## **Oral History Interview of Harold Knowles**

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Name of Interviewee: Harold Knowles

Name of Interviewers: Randy Miller and Lowell Walters

Transcriber: Jesse Ronda

Interview Length: (1:45:26)

Notes: Transcript edited by Abigail Sattler

**Miller**: (0:01) Welcome to this interview in the oral history project of the Liberty University archives. This interview is being conducted on April 22, 2010. Today we're interviewing Harold Knowles. My name is Randy Miller and I'll be conducting the interview today along with Lowell Walters. Greetings Lowell.

Walters: (0:19) Why hello Randy.

**Miller**: (0:20) And greetings Harold.

**Knowles**: (0:21) Hello Randy, Lowell.

**Miller**: (0:23) Can you tell us, just as we start here today, some general biographical information about yourself. Tell us a little bit about where you were born, where you grew up, and a little bit about your family background.

**Knowles**: (0:34) Alright I certainly will. And thank you for the opportunity to do this. I was born and raised here in Lynchburg, Virginia. Mom and dad...and on my mother's side, we go back to my grandmother, great grandmother and great, great grandmother, so we're really native Lynchburgers. I accepted Christ at age 13 at Park Avenue Baptist Church and within a few months Jerry Falwell, Dr. Falwell came in with some other of his buddies and then my mom and dad received Christ after that and my whole family accepted Christ at Park Avenue which consisted of mom and dad and I've got three brothers and three sisters. And all of my brothers and sisters now are in some type of ministry work; either deacons or music or preaching. And of course my mom and dad have passed away since but we were there at the early stages too of Park Avenue Baptist Church and when Dr. Falwell came in and accepted Christ, I was in what's

called the junior department and about ready to go into the teenage department. Jerry was 18, I was almost 14 and because of Jerry's um...zeal, I guess even at that early age just right after he got saved, you could see that God had...was putting his hand on him for future ministry, Jerry began to work in the youth department and became the youth pastor and within months, we had so many young people in the auditorium there that we had to meet, in the summer time, the early spring, and fall, we had to meet on the sidewalk. And if you ever...if anyone's ever been over to Park Avenue Baptist, you'll see the center part of it, there's a double door there and you walk out on the sidewalk and we had chairs out there because we couldn't get them in. And Jerry rounded up all his buddies over at Fairview Heights and uh...which was called the "wall gang," which I wasn't part of that, but we became close friends at age 18 and uh...then from there, as Park Avenue grew, Jerry went off to Bible college in Springfield, Missouri, the Baptist Bible College, and one year came back and took off some time and worked at the church. Then we were having...and I as a young teenager, I don't know all the workings of why the church was about to split, but we had a Sunday morning meeting. Well, first of all, the pastor, I won't mention that name, had had some immoralities and left the church. And the church brought in a new pastor named Frank Wood and for some reason the church was going to vote him out. And we were there that Sunday morning that the vote came and Frank Wood had gone out to all the other church members that had left when the other pastor left and said he was getting a dirty deal and, make a long story short, the vote didn't go and the, the majority stayed and the minority pulled out, which was over a hundred people and uh...Dr. Falwell had just graduated from the Bible College in June of '56 and uh...the church...the school blamed the split on Jerry, which had nothing to do with it, and he was holding a revival that Sunday in Richmond, Virginia with a pastor name Gene Lowry. And Sunday morning when we voted to vote out the pastor, since it didn't carry, we...a bunch of us, about I don't know how many, maybe 50, got in to cars and drove to Richmond and met with Jerry after church that night in a restaurant there in Richmond, Virginia and explained to him. And Macel, his future wife, was with us and Macel and all of us rode together and we filled Jerry in on what happened and we all had prayer in a backroom in a dining room restaurant there in Richmond, that we would ask God's blessing on coming back and putting this group together. And so the first Sunday, I mean, the Sunday we voted the pastor to vote him out didn't happen. The next Sunday, we were meeting in the Mountain View School, which, if you know history of Thomas Road, you know that the Mountain View School is on Campbell Avenue. For the week prior to that, we came back and Jerry and I and all the young men that...we were saved together, about 15 of us, did a lot of door knocking on that week. We went around to a lot of either good church members or, or ones that voted uh...tried to vote Frank out, and let them know we were going to do something to have him a place to meet. So we met in the um...Mountain View School for the first Sunday and the second Sunday, we met over in the, that's when we purchased the uh...Donald Duck building.

**Miller**: (5:19) So, now, just to be clear, this Frank wasn't the one that had moral problems.

**Knowles**: (5:24) No.

**Miller**: (5:25) So, it was more of a philosophical or personality type thing? Would you characterize, characterize...

**Knowles**: (5:29) Yeah, I, I think it was. I, I can remember he brought his brother in. His...moved his brother in from, I think they were from Tennessee, moved his brother in to be the head deacon. They were changing a lot of things. They took, they took Park Avenue off the radio. They did a lot of changes that the people didn't really like. Not, not a really bad change, and as I said, as a young teenager I didn't, I didn't...wasn't in on the workings or why the deacon board decided to do this vote. But most of the deacons and, from what I can remember, all of them voted to vote him out and so they...and so when Jerry started with us in, in '56, we already had a full deacon board [laughter]. But no it wasn't Frank. He just made a lot of changes that just went against the majority, well not the majority evidently, but it, it went against a lot of the folks that didn't like what he was doing.

