go to their homes at night and talk with them. We asked them to stay out, not to come in. I guess maybe about half that worked in Lenoir Dining Hall stayed out and about half, mostly the elder ones, the ones that had been there-- we had workers that worked upstairs in Lenoir Hall that had been there twenty and twenty-five years. And these were the people that just thought what we were doing was crazy and we were, you know, going to lose our jobs and they just weren't going to have any part of it.

B.J.: What did you say to some individuals that you had to persuade, you know, "Come on and strike," what did you say to them?

E.B.: Well, we pointed out the points that they were being used too, that they had been there all these years and that some of us were making as much as they were making. We tried to show them that they were working us overtime and nobody was being paid any overtime pay. And we also at that time had many funds being raised for us. The professors on campus, certain students, were just. . . we were selling food, we had set up a place ourselves and had the workers cooking and we served food for a donation and at the time we had made out a schedule where we could pay the employees so much money for being out of work;

we offered these people more money than we ourselves would be getting if they would just stay out. But we got no cooperation from quite a few of them.

B.J.: You mentioned that you had some meetings with the administration and I think one you mentioned was to take place on that Monday. Could you tell me what happened in the meeting and if you can recall some of the individuals --I know you mentioned Prillaman. How about Claiborne Jones? How about Fred Haskell, was he there?

E.B.: Yes. At that time, there were many meetings being held. Mary Smith and myself were staying over late at night and meeting with different groups, like the School of Public Health; the professors had a meeting; there was just lots of meetings. And we were kind of speaking and letting them know what was going on. So on a Monday we did have a meeting with Branch, Prillaman, and there were just so. . . let's see, Claiborne Jones, some more that was right up there in the Personnel Building right there, but I can't recall their names. But anyway, we had something like a two hour meeting with them, and really, you know, we could see that that meeting had been almost like some of the ones that we had had with Prillaman. We really didn't get anything out of it.

B.J.: Did they make any promises?

E.B. Not really at that time. They were just telling us what they could do, what and how the University was run, and the part that the legislature played; they could not make a move until the legislature met in July and, you know, a whole lot of the same things that we had heard.

B.J.: How do you think you were treated by the Administration, the Personnel?

E.B.: I think we were treated real bad. They kind of, you know, made you feel real low and just like you really didn't know what you were talking about or

what you were doing and this type of thing, so I think that that's the feeling tha most of us got from it. But along about then there were some angry people around there. We were getting a little fed up and we were getting a littlê angry too.

B.J.: How about some more meetings, if you can recall any more that took place.

E.B.: What happened at that time: we did not have another meeting with them, with the officials. We began to have meetings and rallies with the students. There were a lot of the professors, like I said before, that were very active, that felt kind of like they were obligated to do something, to bring the thing to a head. They were trying to find ways, and to come up with ways to put pressure on the University. And Preston and the Black Students played a big role in this. Preston and they would always ask for the black students and they would listen to them and their ideas of how maybe that particular group that we were meeting with could come up with something to put pressure on the University.

B.J.: How did some of the black students raise money to help you during the strike?

E.B.: Oh, boy, I forget now. . .

B.J.: Like some bake sales and. . .

E.B.: They were out, downtown on the street, with signs; they were polishing shoes -- right, I never will forget that== they were polishing shoes, they were doing just anything tht could come along to raise money.

B.J.: Do you recall any white supporters, or names of white supporters, and what white students did to help during the strike?

E.B.: There were lots of white supporters, and really I can't supply you with names, because I have forgotten. There were so many tht were real active, and they worked real close with the black students also. One thing; they didn't jump in and try to make decisions. They offered their help, and they let us decide in what way we could use it or need it. We appreciated this, and we had lots of white students that was real active and professors, too.

B.J.: O.K. How about community support. Were there any organizers, like Chapel Hill Human Relations Commission, or any high school students that played a part in the strike?

E.B.: We had high school students, that came over and had rallies. We had also college students, from other colleges to come over and have rallies and to speak at rallies for us. We also had, out of the community, there were several housewives with babies that would come out and support the picket line, and this was real great, because the mothers would come pushing their babies in strollers and carrying their babies on their backs and walking in that picket line. So we really had a lot of support.

