

Interviewee: Carl Bean

Interviewer: John Selders

Date: July 2008

Transcribed by: Teresa Bergen

[Begin Track One.]

John S: Who are you?

Carl B: I am really a church boy. When I think of myself, I think of Grandmother carrying me to church in Baltimore in the '40s. I was sharing with my bishops this week, one of the things that was a call for me was the sound of the feet of the women of the church as a little boy, that sound that hollow wooden floor made as they kept time with their feet. And I was sharing that it is so African, and it's so rich and it's so real. And it was the call to worship for me. I didn't have a name for it then. But I remember so well out of all that took place there was always the memory of that double time signature that they kept with their feet. And somehow I understood the depth of that particular thing taking place, what it meant to them and what it did for them. And it also called me to that room. We would leave Baltimore and we would go to Virginia, which is where they had come from before going to Baltimore. And they had what they called Harvest Homecoming Rally. And in this cemetery they buried a lot of the seniors, the elders. And I remember the tables on the church ground and the meals being cooked, and all of the joy of sharing that meal. But the thing that still stands out to me is in the midst of that, they would gather in for that afternoon service. And it was more of a prayer service. It wasn't as formal as

that sacred morning worship. And the way people began to leave those tables was the sound of that congregational singing. Without piano, without organ. And the time was simply what they did with their feet and their hands. But it was more the feet in those days than even the handclapping. And I don't know if that was a sense of sacredness, that you didn't do as much with your hands. But I remember that, and I remember the call and response. Not so much like what we do today, but a different kind of call and response. It was a rhythmic call and response and the women were kind of singing in an alto voice, a very heavy, resonant voice, and they would kind of answer the men. And that is just the point at which my theology begins today is there. The call of God, for me, was in Mulberry Baptist Church, down there in Richmond County, Virginia, where I recognized for the first time the sacred call. The voice of God beckoning me in my heart to come into that setting where most of the children were not, as a matter of fact. The children were outside playing between the graveyard and where they were eating. But for me, I needed to be inside that building taking part in that. So I am authentically a black Southern church boy who is African in every sense of the word. Because all that is African excites me. It causes me to come alive. It causes me to transcend whatever might be going on. Those rhythms, the swaying, the way of movement, all that is black church is authentically who I am. And so I had to, in making my journey I had to come back home in such a real way to going past what I've learned, past Eurocentricity, past even liberation theology and what came out of the '60s, to what was real in my journey in the '40s. I was born in '44. So I'm only talking about '49, at five years old. Six, '50, '51, this realness for me in what was taking place in them. And it was chants. I remember, I don't remember the words, but

they weren't the gospel songs. These were chants that had come out of the field that they would sing and that the older people knew so well. So I'm talking about being connected to the religion of slaves. And what a privilege to really know that's what I come from and what I was nurtured in. And it was so real, and it was so authentic that as I sit here today, it's still real in my heart. I still hear them, and I still know it's the voice of God as I hear their voices. Because what it said to us, that this is a time when they could have been dragged out of that church and hung by a tree, it said that this power is present with us in this Southern experience. And also, the words they were singing were talking about it being a deliverance from the experience. So their theology was so big and so real and so broad. And probably one of the earliest songs that I ever knew and still love to sing around the house is, "Oh, Mary, don't you weep, don't you moan. Pharaoh's army got drowned, oh Mary, don't you weep." Because today, then it was probably, the rhythms and the harmony. Now I realize what they were saying to each other. No matter what they'd gone through in those counties, in the backwoods, that when they sang that to each other, "Oh Mary, don't you weep, don't you moan, Pharaoh's army got drowned, oh Mary, don't you weep," was no matter what the sheriff is doing, or his posse, or the Klan, Pharaoh's army got drowned. We will survive this. Because the very fact that Pharaoh's army got drowned meant that they found freedom on the other side in the Promised Land. So they'd taken that story from Old Testament knowing that it applied, that God was still that God, and was still working for them. So today when I think about that, I am much more in the process of looking at the theology that was passed on to me prior to the classroom. What made me a believer. And that's what really made me a believer. So I remember Grandma's hand in

Baltimore taking me up to Israel. But it was really Mulberry Baptist in Virginia that she was trying to duplicate and make sure I was connected to there in Baltimore. The other part of that, for me, was Cousin Carroll. Cousin Carroll was my mother's first cousin. And Cousin Carroll was a gay man. And Cousin Carroll's lover or mate was Andrew. And so for me in my home in Baltimore, the family came to Baltimore for Thanksgiving. And my mom carried on Grandma's tradition and she was the cook. So Aunt Hattie, her mother's mother, those two aunts that were Mom's aunts that were still living, came from Arlington and places to Baltimore. Well, Cousin Carroll lived in Washington and worked for the Treasury Department. He had come from Richmond County and Mulberry Baptist, and he was a gay man. So I came up from as early as I can remember with the image of Cousin Carroll and Andrew being at the dining room table for Thanksgiving. So I was introduced to, I didn't know the word "gay." I didn't know any of that. But I knew Cousin Carroll, and I knew I was like Cousin Carroll. And I knew that the whole family, all of the cousins, aunts and uncles, some preachers, their wives, they're around the table. But there was also Andrew and Carroll, sitting side by side, just like every other couple, sharing the meal and down South, at Mulberry, Cousin Carroll was one of those voices that came home to sing. So Cousin Carroll was that male gay voice who they looked forward to Carroll coming home to sing. Now I didn't know then any of that, except that Cousin Carroll was one who joined with Cousin Susie Porter who was in Baltimore, who had her own little storefront kind of singing ministry who came home with the big hats and the purple dresses and the things they couldn't get down there. And Susie would bring a busload of people from Baltimore who didn't even come from there, but were just Southerners and looked forward to

going down to the Harvest Homecoming Rally. The other thing I remember was when Cousin Carroll and Susie would sing, those kind of call and response things that were probably in the gospel idiom of the day, what would happen in the church and how they would rejoice, and how Cousin Carroll would celebrate it so. And that was very real for me. And I loved to sing.

Singing was how God nurtured me, and I often share with my parishioners, whenever I left the house in Baltimore to go to the grocery store, I sang. It was my balm in Gilead. The minute my foot would hit the pavement, I was singing. And years later, I went home after being with the Bradford Singers and I'll never forget Miss Jordan down the street who used to have me do errands, mop her porch, make a little money. She called me, and my nickname in the neighborhood in Baltimore was Sammy. And she said, "Sammy, is that you?" Because I was going to the store for my mother, going down the alley singing. She came to the back door, she said, "Sammy, is that you back there?" And I said, "Yes, Miss Jordan." And she said, "Come on in and let me hug you, boy." And I went in, and she said to me, she said, "No matter what was going on, when you came through that alley singing, all of us knew everything was going to be all right." And I had no idea that that was happening. So here I was somehow continuing this African tradition in America, in Baltimore, I had become that person who through song and ritual went from village to village and made everything okay. And I didn't even know that, it was part of who I was. It was just what happened for me internally. So that, having that core is how I think Unity was allowed to come through me. Because there was Cousin Carroll and Andrew. So I wasn't introduced to gay people at something in a bar or in the gutter, as it were. These two people, first of all, he was Mom's first cousin. Most of them were women. He was

the only male. They loved him. He fit with them. Carroll was somebody special to them, so I also saw them celebrating him. And him mixed in with them so I didn't see like gay was separate. And I saw Andrew also accepted with the men of the family. You know, it's like I had been kind of natural sense of being other-sexed or gay. There was something for me that came before what the world said about "those people." "Those people" were one of the family. So there's a difference there. And I know that that is a big part of who I am today because of Cousin Carroll. And I'm very grateful for him being present, he and Andrew, being present and being a church man, and being a gospel singer. All of that. Because it gave me surefootedness that I don't think I would have had otherwise. In Baltimore, back to Baltimore, I remember the first time they asked me to sing. The choir director heard, I guess, my voice as a little boy. And I was so frightened of singing in front of others that she had to empty the little church and have everybody go out on the sidewalk for me to sing. And then I would sing. And once they came back in, I wouldn't sing again. So there was this fear of singing. And I think that came from the trauma that came from the incest. Because I was obviously soft or effeminate and it caused someone in the neighborhood to take advantage of that. And I think that's when it shut me down, this shame that I didn't even know what to call it at the time. But I remember that happening, being the example of what that was, now I can identify what that was. But this sense of me being connected to the Divine was already there. So nothing could hold me. It was somehow that had won as an identifier of who I really was. And I remember so well the richness of them taking us by the hand at Mulberry, and taking us to these gravesites and saying, "This was Great-Great-Auntie so and so. And she is the one that Susie got that voice

from. Carroll got it from this one.” And I’m not talking about tombstones. I’m talking about wooden markers. So it’s an amazing thing, this journey that God has allowed me to have to find my way through my Blackness, through the history of my people. And this love that I had for it, no one really gave it to me or instructed me. It was something going on in me, this call to get in there when other kids were busy playing marbles and I wanted to get in there and be immersed in these sounds, and this rocking. I just think I didn’t want to do that, I wanted to be in there. And so that’s a big part of who I am today. When I look at my journey in Baltimore—

John S: What church?

Carl B: Providence Baptist Church. And my pastor’s name was Marcus Garvey Wood, who is still living in his, I think, middle to late eighties, who had also come from Virginia. Had come to Baltimore, had gone to Morgan. His first cousin was Samuel Proctor. Samuel Proctor was one of the first voices that instructed me. We would go to the Lott Carey Youth Convention at Virginia Union University during the summer. And I was one of those leading Baptist youth that was selected to represent Providence Baptist at the youth seminar at Virginia Union. So we’re talking, I think, ’54, ’55, ’56, something like that. So I’m ten, eleven, or nine, ten, eleven, something like that. But anyway, so I met Dr. Proctor in Reverend Wood’s home, as first cousins. My family lived on the east side of the town. My dad lived on a tract of land in Baltimore. I was born in Hopkins Hospital. We only lived walking distance, maybe six to eight blocks from Hopkins. So I remember going there for my childhood shots, and sicknesses and that whole thing. A very rich neighborhood. But they decided to tear down this block or so of houses to broaden the

street called Orleans Street, which gave people like my dad several thousand dollars, which black people just couldn't even think of having at the time. Which moved us from East Baltimore to West Baltimore. When we moved to West Baltimore. Now we're moving to the side of town where some of the Jewish folk was giving up homes and blacks were buying. Before, we had very small rowhouses with little white steps. Now we're moving with the front porch, the awning, the lawn. So this is '51. So I'm like, ('49 I go, so I'm five, '56 I was going on seven?), something like that. Reverend Wood is finishing, finishes Morgan. Proctor introduces him to the group of people that have decided to look for the brightest students in America in the theological schools that are African American and offer them scholarships to Crozier Theological Seminary. Reverend Wood is one of those students who go to Crozier. And he's a senior. King is a junior. So Reverend Wood is being immersed in social justice ministry. I've moved from East Baltimore where it was more of the joyous, foot clapping, simple like basic God being transferred from generation to generation. Now I'm across town where most of the churches are farmstone, brick, towers, organs that are pipe organs. Now my Sunday school teacher is a teacher in the public school system. My, the person over the music department is the head of the Baltimore Public Schools music division for black schools, Miss Marian Smith. She's over our youth choir at Providence. So it's another whole world. You've heard this thing, if you're darker than a paper bag, you're not going to fit. But I didn't find that at all. These were the most loving, wonderful people. To get back to the story, as it happened, we moved on Loretta Avenue. And Reverend Wood's brother, Leslie Wood and his wife, moved on the same block. She came around knocking on doors, looking for kids to build his Sunday school. Well

my family was new to the west side so they didn't really have a church. So they said yeah, you can take him to Sunday school. So that's how I got to Providence. Because of this love for the church and this musical inclination, I was glad about that and wanted to go. However, when I hit Providence, Reverend Wood is coming out of Crozier. So he's had, and his first cousin is Samuel Proctor. Now I'm stepping into another world when it comes to Black Church. Even though Reverend Wood had come also from Virginia and understood everything about the Smithfield ham and all that, he had been given the opportunity to have this broader perspective on religion and the opportunity to think and to reason and be challenged. Because a lot of what he believed prior was certainly challenged. But the great thing for me was I stepped into an environment that allowed me to think. So we went to Baptist training, we had Sunday School. We had a very synchronized Sunday School program. Once again, we were asked to write, all those kinds of things. And then when it came to the music, Miss Smith really was a minister of music. So we learned anthems. But we were taught what it meant, where the music came from, how it happened. But Miss Smith was also a very proud graduate of the traditional Black Southern school where she learned her music. So we were really schooled in Negro spiritual, really schooled. But Miss Smith had the heart. She was, for some reason she never was able to deliver a child. She would always miscarry. And I remember Reverend Wood making it real clear to us once when she had become impregnated how we needed to give Miss Smith extra care and not to stress her, not to worry her. I don't remember what words were used, but we got it. And we knew that no one was to do anything to upset Miss Smith because we wanted this baby to arrive, too. But Miss Smith also, my first solo at Providence was Fred Waring's, I think

it was “The Night before Christmas.” And I had the little alto solo in that “Night before Christmas.” You know, “He spoke not a word but went straight to his work, he hung all the stockings and turned with a jerk. And laying a finger on side of his nose, giving a nod, up the chimney he rose.” So I was introduced to this broad spectrum of American music through Providence and through Miss Smith. I was always in Reverend Wood’s house. And Aunt Bessie, his wife. I just loved the church. Wanted to be, I would leave school, stay on the bus, go down to the church, just to help the secretary run the stencil for the program. Because I just loved being in the environment. And Reverend Wood saw it and nurtured it. And he would just, you thought I lived in their house half of the time. Because his son Marcus and I were very close, and his daughter Jeanette. Marcus was a year older. Jeanette was probably three years older. And he would take me places. Because of Providence, I was introduced to the Jackie Robinson Youth Council of the NAACP, very young. And this one, in Baltimore, Lilly Jackson, Miss Jackson was the architect of the lives of the young people in that church tradition. Miss Jackson was known at the time for having established the largest branch of the NAACP, which was in Baltimore. Miss Jackson went to Sharp Street United Methodist Church. I will never forget. Because it’s where we had our meetings, in the basement of Sharp Street. Now one block was Big Bethel AME. So Miss Sharp, she was between those two. But we were trained then, I had to know why my people were marching. And we had to know what our part was in this thing. And so they would put chairs around in the basement of this church, march us around, say the epithets, throw water, tell us that was going to be spit, how we couldn’t react, what it is we needed to do, and how people needed us. So if you couldn’t do this, you couldn’t be a part of

the whole lunch counter thing. Now I'm talking about elementary school here. This is all of this, going through all this in elementary school. So I come from Mulberry Baptist down South with the graveyard at the back, Cousin Carol singing, this was going on in my life. Also, I had Providence, Reverend Wood, Crozier, Miss Smith, Dr. Proctor, all this is going on. So one side of the family were stomping, the other side of the family [singing] "How lovely are thy dwellings, oh lord." And I'm experiencing all of this. Now also, in that whole milieu in Baltimore, you had Thurgood Marshall. So around Miss Jackson meant being around Thurgood, understanding what was going on with the legal defense team of the NAACP. And it meant that Reverend Wood and Martin were good friends. As a matter of fact, he was due to preach at Providence a couple of weeks before he was assassinated. So when I go to Virginia Union in the summer, I'm on the campus. I'm present with the youth from all over the country. We do vespers. We do different classrooms. We have private time with Dr. Proctor. We're being taught about Lott Carey, his work, who he was, what happened in Africa. So I'm getting this in my Baptist youth training. But we're also getting the importance of being connected to God as individuals and how real was that for us. And to make personal testimony in vespers and in these different settings. Everyone, you couldn't be passed over, you had to talk, you had to make comments. So this is prior to eleven, ten. So this richness is a lot to do with who Carl Bean eventually became and how he became who he was. It's because of where God placed me. I still to this day from time to time will see Dr. Proctor's face. I still see his face. I still know the warmth of him caring for us on that campus as young as we were. And how he brought us in and made sure that we were not left out, and that we were made to feel special and a part of

America and what it was about. So that whole youth piece is a big part of what prepared me to be who I am today.