**Walters**: (6:26) Now back in those days when the first pastor had the immorality issues, whatever they were, and Frank came in, how did folks settle on a pastor at that time? You know, how did, how did Frank come in the doors?

Knowles: (6:40) Well, what happened...I was, I was able to...we had a student, before Park Avenue split, we had a...Jerry came in for a visit and we, he was driving a student back to Springfield to go to college and asked me to ride with him. So I decided that I would go with him and ride all the way to Springfield and we took this student there. And while we were there, Jerry's wife to be, Macel, called and that the...Paul, well, I'll just use the name Paul, Paul had messed up the ministry and had left and left he church without a pastor. So Jerry had spoken to some of the powers to be at the Springfield and they recommended to bring Frank Wood back. And we packed him up in Jerry's little car, at that time he had a little Plymouth coupe, and packed him up and me and Jerry and Frank came back and the church accepted him because of...through Jerry's recommendation. And Springfield's recommendation.

**Miller**: (7:43) Now [*clears throat*], it seems as though the Baptist Bible Fellowship was much more involved in the workings of the church, you know, more like maybe Southern Baptist churches kind of work today as opposed to, what we think of today, as everybody being very independent and autonomous. Was Baptist Bible College the one place where if you were going to go to Bible college, that's where you went and if you had fellowship together those were the churches? Tell us a little bit about the Baptist Bible Fellowship and then Park Avenue Baptist and later on.

**Knowles**: (8:15) Well when the other pastor that started the church, Paul was there, he used all of the uh...well and then you, you'll know the name John Rawlings. John was one of the, one of the speakers there were many, many...Bill Dowell in fact we have Bill Dowell's granddaughter works for us here at Liberty. But most of the major speakers from the college came to Park Avenue. And we uh...well I lost my train of thought. We uh...was close associated with the

Springfield school. And then when the church split, and then the next week we started Park Av...I mean started Thomas Road, the school blamed Jerry on the split. And I was finishing high school and sent in my letter and my application to Springfield and about July, I got a letter back stating that they would not allow me to come in; I was rejected because I went with Jerry. And they said that if I went back with Park Avenue and stay a year and, and be a good church member and work with Frank, then they would let me in. But I said "no, I'm not going to do that." I followed Jerry then and, and all these fifty something years I, I've been that way. But we, we was rejected and the letter said, which is funny, I've kept it but I don't have it available, they call him a snake in the grass.

**Miller**: (9:37) [*chuckle*]

**Knowles**: (9:38) And that he came back and fooled the people and, and got Frank to be voted out...be voted on. And that wasn't true at all and Jerry had nothing to do with the split. And then, they had told me in the letter, they had warned jerry not to start another church in Lynchburg; we didn't need another church. I always tell people down on the, on the road to visit donors that, you know, if you've ever been in a church split it's very painful. But you can see the result of Park Avenue to Thomas Road how, how great a church split became.

**Miller**: (10:10) Sometimes church splits end up being like uh...Paul split with Barnabas so he and Silas went on and Barnabas and his new partner. So sure, sometimes the Lord uses those things. What ever became of Park Avenue Church? Is that active?

**Knowles**: (10:24) Well it's uh...I don't think so. Right after, right after we left and the church sort of went down and Frank left. They got another pastor in it that did not take it on and eventually it changed its name to Community Church. At this point uh...I think it's part of Salv...Salvation Army now.

**Miller**: (10:45) Ok.

**Knowles**: (10:46) I'm, I'm almost sure of this cause I know we went over in the...when, when uh...before Jerry died, we went over there with some other people and the main auditorium was a, like a, a thrift shop [*chuckle*]. It was very sad to see, you know?

**Walters**: (11:03) The um...back in that time period when that was going on, didn't Jerry come back from BBC and evangelize a different "wall gang?" The Fifth Avenue or the Fifth Street gang?

**Knowles**: (11:15) Fifth Street gang, yeah.

**Walters**: (11:16) Yeah, were you part of that or?

**Knowles**: (11:17) Well, I was more or less the Fifth Street area. I lived off the Cabell Street area which comes in to Cab...to down to Fifth. Yeah, once he, once he worked on evangelizing the Campbell County kids and all his Fairview Heights people, the we started working on, started working on Fifth Street over in my area. So...which became...that's how the Park Avenue grew so fast with the teenagers. And then we just transferred that on to, to Park Ave...I mean to Thomas Road Baptist.

**Walters**: (11:45) What do you remember about his earliest days post-conversion there? I mean, going from an unsaved youth coming back from BBC and helping to recommend or bringing the recommendation of Frank Wood, I mean, that's a really aggressive growth pattern. What can you tell us about that? What did people see in, in him in that time?

