

**University of Mississippi
Center for the Study of Southern Culture**

**Black Families in Yalobusha County
Interview with James Swearngen**

**March 10, 2021
Interviewer: Keon Burns
Length: 78:49**

[Interview Begins]

Keon Burns: 00:00 Today is March 10th, 2021. The time is 2:11. My name is Keon Burns, and I will be interviewing Mayor James Riley Swearngen. Could you state your name and date of birth for the record?

James Swearngen: My name is James Riley Swearngen. my date of birth is August 14, 1950.

Keon Burns: Could you tell me about where you grew up? The place you grew up.

James Swearngen: Well, I grew up in Oakland, Mississippi. My mom and dad, we were living in a place called Steubenville, Ohio which is about 39 miles from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. We was in that very northeastern part of Ohio in the coal country and steel mill country, and they broke up. Then my mom bought me and my brother and sister back to Mississippi. I was about eight or nine years old, and you talk about a culture shock. It was when we got back to Mississippi. I was raised across the street from the white school as we called it. And just across the street, came back to live with my grandmother and that is where she lived.

01:24

But our school was down in the country by Walker high school that is where we went to school at. That is kinda where I grew up for most of my young life, and all the way through 17, 18, 19 years old until we got out of school. But it was really a sight to see that where you lived at right across the street from a school, but you wasn't allowed, my grandmother told us not to even get on that campus, you know. Don't even go over there, but me and my brother were hard-headed and at night we would go over there. If they left balls out, we would probably get the balls, and we knew how to play football. We

watched them; we were there close enough to watch them. And they had a lot of things going like high jump, pole vault. We had all of that stuff behind our house.

03:01

James Swarengen:

We would get sawdust and build our own where we could put the cane and high jump and pole vault. We had a lot of things going on that our schools did not offer. Where our schools offer one sport and that was basketball. And you played it outside, and you know how many people it takes to make a basketball team, five people. If you had a ten member team that still wasn't [nothing] out of a couple of 300 people. Very limited, you had to be very good to play on that team, so we were very limited to our activities that we had in those schools in those days.

04:53

James Swarengen:

We learned to survive, because we had no other choice. We grew up in the town where you couldn't, there were maybe one or two black businesses, a barber shop maybe and a hamburger joint or something. Where people danced on Saturday nights or the weekends. It doubled for a hamburger joint or cafe as we called it. Everything, all law enforcement was white, so you had to be careful what you did and what you said. So, it was just a culture shock for me, but I learned that that was the way that life worked. I used to think about my grandmother she would tell us nawl don't do this or don't do that. We would say, "Man she is just so mean." But she was trying to preserve our lives because she know what would happen to especially young black males if they said the wrong thing or looked at the wrong thing or did the wrong thing. She said, "I would rather chastise y'all or maybe put the stick on you then see them do it." Because she had saw that happened in life. She was a great grandmother, and she just realized that that was the way we needed to be raised. Most of the times, we stayed in line; we really did. Yep, that is where we grew up right here in this little town called Oakland, Mississippi. Throughout the years, I have been here pretty much my whole life. I ventured off and worked construction in Oklahoma, Texas, Missouri, and different places. And I came back got a job, and I retired off of that job after 44 years in Grenada, Mississippi.

I ran for, the first time I ran for office was in 1980; I think I was 30 years old. I ran on a special election for an Alderman. One of the white guys died, and I come to the City Hall to

James Swearingen:

pick up my credentials. So, I could get it filled out and run, and the clerk at the time she called the mayor. She told the mayor; she say, "I got Swearingen over here, and he wants to run for Alderman." He said, "Well put him on the phone, let me talk to him." And I got on the phone, and he saying, "Well look, Riley." That is what they all call me. He say, "We gone have a full election next year, and we already got somebody there we are going to run on this ticket. We just need one of the aldermans died and we already have who is going to run on it. We are going to run the postmaster, Mr Hyland. And if you would just wait till next year, the full slate of folks and get on in." I say, "Oh, okay then." Then me and him hung up, and I told her that I still wanted to pick up my credentials because I don't know my folks. I will have to talk to them about whether I should run or not.

We had a group that we done organized called Concerned Citizens. I went back to the Concerned Citizens, and they said, "Nawl, you gone run this time." They said, "You gone run." There were a few whites who had joined on our side, you know. They done made some of them mad about something, so we had a few of them. And the election went on, and I won that election by six votes on that evening. I beat the postmaster, Mr. Hyland, who had been the postmaster ever since I could remember. And they tell me that they counted those votes that night until they wore them out. Then, it wasn't but three votes at the end of the night ahead of him, but that is the way I got to be Alderman.

Then I was the first contested black Alderman in the town of Oakland. They would run one black guy, he was a school teacher. We were at large systems, so they would run four whites and one black, and it was automatic that they would have their five aldermans. But I kind of disturbed that when I ran against the status quo, and I beat the status quo. And the next time around I did not run for mayor on the next one. But we did have a black guy, Mr. Franklin Jones; he ran for mayor. I served one year as Alderman. Then, it was time up for the whole slate of officers to be replaced, and Mr. Franklin Jones he became the first black mayor of the town of Oakland. That is the way that we get established here in Oakland being running for different offices.

After four years, I guess it was my, I was looking at it from my perspective, but I didn't think that Mr. Jones was doing the job that I thought he ought to be. So, I challenged him. The next board meeting, I mean the next round, I was elected mayor, and I served two terms, eight years as a mayor. Then I lost again to another guy, he beat me, so after that he stayed one term. After that I think I was out of office from 85, I went in 85, and I stayed through 93 or something. Then I was off for 4 years to 97. Then I come back, and I've been mayor ever since every four years I am re-elected as mayor.

They tell me a lot of times there all to be some term limits on it. I say, "It is. Four years." [Laughter] Four years is the term limit, and I can understand what they talk about. But long as the people want you, you run, sometimes you don't want to, but you run anyway just to give them an option.

Keon Burns:

Could you tell me some more about the concerned citizens group? Why was it organized?

James Swearingen:

09:09

It was organized because in our neighborhoods there were not paved streets, and there was harassment by police officers. It was just some of the same things that went on in all areas where blacks were being represented at. So, we thought that we wanted some changes to some of these, you know, get on the board in change things. It was a group of people that just got organized. We would meet and talk about the things that were going on. And what was not going on and trying to get unemployment into our town just basic things. You know, you get some paved streets and better sewage and water. You know, some of the necessities that we needed to make our town grow and prosper because there were no jobs. And stores were closing up, and with some of them still closed. We were anxious to do some of those things that's what that Concerned Citizens were looking at. We looked at that real good that is where that came about, and everybody that was there sitting in those churches, we would organize and meeting. They wasn't on our side but then it was party aligned. We had one lady, when she left out of the meeting, people would call her and her line was busy. Then they would call the mayor, the current mayor and his line was busy.