John S: Who's your mama and daddy? Who's your mama and daddy?

Carl B.: My mother was fifteen years old when I was born. Her name was Arleen Hunter. My father was Calvin Bean. He was sixteen. They were next door neighbors. I'm sure they were experimenting. I'm sure it had nothing to do with "let's have a child." I'm sure it was pure childhood, adolescent experimentation. My father's mother, my grandmother, was married to the woman who I called Mom, who was made my godmother, who raised me. So I've been talking about Mom, in Virginia, it was her family. Because the fifteen year old absolutely could not raise me, or the sixteen year old boy. So my parents, whom I call parents, Mom and Dad, in fact she was a Veney out of Richmond County. It was the Veney's that really made that bridge for me. Because to them, this was Gina's boy. And so they knew nothing about Arleen and Calvin. They knew Gina's boy came home with Gina. And I called her Mom, and I called Dad, her husband, Leonard Smith, Dad. I retained my father's name, Bean, I always had that name Bean, and it was always very clear who they were. There was never a time of disorganization or being disoriented for me. They made it real clear who Arleen was, your mother, who Calvin was, your father. So and to respect them. But I also knew Mom and Dad because I was nurtured in the home. And they never pushed, like, "Call me Mom and Dad," anything like that. It just happened when we moved west to Loretta Avenue, I was thinking and feeling different. But the kids weren't. The kids said, "Your mom called you. Your daddy, your father's down there,

Carl.” So I had to recognize that the kids didn’t, they weren’t tripping over the difference in the Bean and Smith. It was your mother and your father. So I just began to say Mom and Dad. That’s how that worked out from there.

John S: Where did you go to school?

Carl B: I went to school, first at Dunbar Elementary School in East Baltimore. Dunbar at that time was probably *the* black school in East Baltimore. It went from kindergarten to twelfth grade. The house that I talk about Dad and Mom selling was right across the street from Dunbar. I could leave the house and walk right into the kindergarten. Right up the steps. It’s still there. I go back and just stand and reminisce. Now it’s called Sojourner Truth Junior College, the elementary where I went to school. From there I went west, and I went to PS 144, 141 first, I think I was there until fifth grade. And then 144, where I graduated in ’56. At that point in time, the integration happened in Baltimore. And in seventh grade, I went to an integrated school. And the first day, they beat us with snow tire chains. And it wasn’t the students in the school, it was the kind of kids who dropped out of school who came back who was insisting that this was not going to happen. And they took steel snow tire chains and beat us little eleven year old kids with these, and a Jewish man who owned a car dealership about three blocks from the school opened his car dealership and let us come in and rescued us. And I don’t know how those black schools heard about it to this day, but as he, when he let us go to go across the bridge to the black part of town, these high school students were coming from Carver and Douglass in droves. And they went up there and, it’s horrible what happened, but they got the news and they came to fight. But I had been kind of prepared through the Jackie Robinson Youth Council for

what was taking place. But we didn't know, we didn't think it would happen in Baltimore to that extent, the way it did that day. So that's kind of, in that setting, I was prepared for like accelerated learning. For instance, when I left there in the ninth grade, I went to Baltimore City College, which was like a Jewish high school that if you took the A course you skipped your first year of college. And Mom and Dad were not educated. I think third grade, fourth grade. And I was the kid who excelled. So there was such a pride about me being a smart kid and having this voice. And the people in church loved me, all that going on. And Reverend Wood's son had studied music, so he could read. And when he went to City, he started telling me about the music curriculum. Well I felt I couldn't do this because I couldn't read. But somehow, I told him I'd like to go to City and do the music curriculum. And they allowed me to sing a song. And I got into the voice major program without being able to read. Which was an amazing thing, because I thought it was impossible and so did others. But I think what helped, also, the year prior, in ninth grade, I scored 100 on my math. My math score for the year was 100. And it was the year of algebra and introducing to geometry and that kind of thing. I've always loved science and math. They say music, it all goes together. I don't know. But I think that helped that take place. And then Mr. Saunders who I think now was a gay man, was my history and civics teacher. And he kind of really opened my mind to how the government worked, and I just ate all that stuff up and would do these extra credit projects and that kind of thing. And then my math teacher, Mrs. Paulette, also was this wonderful woman who really destroyed all the mythology around what white people were. Miss Paulette was an absolute wonderful human being. And she saw this mathematical mind that I had. And so she would give me little extra things beyond

what the class got. And then she would challenge me to mark their papers to see where people made mistakes. And so I wound up with this great group of people around me, black and white, who were nurturing me. Now also in that same school, the principal didn't let us have any yearbook, no class pictures. Because it wasn't gonna happen with this white and black...so that also was there. And certain teachers really let us know didn't want us in their classes, but there were those others who just went right on beyond that. I don't ever remember singing in a glee club there, as much as I loved singing and what have you. So I had a very rich life. And at the same time, I understood my difference. I knew who I was because of Cousin Carroll and Cousin Andrew, I knew what I was. And it was okay because there were also other gays in those sophisticated black churches. They were there, though the word wasn't used, usually in the music department. But you're talking about people who had graduated as music teachers who taught music or really had a job as a minister of music who traditionally really got a degree in sacred music. So it was very different then, what I was about to be introduced in black gospel. That was another whole world, and I hadn't touched that world yet. I was over here with the [singing] "Didn't we, Lord, deliver, Daniel, deliver Daniel." So this other world was waiting for me. Now what happened there—

John S: Talk about, before you go to—

Carl B: Yes.

John S: You graduated from high school when?

Carl B: I dropped out in tenth grade. When I got to City, that was the year everything hit the fan. One of the persons within my church journey who had been being intimate with me somehow had

something happen in his home. And he shared with them that he and Carl had done whatever he told them. I don't know what he told them. Anyway, that family was also on the block, also going to Providence. So they came across to talk to my family about what had happened with their son and me. Dad, who had always been extremely loving with me, just became this animal. I didn't know who he was! It was like, what's going on here? And it became so ugly and so different. Here I'd been so nurtured and so loved and so cared for by neighbors, by church, by family. And this information came forth. All of a sudden, there was this embarrassment, I believe, because I was carrying the torch. I fixed it in that house for their lack of education. I was able to go places they hadn't, I was able to be in those rooms like the youth council of the NAACP. I was getting these awards and things, so I was making this house acceptable. This neighborhood, where people were educated, more sophisticated. And now I understand. I didn't understand it then. So when this block came through me, then everything changed for them, and they decided to focus on me because it was too painful to focus on what they felt were their shortcomings. Now I can articulate it. Couldn't then at all. Was just totally overwhelmed, didn't understand what was going on, why I was the culprit. He somehow was okay. I was, I guess, the homo, he was the hetero. [laughs] You know, so I'm assuming that's what happened. But anyway, it got so bad till it was I was going to eat off different plates. Then I wasn't going to be able to use the silverware, because you know what they do. So I wound up with this pie tin that was aluminum, and an aluminum cup. And so I was going to be separated out. And so now all of the stuff that I had made it over, coming from the other people, not being my real parents, now all of this came up in me. And I remember going upstairs, I wrote a note

which I still have, my suicide note. And I said, “Mom and Dad, it’s obvious you don’t love me anymore.” And I was fourteen going on fifteen, or just turning fifteen, something like that. I said something about I hope when we get to heaven or something, but anyway, I took all of the pills in the medicine cabinet. All of them. All of the aspirin, the Tylenol, cold medicine, whatever it was, I just downed it. Left a note in the bathroom, went in my bedroom and pushed my little chest of drawers up against the door. Well remember, I’m the little singer, I’m always busy, I’m making noise. And it was very odd, I guess, Dad, who loved me emphatically, but, I think, was trying to prove to Mom, whatever. So when he didn’t hear, something caused him to come up those stairs. And he usually went to bed before she and I did. And went in the bathroom, and there was the note. I was already, basically, out. And he forced his way into the room. Pushed back and pushed that chest of drawers away. And I just remember then being real groggy and winding up at the hospital that was closest to where we lived. Which was, I think Lutheran or something, I’m not sure. But anyway, they put this big tube down my mouth into my stomach and pumped my stomach and what have you. What the family didn’t know that night was by law they couldn’t release me to go back into that environment because I was underage and I was suicidal. And it was the best thing that ever happened. God stepped in right there. Now my natural mother was a custodian at one of the university hospitals, because Baltimore has Hopkins and it has the University of Maryland, it has University Hospital. My mother and her oldest sister were custodians at University. Because of that, I was able to get into one of those psych wards that was run by scholars, and those that was doing really important work around emotional, mental health and things like that. So I wound up at

University with all these spoiled white kids, really. [laughs] I don't think there was another black kid on this ward, as I remember it. But the first couple of days, I couldn't have a fork, I couldn't have a knife, I could only use a spoon and all that. And one of the techs that was supposed to come to my room and talk to me asked me, I guess he had notes, but he was told to get as much information out of me. I think he was a student in psychology that was working there part time. Well, I gave him a lot of information because I was not afraid to talk, which led to something else that they probably didn't want. [laughs] Anyway, I remember after a few days, and they determined I was no longer suicidal, I was put up on the other floor where you could have the forks and knives and you could get a pass to go shopping, stuff like that. And there was a woman, a registered nurse, a black woman, who was on the ward and talked to me. And she said, "Don't worry about nothing. My brother's just like you." She named him. And I knew him from one of the sister churches on the bourgsie side of town that I came from. I knew him. I knew he was just like me, even though we had never said anything. But she was a Godsend. I no longer felt alone or isolated or that I was in a strange environment. Here was a black churchwoman who was an RN, so she brought all of that the church brings was within that white uniform with her. So when she would embrace me or hug me or hold me, she was bringing me back to wholeness and back to life. I really no longer wanted the suicide thing. It was much bigger than whatever the psychiatrist could say to me. Here the church was again, boom, here comes Christ. All right, I got you, come on, come on home. And I remember so well how every day I would look forward to her shift, and her showing up. She'd bring me little things, you know. And she would talk to me about what was going on in that church circle

where I went to the youth council of the NAACP, and what they were doing, and what was going on. And the other thing, fortunate for me, was Reverend Wood, because of his education, made sure to be at that hospital and do pastoral visits. And they were kind and comforting. And he was not from that other school. The homosexuality didn't cause him to push me away. I never heard a sermon in my childhood church about Hell and Sodom and Gomorrah, nothing like that. It was foreign for me. I learned that stuff after getting into Gospel. But anyway, so because there was Dr. Proctor, and there was a social justice ethic under almost everything. So the love ethic was also very big. So I didn't know a God that was fearful or that I should fear and I'm going to spend eternity burning. I didn't know anything like that. Thank God. I didn't know anything like that. [laughs] But anyway, Reverend Wood was present, the nurse was present, so the black church was present, even in the psych ward, present. Christ, therefore, was present. So all that was in me around childhood prayer, what was sung, was resonating in my heart, up and down the halls of the hospital. And I was singing, I remember the song coming back. And I found myself singing up and down the psych ward. And people said, "Oh, Carl, what's that you're singing?" And that kind of thing. But it also gave me a chance to be around my blood mother for the first time. Because she would take a break from mopping the halls or whatever, and come up and spend time with me. And so that was fascinating how God let our lives come back together in a situation like that. Now the biggest thing was my psychiatrist, Dr. Framwas an exchange student from Germany where they were ahead of the American schools of psychology. They didn't think of same sex attraction as an abnormality, or as something weird, strange or crazy. But she was talking to me about, "Carl, you can reach all of your goals.

Your dreams can still be fulfilled. The only difference is who you are attracted to sexually.”

That is not what the family wanted me to hear. It’s probably not what the American psychiatrists wanted me to hear. But it’s what God wanted me to hear. And Dr. Fram, because of her, I left there far more sure footed and able to stand in who I was, then before. And she told me, “I can’t do what your family wants. What they want is this, but I can’t make you a heterosexual. But I can help you accept yourself, do well in school, and go for your dreams.” So she made sure that the tutor from the Baltimore public schools began to come to the hospital, kept me up my tenth grade level and all of that. Once I finished, I went to live with my mom, who was poor on that other side of town. Had gay friends. Was able to accept me better.

Unfortunately, that only lasted like a year. She died from a bad abortion, which was very traumatic for me. Because she had a young kid by another man, and a young brother and sister in her home. And I kind of babysat while she worked. And this woman came from that hospital who did a hatchet job. And my mother was anemic. And so she died from this bad abortion.