B.J.: I want to give you a few names of individuals, and if you could tell me how they supported; how about Julian Chambers?

E.B.: He was our lawyer. He came up and offered to handle any of the legal matters for us. Free of charge.

B.J.: Did you contact him, or he contacted the workers?

E.B.: I think he contacted. . . between he and Preston, it was worked out. I really don't know today just how it was. In fact, I do think he volunteered to come. Because he came first and I think maybe Preston had made him aware of what was happening. But he did come up.

B.J.: Anne Queen.

E.B.: Anne Queen, I can't remember exactly what part she played. The only thing I know, she was just there every time you turned around (laughs). Sometimes I wonder if it was all really good, or whether, you know, it was just being a little nosey and trying to find out exactly what was going on, or whatever. But I know she was just there.

B.J.: O.K. Senator Ralph Scott.

E.B.: Senator Scott stayed in touch and I think he really talked to the Governor at that time. And he stayed in touch more with Mary Smith because at one time, another Mary Smith had been kind of close in some way with the Senator. So he really stayed in close touch with her. And she, I think, told him some things that he may could persuade, talking to the Governor, so I. . . that's the way he helped.

B.J.: How about Dr. Alend Lind?

E.B.: Dr. Lind was very active. He spoke for us at a lot of rallies. He also helped a lot of rallies themselves. And this way.

B.J.: Was Ralph Abernathy ever a part of the strike? Did he ever come into the campus?

E.B.: Yes. He came to campus once. Went over and spoke to the Chancellor. And begged him, as he put it, "I beg you to do something about this, and I hope I don't have to come back." "And knowing you, the type of person you are, I'm sure you'll reach a decision." And, you know, this type of thing. (laughs). And so this was him. So, he spent about an hour with the Chancellor, and then came over to the Student Union and spoke before a group of students, and somethings that he said really were encouraging and I think some of the students really were kind of sick of them. I myself, I really didn't think that he helped any.

B.J.: O.K. I know you were with the delegation that went to a meeting that you had with Governor Scott. What was the outcome?

E.B.: Well, he at that time. . . one of our grievances was a 20¢ pay raise, which was bring^g us to \$1.80 an hour. So this was. . .

B.J.: Wait a minute. Were there any people making less than \$1.60 at this time?

E.B.: Right. We went on strike, we had people making \$1.45 and most of us were making \$1.60. So we asked for a 20¢ pay raise, so that everybody would make \$1.80 an hour. And that naturally you would get across the board raise. But, you know, people that start at \$1.60 and when they go on the Permanent Payroll, would be raised to \$1.80. So Governor Scott passed this before a legislature meeting. So this is what the role he played. But before this happened we had had a big rally at Carmichael Hall. Joan Baez -- I guess you've heard of her, she's a singer -- she came and sang for our group. And so we had this rally, and we made some speeches that night, and we had asked for the whole University to go on strike. We would just ask for anything, like it was asking for a drink of water (laughs), and of course, you know, the black students were right there encouraging us to do these things. And I think strangely enough the next day, classes began to form right out in the open, just one right after another. So, this happened. Well, this was before we even got the meeting with the Governor. We had asked for a meeting. Chambers was trying to set a meeting up. But we hadn't got it. So this made the news. And right away we got a meeting. So we went down. We talked, but we didn't really know what was going to happen. But then the next day, we heard it over the news.

B.J.: Did you talk with the Governor about your other grievances, the other complaints that you had with the administration?

E.B.: Yes, we talked with them about it, but he didn't really seem to be too interested.

B.J.: O.K. What about press coverage during the strike?

E.B.: Oh, we had more than we really needed, but I can't. . . I know the Tar Heel -- and I don't know who was writing for the Tar Heel -- and During Morning Herald, and Chapel Hill Weekly, and then there were a couple from Greensboro, Bob and Judy Steel, I believe, that were covering it from Greensboro. Just lots of coverage, but I really don't remember. Along about that time, I knew them. (laughs).

B.J.: Did you get in reports in regard to television? Was it on any national news?