[Laughter]

So, we knew and sometimes we would throw the monkey wrench in as to say. We would say things that we knew that we wanted her to go back until him there wasn't going to actually--. In other words, we gone have this meeting with you, but tomorrow we go and have a different meeting. We would pull a lot of that. You have to learn how to do those things when you have those kinds of people involved. I don't know whether we are cleared of those kinds of people now or not. Where they still they do those kinds of scenarios. This is what the concerned citizens was, and I just believe in all communities both large and small you had to organize. We didn't have a branch of NAACP in Oakland at the time. We just organized what we called Concerned Citizens. That is where that came from.

Keon Burns:

Were any of the members of Concerned Citizens in any of the offices? I know they wanted you to run for alderman. Were there any other people that were already in offices or positions or trying to run?

James Swearingen:

No, there were no other members, but on that concern citizens, we had schoolteachers. we had people of knowledge; they would meet with us. And would try to show us the best way, leadership. We had ministers, and we had schoolteachers. We had lay people, maybe a businessman. We didn't have many, but those people who were conducting the business, end some working in businesses. They would be there; some of the people didn't want to be known that they were there because of their jobs. A lot of school teachers lost their jobs when integration came about; they would come up with something saying they were a part of the wrong side of the tracks or whatever. And they lost their jobs. They would find something to fire them about, so we had to be careful with handling that.

Keon Burns:

Once you became Alderman, once you got voted in that first time as a special interim Alderman, what did the concerned citizens want you to do then? Did they just want you to talk and be their voice for the group?

James Swearingen:

Yes, that is what it was. It was just to have a voice on the board of Alderman because the Alderman that was there, he was a great guy, but he just didn't question things. He didn't put forward too many things, and when I came on I started

asking about the streets in the black neighborhood, you know. Why, well we don't have money to do that. Some of them would act aggressive, I had one guy. He called me when I was introduced to the board by the mayor.

James Swarengen:

He said, "Oh, I thought his name was Riley Barton." That was one of the white guys that voted for me or had people to vote for me. He was making that I told him, "You got the wrong person man. I am Swarengen. Folks elected me just like they elected you." You had to be kind of stern with him because he was a retired something out of the military. He was way up in the military, so he was a very aggressive minded person against what we were doing anyway. We had to kind of just look at him from a different perspective, but the other aldermans told me there were times that he would read the minutes. When he would look at the minutes, there were some things that had happened that he didn't even remember [Laughter] happened.

They had another little place that they would meet; you could see them sometimes. If they didn't want him to know, and that was another thing. I kind of broke all of that up; it wasn't going to be, if it didn't come across this board. And it wasn't on our agenda or something, or we didn't vote to put it on. It was not on our agenda. It wasn't going to happen. You wasn't going to have a meeting somewhere else, and then come tell me that we voted on it like that. That kind of broke up a lot of that, you know.

They would do what they wanted to do, and then bring it to the meeting. Then say, "We voted on that such and such a time." He was a yes fella, but he was a great guy. But he was just a yes guy; I think he started doing better once he saw that he had some help on the board. Me being the young guy that I was, had marched with Dr. King and saw different things, you know. I was just a little more aggressive than he was, you know.

Keon Burns:

Is that part of the reason you wanted to run for alderman because you marched with Dr. King because you've seen all these things? Is that part of the reason why you wanted change for Oakland?

James Swarengen: 15:55 Yes, it was. When you grow up in that kind of environment. Where you are right there at a school, but you had to go to school 2 miles down in the country. You saw the things that happened, it kind of builds up a resistance in you to the way that these people have projected for you to go. It is not nothing that, you are kind of resistant to those kind of things. You say that I'm going to make a difference if I can. Back in that day in the 70s and during those times, you had to be brave to want to confront some of these people because they were very aggressive, some of them. If any way they can keep the crumb from landing your way, they would. [Laughter] When you get involved with this, then they got the banks; they got this; they got that.

These are things that if they could fight you in any of it; they would be more careful about it because they say, "Look he ain't gonna be easy to deal with probably." They was gone before it was over with most of them got beat because we had the numbers. Once we got our folks registered, because it wasn't many of them like it is now in the city limits. I think we got more now than we had people back then because a lot of them is leaving. A lot of them are dissatisfied with what was going on. They started moving to other places where the people were more aggressive minded trying to have things and do things; they left. It was pretty much an easy go for electing black officials in this town.

Keon Burns: Earlier on when you were growing up in Oakland, did you ever run into any trouble with law enforcement or anything like that?

James Swarengen: 18:06 Oh yeah, we would run into it, and I had a brother at 16 years old. I think they were gambling at a friend of ours house, and they came in and arrested, they were looking for somebody. They say they had stole something or something, but they arrested about five or six. We had a very racist sheriff then by the name of JG Buster Treloar, and he took my brother to jail at sixteen, fifteen or sixteen years old. He had a billfold in his pocket, and it contained a white girl picture, my mom worked for these people. You know how they would give you \$2 and let you bring home all the newspaper, and the things that they did not need anymore.

He had this girl picture in his pocket, and he said. there was another guy there and he said, "Who's picture? don't you have better sense than to carry a white girl picture around in your pocket." That is what the sheriff told him. My brother said, "Nawl, my momma bought that home." [Buster Treloar said,] "You are carrying that around it around like that?" and he said, he just hit him upside the head when his gun belt or something.

James Swearngen:

He said, "My brother never would cry." You know, he didn't break him down. He was a tough boy, and he just wouldn't cry, you know. My brother told me, that he beat him with the gun built this Treloar guy did at 15 or 16 years old whatever he was. Then he threwed him in a cold cell, one of those cool cells. He said, he told me, "Riley that is when I had to cry. I broke down then." But they went over and got him. That was something I always, That guy once upon a time, he did kill a man In that jail over there. He killed a man, his last name was Daniels , he beat him to death. This was the kind of, they had a group of them it was Treloar, Lloyd Hue, Charles Hill, It was a bunch of those guys back in that day. If you got caught doing anything, you had a bad day.