**Knowles**: (12:05) Well, I always tell people this. When, when we were saved at Park Avenue, there was just a single building; there was not a baptism pool there. So Paul, the other pastor that started the church, waited to baptize all of us, about 15 of us, until the, the new section was started. So the night that we were all baptized, it was Jerry Falwell, Jim Moon, myself, my brother, and 15 others were baptized the same night, and I always tell people how God puts his hands on certain people. We were all the same, basically, the same age. I'm not saying we all have the same intelligence. I'm not comparing myself with Jerry's intelligence. But we were all young and ready to, you know, you know, like Jerry used to say "I attacked hell with a bucket of water." We were all ready to do that. But out of that 15, God put a hand on Jerry and you can see from that beginning, him working with the young people, how that he had this charismatic personality that drew people to him, the way that he handled people, you could look and see that. And he, he looked...he was more at age 21, 20, 21, he was saved at 18, but about 20, 21, 22 when he's working at Park Avenue during the college years, you could see more maturity. He didn't' seem like a twenty something year old, he seemed like more of an older person. And so when we brought Frank Wood back, his maturity was...went before him that the deacons and the church members thought "wow, he is Jerry Falwell." And of course the Falwell had a name. My mom and dad were total alcoholics and had drank...lived at Fairview Heights in, in the, which was called then, the Merry-Garden, the dancehall. So mom, when mom got saved and then, and then when Jerry came in, mother always said, it was funny to me, that she said this was another Falwell trick to meet people to get to do the business and she didn't, the people didn't trust Jerry when he first came in cause the Falwell name didn't have really a good name cause they were the bootleggers, as Jerry says, and they were the um...and they fought, they were...they controlled the Fairview Heights hillside. But mom always thought it was a trick but Jerry's maturity, I think, people trusted him, that he was more than just a kid.

**Miller**: (14:20) Now we keep talking about Fairview Heights. Kind of what is that area today? Where would that be?

**Knowles**: (14:27) Fairview Heights is, more or less, off of...at Campbell Avenue.

**Miller**: (14:31) Ok.

Knowles: (14:33) Up there, up there the top of Campbell Avenue, where the road splits, goes to 501 and 460. Where there's a...as you go to the top of the hill there, that's where all that Farview...all that Falwell, the Merry-Garden, all Jerry's brothers had restaurants and gas stations there top of the hill and it's at end of Campbell avenue. Now, when mom, when mom got saved, we were teenagers, mother, it sound strange because Lynchburg's not a really bad town at all, never has been, but mother forbid us to go into Fairview Heights. They thought she thought that was a bad area to walk into but that was funny because she didn't allow me to go to Madison Heights across the river because she said that was bad too so we hung around. My central playground was Rivermont Avenue and Cabell Street and then we became involved in Park Avenue, the church there, and with the youth department which uh...that's where more or less we hung out.

**Miller**: (15:28) This is a minor point, but do you have any memories of Point of Honor on Cabell Street?

**Knowles**: (15:32) Point of Honor, yes. Point of Honor...I lived off Cabell Street at those days it was more of a playground. The building, the house there itself was...we had shuffle board inside, we had pool tables, we had games. That was just more where young people met and played on the playground with the swings and football and baseball. It wasn't a historical, I mean, it was a historical house, but they were letting it got to pot. Cause we played in that place, as kids, cause I lived across the street at that time below, below Cabell Street and we used that as a playground and a picnic ground and it just wasn't historical until later on in years the City Fathers decided we got to do something with this house.

**Walters**: (16:15) Now, you said that you and your family converted to Christianity or got saved...experienced salvation then about the same time as Jerry, correct?

Knowles: (16:26) Yes, right.

Walters: (16:27) So then this Paul founded, founded Park Avenue?

**Knowles**: (16:30) Uh huh.

**Walters**: (16:31) What uh...do you know anything about that founding and what were the other churches like in the area at that time and?

**Knowles**: (16:37) Well I went to um...I had, I had a uh...my aunt, I call, we call them aunts in Lynchburg, my Aunt Lynn...Anne Peters uh...was going to West Minster Presbyterian and she would come to the house...mom would never be drunk on the weekends and uh...she would come by the house and pick up the older, me, my brother, my sis...younger sister next to me, we were the oldest, would pick us up and take us to Park Avenue, I mean to, excuse me, to West

Minster Presbyterian where we did not hear about salvation as a tee...as a kid. So we were involved in West Minster. Across the street was College Hill Baptist. I wasn't involved and I didn't know a whole lot about church. We went to West Minster a little bit because she dropped us off and she went on to the adult class. And then there was a family by the name of Mr. and Mrs. [Smid], that went to Park Avenue, and between my house, where I live on Grace Street in Lynchburg, between my house and Robert E. Lee Junior High, which has been changed, I don't, I don't know the name of it now, but anyway, my junior high school, we would walk home and they had taken an old grocery store and they had converted it into like a child evangelism and would get kids off the street. And that's how I heard about the gospel. And they told me about the Lord Jesus and about how to be saved and then they invited me and my brother to Park Avenue where we accepted Christ and we got involved with the young people at that point. But as far as the other churches, I'm not sure.

**Miller**: (18:16) Tell us a little bit about the religious scene in Lynchburg in the '50s there. The Charismatic Movement wasn't real strong.