E.B.: Yes. Let's see, I think Channel 5 and at one time, Greensboro Channel 2 carried it.

B.J.: Did you ever get discouraged during the strike?

E.B.: No, I didn't myself. I don't think I could have been, or anything could have discouraged me because of what I had been through before the strike, and I just think anything we could have done could have been better than what was happening. And I never got discouraged. In the beginning quite a few of the workers were discouraged. And talking with some of the ones that would not participate, kind of discouraged a lot of them too. But we worked on them and we got them active like some, you know, that didn't care to speak and this type of thing, we worked out a schedule where we had picket lines and we would have so many groups, you know, maybe a group to walk this time, and a group the next time, and involving everybody that was out. Also we had, using the Baptist Student Union then to prepare food, and the ones that were out, the elder ones that weren't able to work the picket lines, they would prepare

the food, this type of thing. So as they would become a little more involved, they became, I think, more encouraged.

B.J.: How about when police came on campus? Did this get things a little down?

E.B.: We had plenty of that. I don't think it made anybody get down, it just kind of made them more angry. More determined. Because we didn't see any reason for National Guard there. No one had really done anything to cause this. So this kind of showed us just the type of people we were dealing with --the University officials -- because the University cops could just have easily have handled what was going on. And it would have made it a lot better.

B.J. What called for the police on campus, do you know?

E.B.: I don't know, but I had a good idea. I think it was Friday and Sitterson.

B.J.: I know that Lenoir Hall was closed and then is it true that Governor Scott reopened it?

E.B.: That's true. Lenoir Hall was closed. What happened. . . we were fixing, in Manning Hall at the time, right across from Lenoir, and so the black students were asking all the students to come over and eat at Manning Hall and leave a donation. So, of course, you always have your students that's not going to do this, that's not going to become involved in anything. So you have the ones that's going to eat in Lenoir, regardless of what's happening. So I think the black students went inside and asked them did they realize what was happening to the food service workers, the people that had been preparing the food for them and asked them if they wouldn't like to help us, and I think that they got kind of some nasty remarks and so they were kind of getting together, and (laughs) I think that's when they closed it.

B.J.: What do you think would be the turning point of the strike? The firing of

Prillaman, the black militancy?

E.B.: That was in our grievances, that. . . and the \$1.80 pay raise, the re-hiring of Dorothy Ann Stephens, at the same time we wanted job descriptions and job titles. We asked to have name pins. Because supervisors and managers would come in and just blast out your name all over the place, you know, "Elizabeth, Esther," no one ever thought to address you by your last name. So we asked for name pins. If we had to call them Mr. Prillaman, then we would like to be called Mrs. Brooks, or Mrs. Smith, or whoever. So these are some of the things. But the main three was the firing of Prillaman, the \$1.80 -- or the 20¢, rather -- pay raise, and the re-hiring of Dorothy Ann Stephens, and the job descriptions. We also wanted our back-time pay. That was the first issue. We wanted our back pay, because we knew we had been working overtime and no one had ever received any overtime pay. So right away, the University told Chambers, who was the lawyer, that they would bring in some help to go over these. . . the payroll in the past years. And that they would pay to anyone who had been overworked, they would pay this. So they did, and I don't know who they brought in there. I saw two ladies up there working on the time cards, this type of thing. But they went through them in about two weeks. They paid some people three and four dollars, some two dollars, some maybe 99¢. Oh, and I think about five dollars was the highest they came up with for those people at that time.

B.J.: Five dollars?

E.B.: Mm-hmm. So then, like people that had been there a long time saved check stubs and this type of thing, giving you the hours they had worked, the amount you were making an hour, and how much they had on the check stubs. Of course, Chambers looked at these, and had Federal people come in and look at them

and it took them about a month and a half. And of course, the University wound up paying about \$180,000.00 in back pay. This is really what turned on the other workers that did not participate in the strike. They came to us and apologized and said that (chuckles), "If you ever decide to do anything else, we're going to be with you." Because they're the people that got eight, nine, or thirteen hundred dollars. We didn't really get that much out of it. So then, you know, they decided that they would really stick with us from then on out. (laughs)

B.J.: Who do you think could have settled the strike? Before you went on the strike that Sunday? Who could really have settled it?