This was the kind of resistance that we were up against growing up , and we had those people who would ride around with those rebel flags on their cars. If you saw them, most of them, we were walking when we was young. A group of us would go and play basketball it's somebody house, and we were walking back. And we would be the target for some of those guys with the rebel flags on their trucks and things. What we call, was intimidating you. We would have to hit the bushes sometimes . We see a car light coming , and if it was dark, we would just hit the bushes where they could not see us.

James Swearngen:

They know we were down that way, so that was the things, then if you go over to the law and explain to them what was going on. "Awww them boys ain't doing nothing." The law was not made for , at that time, they had not made a law that was against a black man that a white man would enforce. We were just, it was just bad times during those times, growing up in Mississippi . Then I could imagine before our time because Emmett Till got killed not too many miles from here. It was just a bad time for all of us.

Black man growing up in Mississippi during the 50s, 60s , 70s, it was just tough you know . We were just up against, if you go to the courts in things you didn't have a chance . Whatever they tell you, you didn't have a chance, so the best thing for you to do is just try to stay out. If you spoke out, or ran for office or something like that then you became a target to a lot of them. My mom told me say a lady told her, one white lady told her said another white lady told her said, “ Well, you know we got a nigger on the board now.” she told them, “ Well, I don't know what you are talking about when you say nigger.” She played dumb she said, “ Because you already had a black on the board if that is what you are talking about.” But he was a high yellow guy, you know. she said, “Well, they say they have a nigger on the board over there.” Me, I am black, you know. [Laughter] I am color black, you know.

I guess those were just things that we had to put up with, but not all the whites were bad, period we had some that was. I know my Mama went and told a gas she was working about about what happened to my brother over there in jail when that Treloar beat him over there. She told him. She said, and they got on him. They told him, but it didn't do much good, you know. He didn't care because he was just that racist type guy. He was the sheriff and he did what he wanted to do, and he had deputies that also did he demanded to be done. We went through some tough times in this part of Yalobusha County. I am sure it was going on all the way around because I heard a lot that was going on later on when I became the president of the NAACP of Yalobusha County. You know we would fight cases were people were getting beat up and this, that, and other. It was just a bad times, you know.

Keon Burns:

I know the Daniels guy you bought up, Woodrow Daniels.

James Swearingen:

Woodrow Daniels was his name right.

Keon Burns:

You would have been too young at the time you wouldn't have been president of the NAACP.

James Swearingen:

23:45

No, I wasn't. I wasn't. I didn't come on until I think 83 or 84 when reverend George (23:55) was the president, and I was the vice president. He left and moved to Tupelo. And that is

when they appointed me to be the president of the NAACP Yalobusha County.

Keon Burns:

How did your mom and grandmother teach y'all how to handle yourself and protect yourself when y'all were running around playing?

James Swearngen: 24:17

Well, my grandma she taught us to always be observant wherever you were . Watch what is going on, don't get with the wrong crowd. Folks stealing and doing stuff like that because she knows that that would have been a bad thing. You get in trouble, and they are going to send you down the road to reform school if you were young. We had some guys who were pretty tough back in those days. They would do some things . She tried to stir us away even though my brother and I sometimes got into stuff. I never would steal, but I would do things that was not right concerning a lot of people and things. It was just that you did not stand a chance.

If you done something my grandmom always taught us. She would tell us to go in the backyard and play cause we got off the bus. We got off on the corner down there, and we started up the street to where our house was. White school was still going on; they were there. But during the summer months, during farming time, we didn't leave on no farm or nothing, but they would dismiss school around lunch time. So that black kids could go the cotton fields or go farm whatever they had to do. We had to walk their screens to go home, and it was a group of white kids .

James Swearngen:

Some group of them would be there every day when we got off the bus. When we head up that street, it would be nigga, nigga, nigga, nigga. From the time we got off the bus until we made it to our house That is what they would call us. It was just a song, we sang, and we didn't want to take it but our grandma she told us, " Y'all come on." she would stand in the yard a lot of times to make sure because we wanted to throw rocks at them. We wanted to get even with them as to something, and it wasn't all of them, it was just a certain group of them. They were going to be there that same day to say those things. It was boys and girls, girls would be laughing, here we come up the street and they call and us, "Nigga, nigga, nigga, nigga."All the way home until we got home because we lived right there in the neighborhood. That

was some things that agonized us, so you grow up with that in you.

You remember a lot of those things, and I can live with it now a lot better than I could live with that then. I see things a lot different than because my grandmom wanted us to live to get grown. A lot of times when they grew up back then your best out was to when you finish school or get out of school or quit school whatever you did to go north. Go north, you know because that's what they wanted you to do. They knew it would be better up there for you than here because there wasn't any jobs. You would have to work for those people for minimum wages. And if you didn't be mighty careful, you would get in trouble. it wasn't something that you needed to go to jail for , but they were going to put you in jail.

I remember one time getting a ticket from one of the law man. I had a car it was smoking, you know. He gave me a ticket; he said, “ Your muffler is bad on this car.” I said, “A muffler.” Because I took auto mechanics in school, I said, “ Muffler don't make it smoke. The engine is gone.” He said, “ Well I say it is your muffler and I am giving you a ticket for an improper muffler. And that is what it is ” I said, “ Maybe I can talk to the judge.” He cursed and said it, “You just try that, you just tried that.”

And I got to the judge, and I rating he told the judge. And I told the judge. I started to and he told me, “ Yeah Mr. Hughes told me about your smart [Laughter]” So what chance did I have? I had to pay my ticket, you know. That is all the choice that I have was to pay the ticket. These were some things that growing up as a young man here in Oakland you had to endure. And you had to really stay on your P's and Q's not to have to go to jail and do time and stuff like that For something that was minor. And I am sure that it was going on all the way across the state of Mississippi. I am sure the state of Mississippi. I don't know where else, but it was tough here.

Keon Burns:

When you did graduate, when you were done with school did you decide to go north?

James Swearngen: 28:50

No I didn't. Has started working , I worked construction here in Grenada for a little while. I drove some trucks and things. I had a friend , and he asks me, “Come on and go out of state with me.” We were building Interstate 40 across Arkansas. We worked on Interstate 20 across Texas in Louisiana. We

were furnishing cement to a company called TL James. They were building the highways; they were built out of concrete then. I worked like that for a couple of years, and I made good money. But we were young, and we were blowing it because we were in a different town or city every three months. We would have to move because we would get the work done here.

I did that for a while and then I come home in the early 70s, I think. I started working at a factory here down by Grenada. I come home and got married, and I started that up. That is where I stayed for 45 years trying to send kids to school. I had six kids, and all of them at least got a bachelor's degree. I worked hard to try to get that done, you know. That is where we have been for the rest of our lives.