And I was traumatized but didn’t know it, because I was the one who saw the woman, saw her little daughter, and asked her little daughter to have dinner with my sister and brother. And the little daughter had told me where they lived and it happened to be on the west side, so I knew the neighborhood. So my mother, last I remember of my mother, was she couldn’t breathe, and she asked me to come and blow into her mouth. And so I was doing that, and she asked me to rub her chest. And I rubbed so much until the skin was actually coming off. So this was a lot for a fifteen year old to take in. Clearly it was God, somewhere, on some level, sustaining me through all of this...so that I didn’t go off the deep end. And the detectives came that morning

and just knocked on the door and said, “Are you Carl Bean?” I said yes. They said, “Your mother’s dead.” It was that cold. And then I found out years later, the reason she died is because she wouldn’t tell the woman’s name. And so they refused to do anything. And that’s how my mother died. So it’s been quite a journey. But bubbling under was my connection to Christ. That was always there for me. It was always what sustained me. Now on this side of town, I saw what we then called “drag queens.” And being loved in community, going in ladies’ kitchens, doing their hair with the curlers right off the kitchen stove. So now I’m making this other connection. Now this is not Cousin Carroll and Andrew anymore. ...Dr. Proctor and all and this is “let the good times roll,” this is another side of town. But still there’s the churches. They’re just smaller, more Pentecostal, more fervor, more celebratory. But me, I can’t leave the church. And the young kids, even the drag queens, got little churches that they go to. But their music is spiritual church, and this was a whole other world. Anyway, on this side of town I started, kids was singing these Gospel songs. Mom would play the Gospel in the morning, Pauline Wells Lewis, called Aunt Pauline in Baltimore, she was the one who brought the gospel group to Baltimore. And she was on the other side of town. Gillis, even though it was Gospel, was one of the Gospel churches on the west side. And they would bring the Caravans and all that. So I would hear the music in the morning before I went to school, but it wasn’t a part of my tradition. But I got over here, and kids were singing this music. And it was so joyous, and rich, and full! And these were harmonies I wasn’t used to making, and I wanted to do this stuff, like, whoa! So I started mixing with them, getting to know them. My mother was okay for me to grow my hair out, curl it, you know, oh, I had the girl’s shoes, the girl’s skirt, and my friends, I

got the new lingo were the sister lingo—girlfriend, all of that, I was living a totally different life on this side of town. So this side of town it was Miss Carl, Lottie, girlfriend, but they were singing this music. Now it's like I'm missing Providence, but this one would fit me properly. I want to go over to Providence, but I won't fit at Providence. So I find, okay, now I'm singing at Father Franklin's, Father Patrick Franklin was like the spiritualist guy that was powerful in Baltimore. And the older folk would say you would get the number if you went to Providence. [laughs] What was his text? Be sure to play that text. So I'm learning a whole new church thing over this side of town. And I meet Butch. And Butch Faust was from that Pentecostal kind of environment. But he lived west. So when I met Butch there was this camaraderie because we could talk about the west side even though he was raised in this Pentecostal faith. And he and I would begin to harmonize. He'd begin to take me into this harmony around Gospel. And then he would invite me to little programs, because he sang in a little group where they sounded like grown folk when they would open their mouths. So I wound up in this environment and everybody was gay! The pianists were gay, the singers were gay, the women were gay, everybody was gay! Aunt Pauline, the person on the radio, every— And so here was another whole world for me. I found myself in this world. Now I'm fifteen, going on sixteen. My mother died. The courts let me go back to my godparents because that's where I've been raised. And my mother's Social Security is going to tend me to the age eighteen. I get back on the west side, I've got this money coming, I'm grown, I'm going to do what I want to. So I'm going with Butch to all these programs. Now it's '59, '60. I go and I hear the Caravans. I'm second row; Shirley Caesar had just joined them. I'm like, oh, I don't know what this is. I'm ready to swing

from the ceiling. Whoa! But I had this huge voice, and I could sing over a whole choir. So I'm finding out that when people hear me, they respond. And I'm liking this, and I'm enjoying what's going on in this whole thing. And then I'm hearing about the male groups, the Clefs, but the king was Alex Bradford and the Bradford Singers. And I get to see them and I just can't believe how free he is...and how he's just so femme in these pastel robe colors. All this, you know! And I read this book about the Village and the beatniks and gay people. The homosexual element in this. And so I say, I want to quit school. And so I had to be sixteen to quit. So my godparents signed. I had this money from Mom till I'm eighteen. New York, this is where I'm headed. So I go to New York—

John S: Hang on, Archbishop. Let's stop right there.

[End Track One. Begin Track Two.]

John S: Archbishop, pick right up with that Father Franklin. Who was Father Franklin and them? All of them?

Carl B: [laughs] Father Patrick Franklin was a spiritual preacher. And the spiritual preachers, well, let me say it this way. The great spiritual preacher for my life was Clarence H. Cobbs. Clarence H. Cobbs was the sophisticated, brilliant, Black, openly gay man in Chicago, Illinois that founded the First Church of Deliverance. The First Church of Deliverance, I found out after becoming a part of Gospel, was the place that all of them thought of as Mecca, whether it was Alex Bradford, Raymond Rasberry, James Cleveland, you name them, it was about First Church. But in Baltimore, prior to getting to that, in Baltimore, Patrick Franklin had come to Baltimore to do

his thing. And his thing was prophesying. As I said earlier the ladies, before the government decided to take over “policy,” the numbers was a way that black people could try to get some money. And by the way, my grandmother wrote numbers, and Mama wrote numbers. And so all the church folks played numbers. Well, anyway... Uncle Sam couldn’t get money from them, so they decided to make it legal so he could get the taxes on it. Now you call it lotto when you just go to the corner store and you buy the ticket. But in them days, it was policy, it was numbers. So anyway, they would go to people like Patrick Franklin and he would whisper in their ears, or he would give out this sermon on the radio, and everybody would be sure to be at the radio to take down that text, get that number. And they would say “combined, three-way.”

[laughs] So that’s who that was. And in that church, Butch Faust, who was the one that I came in contact with after University Hospital who had come from that young Apostolic thing and who had been singing Gospel from a little kid, he was in that milieu of Black Gospel there in Baltimore. And at Father Franklin’s church, Butch started taking me there. And going there, I met James Lee. James Lee was a male soprano who had the distinction of being the only duet singer with the great Mahalia Jackson. So if you look at Black Gospel history, James Lee was the one who sang duets with Mahalia in her earliest days in Chicago, Illinois. Well by this time, in the late ‘50s, early, James Lee was in Baltimore working with Patrick Franklin, Father Patrick Franklin. Well, it was at Father Patrick Franklin’s church that I got to see the Clara Ward Singers, the Bradford Singers, the Clefts, the Roberta Martin Singers, all of these people. And our local groups of Baltimore, the famous groups of Baltimore were the Baltimore Echoes, the Vashti Singers. These were the famous local groups. And Butch knew all of them. So he began

to take me to the houses that the groups lived in. And I got to see lovers and others. [laughs]

But this singing, this music, even Baltimore's group, The Echoes, Sweet Henry would import great male singers that he would hear along the way. Leroy, who was a great singer, had come from Houston, Texas. Eugene, who played, had come also from Leroy's childhood milieu in Houston. Jimmy, I think had come from the Carolinas. Billy Black was a native and I knew Billy because I was also an Elk in the junior herd of the IBPOEMW and I was a drum major and a baton twirler and a high stepper. And Billy was a drum major. So I had all of this going on. And then the young lady who played the bells or the chimes in our band was Leila Royster, who sang with the Drexels. Now she had been a Baltimore Echo, but I got to know Leila basically in the drum and bugle corps, the pride of Baltimore Elks Lodge. So Billy was an Echo. Leila was an Echo. And I come in from the other side of the sophisticated Black Church. But now I'm joining this Elks, and I'm learning, and I'm marching and I'm twirling, and I get to be friends with them, so I begin to be around their local group. Now they were with a group called the Drexels. Leila went on to be a Davis Sister. So here, so I'm kind of moving into this whole new era of Black worship music, Black Christendom, a sense of connectedness to God, a very natural flow of Black faith, a very simplistic love of God that was available to you when you were broken, when you were battered. You felt the comfort of God's hands. When their mothers and aunties and uncles touched you, you knew you were welcome. If those people say, "Go on over there and get something to eat, boy," it was very uncomplicated love. It was very black, what I used to get at Mulberry on the church grounds in Virginia, now I was getting that in Baltimore, in this other whole side that I would have never known about had I not wound up

with the suicide and the hospital that took me in that other direction. Now Leila and them, Butch and them, they sounded like grown people. I couldn't believe these were my peers and they were singing like... It was nothing like what I'd heard at my church. We were singing like children's music. Even the book said "Children's Hymns" or whatever it was. It was always "children's" or "young adults." These kids were kicking out "Lord Keep Me Day By Day." Sounded like Albertina Walker. So I am like in school for real now. I'm really in school, like oh, I've got to get this. Because I don't know how they are doing this. How are they so young, producing these sounds? So in this environment, I learned what it was to have God and nothing else. Across town I had my own bedroom, picked out my bedroom furniture, I had a birthday party every year. I got Christmas clothes, Easter clothes, back to school clothes, clothes you wore in the evening, clothes you wore to school in the day..over here. Back over there I went to market with Mom and Dad. We went to a particular market just for meat and for the fish. And I got to pick out what I liked. You know, over here, it was food stamps, it was baked beans and hot dogs. But over here, there was a level of love that was so magnetic. And you just didn't want to leave it. You didn't want to go home. Those certain houses with those certain mothers, those certain grandmothers, where all the kids felt so comfortable you wanted to be there. Even the good time aunties, there was this embracing. And there was a respect for God. So the good time mama and good time uncle who drank the liquor or whatever, still respected God. Now when the grandma hit the room that was representing the church, they backed up. But everyone was welcome now, because Grandma was the seed that sowed it all together. So everyone was welcome. But this is also where they could stand up and count off that thing, and hit that latest

gospel record that was on the radio, and sing it just like they wrote it and knew it, and again, they were thirteen, fourteen, fifteen, sixteen. And I'm like I've got to do this. I've got to do this. So on this side of town, with Pat Franklin, I'm sitting front row, there's the great Clara Ward, Marion Williams, Francis Stedman, Kitty Parham. Now Butch knew all them, I didn't know their names, so I was learning. But those voices! So now I knew where Cousin Carroll and Susie Porter came from, what this was all about. But my voice was big. So if I opened my mouth, it was like [yells]. And it just would be over everybody. So they started pulling me in, "Come on, C, take this part!" I was scared to death! [laughs] Oh my God! Now I'm not going to be in no alto section. I've got to sing that whole thing by myself. And if I mess up, you're going to hear it. Cause now I wish I wasn't loud. But I needed to be loud to match them. Because there were no mikes in these little storefronts. And you had to sing with the piano and the drums and be heard with no amplification. So I'm learning. And then I hear Ruth Davis. Oh my God. Ruth Davis was the freeest, oh, I can't even put into words what happened to me when I saw Ruth Davis. With this short male bob hairdo and this voice as big as any man's, could growl like any quartet singer. But just would fill the church with this voice. And once I heard Ruth Davis, I remember asking Dad and 'em, I went to the record store and I got "Jesus Gave Me Water." I bought two first albums, The Shirelles, "Soldier Boy," and "Jesus Gave Me Water." And when I heard those songs, "Jesus Gave Me Water," and Jackie Verdell "Sing Free"(grunt) and "Jesus, When Troubles Bring Me Down," I was through. I was like, oh, Lord, what do I do with all this? I started singing with the record. Singing like Ruth Davis. I was going to be Ruth Davis if it killed me. I was going to...sing these songs. So Butch started putting me in the little

local groups. And I would go to the Echoes' house. The Echoes, like I said, was one of our major groups. And then I met Jonathan. Jonathan lived around the corner from me. His mother was, his grandmother was a storefront preacher. And Jonathan actually can sound like Ruth. And we became friends. So now I'm in another whole new group of gay folk that could sing this music that was accepted in the churches because of these voices. And what they did in these churches, what they brought to the service, and these preachers, some of whom were gay themselves, knew about all of these circles in some of their houses. You could go over, and all that kind of thing. But they were all believers. These were kids who were all believers, but believers in a way that I didn't know belief prior to them. I knew the very structured, sacred, learned Christ. And that was my intro on the West Side. But the earliest call that did those foot stomping down home Virginia women's shoes on that board, clapboard, whatever people call it, that hollow sound, and called me out of that field when they were eating to be in that room and in that environment. So that was there. It was just lying dormant. When I hit this Gospel thing after the hospital, it awoke that, now I found it, it was in Baltimore, too. It wasn't just down home. Baltimore was down home. No one likes to admit that, but Baltimore's the South. And down home was right there, too. I remember James Lee. James Lee was one of the most wonderful men. I'll never forget James Lee. He was kind, he was warm, he was nurturing, he was sweet, really he was in Baltimore, he was the only one that had really come out of that Chicago Gospel thing. James Lee really was from Chicago. Really knew Cobbs and all them. Really had sung those duets with Mahalia, and traveled on the road with Mahalia. So James Lee you would have thought from the other side of town would have been the hainty one. But here

on this side, the most learned, knowledgeable one in that grouping was the most loving, kindest. If anyone demonstrated the attributes of Jesus, it was James Lee. And he had an affection and fondness for me. He saw this little boy who was a duck out of water. He knew it. And so he just grafted me right on in and made sure my ear was able to carry them notes and keep it wherever it was supposed to be. And I just couldn't wait to get down to Patrick Franklin's house to be around James Lee. I said, "Butch, we need to go down to Franklin's house." He said, "Well, why—" I said, "We just need to go down to Franklin's house, because James Lee is going to sing." You know, that kind of thing. So that was my intro there. The other side of that was singing, sometimes we would go to march at the Elks Turnout Tri-state like in, say, Delaware or something. Billy and Leila would sing on the bus and would invite me to join in on harmony. So now it was all around. In this process, this is the time when I'm beginning to read about the beatniks, hear about the poetry and about to say to Mom and Dad, "I really want to go to New York." Now I want to go to New York because I want to sing. And I found out that New York is for me, from Baltimore, the closest place. 'Cause I couldn't even imagine Chicago. I just heard about that. But New York was the closest place for me by Greyhound to get there where there might be a chance to sing and make a living. I'm going to be a Gospel singer. Well, of course..., "What? No, you're not! You're going to go to Union. You're going to go to Morehouse." "No, I'm going to sing Gospel." Because I had this thing that, if I go back into that, they might throw me away again. They might turn on me again. And I don't want to take a chance on that. Because they hurt me very deeply because I really loved them and they were all I knew and they threw me away. And so I didn't, you know, I wanted to stay over herewith the rice and

beans and the hot dog people because there was gay people there, lesbians there, and gamblers there and all. But they were there. They were welcomed. They weren't ostracized or thrown away. So I'd rather take my chances with them. Dad takes me to the Greyhound. Now Dad is from on that side of town, (?) over here. So Dad takes me to Greyhound, with Mom, "Let that boy go. Don't try to make him stay here. He wants to sing. Let him go." Takes me to Greyhound. First time I see him just totally break. "Boy, I love you. And your mama, she going to be all right. Take some extra money." Plus what he did with her present. "And you going to, you sing now." He tells me, "I used to live in New York," tell me what I shouldn't do. And we cried and he puts me on the Greyhound to New York. Go to the Sloane House Y. That was the agreement, 34th Street, Sloane House Y. Get my first little job at Macy's as a stock boy that year because they were hiring for Christmas. It was like, I guess October or something, October.