E.B.: Before we. . . Well, it had gotten to the point on that Sunday that I don't think anybody there could have settled it. Because we had lost all confidence in them. We just wouldn't have trusted them. Earlier, Prillaman probably could have prevented it himself. But after it got to the point that so far along, and after we had been to Raleigh and we hadn't heard any results from Raleigh we just kind of . . . and also we had had meetings with. . . who is his name in the Payroll Department up there on campus. . . can't remember his name. But we had had several meetings in Battle Hall and. . . I can't remember those folk names up there. But see, we had just gotten to a point we didn't trust any of them. Because we caught them all in lies. None of them had told us anything that they had really followed through with. So I think it had gotten to the point, I don't think we would have listened to them. It would have had to come from someone else, someone other than the ones we had been involved with. At that time, we hadn't been involved with Sitterson or Friday. So maybe they could have come out and done something about it at that point,

but they didn't. And the ones that did come, we just wouldn't pay any attention to them.

B.J.: Were you ever threatened? You were one of the main leaders.

E.B.: No, no more than being threatened with being fired.

B.J.: How about phone calls at night?

E.B.: No. No one threatened me. Some of the officials would drop hints about losing your job, causing everybody else to lose their job, you know, this type of thing. But no one really threatened me.

B.J.: Did anyone ever try to buy you off, since you were one of the leaders, you know, offer you a lot of money if you'd tell everybody to quiet down. Was this ever done with you?

E.B.: Yes. At one time, I was offered, I think, \$4.00 an hour to talk with the group and make sure that no one thought about striking.

B.J.: Who offered this to you.

E.B.: This was not the University officials. This was SAGA, the food company. This was in . . . [interruption] No one offered to buy me off, no one offered anything. Prillaman didn't think that he had to. He just felt like everybody was afraid of him, and the only thing he had to do was speak. That is almost the way he had it then.

B.J.: Did you foresee another strike, after the first strike was over?

E.B.: Well, after the first strike was over, I didn't. I thought things were just going to work out dandy, and soon after SAGA food company came in, I almost knew there would be another strike. Didn't know it was going to be as early as it was (laughs). But I did know that there would be a strike, because when they came in, they came in laying off people. Just came in making a wipe-out. And again, we were back in the similar situation. No Job descriptions, no job

titles, you just do whatever's to be done. Everybody's got to be working at all times. And it was just very much the same. The only difference that I see was the pay raise. We didn't really, weren't that concerned about the pay raise during the second strike. I was the working conditions. And the firing of the employees.

B.J.: Did you know that an independent food service would be coming in. Did you know that before they came in, after the strike was ended? Did you have any idea during or before the strike that somebody, the administration would sell out to an independent food corporation?

E.B.: No, we didn't. When we went on strike against the University we had no idea that another company would come in and take over. We heard this during the last meetings we had with the University, that there were chances that they would sell out to another company. But it didn't really bother us, because we just didn't feel like anyone else would come in and do the things that they had done. And we thought, "We always do good work," and we thought that's what anybody was looking for. And we really wasn't concerned about it too much.

B.J.: Do you think your participation in the first strike was ever used against you? Under SAGA?

E. B.: Yeah. Very much. They had their eyes on me when they came there. On Mary Smith. And they did not allow me to open my mouth. (laughs) Different students would come in, and would question, "How's it going?", you know, "Are you having any problems with this company?" And they definitely didn't allow me -- "I don't want you talking to no body," on my time." And so he meant that. "I am not going to have it." So I did have an hour for lunch, and I just went right across to the Student Union and I talked for the whole hour. (laughs)

And the next day would be a whole [✓]right up in the paper. (Laughing).

And he would have "I am not going to tolerate this... I am simply not going to tolerate this." And so I said to him, "At least I didn't lie, I told the truth, you know." And so they really put the pressure on me. They shifted me around from place to place. They changed my schedule; I had been working the second shift because it benefited my family the best, and they knew this. They had ways of finding out, you know. [End of Side 2]