**Knowles**: (18:25) No.

**Miller**: (18:26) Was there a lot of Church of Christ, Disciples of Christ?

**Knowles**: (18:29) I didn't know of any. The Presbyterians were, were, I guess, doing some things. They had, they had the largest churches here, Rivermont Avenue Presbyterian. One other thing that's funny too that I, that, at Rivermont Avenue Baptist Church, when we were over...and when we, when we started Park Avenue, I mean, excuse me, Thomas Road. When we started Thomas Road in the weeks to come, we would be over in Rivermont visiting and I remember knocking on some doors and as I came out of a door with, with another friend of mine, the pastor of Rivermont, I don't know his name now; he's been gone for years, he came out of the, out of his car and had a map drawn up. And he said that "I heard you all started Thomas Road and here's, here's your church, here's my church and" uh...and he had a line drawn down through the middle of like on Main Street and Church Street that "this is my territory and over there Thomas Road is your territory." And he was sort of saying, you know, you're over on my grounds. And we sort of just laughed, I mean we thought he was kidding but he wasn't. And finally called Jerry up and told him that, you know, "stay on your side of the town we're on our side of the town" and of course Jerry didn't listen to that. Jerry, as you know in his book, he, he knocked on about a hundred doors a day so he didn't really care. He wasn't being unkind but Lynchburg was his territory [laughter].

**Walters**: (19:50) Sure.

**Miller**: (19:51) So there were militant, fundamental type churches in the Baptist Bible College mode and I imagine that there was more stately, formal type churches. How did Park Avenue fit into that blend?

Knowles: (20:04) Well not good uh...I remember, I remember the First Baptist downtown uh...I had some relatives going to First Baptist in, in Lynchburg, downtown Lynchburg. And I remember they were saying to us, you know, "who do," you know, of course Park Avenue was growing. It was becoming the largest churches in Lynchburg. They would, they would call us like country hicks or rednecks or call you names and try to put a title one you and not saying that you were Christians born again and serving the Lord. You know, "you're not my class of people" because, Park Avenue dealt basically with the, with the down and out, so to speak, street people. People that didn't have any money. People, you know, you know how people class about people, and Park Avenue drew people that really needed the Lord but would not go to Rivermont Pres. or, or Downtown First Baptist, yeah. So they were very militant, I think [chuckle].

**Miller**: (21:02) And just touch on this then. How did the whole African American community in Lynchburg, was that totally segregated at that time?

**Knowles**: (21:09) Totally. Oh yeah, we didn't uh...far as, far as African Americans, we didn't...in fact, I went to E.C. Glass High School and we didn't, I never, there were no blacks at my high school until the six...in the middle sixties. We had no blacks in Park Avenue and even the early stages of Thomas Road, we didn't have, we didn't have any blacks in there until probably the mid '60s. And but, you know, I think the rumors came out a long time ago that Jerry, you know, discouraged blacks from coming but that never happened. That was never, that was never done.

**Miller**: (21:41) It was just that was the way of the South.

**Knowles**: (21:43) That was just the way of the South. Blacks looked at it as a white church. I grew up off of Grace Street where um...where, I lived on a street called Polk Street, we had blacks down on the corner. Since mom and dad drank a lot, those, they, they came and looked at us little kids. We had a couple of black ladies that would come up and make sure we had food and took care of us. We had a situation one time during the, during the winter time when mom and dad were out drinking and my brother and I went out that night toward Christmas and stayed out a little later than we should have stayed and came back and it snowed and snowed and snowed and as we walked up the driveway, we stumble over something in the driveway. And it was mom. Mom had come in and passed out and snow had covered her and we found her and got her in and we went down the street to this black lady and she came up and took, and, and changed mom's clothes, warmed her up, and, and really saved her life. If we hadn't come home that night, mom would have froze to death. Dad made it in the house and passed out. And from that point, my mother sobered up. She realized, "I could have died." And the reason that we...we stayed very close after the years later with the pastor Paul, we stayed close to him even till he died...and Jerry and I did. And about a week later when mom was dug out of the snow, Paul knocked on our front door and met all of us and, and so to, to us Paul was a, little s, savior

that saved my family from a lot of destruction. And even though what he did was wrong, we forgave him cause God, who are we, you know, God forgave me, who are we not to forgive. We became close friends and even though when he died in California, Jerry and I went out and did the funeral. I did the singing, Jerry did the preaching. So basically that's...but going back with the black area, we did not have any. We didn't even...we might of knocked on some doors but nothing.

**Miller**: (23:46) And so based on what I'm hearing you say, is it true to characterize that Park Avenue Baptist Church was more for the down and out, the, the middle class or lower class folks rather than the high society people of Lynchburg?

**Knowles**: (24:00) Sure.

**Miller**: (24:01) And then that carried on in the Thomas Road?

**Knowles**: (24:03) It did. Basically in Lynchburg, in those days,, you had the cotton mill going strong. You had Craddock Terry Shoe Corporation going strong. And these were, these were factory workers. And nobody had a lot of money, nobody was considered, you know, rich at Park Avenue. I think Jerry was probably the only one that was driving a new car cause of his mom. But yeah, we, more or less the down and outters. Of course and then, you know, Jerry started the home for alcoholics in the early '50s. Well go, getting back to Park Avenue, Jerry had met some of the men that was ended up at Elim Home when Thomas Road was started at Park Avenue and, and catered to those men. That's the kind of people that we invited to church were the alcoholics. So mom and dad knew a lot of people they drank with and they, they would bring those into...and the Park Avenue accepted them where as maybe Rivermont Pres. or First Baptist didn't [chuckle].