John S: What year is this?

Carl B: This was '60. That's when my natural mother died, so I was turning sixteen. So '60, '61, I'm arriving in New York. I begin to meet black gay kids who are church kids. They tell me about Harlem. And William Morris O'Neil. "There's Christian Tabernacle. You've got to go up to Christian Tabernacle. And Tabernacle Christian. "I said, "Okay, okay, okay." Well, I'd heard about Abyssinian, from my background. And so I'm trying to find about Abyssinian because that matches Providence. But I've also met this Gospel bunch and I'm more excited and I'm more comfortable with them. And Christian Tabernacle is run by William Morris O'Neil. William

Morris O'Neil was a child in First Church of Deliverance. So he's come to Harlem and duplicated in a much smaller way First Church of Deliverance. Christian Tabernacle's a spiritual church. They wear all white. He explained to us why Rev. Cobbs and them put people in white coming out of the Depression so that no one would feel better than anybody else and so they would all wear white. And you would simply go to a surplus store and buy white gloves, wear white shirt. The women wore white uniforms like nurses or ushers. So everybody in the spiritual church was in white. Every Sunday white stockings, white shoes. And that Reverend Cobbs had established this because when he established First Church it was during that period coming out of the Depression. So this was a way of making everyone equal in the Church of Jesus Christ. And so there was no rich and poor and highs and lows... Well, we were learning this through O'Neil at Christian Tabernacle. And we had a cross on the ceiling and white and red down the aisle, and the little barriers on each side because it was for the consecration offerings. You could only get in the middle aisle to get the consecration offering, which you laid on the Bible. So he had done everything kind of like First Church, even the choir loft with the certain lighting. And he had deacons, but he offered the bigger thing in that environment was the women who had the ability to spiritually read and have insight. He had acolytes, because First Church had acolytes. The kids that would light the candles and all of that. I'm trying to remember what they called these women. They're still in the spiritual church. And they have a particular name. And they wear their head covered and what have you in First Church. All of that, all the Metropolitan Spiritual Churches have them. And I'm blanking on what the name is, what that body of women are called. Because they're not in the Black

traditional church, but they are in the spiritual church. But anyway, we sang the songs First Church sang. We, because he had come out of First Church, and in Bradford's group, Charles Campbell had come out of First Church. All right? So I joined Christian Tabernacle. I buy my white, wear my white. This is brand new for me. This is new, Wednesday night service where they prophesize and do readings and call, this is brand new. Now this other little sophisticated me is going, what is this? [laughs] The Samuel Proctor's jumping up in me going, "Wait, we didn't teach you that, Carl." And I'm sitting here trying to, I'm enjoying the music, and I'm going to be a part. Medium. That's what those women were. The mediums. So if you love the Lord and you love the church and you love the tradition of the church, no matter where you find yourself, you're going to become a part of what is Black worship and what is healing in that environment for you and your journey. So I jumped in with both feet. And the mediums would occasionally on Wednesday nights come to me and go through this, dance all around me, go up and down my body and prophesize. All that was okay, because I was in the church. In this environment, I am approached by Calvin White. Now Calvin White has been with Alex Bradford, but I didn't know that. Calvin had been with Alex and he had sung with Alex. And he had left Alex and decided to start the Gospel Wonders, which was a local group in New York that had had some hits in the early '50s and he brought it back coming into the '60s. Well now, Alex is now in conjunction with Langston Hughes and Vinnette Carroll, they're creating Black Nativity. I'm hitting New York. I'm with this local group in Christian Tabernacle. We call ourselves the Gospel Souls. One of us is from Charlotte, North Carolina. No, from Charleston, South Carolina, Jimmy Akin. I'm from Baltimore. Wilbur is from Raleigh. And Arthur, I think,

is the only real New Yorker. And we call ourselves the Gospel Souls. I'm the least among them with this Gospel thing, but for some reason I'm the one people like to hear. So they tell me, okay, well you're going to sing "Coward Soldier." Well, Shirley Caesar just put this out with The Caravans and I'm singing "God don't want no coward soldier." So I'm heard in New York. And I'm just walking in [singing] And I don't know it like they do, because they know all this stuff. So I'm just making mine up as I'm going. I'm preaching out. But the people like joining, you know. And so I wind up being heard in Harlem. Calvin hears me. Bradford hears about me. Judy is one of our members in Christian Tabernacle. Judy had done a short stint with Alex Bradford prior to this in '60, '61.. Judy and I are hanging out one day. I don't have a dime to my name. Too proud to write home to Baltimore. We're Uptown. The gay bar is one block from the Apollo, Fantasia. The women from the Apollo often come to the Fantasia because they won't be bothered there. Their hairdressers go there, their valets go there. So all the people go there because it had great eating, and a little show in the back. It had a beautiful bar, glass, all this glass and all these bottles of fancy, so ladies didn't have to worry about being bugged, and this was, so they came. So it's midday. Judy and I round this corner about twelve noon. Judy knows the people in the bar. And I'm really too young to be in there. But it's midday, so most of the people are eating during the day. So I go in with Judy. I'm still scared, because I ain't twenty-one. So I'm standing way back by the jukebox. Something comes on from Motown, I think Martha and the Vandellas, and I began to harmonize. Judy's up here talking to the guy behind the bar, bartender, and the man. Well, the man is Alex Bradford. He says to Judy, "Who's that boy singing?" Judy says, "That's Carl from Baltimore." He says, "Well, go tell

Carl from Baltimore, I want to talk to him.” So Judy comes to me and said, “Professor Bradford, that’s Professor Bradford.” I said, “Professor Bradford? You close to him?” “Yes. He wants to meet you.” So Judy takes me over to the bar. They brought his steak to the bar so he doesn’t have to go in the back, because he’s a star. And everybody knows him And Alex said, “I like your voice. And I want Judy to take you to the Cecil Hotel tonight. And I want you to stay overnight. And I want to bring you to my house in Newark tomorrow.” I was out of my mind. I mean, I’m like, where did this come from? How did this happen? Because I didn’t go the route of being in the little local groups and all things. I’m in New York as a new place. I’ve been in this church six months, whatever. And now I’m going to Newark to the great Alex Bradford’s house. I’ll never forget. Bradford lived on Stratford Place. Has this round bed with a mink spread on it. I ain’t never seen anything like it. All the time I’m walking around Bradford’s, I was just in awe. The piano, the everything. This oil painting of his first album, “Too Close”. Someone had done this huge oil of that pose of his, up over his bed, and I’m like just scared to touch anything. Now he’s really authentically out of that Chicago School—Mr. Dorsey, Mahalia, the whole thing. He had played for Mahalia. He had been on the road with Mahalia. So he knows James Lee. So now I’m talking, I say “You know James Lee?” He gives me his sheet music: “Too Close,” “One Step,” “Lord, Lord, Lord,” I said I wasn’t going to tell anybody. He said, “Carl, take these home and learn them.” Black Nativity, I don’t realize I’m being given this chance to be in the presence of the great Vinnette Carroll and Langston Hughes. I’m not even realizing what’s going on in my life. God is just directing this stuff. Langston, Vinnette, Talley Beatty. Leonard Bernstein [laughs] You know it’s like, and I’m not

having a clue, really, because I don't know the names then. I don't really know what they mean then. I know I've heard Langston "Dream Deferred" but not really, because I dropped out in tenth, I'm so not, by the time in them days that I came out of the tenth grade, I was college level, really, because my summers were at Virginia Union under Dr. Proctor, out of the Baptist tradition, so I'm not even realizing the level of education I'm getting. So when Alex, he puts me on the floor with his group that week in his house. These folk kick it! Boom! Boom! Boom! I thought oh my God, what am I supposed to do? I'm gonna blow it! Alex says, "That's it, come on, you can do it!" He's real nurturing. I'm just excited. I go back to New York. I go to Christian Tabernacle and O'Neill come down the aisle and read me. [laughs] I'm trying to figure out what's going on! I know somebody told him I've been out singing with Alex Bradford, whatever. "If you stay in this choir." Okay. Now I'm terribly confused. But my mom was afraid, Bradford and them had gotten this contract for London, which is where Black Nativity really broke out and became great. And Mom was afraid to allow me to go that far away. So though that was the first time to be accepted as a Bradford singer, she wouldn't let me go. So I go back to New York. And I can't do it. Calvin White, who leaves Bradford at this time, Calvin White was Bradford's second lead singer. He leaves the Bradford Singers. He didn't go to London. But he is on that Black Nativity soundtrack from the play. He comes back to New York, but he's been a Wonder, in the early '50s, he recreates the Gospel Wonders. He hears about me singing with the Souls. The Gospel Souls go to do a program up in the Bronx. Calvin's group, New Wonders, are on the program. We sing "Coward Soldier." After the program, Calvin calls me aside and says--somebody in his group had told him that boy they

talked about from Baltimore can't sing. Calvin pulls me outside and says, "I'm Calvin White. You Carl Bean?" "Yeah." Jimmy from the Wonders is standing there. He said, "This is what he told me he can't sing. Now I don't know this New York stuff. But this is how he does it. This is what you say "can't sing?" "Oh, really. Watch me to ask him to join this group that you're in."

So he asks me on the sidewalk, "Would you like to be a Wonder?" And I said, "Well, yes! But I need to talk to my group." I tell them and they said, "Oh, no, Carl, because we would all like to be Wonders." So they feel more about the Wonders. Calvin was a little fledgling at the time.

Now Calvin's voice is on, that thing that they put out, they still have out by Alex or Columbia, "Checking the Rafters," (?). Calvin does second lead on "Said I Wasn't Going To Tell Nobody."

Because Alex was still under contract to Savoy and couldn't use his voice on that record. So Calvin is singing "Sweet Jesus" and "I Wasn't Going to Tell Nobody." That's Calvin White, who just passed last year. Anyway, Calvin takes me into the Wonders. Then he introduces me to the New York scene—Herman Stevens and the Stevens Singers. Herman plays at the Apollo.

The Stevens Singers, a trio of these little short women with these big voices. Helen Stevens from the Stevens Singers winds up being a Raylette. But the girl who comes in the Wonders, there's this young group called the Twilight Gems. They are Brooklyn kids. Estelle Brown, who winds up being a Sweet Inspiration, who's still in my church today, becomes my heart in New York. She just takes me under her wing. And me and her, we... And their foster kids too, to be raised by this sanctified woman in Brooklyn. But Estelle takes me out to Brooklyn to visit and all that. And they can sing, too, like grown folk. So Calvin and Estelle are old friends because they're both kids from New York. Calvin brings Estelle in the Wonders. There'd never been a

girl in the Wonders. Meanwhile, Estelle's beginning to make money downtown at 1650 on Broadway, the Brill Building. Because Estelle is connected to Whitney Houston, Dionne Warwick, Dee Dee. They just call it the "girls' den." They had come here from Jersey. Where background...were hiring them to do all these background. People think it's the Shirelles.

John S: It's the Sweets.

Carl B: No, it's the Sweets. Estelle, every time they needed a male voice tells me, "Carl, come on, go downtown and make some money." So now God has fixed it so I'd be pulled into this other milieu of Black Gospel folk from Jersey. So I meet Dee Dee, Dionne, Sissy, all of them, this is the early '60s. So now up and down Broadway I'm meeting people at Roulette Records and Columbia and all that. And I'm making this little extra pocket change. Calvin is writing for the Wonders. He gets a contract with Savoy. Well, Savoy is the great Black Gospel label. So Calvin writes this little ditty. We go to sing it. [singing] "I've been lied, cheated, talked about, mistreated, I've been scorned, talked about....Praise the Lord!" We said, "Oh, we like this." So we kind of made up that part of answering each other. When Estelle said, "No, no, no...wrong! We was like, fun. So Carlton Hampton was our pianist, who wound up for years, Hampton Carlton being the pianist for the Clouds of Joy, the organist for the Clouds of Joy. He's now passed as well. So anyway, we do this record. And this is about '63. We're rehearsing a lot. So I must have come into them in like '62, April. '63, nineteen. We're rehearsing, rehearsing, rehearsing. Calvin is writing, writing, writing. We're becoming New York's own group they're proud of. These young kids... So Calvin knows everybody from being a Bradford singer. So he

says, "We're going to have the Davis Sisters come on our anniversary, we sing for them."