Keon Burns:

What did your grandmother and mom do for work?

James Swearngen:

They both worked. They were domestic workers. They worked in them people's houses. Back then it wasn't nothing else for them to do. They either work in them people's houses because we didn't live on a farm or nothing like that. My grandma had a little house, and that is where we lived all of our lives. There with my grandma, all of her kids were grown, so Mama came back and lived with her, you know. brought us back to Mississippi, and that is where we lived with our grandmom. That is all they did, they would go work for those people for minimum wages and try to keep us. My dad he went into the military, so they got some money from him for a long time. But it was tough trying to make ends meet because there just wasn't any money. There were no jobs, so me and my brother were glad to get a job where we could go out and earn some money.

That was the main thing to try to get jobs where we could buy cars and things like that. We did buy old cars, you know. buy one car I think it costs \$50, and we kind of got it going because I was in that auto mechanic school. And I learned how to rebuild engines and stuff like that and get it going. I was blessed with that.

Keon Burns:

What was your first job? Was it the construction job? Was that your first job?

James Swarengen:

The first job was when I was going to school I used to work for this man, he had an auto mechanic shop. That is what I used to do for him . My first job me and my brother was mowing lawns. We had this guy come by and he would pick us up. I couldn't chop cotton; I got to chopping cotton in this man field. He had a big truck that would come to little downtown Oakland, and he would park his truck. And all the town's kids would get on the truck as to go on the field because there wasn't nothing else to do for a bunch of us kids during the summer. They would all get on the truck, and I would get on that truck too, get my little lunch and a can of vienna and a pack of crackers maybe or something.

James Swarengen:

We would, but I never could get to catch the chopping cotton. He put me over there with some ladies, older ladies. They say, "Boy you better come on." I wanted to be over where most of the young folks was where they were talking and discussing everything. But they put me over there with them people, and I was trying I didn't know morning glory, that is a weed that grow. He say, "That boy chopping down all of my cotton." I work Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, and when I got to get on that truck that Thursday, he said, another guy had met with him they lived on his farm. He said, " He don't need no more help today. [Laughter] I went back home and my momma said, "What happened to you?" I said, "He told me that he didn't need me." She said, " Did everybody else get on there?" I said, "Sure did." She said, "Well, you need to find you something to do besides sitting around here."

James Swarengen:

I was about fifteen or sixteen years old. This guy come by, he say, "Hey, you want to help me mow some lawns?" I said, " I sure will." Three dollars a day chopping cotton, four dollars a day for mowing lawns, and we didn't start mowing until the dew was off. You couldn't go out there while the grass was wet, so I came out and been done went home and run water in them tubs, one of them tubs, and took my bath and be back in town sitting down there waiting on the truck to come in. So I came out better, that way, and I learned how to do that. I went into the mechanic thing, so I worked in shop, worked on commission for how much I did. If I tore down an engine and put it back in a certain time, you know when a man had to have his car back. I get paid my part too, you know. It was a pretty good thing. Then I left and went out of state, you know. I had to have more money, you know.

Keon Burns:

What made you want to go to auto mechanic school?

James Swarengen:

34:25

Well, it was an option, I wasn't doing nothing in school you know. I was an A student, but I just wasn't interested. So that was another part that I could do in high school. I did that. I really liked that because we had an instructional part, four hours in the shop, I mean in the classroom, four hours in the shop. I excelled in that, and I was probably one of the best. I got certified in it where we could. I got a diploma or whatever they call it. I could tear down an engine, throw it all out there, put it back together, and fire it up. I was good at it; I knew the classroom instructional part.

James Swarengen:

We had this guy from Valley State. He was our instructor, and we could take an engine. If we have to take it, take it all apart, take the pistons out of it. He said, "When you go out there, Swarengen, and tell me the cubic inches. How many?" And I had my caliber and everything, and I go out there and measure. And I come back and do that and tell him times pi, you know. And figure out how many cylinders, and I tell him, I be within one of a cubic inches of it. But a lot of those guys, they didn't care, you know. They didn't want to be there; they want to even be there. And they didn't learn nothing. They didn't even try. It was a benefit in that man.

I just wish that I could have pursued that. You didn't make money back then. I used to do a lot of mechanic on the side, but people didn't pay like they do now. You take one of these vehicles to the shop now. I think it's about \$100 an hour, you know. And they are going to tell you what it's gone costs before they--. We have to pull this transmission, it is going to be six hours at such and such amount to pull it. Six hours to go back with it with it whatever.

James Swarengen:

I did, what else did I do? Oh, yeah I did go back to school. We had a thing the Mississippi conference for black mayors. When I first became, it wasn't but about 18 or 20 black mayors in the state of Mississippi. They were all mostly in the delta it wasn't, I believe I was the furthest one back toward the hills. It was eight or nine in Bolivar County. Mount Bayou and all of those cities over there, you know. And Tutwiler, Mississippi and a few and Tallahatchie, but mostly over there in the Delta where the black mayors were.

The last count I had it was about 80 something of those now, but back then it was less than 20. I believe that Bennie Thompson may have been one of the black mayors at the time. Because those towns were becoming predominantly black back toward the Mississippi River. That is where the greatest concentration of black folks live was the Mississippi delta, you know. Nowadays I assume that a lot of people have left the Delta, but we had a man down at Tougaloo college who was teaching us stuff when we first got to be mayor. He, Dr. Karsky, I believe he taught us the way they use the gerrymandering and redistrict.

James Swearingen:

And the only way we got a black congressman in the state of Mississippi was there we got Mississippi redistrict where we ran the line north to south. And have your district like this up and down like the Mississippi Delta where you took in the greatest concentration of your blacks. You start all the way up at the (38:10) and you went all the way pass down where Alcorn at way back down that way. All on this side of the river was predominantly black people, you know. The way they had it drew up years ago, they had the districts running east and west. First district it would get some of the blacks. Second district it would get some of the blacks. Third district. it was five districts then congressional districts, but now it's only four. you were not ever going to elect a black, never. But when we got it redistrict soon, that is the way we had to do in all these counties. We had to do here in Yalobusha County, redistrict in this county NAACP and SCLC CNR.

When we redistrict this county here, we had to get it to where we had two predominantly black districts, you know. We thought here in this district, the water valley, they went on and elected their first black supervisor, James Nicholson. He was the first one. I think they had about 63% black when they got ready, you know. But we over here, we had in the 50s 58, 59% blacks, and we thought that we could do it. But you couldn't for that not then. We had to get up at least to 59 or 60% in this district which I live in before we could do that. An all-black supervisor because of the guy over in Cleveland, I forget his name.