**Walters**: (25:01) What do you remember about the style of services and things in those early days at Park Avenue and?

**Knowles**: (25:07) Well, you know, Jerry, if you read his book or know anything about him, he, his mom would turn on the Old Fashion Revival Hour, Charles Fuller out of California, which they had really lively gospel music. And Jerry catered to that type of music when he first heard it. And he heard that Park Avenue was having that type of gosp...some good gospel music plus, as he said, some pretty girls. So the service was very lively, very um...gospel music in those '50s, in those years, good preaching, strong preaching with Bill Dowell and John Rawlings and a lot of those Baptist Bible College professors, professors, they were preachers too, would hold revivals and meetings there at Park Avenue.

**Miller**: (25:53) Were they evangelistic meetings, teaching meetings?

**Knowles**: (25:56) More or less evangelistic meetings, yeah. Paul was more of evangelistic type of preacher than a teacher. And I remember when, I remember when the Revised Standard Version came out in '54, Jerry, I mean, Paul preached against it. How all the changes in it and how corrupt it was, threw it down on the pul...threw it down on the floor and kicked it and it landed at my feet, which I still have it, and I, and I picked it up in those days and said, you know, "we don't need this Bible." And, but he was very outspoken. And I think if, if hadn't of messed up his life, I think that he would have been uh...we, we would have had a great church but I'm not sure if we would have had a school. And you can see God's hand on, that God was on Jerry and somebody's heartache became somebody else's good news.

**Walters**: (26:48) Well, since you happened to bring it up in talking about the versions of the Bible and things of that nature, as the NIV came out over the years, don't want to the clock too far forward here...

**Knowles**: (26:58) Ok.

**Walters**: (26:59) in the chronology, but tell us about that, that, the evolution of that issue in Thomas Road in particular and the stance on the new version...

**Knowles**: (27:07) New versions, yeah.

Walters: (27:08) translations and things.

**Knowles**: (27:10) Well, you know, you know, I don't know about your life, yours, but, you know, when you're saved, under, under whoever you're saved under, basically, I think Jerry held this to his death like I did, we were saved under Paul and ministry and the King James Version and that's what we stuck with. And uh...now there are some translations when the, when the Revised Standard Version came out, there was tremendous changes in that, in that, I mean, they changed a lot in that. Now, the NIV has some good to it and uh...but Jerry, through the years...now he changed, I would say, in the last 20 years where he would say "I memorized from the King James but I'd refer back to some other translations for translation" which are sometimes better translated than the old King James cause the new King James did do some changes.

**Miller**: (28:01) Did he by the end of his ministry go to the new King James? I think that Jonathon did that. What are they using today at Thomas Road?

**Knowles**: (28:07) One of them...basically uh...I noticed Sunday on the screen, when it came up, Jonathon was using, more or less, the new King James. Yeah, and, and, cause it didn't take out, you know, the RSV took out the blood and it took out the word virgin and put in a young woman and a lot, a lot of changes.

**Miller**: (28:25) Well and it was produced by, as I recall, by the National...

**Knowles**: (28:28) National Council of Churches.

Miller: (28:29) Council of Churches.

**Knowles**: (28:30) Yes, yes.

**Miller**: (28:31) And, and before we leave Park Avenue Baptist and the Baptist Bible Fellowship, I did want to ask you, was Jerry ever vindicated? You know, you said they were blaming him for something that he didn't do as far as starting this split and so it had an effect in your life...

**Knowles**: (28:49) Yeah.

**Miller**: (28:50) and when we talk about the effect, particularly on your life. But I want to ask particularly with Jerry Falwell. Did he ever go back to them and say "hey guys, you know, I want to be in your good graces" or did they ever come to him and apologize, could you?

**Knowles**: (29:03) Well, yeah, he, that, that, we went to um...in the early '60s, Jerry and my wife then, I was married, moved back...I went to...I ended up going to Tennessee Temple in Chattanooga, and I'll mention that later, uh...in the early '60s, Jerry decided that he would go to a huge Bible conference in Detroit, Michigan, it was Beauchamp Vick's church and Beauchamp Vick at that time was the president of Springfield. When we got there, a lot...Jerry was shunned by a lot of the professors there, pastors really, and a lot of the church members from that church, a lot of Springfield people that I, that I...we watched him one day speak to some people and they spoke or they kept walking and my wife remembers that today that tears came into his eyes. So we came back and then he preached a sermon. I don't know how long ago right after that, but he preached a sermon and said for 15 years they blackballed him, and that would make it 1956, that would make it, what, '71, until '71. And then he invited, he invited the man that sent me a letter, named Reginald Woodworth, there was a registrar at Springfield. He invited Reginald to come down and speak at Park...at Thomas Road in early '70s. And I think then is when he started and then others started coming in.

**Miller**: (30:32) Kind of mending the fences.

**Knowles**: (30:33) Mending the fences. And I remember one time when we were eating out when John Rawlings came and we went out to eat and Jerry told John "this is the guy you all shunned from school." And John threw up his hands and said "Jerry, I, I never had anything to do with that in the, in the early days when we shunned you and, and rejected your church. I had nothing to do with that." And I don't…and Jerry, if you know Jerry, Jerry was never one to hold a grudge. I mean, if you had done him wrong, he would go forgiveness and go on and you would never hear about it again. He never, he never spoke from the pulpit on, on what happened

except for that one Sunday that when he preached on "for 15 years I was blackballed." And then they started coming out of the woodwork; when he got big [laughter], you know.