Jackie Verdell falls in love with me. Sister Jackie start calling me Baby Boy. Baby Boy's got a big voice. So now I become Baby Boy. And the gospel folks start, that became my name in gospel. So "Long as I got King Jesus"...as soon as the record came out--they start playing it in New York, playing it in Chicago. And we start getting these requests, to come this song. Well now, I only know in Baltimore, Gillis, where I went to programs, seventy-five cents advance, a dollar at the door, and saw the groups, now we're a group that's going to be brought to this kind of thing. So we started, Joe Bostic is like the king of the gospel disc jockeys in New York. He loves the Wonders because it's a New York song. And Joe Bostic, Junior, really loves it. So Joe Bostic starts putting us on the big shows at Rockland Palace, the Apollo, wherever he had a big show with Mahalia, the Wards--the Wonders going to open. Well, now I'm a gospel singer. I got a black robe and a white robe. [laughs] And I'm meeting everybody, but I'm happy. This kid who had been so broken, suicidal, left everything he knew, Jesus Christ made a way and said, "Live. Live..Behold, I am with you always." Actually I tell people so often that this Savior of mine first rescued a kid born to a woman fifteen, father sixteen. Caused the people next door to take him in. They took him in to that richness of the South. Then caused a nurse to show up. And by the time he was fifteen and suicidal, who loved the Lord and embraced him, caused a doctor from Europe who didn't agree with the American psychiatrist to be his doctor. So I mean, Jesus was always there. Christ was always being manifested, always. He would never let me fall off the deep end. And so then I get in the band and there's Leila...and Billy Black. And then I get to New York. And out of eight million, do you know how many kids must have come

to New York to sing gospel? And wantin' to be famous, wantin' to be at the Apollo? And I wind up in this right place at the right— it ain't the right place, it's the hand of God directing your life. And then people embracing me, the Davis Sisters, and giving me the name Baby Boy. And protecting me. Well, if someone did something, too much drinking or something, "No! Don't take Baby Boy on that road! Uh uh. Baby Boy, you come and you sit right at... Jackie Verdell: "Baby Boy, uh huh, Baby Boy, Baby Boy, sit right here, right here. You're not going with them two." How can I not love the Lord? You know, how can I not love the Lord? And so I'm in New York, we're singing, the Caravan—

John S: You're a Gospel Wonder.

Carl B: Yes! I'm a Gospel Wonder. "As Long As I've Got Jesus" is a hit. We open for the Caravans in their Vee Jay days. Hit after hit, after hit, after hit. We turned Rockland Palace upside down. Just church kids singing out of our hearts. Joe Bostic's so proud of us he beaming, he ready to do cartwheels. The people clapped us back three times. We knew we had a hit. We sang it at a Monday night program with Luanna Murphy, Mother Murphy. Bishop Murphy was a Chicagoan, I'm getting connected to the Chicago thing. She had us on a Monday night at a 130-something Street at her church. Them people had us sing that thing all night. We never sang a beat. That was it. We sang...as soon as we sat down—"hu-huh, come on, sing that long thing again." We sang it, all that... I don't know that in this audience is Carl Hall of the Raspberry Singers, who has moved to New York. Who again pulls me in. "Baby Boy, oh, I enjoyed you so

tonight, Carl. Lord, you just sing with such fervor. I'm hearing these words for the first time.

And you just sing out of your heart. And, boy, don't you stop singing!" And Carl Hall. So now I got Jackie Verdell who pulled me in and Ruth Davis who pulled me in. Carl Hall, I don't realize even the magnitude of who they are in this thing called gospel. He is the voice of the Raspberries! The voice! And he pulls me to his breast. Jackie Verdell is the one who sings over Ruth, takes the song that Ruth finishes and sings higher, she pulls me in and Baby Sis pulls me in because she sees this soft thing, and she going to protect me. She going, "Don't you mess with Baby Boy," you know? [laughs] But I'm not realizing at that time, but that sophistication in love being shared, from heart to heart and breast to breast--that Reverend Wood, and Proctor and them gave me--came in, and it kept me from crossing a line that I could have in that gospel field. Because my Christ came with respect and dignity. So some stuff was just not going to work for me. Even if I tried it, there was going to be no comfort zone for me in that. Because the dignity of Miss Smith, and see, Miss Smith was the one who taught me to sing with the heart. Because Miss Smith would sing those at Providence...and the tears would just form on there. So Miss Smith taught me how to sing with the heart. She could sing, and just God was present. And it was not in the emotional, but yet it was Christ, and you knew it, you knew it.

When Miss Smith's soprano would ring through that joint, everything was still, everything was bowed before the Lord. And you knew it. And so...I'm sitting with this dual experience in this new environment. So I couldn't go but so, it was like, whoa, Nelly. Then, with the Wonders, we're singing. Rev. O'Neill brings James Cleveland for his anniversary to Christian Tabernacle. James Cleveland is riding high with "Peace, Be Still." [singing] And I've never been to Paris in

the spring or the fall... And the Cleveland Singers wear these metallic-looking silver lamé suits. And we got three boys and a girl. Roger Roberts is singing soprano like Carl Hall. And he's got Odessa, Claude and Eugene. Well, him and Bradford, of course, are dear old friends from Chicago. Yes. So we sing this night at O'Neill's. And we make the mistake of singing "As Long As I've Got Jesus." And it destroyed Christian Tabernacle. Because we were New York's own. And we knew all the gay kids, and they loved us, their own. James was the star, there was no doubt about it. But "As Long As I've Got Jesus" destroyed that church. [laughs] Boy, the more they were pushing us, the harder we would sing. And the more they'd push us, the harder we'd sing...

John S: .. "Peace, Be Still".couldn't do nothing.

Carl B: We was creating routines on the floor. We hadn't done none of that stuff before. Calvin would say, nah, nah, nah, he'd walk out and put this (?). I said no, I'll go down and put this one out so Calvin...Estelle would come down and say nah, nah, and we'd jump back and they'd leap up and go to running. And James was— [laughs] Now they got Jesus, and the Cleveland Singers had a hard time that night because it was in the room. It was just in the room. And they tried to stop it, and people started shouting again. They was trying to stop it, people started shouting again. So but we did know, what we did know was when Calvin had signed the Wonders to Savoy, the publishing was Savoy, and James was their star. So when he wanted it, he could sing it. And he cut it over us and all (?) and put his on it. To this day, the world thinks that "Long As I Got You" is James Cleveland's song. It is Calvin White's song. And it was the Wonders that

did it. But before he did that, that night they had a party up in Harlem. But the Wonders and the Cleveland Singers were invited because it was the inner circle. So they had a dinner and a party, and we all went to the party. [laughs] And the (?). That's when I got really initiated. [laughs] Oh my Lord! When you look back on how God works, it's amazing, it's amazing! So Bradford had moved back to Chicago. And "As Long as I Got Him" had turned out to be a hit in Chicago. Disc jockeys were there playing by the Wonders... Because James hadn't recorded it yet. He had gotten, heard of it, it did what it did, I guess he let Lubinsky know he had this song and it was, they were on Savoy and Lubinsky probably told him, "Yeah, we own the publishing, so you can cut it," or whatever. And that was, of course, their moneymaker was the Cleveland Singers, James Cleveland. Really, was not the choir, James was the moneymaker. So anyway, we did get at least a year of work out of it because people were playing the Wonders. But Bradford brought us to Chicago for his anniversary. So we go to Chicago for the Bradford Singers' anniversary. Bradford was at Stone Temple Baptist Church in Chicago as minister of music. And that was on the West Side instead of the South Side. And so we get there—me, Estelle, Jimmy, Carlton, Calvin. And we walk in in our little robes, and.. Bradford got the joint packed. And front row—Albertina Walker, Dorothy Norwood, Roberta Martin. So we are like [gasps] oh my God, what are we going to do? Calvin said, "You're going to sing. That's what you're going to do." [laughs] You know? They were the most wonderful, pushy, putting us on, "Go sing, kids!" We sang that song. It was a great time. Bradford remembers me from New York and (?) whatever I led there really went over well. Bradford immediately went to Calvin [laughs] the whole set, said, I love my group, Bradford, I love the Wonders. But now I'm being

brought into the Chicago thing. While I'm there, I get a chance to go to First Church. When I go to First Church, I really begin to hear and understand Reverend Cobbs' importance in the Black Church development and how he was so big at one point, first on the radio, they had this huge listening audience, that he was on the cover of *Ebony* or whatever it was way back then for having achieved this feat as a Black Church person, and how he fed the poor and how he somehow was able to minister to the restaurant owners, to numbers people, the girls walking the street, people in prison, and the church folk. So he built this phenomenal ministry that just touched people's hearts in ways that transcended denomination and all of that. So he fascinated me. Frankly, because remember, underneath it all, I'm this kid who's nurtured an education around Christendom. Black slavery, black religion, understanding it, reading everything I can read and devour. So I wanted to know the history. So then I find out about him having in his church, Kenneth Morris as his minister of music. Kenneth Morris makes his living demonstrating Hammond organs for Hammond Organ Company downtown. He convinces Rev. Cobbs to try this sound with Black Church music. Rev. Cobbs says, "Oh, yes." And I can't remember the particulars, something about the Hammond Organ people did something if he would do it. And so, whatever that was he said yes to. So that was the beginning of the Hammond organ being used in black gospel through First Church of Deliverance while Kenneth Morris happened to be partnered with Sally Martin in Martin & Morris Music.

Carl B: Yes, publishing. Making their own money way back then. And Bradford loved Miss Martin because he would always, Bradford died...at Roberta. Because Roberta gave him twenty-five dollars for "Too Close to Heaven ." So I just remember calling him from Chicago and telling him that Roberta had died. And he said, "Good. She should have been dead a long time ago. I said, "Alex," he said, "I mean every word I said." And by then I was in Chicago with the Chimes. And the Chimes, there was Claude Tmmons, Imojean Green who been a Davis Sister, Lee Charles Dailey and myself. And they had been, the Chimes was a group that also produced a lot of gospel greats. The Chimes produced James Cleveland. They formed the Chimes together in Chicago. See they produced James. Jessy Dixon, Dorothy Norwood, Imojean Green, all them came out of the Chimes. So this connection to the Davis Sisters keeps happening. Now I go to Chicago. Anyway, I wind up going back with the Wonders, going back to New York. Calvin, who had left Bradford, really didn't love it like me and Estelle did. We loved it. We wanted to make our living singing. Calvin could go and do his computer stuff and make his living and settled. So we said okay, the Wonders aren't going to do anything. Estelle went with Jerry Wexler and they started calling them The Sweets. They formed such, they wound up working with Aretha, with Presley, then Jess and 'em took them in the studio, and they created the song Sweet Inspiration and the rest is history. You know, they still make them to this day as we sit here. Singing behind Elvis on a screen, though he's been dead thirty years. They're still out there filling auditoriums with the people that worked with Elvis singing in front of a big old screen with Elvis' likeness from Las Vegas and making a living. Now only God could do that, and Estelle and I laugh about that all the time. They fill boats of people that go to see that

thing. . So when we go back, I go, Butch, I go to Baltimore and Butch says, “Aleneed singers, Carl.” I said, “What?” He said, “Because he sent for me to come from Baltimore. He’s not satisfied with the group he has. And he needs a group that can cut the mustard on the road.” He says, “So just show up in Chicago.” Well, Alex had the Wonders there so I knew he was living in the GraemereHotel. I go in the road with Dee Deeand we wait for a while as her valet. And so I go there and okay, this is okay but it ain’t working for me. So when Butch tells me, when I’m in Baltimore with Dee Dee, and Butch tells me about Bradford needing singings, but I can’t let Bradford know that Butch told me I got to show up in Chicago. So I go back to New Yorkwith Dee Dee and I leave Dee Dee. I thumb from Newark in the snow to Chicago. Because I want to know what it’s like to stay in Chicago, so I decide to hitch hike. So I go back to Chicago, I thumb. And when I go back to Chicago, I go, some gangsters who are Italians are thelast ones to pick me up. It’s happening. The last drive off the road, drop me at the Greyhound in Chicago, are actual real live gangsters. I didn’t believe them until I saw them put the stocking, pull the stocking over their head at a gas station to rob it. And I said, “Please, lord, no!” They saw that I was so authentically a church guy that they wouldn’t do it. They said, “Man, you really mean that!” Because they thinking I’m black, so they talking black hip talk. And I said, “Oh my God, now, just let me out. I can’t—” So they sensed this, and they began to talk with me about Christ. And I begin to tell them about him being my savior, and what a good god he is. And I’m just talking. And they decided not to rob this station. When they get me to Chicago to the Greyhound, they give me afifty dollar bill. And they said, “Here, man. And we hope whatever you came here for works for you.” I find out where the Graemare is, I go. I tell

the man, "I'm here to see Alex Bradford." He said, "Well, Alex isn't home. But I do know where he is, because he left a number." I'm sitting in the lobby, snoring. He calls Bradford at this party. He tells Bradford there's a Carl. And Bradford says, "Carl who?" Thinking it's Carl Hall, I guess. So he says, "Carl Bean," "Carl Bean," "Carl Bean, what is that?" So anyway, Bradford comes, I get on the phone, Bradford says, "I'll be home in about an hour. Sit there and you can stay with me (?) anyway." He comes home. I stay with him. I've been raised where you do your part. So I make sure that house is spick and span, wash dishes, everything. And I told Bradford, "If you just help me find a job, because I hear that Jesse Dixon's starting a group, and I'm just going to try to be one of the Dixon Singers." And he said, "Okay, Carl, let me see what I can do." He would not (?) before he would ask me, he left and went out, had Alberta, his wife, rehearse the group. Calls Alberta, says, "Teach Carl second lead to me." Alberta gets off the phone and says, "Alex just called and said to teach you second lead." So I go over to the piano. And at this time he's singing, his record is "All I Own, Jesus Gave it To Me." And he had that album out on Vee Jay.. So we're rehearsing, we're singing, we're singing, we're singing. And so he comes back home. So now these other singers he doesn't want, he's going to use me to get rid of them. "Can you hear this boy? And he's brand new. And I can hear him down the hall. And I can't even hear you all. He outsinging everybody in the room. I need people that can match him. I don't need you all. I'm sure that he's going to make these Chicago people hate me and want to kill me. And I'm new to the town!" Well he doesn't know that I know that Butch had told him to come cuz he needs a new group. So I got them to fake it like I don't know that he's going to get rid of them anyhow. So they daggering me. [growls like cat, laughs] So

anyway, that's how I wound up really being with Alex... through me hitchhiking there. [laughs]

And so, Butch comes, of course me and Butch begin singing in harmony together, because we've been harmonizing since kids up and down the streets of Baltimore. (?) I'm the only one because Isaiah Jones and Charles Campbell is the only one he kept who was his soprano in the original Bradford Singers. They were lifelong friends. And Charles was a wonderful man, he's really one of my mentors. So we go on the road with myself, Butch, Charles Campbell and Becky from the Argo Singers, who can really sing. And so Bradford had, and we took no prisoners. We did not care. And we go on the road and he's, in those days, the Baptist preachers would book folk for that Baptist convention, that Baptist singing convention. And Alex had been in that from a young man with Mr. Dorsey and them, and Mahalia. So he could call the gospel Baptist, the big Baptist churches and they'd book you through Texas, Mississippi, Alabama. So we did that touring. And it was just such a wonderful time for me, and such a time of growth for me as a vocalist. And Bradford wrote this song and he was doing it in such an old time way. And I just said, "Oh, Alex." And he said, "What's wrong?" And I said, so anyway, he got off the piano. And I had Kenneth, who was one of the other pianists in the group, give me some jazz chording. Now I'd been nurtured by Ruth and Jackie about this time. So I said, "Kenneth, play some jazz chords for this." So Kenneth played the jazz chording. And I took Bradford's song and began to sing it another way. Well, he hit the ceiling! "Have you lost your mind? Do you think you're Nancy Wilson or somebody?! You cannot sing that in the black church!" So we had this knock down, drag out. I said, oh well, it's his music, I'll leave it alone. So we go on the road, we wind up in St. Louis, Missouri. Cleophus Robinson has brought us

there. The O'Neil Twins are in the house. Cleophus in the house. Martha Bass is in the house.