He used to do the lawsuit for us in the county, and well, he was doing them all over the state of Mississippi. He said,

“Man, y’all promised that y’all would, when in these courts, y’all told these folks if they give y’all fifty-five percent that y’all would elect a black.” We had a white guy in this district. Them black folks go out and vote for him, and he would have a big party. But when we finally got the right guy, we been black every since, you know. We got two black supervisors at all times now in the county, but that is the way you had to do over the whole county. Because they would draw up those lines, they had been gerrymandering and doing in national and everywhere else to get these congressional districts.

Mike Espy he was the first black elected congressman in the state of Mississippi since reconstruction. We all worked hard to get Mike in there people, the black Mississippi conference of black mayors, the legislatures, everybody once they drew that district from north south. And included all of the Delta black folks dead is where we came together and elected our first black congressman.

Keon Burns:

Do you remember the first time that you went to say registered to vote or even the first time that you went in voted? Was that in Oakland, Mississippi?

James Swearingen:

41:04

Yeah, yeah. The first time I voted, the first time I went to register to vote. I had to go to Coffeenville to the county courthouse that was the register. We had dual registration at that time you had dual registration you had to register at the county in the town. If you were going to vote in the city election, would you have to be in a little municipal district? You had to vote there, but now it is a different story. If you register with the county they will send your registration to the city and let you know that you are registered or vice versa. People can come here and register then we will send it to the county that they did register. It is better now. But they used to make you run from want to the other when you get registered.

Keon Burns:

That seems like it would decrease the amount of people that get registered.

James Swearingen:

Oh yeah, it did. It was discouraging because some people transportation wise and some of them, which a lot of people still they don't exercise their voting rights like they should. They don't do it. Sometimes I look at I, I look at the aggression that has been going on in Georgia. they have really

been on top of things over there, but Mississippi, we, have not had in aggressive registration in following up on it. And making sure that people are registered to vote, and that is what it is going to take to be able to elect a statewide officials here. Because everything we got in the state of Mississippi now is on the republican.

And I am not saying that blacks would not run for republican, but to be able to get them it would be harder. Even democrats or republican or independence as far as that go, we learned that when we were going to, I went to Arkansas State University to get certified in public administration. There was a grant that they gave Mississippi conference of black mayors, and we would go up to Arkansas every other week, I believe. We was being Friday, Saturday, and Sundays going to school learning how to be good administrators. They had a lot of things back then when we were young in government that they would have something for you. Where you could get taught and learn how to be more aggressive and learn how to bring something home to your constituents. Those were some of the things that we used.

Keon Burns:

What did you learn when you were younger about voting registration? Did your grandma or mom tell you about like?

James Swearngen:

James Swearngen:

Yeah, my grandma she was the one. My mom was an aggressive person, she didn't care. my mom was young, and a lot of time she would cuss folks out, black, white, they say she was crazy. Because she would do those things if they made her mad. But my grandma was the one that really taught us the things, she used to get Jet magazines. Her son used to send her the Jet magazine, and we would see all the stuff. That was about the only way that we could figure out what was going on in other parts of the world because the local papers wasn't gonna have nothing pertaining. But she would see where this was done because she had a son, but she didn't have but one son. And he was in the military, and he got out in Washington DC. That is the one who used to sell the whiskey when he was young. He would go to Memphis and get that sealed whiskey, But he went into the military and got out up in-- he was working at Walter Reed hospital in Washington DC, and he was in the jet one time. She kept that Jet, and she would show it to everybody. He was making up a bed at Walter Reed hospital back then. He made sure that she had Jet magazine

every time they came out, I don't know what it was a monthly or weekly but whatever it was. I don't hardly see Jet no more, but that was a great help to us back then. They had that Emmett Till thing in there; that woman let them put the full picture. Man I'm going to tell you a lot of people say that really was the start of the what you call it here in the South. The movement. It started a lot of the bus boycotts over in Alabama.

Keon Burns:

Speaking of the movement, when did you join the movement? When did you decide--?

James Swearngen: 46:00

I joined the movement kind of in, when I marched with Dr. King we had not had a real aggressive nothing going on in the South. I was a young person; I was 16 years old or right at 16. It was three guys, it was me, Larry Dear, and Frank Ed. We decided that we are going to go in March with Dr. King. so we went up to Panola County and got somebody to take us up there. we got out, in that is where I learned don't ever wear too small of a shoe. I go up there with my little shine shoes that somebody had given me. I think they were Stacy's [Adam], but I had them shiny. I didn't need that kind of shoe out there marching. [Laughter]

James Swearngen:

That is when we really got aggressive. We had a lot of people talking about killing us and all of that stuff because we were marching. As a matter of fact, we was marching down through there some people from here was up there sitting beside the road in little (47:01) boys and girls, white people. They, a state trooper held the whole march up told them to move the car, and they told him that it would not crank. He had to be out there, so I guess he was mad. He told them if y'all don't get that SOB [Son of a bitch] I will push it down the hill. We are was laughing, but all the time when we were marching we had a guy. I don't know if he was from the KKK, he had to protect him too. He had a sign on that said, "Don't be anti-white or white trash." He marched along there with us every day. He would sit over there when we would stop, break, or something, he would sit over there by himself. They had to protect him just like they protected us, you know.

James Swearngen:

We was singing and all of those things. seem like Lyndon Johnson, or somebody was the president at that time. And we would sing, "State troopers got to go and Lyndon Johnson."

We were just signing, you know. We used to have fun during that. Now there was a twenty-four year old white woman there for one day or so. She told me that she was from up in Michigan, and she was married. She had two kids, and she done come down here and joined the march. She was here, marching with us every day there you are in the 60s marching beside a young white lady.

49:30 But man that was some[thing]. They look at that, and they are showing it on film at night, you know. Because when we got there, somewhere, one black guy he jumped in the march. You know everybody is standing on side of the roads when you go through these little towns just looking, you know. And they say this boy jumped in there and marched just a piece and got back out. And his daddy saw him on television that night. [laughter] Ohhh, he got onto him you know.

James Swarengen:

But I couldn't understand it, I often speak to people, and I tell them nowadays that I couldn't understand it back then about why they wouldn't get involved. But I understand it more, a lot of them was living on these folks' plantations. And they was living on the place, folks place where they had to-- And these folks would make you move, you know. You didn't have nowhere to go; it was a lot of intimidation. Like I told them, I didn't have that problem because my mama wasn't going to do that.