**Miller**: (31:23) But um...so now, you don't recall, was there any reaction as he was trying to start his own school? Did that cause any flap among the Baptist Bible folks?

**Knowles**: (31:34) Oh sure. I remember, I remember other preachers that I knew that were not, not here in...see I went to Tennessee Temple Schools in Chattanooga when I was rejected from Bible College in Springfield. And um...in, in Chattanooga is really, really a city of churches and Tennessee Temple was growing pretty big. I was...they had 14,000 when I went there and a lot of those professors and people that I knew in Chattanooga said that, you know, "we don't need another Bible school" and that's what they looked at when this, when this school was started. That Jerry was starting a Bible school but he really wasn't. It was more of a liberal arts or more of a different college than, than Tennessee Temple. And I heard from the Bob Jones people and uh...criticisms. I heard from a lot of other...well really good Bible colleges that said "we didn't need another school in Lynchburg." Like they said to Jerry "we don't need another church in Lynchburg" [laughter].

**Miller**: (32:39) Well, so, I, we've talked a little bit about the church situation here in Lynchburg, let's talk about the college situation. Not in 1971 when Liberty was founded but let's talk about the early '60s when you were getting ready to go to college, ok. So at that time there was BBC which is kind of where the Baptist Bible Fellowship, the militant Baptist fundamentalists were going.

**Knowles**: (33:03) Right.

**Miller**: (33:04) There was Tennessee Temple, um...Dr. Lee Roberson.

**Knowles**: (33:08) Right.

**Miller**: (33:09) There was Bob Jones University which was Baptistic although they were actually just interdenominational as far as that goes, but they were also very militant fundamentalists.

Knowles: (33:16) Sure, yes.

**Miller**: (33:18) But really, as far as, as far as doctrine, there wasn't a lot of difference between those three schools.

**Knowles**: (33:24) No.

**Miller**: (33:25) And then you had Moody and Wheaton which there was, that was kind of a different camp out there. But for someone who was growing up in Lynchburg and went to Park

Avenue Baptist Church or, you know, went to one of the other Baptist churches there, now was it kind of a "well," you know, "some go to Bob Jones, some go to Tennessee Temple" or they all went to BBC...

**Knowles**: (33:47) Right.

Miller: (33:48) and you were kind of an odd duck [chuckle] out then?

**Knowles**: (33:50) Well I was the, I was. And then when I, when I uh...when they rejected me and, and we were holding a revival in August of '56 with a guy name Douglas [Winn] and when I met with Frank Wood and was told I couldn't go to Springfield, I went back that night and to the revival and met with Jerry afterwards and he called over a Douglas [Winn] and Douglas said "well I know a school," which I never heard of...

Miller: (34:18) Ok.

**Knowles**: (34:19) "in Chattanooga, Tennessee Temple."

Miller: (34:21) So it wasn't like this was another choice that others were taking.

**Knowles**: (34:24) No.

**Miller**: (34:25) You had just heard of it first ear at this point.

**Knowles**: (34:27) Right. And maybe you would've heard of...I'd heard of Bob Jones because my Aunt Anne that had gotten me interested in going to church, she had a close friend here that went to Bob Jones in the early...when it was in Cleveland, Tennessee. And so when we went to Tennessee Temple then when, as, as, Thomas Road grew, then that's where we sent students. In other words Jerry's brother-in-law, Sam Pate, went there and many, many others went to...I mean, I don't have time to name them all but many, many...all our students went to, I mean, all of our young people went to, from, that was going to college, from Thomas Road early days, went to Spring...

Miller: (35:07) So in the early days that was the school because you were ban from going to BBC because they assumed that you had started this split against one of their faithful churches?

**Knowles**: (35:17) Yeah, yeah. And I went along with Jerry in the split so they decide that "we're not going to let you guys come in" [*chuckle*].

**Miller**: (35:23) Ok, so now you, you said you don't want to list all of the names but could you tell some of those names and some of the people that we might recognize the names?

**Knowles**: (35:30) Well, no, you probably not recognize names uh...Same Pate...

Miller: (35:34) Ok.

**Knowles**: (35:35) Jerry's brother-in-law came down and my brother came uh...two brothers came. My brother David and my brother John came to...and finished at Tennessee Temple and then they went on to other colleges for other further education. Some of the names just slipped my mind but we, we've had, we had a lot of them but you probably wouldn't know them.

Miller: (35:56) Ok. So now, this was the school then and schools were a big part of church life...you know, we've got all of these young people here, it seems as though it was very youth centered, and so our young people want to go to Bible college and unlike today, when it seems like young people are wanting to make, make a living, you know, they want to go into business or education, there was a lot of young people that had the philosophy in those days "well I'm going to go at least a year to a Bible college and, and maybe meet my future spouse" or something like that...

**Knowles**: (36:24) Right.

**Miller**: (36:25) and so did Jerry ever come down to Tennessee Temple when he had young people in Thomas Road Baptist Church? Did he have anything to do with, with Tennessee Temple in those early days?

**Knowles**: (36:35) Well, yes. Let me, let me rev...let's back up because when, when uh...we, I was rejected from the college in Springfield, that was in August and Tennessee Temple was starting in September...

Miller: (36:50) Of that year?

**Knowles**: (36:51) Of that year.

Miller: (36:52) Ok, ok.