All the St. Louis Mass Choir, all the St. Louis bunch in there. So he's angry at us because we had left someplace real hot, it was summer, we had left there and we didn't want to rehearse any before. So he decides to embarrass us on the floor and say, "My group thinks that they are in charge, and I work for them. And so since they don't want to sing my music, I've decided tonight that they all going to sing solo for you. And I'm paying a dollar a holler. If you don't holler, you don't get a dollar." Now he's totally embarrassing us. And these people are looking at him so everybody has to sing a solo. So he's playing for everybody. So Buddy and all of them are singing, traditional, "I Need These Every Hour," and all that. So when it was my turn. I didn't come from gospel like them, I didn't really know solos. And I certainly couldn't sing In Flamatus. Something from my Providence days wasn't going to work. So I said, "Professor Bradford, would you please give up the piano and allow Kenneth to play?" So he looks at me real strange and says, "Yeah." So he gives up, Kenneth's looking at me, "What's going on?" I said, "Well, Kenneth, play Alex's "Never Will He Turn His Back on Me," the way we did at the house. So Kenneth is nervous, because Bradford raised hell about this song.

Kenneth begins to play and I begin to kind of structure it the way Jackie Verdell did "Trees" or something like that. The joy just exploded. "Say, boy! Say (?)" The O'Neil Twins up on their feet. "Yeah! Go ahead!" [laughs] Well then, I just take off. I'm walking the aisle.. And so Bradford gets Kenneth up, he takes the piano, "No, who you think, (?)" He's at the piano playing. So I learned a great lesson: that if in fact God is present, and you love the Lord and you're singing it for the right reasons, God will give you the victory. So that's how I wound up

really being with the Bradford Singers. Then we come back to Jersey, Bradford decides to move the group back to Jersey. Vinette and he reconnect from the Black Nativity days. Vinette at this time has got money from the New York Council of the Arts, New York state, to do urban kinds of things, because it's the '60s, Vietnam War, and all of that. So she creates the Urban Art Corps. Well she remembers being so successful with Black Nativity that she wants to continue to put black gospel on Broadway. But she wants to really weave it into a real story with a real play. Not just like so much of it has been. So her first effort in the corps, we rehearse all day. She give us a little salary. I think it was like forty dollars a week or something then. But my rent was only ten in my little rooming house. So she knows all the biggies. So they would come in and do in house kinds of workshops. Cicely Tyson, Portier. These are people Vinette had gone to school with. Once again, we don't really know what we're getting. We really don't know what God is doing for us. We're in it, but we're really not, now before it was Langston with the Black Nativity Now it's, the same kind of people with this cultural ability that's being brought to us, and we're getting little salaries, little stipends. So Vinette was a wonderful, a magnificent director, producer. But prolifically schooled in blackness. And it was, it was real for her, from the root of her being, from the bottom of her feet, there was this love for her. Because Vinette was West Indies. And they did well. Her father was a dentist, and her mother was like a teacher. But this root thing was real for Vinette. And so Vinette would always talk to us about our culture before we would do any exercises or take on any new thing. And the long story short out of that workshop, Copeevolved. We first called it, I don't even remember what we first called it, but it evolved. And I remember Lou Rawls and different people were coming in to look at it for

money, backers and that whole thing. And it took off. Well, we were no longer working churches. Now I remember when a man showed up, as a matter of fact the first union (house). And Alex was doing what gospel singers do. We still would be practicing and he could still pay us what he wanted to pay. We hit those union houses, the union man showed up. He said, "Son, what do you make?" I said, "Well, Professor Bradford pay us." He said, "Who's Professor Bradford?" He said, "You all have to join the union. You all have to have your own cards. You all have to pay dues. And you all have to be paid to scale. And if you do lead, you're a principal." This was all news to us. I never saw anyone look like Bradford did.. [laughs]

[End Track Two. Begin Track Three.]

Carl B: This stuff, it wouldn't work for me from what my background was. What they wanted, how you needed to act to please them in that white evangelical way, no. So anyway, I went back to Alex.

John S: Leaving Bible College

Carl B: Leaving Bible College because it was upstate in New Jersey. And then I came back to Newark, moved into Bradford's house. And go back to New York, I moved into Bradford's singers house at that time. By then we had money, COPE was up, it was running, and went back to do the show. But this thing was on me around, that's when I started having this, there's something I've got to do. And I couldn't get it. So I said to Alex, I said, "Brad, I'm going to leave the group." And he said, "What?" He said, "You've always dreamt of Broadway, Carl. You told me, you said in the theater in Baltimore. And when there was musicals, you probably be, you and a few other kids

would stay there. (?)” I said, “I can’t tell you why. I really, I don’t know anybody in California, I’m an Easterner. But I just thought I need to go to L.A. And I want to do it.” And till the last minute, and I bought, took my last pay from Broadway. Went to the Greyhound, bought a ticket. I think it was like a three-day ticket or something like that at the local Newark Greyhound to Los Angeles. I saw things I had never seen. Because I had never seen clay hills or Indian reservations, or any of that. Whatever this was, what really made me say yes to it, I was no longer comfortable just in gospel music. As I said, I could never get Providence out of my system. I could never get the voice of Samuel Proctor, Marcus Wood, Billy Jackson, Thurgood, I could never get that rich nurturing of my duty and obligation to my people as how I was nurtured in Christendom through that arm of my journey. And that never left me. And I was sitting on Bradford’s steps, 149 South 8th Street, Newark, New Jersey, was the home of the Bradford Singers then. We had just worked the Met in Philly for Mother’s Day with the Wards, with the Clouds, Soul Stirrers, Rodney Williams had this huge show. And I heard Marvin Gaye come over the airwaves singing “What’s Going On.” And I knew that was it. And they were beginning to call it message music. And I said, “That’s it. That’s it! That’s what I got to do.” Then the same day, the Staple Singers came through the box, saying “I’ll take you there. I know a place. Ain’t nobody cry. Ain’t no smiling faces lying to the races.” I said, “I’ve got to go.” So Alex did, he saw my seriousness. I had never written myself. I was really jumping out on a limb. That’s okay. I’ve lived in Chicago, I made it there. I worked there with the Bradford Singers, and I went back and I worked with The Chimes. While I was with The Chimes, these kids came from Northern California, because Claude was Hinton’s church. And

they had a little Mammie Made record. And Claude and Imojean invited them on our program over in Argo to sing.

John S: The Hawkins?

Carl B: It was Tramaine and Walter and Edwin. And they had the Hebrew Boys. They stayed with us. Claude and I shared an apartment with Mother Johnson from Hinton's church. And the Hebrew Boys stayed with us. Walter and Tramaine stayed with, I think at Hinton's house was (??), but all that (little sanctified Chicago thing?). All I know is they had those records in a little box from a local person who made high school choir robes and it had that logo on it, Oh Happy Day. So that's how our paths crossed. I left, got on the Greyhound, wrote my first song on the Greyhound. Got to L.A. I started having a dream. And I kept seeing these people bandaged. And I couldn't make it make sense. This is '72, '73. And I kept seeing these people bandaged. And it kept showing me this urban setting with all of these people. And I kept trying to figure out what this was. And they were like mournful and pleading and begging, but they weren't saying words. All of this was happening in a spiritual dimension that you knew what was being said, but no words were being spoken. And the dream would keep repeating. Well of course at the time I didn't, I knew it was HIV. But then, you're talking '72, '73, '74, when God began to give me the dreams. First he pulls me out of Newark, I start having the dreams. I run out of money in less than three weeks. From now, the Holy Spirit(?) is going to teach me in this ten-year period between '72 and '82 when I finally accept completely and say yes. I'm downtown,

Main Street, Los Angeles, no money, a few blocks from where the Greyhound dropped me. I'm staying in a hotel called the St. George Hotel. It's a vagrant kind of place where people, alkies, winos, so God fixes it so I just left Broadway with posters on the side of the subway. And now I'm in L.A., down in the bowels of the city with the homeless, the drunkards people. And I'm just, dear God, but it was lesson time. It was all the Holy Spirit saying, can you love everybody? Can you be with everybody? The dreams were right. There was this woman, she was like a Madonna. Well, I had never had a Catholic background, so I couldn't figure the woman. But the people. One night I ran out of money completely. I had to stay in the mission. This man said, I had my life's bread was anything that could play music. It can make radio, and direct anything that could where I could keep my music. So I had this little Panasonic with a pop-up TV, and it could play cassettes and all that. And so I didn't know, so I was going to put it under the bed, and this old white man with white hair in the cot next to me said, "No, son." He said, "Let me show you. Take that pillow out. Put all your stuff in there. Put the pillow on top of it. And put that under your arm to sleep like that." And so I realized how endearing this was, and I was beginning to see God. As Mother Teresa said, In God's distressing disguise. Before that, I hadn't been taken to that level of God consciousness. But this old man was God, and I knew it This was pure love coming at me. "No, son, don't put your radio and your tape player under that bed. You won't have it in the morning." There was no ulterior motive. There was, he could have done me, you know? But once again, having God taking care of me in a mission situation that was totally foreign for me. (??) I'm around people that live this way every day of their lives. So then I hear about this thing called the Unattachment Center. You go to it, it's a

part of L.A.'s welfare program for single men. You go to it, they give you day work, and you get vouchers to pay the hotel, and vouchers for the restaurants that they deal with around these motels where they put homeless people in. And in those days, you were using silver money for carefree. So they would give you silver money, about ten dollars worth of silver money. You work for them two days, and you could look for work for three. And that's how the program worked. So I go from "Don't Bother Me, I Can't Cope, a hit Broadway show, and I wound up sweeping the parking lots of big county hospitals where I would later visit all of these people with the virus. But I don't know it at this time. And I'm sweeping the parking lot. Now I know God is working with me, but I don't know what I'm being led up to. I keep getting sent to places that deal with health to sweep, to mop, to do whatever. I find a little job at, well there's this church downtown called the Church of the Open Door. They run a little motel that sits in between the church and the main branch of the Enoch Pratt Free Library. The library. Enoch Pratt is really the Baltimore library. Theirs is the L.A. public Library, Los Angeles public library. But anyway, this little place is run by the church, so they got neat little rooms. You can't take no company up. Only go up with a key. There's maid service to change your bed every day, you've got a phone in your room. And they got someone on the desk, so you can get messages and all that. So I'm in this place once again that's God ordained. Even the poorest of the poor has these places, these oases that God directs me to this other oasis. So I find a little job at Prudential. And it's go in there and type 55 words a minute. And I hate typing, I hate being in an office. But I'm three thousand miles from home, I ain't got no money. So beggars can't be choosers, so I take this job at Prudential. I do it for two days and they got me typing policies. I

can only make it two days. I can't do this, I can't do this. I go down to the employment, I said, "I really want a job, but," I said, "I'm here for music. I really want to pursue my career. And I just can't type eight hours, I can't do it." They said, "Well, you scored so well on your exams, your entrance exams. We would really like to keep you as an employee." So I said, "Could you give me, really, I'd like to do four hours a day, twenty hours a week. And the rest of the time I'd like to try to look at recording. I don't know what that means, but I want to try to pursue that." So they said, "Well, we got this (?) department for computers." They were creating this new system with these new coupons that would go out to their insurance folk and you send it back with a check. And you learn how to run these, in them days, huge old big computers, just a whole room full of them. You know, (?) So anyway, they let me do that four hours a day. I started to write. I began to write. So I go, O'Neil has meanwhile left New York, moved to Los Angeles. I haven't been around him in years. And Estelle is really big in his church by now. She moves out here with him to L.A. So I go looking for Estelle. They tell me Estelle lives with O'Neil at his house. I go. He gives an attitude. "Well, Estelle ain't here. And what do you want, Carl Bean?" Because he was mad, I guess, because he prophesized I should go with Bradford years ago. And I went from Bradford. Well, anyway, so he says, "Estelle is in Vegas with Elvis. And she's not home." So I said, "All right." I said, "Well, would you at least give me a number?" So someone calls Estelle in Vegas. And I said, "Well, I'm in L.A. and I'm trying to find my way. He said I can't stay here, but I'll check with you when you come home. I'll be all right." She said, "Put him on the phone." I didn't know she paid all the bills. Estelle gets on the phone. I don't know what she said. Whatever she say— [laughs] He said, "Estelle said for you to

stay here. And for me to put you in her bed. And you can stay in her bedroom and all.” I said, “Well let me say goodbye to her.” She said, “I heard him. And I said all that. And here’s my number in Vegas at Caesar’s. And if he do any strange—” now we’re talking like New Yorkers – “any strange anything,” and like now she could become a Davis sister, “I mean it!” I said, “Calm down, calm down, calm down.” “He don’t know, I pay that doggone dollar!” [growling] I said oh, God, what did I walk into? And they got these two big old, because it’s really like a mansion off Wilshire, these huge bedrooms with a little bathroom in between them. So I stay a couple of days, Estelle comes home, and you know, but I don’t want to be with them. Anyway, out of their choir, I hear this boy that sings soprano like Bobby from St. Louis, the Raspberries. I pull him out, a couple of kids sings good second lead. I said, “Look, I’m starting a group, I don’t know where it’s going to go. I don’t want to sing gospel. I want to sing message, like the Stapletons.” And then other groups were doing message music. Philadelphia International was getting pretty big. So anyway, we sing. I rehearse these things, I write these things, I send a demo. There’s this place down the street from the gay bar in L.A. And I read up and the man says a hundred dollars you get the master tape, demo, da, da, da. Eight of these, four of this. So I say okay, that’s it. So I call the man, he tells me of an appointment. My little group is rehearsing My homeboy Alvin Cannon is there, too, who used to play for (Dorothy Norwood. So he becomes my pianist. So I show him these songs. We rehearse, rehearse. So we do them and I came home from Prudential that day and the lady said, “Carl, you’ve got a call. It sounded really important. They said for you to call them right back.” So I open up the little message, and it says, “Call Lee Young, Senior at ABC Paramount.” They’ve given him

permission to do this progressive gospel music for ABC Paramount. He likes what I'm doing. He calls me. Now I found out God's hand again, this is the brother of Lester Young. I'm telling you, only God! Only God, man! I couldn't have done it, no kind of way could I have done any of this stuff and not in a million years. He's also best friends with Nat King Cole, and was Nat King Cole's drummer. So he's still close with Maria Cole. He loves my voice. He likes the gospel voice. He says, "My brother," he talk about Lester, Lester loved that soulman that's why he loved Billie so. "Man, you've got that ten." I said like okay. He said, "I just talked to the Williams Brothers. These are some young boys from so and so. And I just signed--"

John S: Mississippi.