Because at 16 years old I went out to the grocery store; we had grocery stores in Oakland then. I went down there, and my brother had been working with gas putting a septic system and a septic tank in because we didn't have a septic system. There was this white guy, they were working at his house putting a septic tank. He had me in my brother kind of mixed up, you know. And he said; he was about drunk and he said, "you through digging that hole, putting that." And I told him; I said, " I ain't been digging no hole."

James Swarengen:

And he called me a nigger; he said, [starts yelling to imitate guy] " Nigger you know you been digging that, I asked you nigger." He started following me through the store. "Nigger I asked you if you through digging that hole. Putting that septic tank in there. I got to move in that house or some or there you know." I know he was talking about my brother, you know. I went on back home and I told my mama. I said, "Ma that man

when I was down there he kept calling me a nigger.” She said, “ Well, you gone back in the back, back there, and just don't pay him--.” My grandmother was dead then. She said, “ Don't you go back down there.” I went on back in the house and went out the back door. I went back down [Laughter].

When he started calling me nigger that time I lit into him, and I knocked him all up in them stuff. And he was falling. Then the managers, a man in his wife, white. They come around, [Imitates yelling] “You get out of here! You know better than doing that. Why you do that man like that?” He was kind of bleeding. Then I walked to the outside of the store, and it was some black guys out there. How was going to stand around an older black guy. Man, they act like I was a tiger or something. [Laughter] They didn't want nothing, but after a while, I went on back home up the gravel street.

And I looked up in about 30 minutes, and I saw a car coming up through there. I hadn't told my Mama, I went on in the house. it was them black men; they told my Mama. They call her baby sister; they say, “ Baby sister, you better try to get him away from here tonight because he done that old man pretty bad down there.” My momma said, “Who was it down there?” She said, “Somebody was down there calling him a nigger and doing. He said, “Yeah.” I forget that old man name come but she said, “Yeah, he come home and told me about that man.”

She said, “ Well, I appreciate y'all coming up here and telling me.” She said, “ But he ain't got nowhere to go. He ain't going nowhere, and ain't nobody coming up here and fooling with him.” That is what my momma said. I knew she kept her piece [gun] with her, you know. She said, “ Ain't nobody coming up in--.” They said, “Well, we just come tell you did you might need to get him on away from here.” She said, “ He ain't got nowhere to go, and he ain't going nowhere. And ain't nobody coming up here.” She used the “F” word, you know. I knew my momma man, so I went back on in the house. she came in there and got on me talking about, “I told you not to go back down there.” She was getting on me. I never heard no more about that from that day to this one. [Laughter]

Keon Burns:

She didn't play.

James Swarengen:

She didn't play. That man what happened to him. I guess did nobody else pay it no attention. Because when I was working on cars, he bought his car to the shop one day, and the shop man told me. He said, "Go with him to see what is wrong with his old car." His car was missing, you know. He said, "Just ride down the road with him." I was like, "Ride down the road with this man?" He told me, "Come on and get in." I got in his car, and I figured he done forgot about this. that old man reached to go under his seat, and he reached up under there. And I hit brakes. [Claps his hands to imitate hitting brakes] He said, "Oh man." and started crying like a baby. [Imitates crying] "I am sorry man whatever, you still--." And he come out with a bottle of whiskey, and he want me to take a drink of whiskey. And he want me to take a drink of whiskey. [Laughter]

James Swarengen:

Man, you talking about some went all over me; I hit them brakes. I said, this guy fina come from out under there with a gun. He still remembered that night that I beat him up down there, but he didn't. And I never heard any more about that, sure didn't. Them old men was scared; they were scared. Anytime you do something to a person like that, you know back in that day. You supposed to have left. Yep.

Keon Burns:

Mama didn't play.

James Swarengen:

Mama didn't play. She never did. My grandma was one of the best old ladies. She was very, she didn't finish college or nothing, but she went as high as they go in school around here you know. She went over to another place called Free Spring Academy back in them days that is where she finished up it. She told me 8th grade, you finished a grade that was about like high school back in them days. Then you had to go to somewhere else to go to school to try to fit you some more studies in.

Keon Burns

Was she really big on educating and making sure y'all--?

James Swarengen:

Yeah, she would tell us that that was the only way you are ever going to do anything. She will get that Jet magazine and show us where people then made it, and had good jobs. And living well, and doing things. Yeah, she told me; she say, "Y'all I wish your mom had stayed with your daddy up there. I tried not to get her to marry at first you know." My mom

married when she was really young 16, I think. She married real young. She said, she tried to get her not to do that.

Keon Burns:

Did y'all have a local church in--?

James Swearingen: 55:05

Yeah, I still go there. I still go to the same church. I am the chairman of the board at Ellis Grove church. We still go there. Most of my family still go the ones that are left. The rest of them; a lot of them are out in the graveyard. But yep sure did. My church is here in Oakland. Your city limits run all the way up against another county. I'm in Yalobusha County now, but I could go just that way probably half a mile. And I am in Tallahatchie county. My church sits over in Tallahatchie county, sure do. we have a lot of black churches in and around the area. And a Church of God in Christ, there are plenty of churches around this little-- I told them, we have more churches than we have anything else here in Oakland.

Keon Burns:

Do y'all have any other black businesses around?

James Swearingen:

We don't have no black businesses. There's a guy who has a little tire shop that he opens every now and then, but we don't have no black business. All the stores are own by the Arabs or white, mostly Arabs now. We annexed everything since I've been married, we annexed everything all the way out to the Interstate and on the other side of the Interstate. All of that is within the city limits. we have a factory here that employs about 400 people, Windsor food or Ajinomoto they make Mexican and Asian foods and stuff. They pay pretty good. We don't have enough people in this town to keep them going, but you have all around you Grenada, Charleston, in Water Valley different places people come here and work, you know. We are in need of right now some housing. I believe if we had 20 houses today we could sell them all because people working at the plant they want to live where they work it. That is something that we have to work on to try and get some housing in here.

Keon Burns:

When you ran for office and became the mayor of Oakland, what is the first thing that you wanted to do for Oakland?

James Swearingen: 57:28

One of the first things I wanted to do was try and get grants to pave the streets, and you know. We wanted some businesses. But when I first became mayor, we were confined to the

original Oakland which was 1/2 a mile radius, you know. And all of the downtown little businesses were down. I think when I became mayor, I don't think we were selling a gallon of gas within the municipal limits that was something. So you didn't have any revenue, and that is what has happened to a lot of the Delta towns. Everybody is gone; they are drying up on you. The same thing is happening here, so I had to reach out to the Interstate we had a couple of businesses over there. I said, look I got to get it.