**Knowles**: (36:53) I mean, I mean school was starting. It was already started.

**Miller**: (36:56) Oh, oh the school year, ok.

**Knowles**: (36:57) The school year was starting.

Miller: (36:58) Ok, thank you.

**Knowles**: (36:59) And so I sent my application in really quick and didn't hear from them. Well my mom and dad didn't, we didn't have an automobile so when Tennessee Temple called...sent a, a letter and said "come on, we'll approve you later." And then Jerry and myself and Mr. Sam Pate Sr. and another gu...young man that was saved with us, Otis Wright, all four of us drove to Chattanooga. Rented, Jerry rented a motel room for us and we all stayed there and stayed there

for a week. And Jerry saw Tennessee Temple had about 3,000 students and about 4,000 in church; Highland Park Baptist. And met Dr. Roberson and Jerry told him we just started Park Ave...excuse me. I keep mentioning Park Avenue. We started Thomas Road Baptist a few months...we were only a few months old and Dr. Roberson prayed with him and Jerry said, you know, "if God allows me to do this, some day we'll have this in Lynchburg." And got the inspiration, I think, and Jerry admitted this too, later on in life, to me and others, that that's where he got the idea that "I will, I will keep myself clean and keep myself pure and I'll ask God to give me a large church if it's His will and a school someday" and then the rest is history. Yeah. So that's…his involvement came the same time, week mine did.

**Miller**: (38:22) So, so it's almost uh...are you sensing that it's almost his...that trip with you to Tennessee Temple was really something that put that idea of starting his own school in place?

**Knowles**: (38:32) Yes. Yes. And he admitted that later on in life when he saw all the young people in, in the dormitories and on the street and, and on the campus that this is something that we'll do in Lynchburg some day.

**Miller**: (38:44) And you said that there was about 3,000 students at Tennessee Temple at the time. Any idea how many were at BBC at that time?

**Knowles**: (38:52) Un...no, I think probably no more than a thousand. I don't think it was a, it was a large school.

**Miller**: (39:00) Now, I think Tennessee Temple was involved with the Southwide Baptist Fellowship at that point.

**Knowles**: (39:05) Later, not at that point.

**Miller**: (39:06) Not at that point, ok.

**Knowles**: (39:07) No, they had, they had split from uh...Dr. Lee Roberson had brought out the church from the Southern Baptists. He had split from the Southern Baptists and when, when Tennessee Temple was started it wasn't a Southern Baptist school and uh...so it wasn't really a Southern Baptist school, it was more of a independent, which I guess an independent type of Baptist school.

**Miller**: (39:31) And then tell us about Dr. Falwell's relationship with Lee Roberson through the years then. Did they remain close friends? Did he ever consider him a competitor starting this school up here?

**Knowles**: (39:43) No, Dr. Roberson's school was started...Jerry had spoken to...well you know back in 19 and um...I believe it was '69, Tennessee Temple gave Jerry his first honorary Dr.'s degree, which his mom came down on the train and was there in that service. And we came

down and was in the service when they gave him an honorary doctor's degree. And then after he started the school, Jerry started Liberty, Dr. Roberson had called and Jerry, Jerry went down and met with Dr. Roberson and told him his thoughts. And Jerry basically said "we're going to start a different school." Tennessee Temple was more of a Bible college and Liberty was going to be more of a liberal arts and a different school and so there was no real competition to the...well we did have Bible schools, Bible school here as such but Tennessee Temple was no comparison to what Liberty has become. No, so it wasn't...Dr. Roberson put his blessing on here and came up and spoke and set singing groups up.

**Miller**: (40:42) And do you remember anything else about that service where he received his first honorary doctorate? That's an interesting historical detail.

Knowles: (40:48) Well, you know, when Dr. Roberson got up to give Jerry...see the, the uh...school, no excuse me. Thomas Road at that time would have been 13 years old. Well Jerry had made an impact, you know, cause Jerry went on the radio almost the first day Thomas Road was opened and went on television almost the same week. And by the time 1969 was coming around and the '70, early '70, '70, then Jerry was on, basically on nationwide TV and had, had been on some news programs and had started some type of, I'm not going to say controversial subjects, but he had already made a name for himself that he was known basically. And when Dr. Roberson got up to introduce Jerry, he asked the question "how many of you have ever heard of Dr. Falwell?" At that time not a doctor yet but "have you ever heard of Jerry Falwell?" and I think 90 percent of the people raised their hands in Chattanooga. And so Dr. Roberson was real proud of Jerry and doing that to give him that degree. And Dr. Roberson was a real educator himself. He realized that if I give this...he needs an honorary, he needs this honorary doctor's degree to be accepted in other circles and I think that's why he did it.

**Miller**: (42:02) Before we leave and come back, one of the things I wanted to ask you about is your own education and as you were going and heading to college, what was your intention as a student? Did you want to study to be a pastor, a missionary? What were you planning to do with you life and how did your education help you to do whatever you were planning to do?