Carl B: Yes! "And I just signed so and so and so and so. And we want to sign you." So I said, "Well I really don't want you guys." Because right then, they were into this thing after I did this little record. The gospel jocksthing is too R&B for them, and R&B jocks is too gospel for them. Well now it's contemporary stuff everywhere. It was right at that time. So anyway, I do that. Then Lee leaves there, gets hired by Barry Gordy over at Motown. Lee plays the gospel thing that I did, which is really message music. Barry hears it going down the hall. Barry goes to Lee, asks him who's that. Lee tells Barry, "His name is Carl Bean." Barry listens further. They getting ready to try to conquer the disco market, gay market. So I guess Lee told him who I was, and everything. Next thing I know, I'm at May Company now, left the Prudential, working at May Company part time. Phone rings, "This is Motown Records." I think these are friends that have been out here in the business. I go off. "You know I hate this job! Why would you all play this

joke?" I cussed those people out. [laughs] Three times! So they finally said, "No, no, no! It is Motown! It really is! We're going to send a messenger. We like your voice. Mr. Gordy's interested in you.. And there's a song he wants you to sing." I said, "Yeah." Eric was my good friend the actor. I said, "Eric, when I get off, I'm going straight to your house and knock you upside your head. I hate this thing every day, and you call talking about Barry Gordy. I know it's you and Jean. And you all have got together, but sho 'nuff., I'm talking about thirty-five minutes later, this white boy comes up the escalator, delivery boy. Walks up, I'm working in lamps and pictures. Walks up and goes, "Are you Carl Bean?" I said yes. "This is for you. Would you sign for it?" I signed. It's a package from Motown. Mr. Gordy's stationery. (?) I'm standing there, first of all, totally crazy. People do anything to get with Motown, anything. Send demos, you know, here is God, God, God! I open the package. I'm walking through lighting, and there are these guys who are laughing at me, criticizing cause I'm happy, carefree and gay. Ain't a fault. It's a fact. I was born this way. Now I won't judge you, don't you judge me. We're all the way nature meant us to be happy, carefree and gay. I was born this way. Now not only am I offered a contract by Motown without even pursuing Motown, but I'm allowed to be who I am on the biggest label that ever made it in black music.

John S: That's something.

Carl B: Ah! I'm going like what is going on? I don't believe what's, now I'm calling Eric and friends and going, "You're not going to believe what just happened?" "Carl, what?" "I've just been offered

a contract with Motown to sing about being a homosexual!” Now none of them are believing what I’m saying! I go home, crying. I’m walking the street from the store to my house in tears. And I’m just thanking Jesus, just thanking him. Lord, this was what was going on Bradford’s steps. This is it. This is what was going on. And I was trying to figure it out—message music. But, so the lady was from New York. Bunny Jones. She had been a hairdresser, had her own shop in the ‘40s and ‘50s. Her friends were gay men. She didn’t like the way they’d been ostracized, the way they had been treated. So out of the years of knowing them, these words flowed out of her heart. I was born this way. Because she actually felt that from talking to them, being around them. She didn’t buy they picked it up or, you know. And so I say, I call Estelle. She’s in. I said, “Estelle.” So they bring me in. We go to the thing, the lawyers ask: “Going to sign this? Yeah, I signed. I’m knowing this is the Holy Spirit. I’m knowing this so unnatural, so not normal for the business, for someone to come looking for you to give you money to sign you. Now I ain’t done no talent show, I ain’t done none of this. This is a record playing in a hall. So this is all like and then it comes, well, okay, here is what you must do. So now when I tell people, they say, “Well, bishop, when did your ministry start?” We used to deal with, ’82, when ’85 we got the 501C3 and all. But now I always say ’77 in (Mo West?) that night, that motel, when I stood at that mike. Because disco is about shaking your booty, and da, da, da, da, da. (?) what you sing. When the riff comes, and I found myself singing, “Lord, help me tell the word.” And I was born this way, from a little bitty boy. I was born this way. I call this, they said well, we got the Sweets. I said, “Uh uh. I need gospel singers. And I want the Sweet Inspirations.” They said, “Okay, if that’s what you want, get them.” I called Estelle, I said, “Can

you all do it?” And she said yes. “Call them, tell them what you charge, work out the business.”

So it was me, it was Vernon, and Estelle Brown. The Sweets did the background. And that was really the beginning of this ministry, if I really look at how God charted the course. Because God brought that song. And in it, when I hit the riff, I began to sing about my life. I began to sing from a little bitty boy, from a little bitty boy. And began to sing parts of my life. And then they called me after they released it and said, “You know, Carl, we’re getting letters from all over the world and Mr. Gordy wants us to bring you into the publicity department and open up the phones and let calls come and you just talk to people.” Then I did *Soul*. *Soul* was a popular magazine at the time, black music. And when I look back at that article today, all I talked about was how Jesus Christ brought me to this place, and how I knew the lord wanted me to be open and honest about my life. And that the Lord was using me to free other gay and lesbian people who really loved the lord and really loved the church and really didn’t want to be kicked out or thrown away. And I knew that this was not a course that I had charted, but that the hand of God of Providence had done this because I could have never in a million years thought of this. I would have never thought about writing about being openly gay for a song. None of this would have flowed from my natural intellectual. This was the Holy Ghost. This was God. This was what God wanted me to be about. And so that was real clear to me once it happened. And then, to put the period on it, one day Motown had called and said, “Your other check is ready.” So I go out on Sunset to get my check. And when I got off the elevator, there my picture was finally up in the lobby with Ross, everybody who was any body. And I said, “Only you, God.” And when I came down in the elevator, there was this young boy crying. And I said, “What’s

wrong?” And he began to tell me he was a holiness boy out of the Church of God in Christ. And he was gay. And his family had thrown him out. And he didn’t know what to do. And he loved Michael Jackson. I mean, he sounded so much like him, could spin and all, and I knew it was God that had caused this boy to be in this lobby. And he said, “But I know I could never sing for this company, because I am gay.” And I said, “Let me tell you, Sir, I am openly gay, and I’m signed to this company.” He said, “What?!” I said, “Where are you staying tonight?” He said, “I don’t have anywhere.” I said, “Well, come on and go home with me.” And I knew that the Holy Spirit was saying, “Don’t you touch him. Don’t you undress him. Once again, like that day in Washington, it’s your time to give back. I want you to be a mentor, a father. I want you to be the person in Christ that his daddy wouldn’t be for him is who I need you to be for him. And I need you to share everything I share with you. I need you to share your food with him, I need you to share whatever money I put in your pocket with him. I need you to show him how to take care of himself, show him how to get a job, show him how to put money in the bank. I need you to let me come through you and minister to my child, who I put in your path in that elevator at Motown Records.” Bobby must have stayed with me a month. I had broken up with my lover. And that kid, and you could tell he thought that was going to have to be what would happen. And I said, “Son, you sleeping on the sofa.” I said, “Here, you take this blanket, this pillow.” And he said okay. That night he called me Dad. He stood in the doorway of that bedroom, looked at me with that pillow (stuck on?) his head, and he said, “Oh, Dad.” And from then on, he called me Dad. And God used that boy to tell me, he said, “Your lover is coming back. He might be in Chicago,” he said, “but he’s coming back.” And the way he told it, I knew

it was true. He said, "You don't have to keep crying about that boy." And he had never even seen me cry. He said, "He's coming back to you." He said, "And I'm going to get my chance from Motown." I said, "Yes, you are." (?) So here was probably my first parishioner right there. On the heels of "I Was Born This Way." Right in the record company, down at the ground floor in the lobby, having been thrown out by his sanctified family, sanctified church, trying to find what he should do. He going to find a way to get tow hat to do, if the Lord had fixed it. So from that, the dreams are happening, stuff is going on. I go to the discos, I'm singing. People are rallying. I'm going, "Phew! I don't know what to do here, lord. I've got this love for the church, but you just sent this song, I'm in these clubs, I don't know how to figure this one out."

And so I began to continue to have the dreams, continue to have the dreams, go through that. I called Estelle one day and I said, "Estelle," I said, "I've got to preach. But I'm not sure what." I said, "and I know I've got to be openly gay." And I said, "I want you to ordain me." I said, "I know you're ordained in O'Neill's church. I just want a proper ordination. I don't want, I just want a proper ordination. I just need the papers, because I don't know what God is doing." So she gets hold of O'Neil that Carl Bean has called me and he's told me that, O'Neil went in prayer. And Estelle called me back, and she said, "Archbishop O'Neil said that what you have to do is so important that you need full papers that carry the full weight so that no one can mistreat you. So our convention is on the way here for August. He said if you're willing to go before his ordination board and be examined, and they say yes, they want to give you the full ordination of the denomination. Because the Spirit of God has told him what important work you're meant to do." I just hung up the phone. I couldn't even answer Estelle at that point. I

remember calling her back and I said, “Okay, if this is what God wants, to tell him I’m willing to take the examination.” I said, “But tell him, you know, what am I going to do with PhDs in theology and stuff like that?” So anyway, Old Holiness boy in me said fast and pray. So I went on a fast. No nothing. For days and days and days. August came around. I went to O’Neil’s house. His president, vice president, several officers on his board. Now he’s reconnected with First Church of the Deliverance. They examined me at his house. Estelle’s brother, Eddie Brown, who married Rosie Wallace, was in town. So Eddie was a part of that process. He had married Rosie, was living with Rosie. Rosie had had several hits, “God Cares,” and , what have you. He was there with O’Neill’s conference. So O’Neill’s people, they had to interview me. I was going through this thing, and I said, one of the dreams, it said--do not ask anyone about what I’m telling you, because they’re not going to be able to tell you. And that was so clear. So I just told them, now have you had some dreams. I didn’t go into then. But what I’m going to have you do, in other words, they going to try to dissuade you and tell you that’s not going to work. And that was made so clear in one of the dreams. I didn’t disobey him. So anyway, he came back and said, “The board said you passed with flying colors. And they believe it’s the call of God. And they’re going to step outside of the norm and fully sign on to you being ordained for this work. Because several of them got in the process, and it’s a special work that you’ve been called to do.” Those people made a full celebration for me that night. And all I had was me and my lover at that time. And Estelle, I didn’t (have any really guests?) there. They celebrated as if they were a part of what was happening. So when I walk out of the bathroom at some place that it was, they had all this food, he just said, “What do you want to call this

church? Because the lord has said for me to give you a charter tonight, to charter this work.”

And I said, “Unity Fellowship.” He said, “What?” I said, “Unity Fellowship of Christ Church.”

And he wrote on a piece of paper. And that same night that they signed all the mission papers, they chartered the church. I had no membership. I had nothing but the dreams that the lord kept giving me. And the time that I had spent in the studio with “I Was Born This Way.” So I said to a girl, I was over babysitting for Estelle. She was in Vegas again with Presley. And she asked me to come and babysit the kids. She said, “Carl, what you doing this weekend?” I said, Really, nothing.” She said, “Well I just don’t want to trust the kids with anybody. Would you come and babysit while I’m singing?” And I said, “Sure, Estelle, no problem.” And Vera Owens, who is in the church today, came by from O’Neil’s, looking for Estelle that Sunday evening. And she knocked on the door, the same house that O’Neil lived in, that I was ordained in, after he died, Estelle took over that house. She and her lover were living there. This was the same house that I was babysitting in. Vera knocked on the door. I said, “Estelle’s in Vegas.” I said, “Vera, what would you think if I were to say to black gays and lesbians, there is a whole discipline called liberation theology that is so different from what all of you are hearing. There are people within Christendom that are fighting for gays and lesbians to be included within the church of Jesus Christ. But our people don’t know it! They just don’t even know this exists.” She said, “I’d come.” And I definitely was not expecting this because she was from Keith Pringle’s “If You Confess the Lord,” she from the Pentecostal Community Choir. So I definitely wanted to (?), I’m trying to find a way out of this, really. She said, “I’d come.” I said, “You would?” She said, “Oh, yes. I would love to know more about that.” So in that same house, Estelle, Vera, Christine