James Swearingen:

So I got a legislator, he was a Democrat his name is Tommy Reynolds. He been in the state legislator for about 40 years just about, but he is still a staunch Democrat. He called me last night; he said, "Your share, if the stimulus bill passed today, they are going to give citizen towns some. your share would be \$112,000 coming to Oakland, you know." Because he keeps up with all that stuff, I do too. And it did pass today; I am thinking that that stimulus bill--. And that money he said, "That will help you toward it." I just got a grant to do four hundred and a half million dollars almost to redo the sewage system.

So you have to keep, you have to rely on grants and things like that to keep your water and sewer going. Because you don't want to burden your folks just out of it. You got to make them try and keep up though, but back then that was the main thing to try and get the streets paved. And have some industry, and I didn't realize back then was industry. We used to hop on these folks about a job, you know. The other group of folks that was here before us, we used to tell them about we needed some factories. We need a factory. But when we got out there, and I found out myself. We didn't even have an infrastructure for that would even support a factory, so we had to work on that.

James Swearingen:

I had the chairman of the gas board too that operates kind of independent from the town. We ran a gas line. We were able to get a grant and a loan to run a gas line from Coffeerville to Oakland. We got to supply this plant and most of those people who want to be on natural gas. That was a help because that propane is high, and they steady go up on it. They are in control of that; we got natural gas that was one reason that put us on the right track.

I worked with a lot of these people in and around the area both white and black that wants to see things. Even Water Valley and places like that want an industrial board. So we were able to get this plant here. It started off as a beef plant where they kill cows and do all that. It turned out that they went out of business, and this other plant comes in after a few years. And you are probably too young to know about the great beef plant as they call it. The state ended up buying it, I mean the state were backed about \$40 million, and when they went out of business. One guy went to prison because he embezzled some money and all that stuff. The guy who was running it. It turned out to be a good thing because that place done expanded, and I got a call the other day.

James Swearingen:

They about to expand again, seventy-five more jobs. In the population of Oakland probably around six hundred. We can't supply that most of our people are elderly too you know. Those were the things that you know you wanted to do. I saw some things come of them come into fruition. You got a job, but everybody that wants to work have a job. If they working in Grenada somewhere that is where I worked at all of my life. But a lot of them are working here now, you know. They are at home and trying to get--. I just wish that we had more businesses were African Americans because we had businesses, and we realized that your ice just ain't cold enough. [Laughter] You a penny higher than somebody else on your gas.

I think education is the biggest thing that is what I tell my kids. I say that is why it is so important to keep on and get your education. Get your education, and I don't have to worry about you. I told them, "Once you know god for yourself and you get you an education. Everything is done then. You gone find the way then because you gone be led the right way." I am just glad that I was able to teach them that because I know. Like you, your folks know they have been through it. They know what it takes like you say, I know my mama and dad were not no educated folks, but they were able to survive you know. But they never what it was if you could get one. I had a lot of friends that they fathers, well I have a lot of guys now. They tell me, "I wish my mom and dad would have thought as much for education as you did." Because we didn't and i see all of your kids and they are doing pretty good because they got educated. I got one son that lived here, and

he got sick. He came back home, and he live around. He is on disability, you know. He was a graduate from Alcorn in agriculture working for Memphis Light, Gas, and Water, and I don't know what something clicked on him, some girl or something. He got involved with it, so he ended up getting thrown on the wrong track. But he do good; he take care of his self. Got his own place, own car, he do alright. He is the only one that I got here. Everybody else is somewhere else, you know. That is where they need to be; they need to be somewhere else where they can get something done. Raise their kids in a place where they can get good education, you know.

Keon Burns:

What made you decide to run for president of the NAACP branch in Yalobusha county?

James Swearengen: 64:11

Well, that was something that I was attending meetings, and I guess, when you get out there and you march and look at it. I wanted to be a part of something that was aggressive trying to move our people where they wouldn't be discriminated against. something that you kind of lean back on, and I knew we didn't have a branch here in Oakland. So I started attending the ones that were in Coffeerville because that was the only one. That is where it originated over there, the Yalobusha County branch NAACP. It says county so I got to going and I got doing things. And they just kind of pushed me up to vice president, first vice president. And after that guy left, they said, "Well we got you; we know you." Our branch is not active now as it once was because a lot of the older folks, you know. You got Black Lives Matter, and I do. I really love Black Lives Matter because that is the younger generation trying to do something. at least, they have an insight to want to do.

James Swearengen:

It was hard to get them to join NAACP because some of them they just can't understand--. They say "Well, y'all don't do nothing. You don't." [Laughter] I looked at the way Bennie, and our national president, Derrick, he is from Jackson. He used to be the state president, Derrick Johnson, but he is the national president now. So him and Bennie [Thompson] the one who filed this lawsuit against. The thing that they had, the riot that they had against the capitol because there was an old law on the books that said, you know. Back in reconstruction when they had black leaders going to Washington that they

couldn't be intimidated. When they were doing their job in Washington by the KKK and those other white national groups, so that is the one that Bennie and Derrick are using to sue Trump and those people. The NAACP, they are still around.

My state president was doctor Aaron Henry at the time back in the--. He was a pharmacist from Clarksdale. he was state president for the NAACP for years, and I really admired Dr. Henry. He was a state legislator too; he was one of the first blacks elected to the state legislature in the state of Mississippi.

In 1991 he called all the branch presidents together and he said look we are going to go to Atlanta to see--. What is his name? I can't remember the one who became president of South Africa. We got on a bus; we all chartered a bus to go there to see him. Because he came to America to raise money to go back to South Africa to become president of South Africa. Why can't I think of his name; he stayed in prison for years over there for apartheid.

Keon Burns

Was it Nelson Mandala?

James Swearingen: 67:40

Nelson Mandela period Nelson Mandela. We went to South Africa, I mean we went to Atlanta to see Nelson Mandela. Henry said, "We all going. All state presidents. We are chartering a bus." and we did, and man, that was a great thing. We went into Fulton County stadium over there, and it was so many folks there. It filled the stadium up. It was about as many people outside of the stadium as it was on the inside. That was one great thing to see that man 80 something years old at the time, I believe he was 81. But they had just released him from prison in South Africa, and he was wanting to become the president of South Africa.

