Tyler Keith and I arrived at Barnard Observatory a little after 9:00 a.m. so that we could set up the recording equipment and discuss possible questions and interview topics. We selected the conference room for our interview site, set up the equipment, and waited for Alice Jones, manager for the gospel group The Weary Travelers: The New Generation. Our interview with her had originally been scheduled for yesterday afternoon (May 19), but she called mid-day yesterday to reschedule for this morning at 9:30. This morning, 9:30 came and went, but Mrs. Jones did not appear until about 9:55.

While we waited I had time to take note of our surroundings. The conference room is a high-ceilinged rectangular room containing a long table and about 20 swiveling chairs. Tall windows with indoor shutters occupy one long and one short wall, which face Grove Loop and Sorority Row. Tyler and I set up the microphone and recorder on one end of the table, checking the chairs the three of us would occupy to make sure they didn’t squeak.

At about 9:55 Mrs. Jones appeared, flushed and out of breath. She explained that she had been waiting for us since 9:30 in Ventress Hall, a nearby building to which she thought Tyler had directed her in their previous telephone conversation. (Barnard and Ventress are both brick buildings that have towers, and both are near the Grove, all descriptions Tyler gave her when giving directions.) Mrs. Jones mentioned that her daughter had driven her to campus and was waiting for her in their car. We talked to Mrs. Jones for a few minutes before beginning the interview to allow her time to catch her breath and collect her thoughts. During this brief conversation we learned that she got a degree in education at Ole Miss and had been teaching kindergarteners through 8th graders for about 30 years. She had hazelnut-colored skin, black shoulder-length hair, and wore an orange t-shirt and blue jeans. She had a ready smile that she used often; she seemed happy and quite at ease as she sat down.

After she caught her breath, Mrs. Jones expressed her willingness to begin the interview, so Tyler began by asking her about her beginnings in gospel music and then continued with questions about her involvement with the Weary Travelers—both the original group and the New Generation. Her late husband had been a member of the original group, and several of her children are in the New Generation group, and she explained her own role shift to manager after her husband’s death. She was familiar with the history of both groups and seemed to be comfortable talking about it; she answered Tyler’s questions with details and stories without much prompting from him. Her easy, personable manner revealed itself in her open expression, smiles, and frequent eye contact with both of us.
Mrs. Jones seemed quite willing to talk about the group and her own personal experiences with gospel music. She explained that The Weary Travelers perform not to make money but to further the message that “Jesus is Lord.” Her faith in God was evident in her answers, many of which cited God’s leading as reasons for the growth, changes, and successes the group has experienced. She seemed to sincerely believe what she said; her statements did not seem to be rehearsed, rote platitudes but seemed to be part of how she viewed her experiences. She used steady, expressive eye contact with us as she talked about her faith in God in almost every aspect of her musical experience.

About ¾ of the way into the interview, I had to get up to close the room’s doors that opened to the main hallway and stairwell of Barnard. I’m not sure why we didn’t think of closing them before the interview started, but people upstairs and in the main entrance area began talking and walking around. The noises they made began coming through the headset pretty clearly, so I got up and closed both doors. Mrs. Jones did not even look at me when I got up, and she seemed to maintain her train of thought without difficulty. Throughout the interview, cars on Grove Loop and Sorority Row were audible but not disruptive to the recording. Several times Mrs. Jones drummed her fingers on the table or traced circles on it with her fingernails; the noises made by those actions also came through the headset but did not seem disruptive—rather, they seemed to help Mrs. Jones to concentrate as she formed her answers.

When the interview was over, Mrs. Jones thanked us and left very quickly. She had mentioned that her daughter was waiting in the car, so perhaps she felt that she needed to make sure she didn’t have to wait any longer than necessary. She did not seem so hurried during the interview, however; she seemed content to take time to sort and articulate her ideas thoughtfully and thoroughly. Our interview ended at approximately 10:50 a.m.