Triffwe organized that same house. O'Neill is dead now, buried, several years. We organized there. And I begin to open up the Bible and then they got scared. So then I questioned God and I said okay, I'll tell you what, the *Sentinel* is L.A.'s biggest black paper. If I send in a notice that says, "Reverend Carl Bean, openly gay black minister, wants to have study groups around liberation theology." I said, if I send this in and they print it, then I'll know for sure it's the hand of God. Not only did they print it, they put it on the religious page with all of the black church advertisements. Reverend Carl Bean, openly gay black pastor, invites all to study, biblical study group around gays and lesbians and Christianity. Several of them ran like it was just God after that. Oh, no, no, that's too open, that's too out. That's the birthright there. That was the birth. I met with them in Christine Triff's home. And I began to open up the scriptures, talked to them about Sodom and Gomorrah. Talked to them about the history, what was going on, how it's really perceived by scholars, that the town didn't necessarily even exist. Began to just, they were like [grunts], just mouths hanging open. But the Holy Spirit began to really work with me at that process. All right. I go to a secondhand store. I get a cheap black jacket. I go to West Hollywood. I start hearing about this sickness. I try to get all the information I can get about it. I hear immediately that 60 percent of the children with it are black. Sixty percent of the women with it are black. I said, my people don't know this. I've got to go home to my people. So I go and I get this little jacket. It's so raggedy inside that if I sweat I won't take it off because it looks great outside, but inside it's just dry rot. So I couldn't let anybody see this. So I got my little collar, my little jacket. Nurses start hearing about me going to see people with HIV. Then they said AIDS. So they started calling people, the first little number I got.. They start calling

the reverend. *L.A. Times* does an article, they hear about me. “Reverend Goes to AIDS something” Big article. They put it out on Sunday in the community section. All I have is my little home number. They started calling. My phone rang off the hook. People called me from the bedside. People calling me, the news media covered me, black women on the bus, because I didn’t drive. I was a New Yorker. I didn’t know how. I’d ride to hospitals on the bus. I’m just using what I’ve learned. Just through, really now I revert back to my social justice early training. I go in, I pray, I talk about God. I just let the Holy Spirit really do it. I just use the love that was given to me back to people. God keeps giving notoriety, notoriety, notoriety. Next I get, Occidental College wants you on a panel with the man who named the virus from UCLA. MatelGreme from the organization that Liz Taylor was raising money from. Somebody from Liz Taylor’s office. And the little gospel boy who dropped out of school called me. I’m going, dear God, what am I going to say in this college environment? All the fears in the world come up. I get there, it’s packed to the rafters about this new disease. This man is a researcher. And I blanked on his name right now. But he’s the one who named it her in America. He tells about his research. The lady from the organization tells about whatever they do. The other person talks. And suddenly, Reverend Carl Bean. I said, “Look, I’m new at this. I don’t have a lot of research or anything like that. But I can tell you what it’s like to be black and homosexual and frightened. And to be, one institution you love turns its back. And I know that’s what God is calling me to do, is let them know that God hasn’t turned his back on them. I don’t know how I’m going to do it, I don’t know what I’m going to do. Right now I just visit hospitals and tell them God loves them. I hug them. Hold them. And I got a phone that they can call that they can

talk to them. And people are responding.” So that was that. The next call came from *USA Today*, a relatively new paper at that time. They did, I think it was “Six Who Made a Difference.” And they had chosen people from around America that had gotten involved in this virus. I was the only black one. I didn’t even know, again, about how big that paper’s distribution was. Out of that, in my NIMH context, we would like to know why and how you as a black church got involved. We can’t get other black churches to get involved. So we want to help finance your work. So we named it The Minority AIDS Project. I just told my little Bible study group, “Look, I just got to hospitals. When they asked me in the article, I just said ‘The Minority AIDS Project,’ I didn’t really have a name. But I don’t want you guys to feel you have to (face it?).” “Oh, no, no, no. We want to help.” So that was born out of that Bible study group, really. But it was really born out of Samuel Proctor. And when I really think back, it was what he put in me at the Lott Cary Christian Youth Fellowship at Virginia Union in ’56, ’57, whatever those years were. It was that that really, what was making it all happen. And needless to say, God continued to lift me. We started to have the worship services, because they asked me that year, and Easter was coming. And they said, “Rev, we’d like to have a worship service.” And I said, “A worship service?!” I said, “Whoa, wait a minute, you all.” “Reverend, we’d like a worship service.” So I said okay, it must be God again. So I went home and I prayed. And so they rented this place out in Englewood, the Cockatoo Inn. But we realized it was too far from South Central. So we decided to go into town to this theatre called the Ebony Showcase w. Which is Ebony Showcase, and Ebony Showcase was being run by Nick Stewart, who’s one of those Stepin Fetchit characters from back in the day. And Mr. Stewart loved gay

people and was from show business and said, "Yes, come on, do it here." And this theatre had a roof, holes in the roof, pigeons flying throughout. But we did it and they kept coming. They kept coming. Guys with AIDS just kept coming, kept coming. And I didn't have any particular way. I just let God show me. And the first thing I knew was I needed to affirm him. So I told everybody to just put your bibles down, close your eyes, and I started doing Affirmations that black, white, red, brown, lipstick, these words were just flowing. Gay, straight, bi, God loves you just like you are. God is bigger than HIV, bigger than just the word, it wasn't me, it was just flowing. When you read in our thing what we believed, that flowed. We had one more (officer, Matt?). I sat one night, and something just wouldn't let me go home. And it all flowed out of me, that God is alive in the Christian church, the Jewish synagogue. God is alive in the tribal dance. God is everywhere present. Revelation did not stop with the Bible writing. None of that comes from my tradition, but it came from my walk and journey with God. My whole work is showing me God bigger than, bigger than, bigger than, wherever you stop. By the way, when I told you about that Madonna that I was stumbling over and stepping over, I'll never forget the day when it came to me. God is saying, why are you stumbling over it? Why can't you see me female? Why are you stumbling? And I remember that. And I had to just go, whoa! And I remember that that's when God freed me to accept women on a level that I had not even seen in Providence. You know? That I certainly hadn't seen in Gospel. But here was God, God had come in this Madonna, showing me these people telling me, "You must go." I said, "Well, why was Mary, Mary ain't real in our tradition." I'm going to make it, but you know, I'm not going to see it as such. So in that process, I began to matriculate in love like I'd never known it. Because

God had me in situations. I remember once getting to a hospital, and they were so afraid of it. Doctors were afraid, nurses were afraid, everything. So they said, "You know, Rev, you need to put this one and this one and this one." And I said, "If I go through that door like I'm afraid of them, how can I tell them that God loves them?" So they said, "But you're taking on your own, you're taking a chance and we can't be responsible." I said, "If I'm supposed to go, let me go. But the spirit is saying to me do not go in there gowned, capped and masked, because you're not going to be able to do what I sent you to do." So I went, and God is so amazing to me. And I went in that place, in that room. They had left that man's breakfast tray outside where it wouldn't even, the nurses wouldn't even (?) that's how afraid they were. The black lady maid mopped the floors and stuff, brought that boy's food tray, sat on the side of the bed and started feeding him. Now Aunt Hattie and all them down in Mulberry, in Virginia, there she was, saying to me--this is why we took your hand and took you to church. Look at us. This is us feeding this boy. And we not afraid. And we trained you not to be afraid. It's God again saying-- I didn't send you to be afraid. The washer woman did this, scrubbing lady. By the way, that's what your natural mama was in that psych hospital, remember? I'm telling you, man! Only God! Only God can minister to your heart in ways like that. Only God! And so here I was, in this thing, ran completely out of money. Running from the landlord, sneaking in my apartment, scared to death. But I can't stop doing this AIDS work. Can't stop doing it. Can't stop doing it. I get a call from Robert Gordy. He hears I'm doing the AIDS work, phones me. "Carl?" "Yes." "This is Robert Gordy." "Yes." "Man, they're looking for you in Jersey. That record that some boy, put that record on a turntable, and it's done broke back out." It's '86, somewhere in there. I ain't

got a dime. “Man,” he said, “they’re selling like hotcakes in that Tri-state area. So they just wanted that number. You want me to give them that number?” “Yes. Give it to them.” They call me. “Oh my God, would you come down to Newark with Bradford?” I’ve lived in Newark. I left Newark coming to California. I said, “Well, yes, but you’ve got to know I’m in ministry now, and I’m not just a disco. If I do it, I’m going to do it in my collar.” “That’s all right. We had Tramaine, “Fall Down,” so that’s all right with us. This record is so big here!” I ain’t got a dime, man. I go to JFK. There’s a white stretch limo waiting for me, big sign, “Welcome Reverend Carl Bean to Tri-Cities,” blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. I get in. There’s this fully stocked bar, all this. I’m not believing. I cut this song in ’77. It’s 86. I can’t even tell them the jacket I got on got so many holes in it that I done (?). I go to this car, I said, “Listen. I’m an old gospel singer now... Carl. Don’t you leave me with no checks. Get back to L.A., and you just got paper.” So I said, “Look. A thousand dollars every time I sing this song. Cash. Because Zanzibar in Newark had a triple line at twenty a head wrapped around the block. Two shows, they want to do. Twenty a head! I go in, it’s a straight boy put this record on the turntable. A straight boy liked the way I was emoting, standing up for myself, and told me that the straights were the ones who brought it back out, because they thought it was great for somebody to be standing tall, being themselves. It was straight kids dancing to, “I’m happy, I’m carefree, I’m gay, I was born this way.” They’ve made it, whatever’s going in their life is the way they were born. And they have, I’m standing, God is there, look at me. Look. I want you to see me. Not how you think it should be. I want you to see me.

John S: They doing liberation theology.

Carl B: Yes! Look at me. I've got a thousand dollars. They clapped me back. I got another thousand dollars.

They clapped me back. I got another thousand dollars. We left the Zanzibar, they took me to

Jersey City. Thousand dollars. I left Jersey City, they took me to Paterson. Thousand dollars.

We left Jersey, we went to Brooklyn, about four stops there. We went to Manhattan, to the gay clubs in Manhattan. I think maybe it was a big black club in lower Manhattan that was big.

Better Days, I think it was called. Packed. The guys from Soldier Story was there.

John S: Rollins?

Carl B: Yes. That I didn't even know was from my hometown, from Baltimore, I didn't know at that time.

Packed! I could barely get in the club. Long story short, I get back to L.A., I was ducking my

landlord, that I hadn't had a dime. The song that God had the woman write, (?), I get back to

L.A., I had almost twenty thousand dollars. They had just had a big story in the paper about

people laundering drug money. I couldn't even find a bank to put it in. [laughs] I went to the

corner bank. I'm black. I've got this money in paper bags. [laughs] I couldn't even find a bank

to put the money in! And so I go to the black bank, and that's how we opened up

MAP's accounts. And I put the money in. And I'm walking away from that bank, say, what

does the song say? If you go, I'll go with you. Open your mouth, I'll speak for you. Lord, tell

me what to say. They won't believe in me. I will. That was it. The faith quotient about the work

then was settled. Because once again, there was no way anyone could have even written that.

That a record, that it was from '77, would be picked back up by a straight kid in '86, and spun so much that it would be picked up by straight kids and gay kids in this milieu of mixture in Newark. And then it spins over to Paterson, to Brooklyn, to Bronx. Then one of the labels put it back out, because it became so popular. Big Boy or Tommy Boy or something it was, re-put the thing out. The thing won't die! It was then re-released just a year or so ago again in New York. So the message, the theology, the truth of what God wanted Carl Bean to do really started at Mo West in '77 in that studio. And still to this day continues to reverberate around the world and set people free. This thing, I didn't even believe that we would do real church in L.A. Less for when New York calls and says, "We want a church." I, there's no way, and I tell them all the time, this is a miracle! It has nothing to do with me. This is ordained. This is God's thing. I am so aware that this is God's thing. I was sitting in here in my presidential suites everywhere we go. And last night I sat down, this room was filled with two new groups that want Unity. There was a group from South Carolina. And from northern North Carolina that Pastor Rawls brought in because they wanted to meet the Archbishop.. And all I've been hearing all this week was thanks for your yes. That's what the thing is down. I've never heard that till this week. And everyone wants to meet me, "Thanks for your yes, bishop. Because your yes twenty-six years ago allowed my yes to come now." When I got those roses, it was from the bus driver that was driving them back and forth between their churches. And he said, "Thanks for saying yes. For your yes." And all of them have been saying to me, "Thanks for your yes." And it's when he said it in that little house on Dallas Street, take this boy next door, basically to the church folk. And then when the church folk had the blessing and move to West Baltimore. And Miss

knocked on the door and said, "Can I take your boy to church?" Because my brother-in-law stopped his ministry here in Baltimore. And then Marcus Garvey Wood, Lady Snith, Samuel Proctor. Can we take him to Virginia Union during the summer and let him learn more about the Christ. Alex sitting in the club. Boy, I hear you over there harmonizing. "Boy, you want to sing?" And then Lee Young, Senior, the brother of Lester Young saying, "I want to sign you at ABC." And then Barry Gordry saying I want you to sing this song. This ministry, this is Jesus of Nazareth who they call the Christ, Who was introduced to me in the halls of Providence Baptist standing there that Sunday when Reverend Wood took that pulpit and Reverend White was going on in '51. I didn't realize I was being called right there, right then. Because I never will forget that moment when he transferred, and I couldn't take my eyes off of him in that pulpit. That's not (?) and just want to be there. And so, when a transgender kid walks up to me, "Unity saved my life." Or some kid says, "I was ODing from meth or heroin. And Unity showed up and saved my life." And then I think so many of them who died, never knowing that God really loved them. When I think of Sister and James and Brad and Jackie. It just tears me up. They went to their graves still not knowing that they were loved by the god that they sang for and gave their lives for and lived for so fully. And sometimes when I'm sitting in my church, I say, God, if I could have just done it a little earlier so that Alex and Ruth and Jackie could have been set free. Because the deepest pain in my life this day is the fact that they died with the question mark still in their hearts. And they had given their whole lives to the church of Jesus Christ. And so that's why I tell people, Unity is not mine. It's God's. I am but an instrument, and God continues to draw folk around me that are so broken. Even my last love

interest is so broken so badly, so destroyed. And God has never let go of my hand. And that's why I can never let go of his hand and others like him. So I just count it a privilege to be able to tell people that Jesus is available to anyone and everyone who just say yes to him. And that's really it. It's very little to do with me, and everything to do with God. Who really is love. And my purpose is to live the love that God told me to demonstrate through the message that God is, in fact, love. And that's beyond personification. That's beyond male, female, but love. God really is love. And that that really is available for everyone. And that that transcends all categories, all theology, all churches. Everything. It's just there and available. For birds, bees, flowers. God is love. And love is healing, and it delivers. And the only ache is that one, that I miss them. I'm surrounded by millions of people who love me and I know they love me. But when I, I just miss them. I miss them for the way they left. The way they left. And that's the ache today, that's because they nurtured me and they were so good to me and for me. And you know, I have to stand at Sister's grave and know that this great lesbian warrior in black Christendom has gone to this grave heartbroken when Jesus was everything for her. God was everything for her. Alex, fifty-one, what was that stroke. It's the conflict. But yet, at twenty-five, twenty-six, he said, "I'm too close to heaven to turn around." You know, he wrote a song, "What folks think about me won't keep me out of heaven." But I work with him in the club, and God let me—

[End Track Three. End Session.]