James Swearingen:

I remember Atlanta, I mean Florida wouldn't even. Florida was one state that didn't even want him to come, but they supposed to have been playing the Super bowl there that year. black players said Nah we not going down there, and I think they finally changed it or something. They might not have even played that year, but man, that was something to go over there and hear Nelson Mandala. They had the helicopters in everything trying to, security and everything. Man, that was a

great day. I never will forget that great day to see that black man walk up on that podium, hair white, you know. 30 something years, they kept him in prison for 27 years over there for a part time. Then he come out and go back and be the president. He raised \$8 million over here, and went back to South Africa to become president of that country. Nelson Mandela.

James Swearingen:

But we had some good times back then. We song on the bus going over there. we had in African that told us the whole history of when they put them, of how it was when they put them into that southwest. He said, that Soweto, you know and all that. You know how they did him when they--. that was a minority rule over there, the white they were in my minority, but they wanted to rule. We had some times back in the 60s and 70s, but we finally come through you know. But I am afraid that our people, our younger people.

71:01 This Black Lives Matter movement this summer that stemmed from George Floyd thing; it kind of woke a lot of people up. They was sleeping. It's not that you want to out due nobody or overdue but these last four years we had these people that were supporting those white nations that really it ought to not be like that. They are trying to take us backward when we all, in this world is big enough for us to live in. Ain't no use in trying to do me one way because of my skin color. If I am intelligent enough to deal with you, we been intelligent enough to live here together this long, so why--. Dr. Henry used to say if somebody got to be in the basement, why don't we swap it around? You know in the basement of life, you know. Let's move it around, you be there for a while then I will be there for a while. But I think we have done enough in the basement. We need to move forward now, and we are. We are. We have done real well.

Yeah, James Meredith is the one started that march you know. And he got shot down up in Tate County when he started. That is the one that I marched in when Dr. King come in, and took that march up and went on with it. James Meredith being the first Black to really be enrolled at Ole Miss, you know. Dr. Henry, Aaron Henry, told me that he went to Ole Miss, but he was under cover. He was under cover; he went to pharmacy school up there. But he wasn't enrolled there, but he had a guy that used to be the mayor there. That guy was his

friend, and he let him come in and studied. But he never was enrolled there, and that kind of thing happened I assume.

Keon Burns:

Would that be after Meredith or before Meredith?

James Swarengen:

That was before Meredith. Aaron Henry, he had a drugstore in Clarksdale fourth street; they bombed it. They did everything to Dr. Henry because he was a civil rights guy. He was the head of the NAACP for years. Derrick come along and took over after him.

Keon Burns:

Did you experience any of that with you being a president of Yalobusha County then you being mayor?

James Swarengen:

I experienced some hostility from it, you know. It wasn't as much as nobody coming out and just throwing a bomb at your house and doing stuff like that. But the talk was around. He is the president of the NAACP, you know, and all that kind of stuff. And I am sure that they talked about it a lot, but like I said, I guess I took it from my mama. I didn't have no scary bones in my body. Sometimes, I would--. I told them that my knees would be knocking sometimes that we were doing some things, but I never occurred to me that you need to turnaround and run or some. We was out there marching, and you know, you see them guys from this area. And when you come through they are looking at you. We gone get you know; we gone do this. But they never did.

They had a thing up, one thing I learned about a lot of our folks is that they not gone do much when you looking at them. But give them the night of cover, the cover of night, and you better be ready because they ready to damage. They will do some damage then when you can't see who they are, you know. Just like they do too, you know. We experienced that too you once we come back to our homes at night. They talk about what they are going to do, but when they found out that they were going to have to fight and do whatever. Because a lot of them guys had their pieces too. They had their firearms also, but Batesville didn't have it rough there. But when they got to Grenada, wow that is when all hell broke loose in Grenada. Yep sure did.

Keon Burns:

You marched in Grenada right?

James Swearingen:

I marched to Grenada, but I didn't go. I wasn't into all that, you know. We kind of backed off after then because we just really wanted to be there when it go through Yalobusha County. They was asking everybody to join whenever they get to their own, you know. And that would help, some folks was going all the way, and they were in it for the long haul. Because the SCLC had pretty much taking over then, you know. That is what were James Meredith; he was pretty much with the SCLC. Yep, it was something. Dr. King coming in, and he was SCLC more too. Southern Christian Leadership Conference.

75:44

We had some great times, tough times but they were great times. People seemed to be more closer then. You had a goal, and you knew what you were working for. You didn't want to continue to work for three dollars a day, and you wanted better housing, that was somethings that we also did, build houses. We would get grants to redo houses and rehab as we call it and build new houses, you know. So we done some of that, you know. It wasn't much money out there, at least it haven't been anyway for those grants. They reduced them so bad in the last few years, and you know it is hard to get a grant.

James Swearingen:

The last time we got a grant last year, I think we built at small senior citizen complex. It started off with about two hundred and ten thousand dollars for the total thing, and we couldn't even get a bid to match that. Everybody was way over. We finally cut somethings and we were able to fit it in. These are some things that I am hoping get better; I know this covid-19 thing that passed it is really going to help a lot of people. It is going to--. If they spend the money right and take care; it will help them out a whole lot. As Biden said, " Just not republicans, I mean democrats, republicans, and independents will all share in this, you know.

Keon Burns:

Has the covid-19 virus effected Oakland in a specific way.

James Swearingen:

Not really, it affected us here at the town hall. My clerk had it. A couple of police officers had it; I had it. We had to shut down for probably about three weeks. We literally shut down, and sprayed the building. Because my clerk went in to the hospital for over two weeks, and her husband died during that time. So we had, but far as the overall town I don't think we

really had that many people that really contacted it. A small place and they pretty much started doing the church services virtually, so that helped out a lot and at the plant I think, we had quite a few up there. But they were able to quarantine and stay safe. We lost one lady out of my church. One person out of our church; she passed along with it. She was in Oxford hospital. Her son got it, and I rating that she got it from him. She ended up having to go in the hospital, and we lost her.

Keon Burns:

Is there anything else that you want to state for the record?

James Swearingen:

Well. I just say that we still continue to try and make things better for our constituents in this little town. Throughout the county everyway that we can and make sure that everyone is treated as fair and equality as the next person that is our goal. Our goal is to try to see to that being done and try to bring things to our communities even though small during this tough covid times. But we know that we just trust in God and pray that everything works out. And it has been so far, we are just grateful that things are as well as they are with us. That is about it.

James Swearingen:

Keon Burns:

I appreciate it.

James Swearingen:

Thank You

[Interview Ends]