**Knowles**: (42:20) Well, yeah, my wife asks me that a lot now.

**Miller**: (42:22) [*laughter*]

**Knowles**: (42:23) "What did you go to Tennessee Temple schools for?" Well, you know, it was, it was just, more or less, that when you...all the guys were going to school and uh...I felt like that I, I would leave it open for God to use me in some type of music or in, in pastoring or preaching. Never felt the call to preach. But then I started working my way through school, I worked for Sears Roebuck and got involved in retail. And God blessed me with retail management that when I finished, finished there, we, we went to work for Sears fulltime and was transferred around and God always opened the door in the town we were in that I would go into a

church and become the music, part-time music...they couldn't afford a fulltime man. So I've been, I've been a music director in many small churches who a lot of preachers, you know, say that, like they used to say, that you live on earth but you're born in heaven. You know, they couldn't afford you but I didn't really need the money because I was making a salary. But uh...my calling has been, more or less, a second man. You know, and I've worked with a lot of pastors and a lot of them with me coming out of Jerry's ministry, in some little churches I've been in, especially it was in Durham and Fayetteville, North Carolina and Burlington, North Carolina, they were a little afraid of you at first. They thought, you know, here comes a guy...in fact, I had a guy, I had a pastor...we were working in, in a retail outlet in, in Burling...North Carolina, and we went to church there and the preacher met me after church and said "you're new" and I said "yes, sir" and he said "where you from?" and I told him. He said "can you come back tonight? I'd like to talk to you." And I said "yes" so we went back Sunday night and I told my wife "boy, this is going to be great. We are new in town, the pastor wants to see us" and it made you feel well. But after church, he told me, he said "now look, I've got a hundred and fifty people here. I don't need anybody else. Don't, don't start another Park...Thomas Road down here. I know you're under Jerry Falwell's ministry but we don't want another Thomas Road." So, really, we didn't go to that church [laughter].

**Walters**: (44:34) Now...

Knowles: But...

Walters: (44:35) Oh, I'm sorry.

**Knowles**: (44:36) I'm sorry. No, but I'm saying as far as my life is, my life is concerned, I have never felt the call to fulltime as far as pastoring.

**Miller**: (44:42) What was your major at Tennessee Temple?

**Knowles**: (44:43) More, more or less, Bible.

**Miller**: (44:44) Ok.

**Knowles**: (44:45) I graduated, graduated with ThG but then later years I did the online here, got my mas...B.S. here in business at, at Liberty University in '89-'90, yeah. So I got a degree from Liberty which I'm proud of [*laughter*].

**Walters**: (45:02) So then you're a charter member of Thomas Road.

**Knowles**: (45:05) Right.

**Walters**: (45:06) And, how many of those original charter members are still alive and around today?

**Knowles**: (45:09) Wow, you know what you uh...I saw that on the, the questions you gave me. I tried to look over a list of...I have a list, I have an original list of, of charter members. I went through that list of about a hundred people, a little less, and I would say no more now than...well it's hard to say because like, like my mom and dad were charter members and when Jerry was counting, when he says 35 adults and there children...I know the first service at, at, on Campbell Avenue at the first school, the very first service we had a hundred and fifty people at the first service. That counted moms and dads and all their children. See, mom and dad, they had seven of us. So the children are...a lot of the kids are still alive. And I would say, probably, I'd guess, I'd say about fifty people probably...

**Walters**: (46:00) Sure.

Knowles: (46:01) alive.

Walters: (46:02) So tell us about the church from like say 1959 through the '60s and up to the

1971 or so.

**Knowles**: (46:11) Well...

**Walters**: (46:12) What were services like? Who did you have in and how did those things evolve over time?

**Miller**: (46:18) And since you were involved with the music, tell us a little bit, particularly, about the music.

**Knowles**: (46:21) Well, when we started...of course we started Thomas Road in '56 and then I went to Tennessee Temple, and Tennessee Temple was a very musical school. They had a lot of great music there. We used a lot of, of singing groups, like, like our Sounds of Liberty, where you, they had their, their kids come and we used Bob Jones uh...we used a group from Bob Jones, I remember, called Christ Messengers came and did a weeks revival. And we have Lester Roloff. And one of the biggest growth to, to Thomas Road would've been Oliver Greene. When Oliver Greene first came and had a, held a tent on the side, and then, then we had it inside at some at, some at night, and then we had...when the overflow came in, put the tent up, but I remember the first Sunday that Oliver Greene was there, we had 400 in church. The next Sunday, of course the people are getting saved and coming in, we had 800 to where Jerry had to teach, more or less, the adults and somebody else had to teach to the young people. And we put a tent up outside for the kids. We couldn't get them in the church. The, the uh...well not the Donald Duck building but the first main auditorium there was off the side...

**Miller**: (47:35) I remember seeing, I remember seeing books by Oliver B. Greene.

Knowles: (47:38) B. Greene.

**Miller**: (47:39) Was he an evangelist who happened to write like John R. Rice was or how...what, what does...was, is he mainly an evangelist?

Knowles: (47:48) Major, well, yeah, super evangelist. I mean, he was a guy that when he got up to the pulpit and started preaching, he held your attention. You thought in an hour's time, it looked like fifteen minutes. Very, very evangelistic; did a long invitation, but very evangelistic. And one thing that I admire about Oliver B. Greene...and I remember talking, him talking to Jerry uh... "when I come here, you can pay for my motel but I'll buy my own food cause I've got to eat." And you know, some preachers today, you know, they want you to, you know, total expenses but I remember when Oliver Greene... I think God blessed Oliver Greene's ministry not because of that but he wasn't a taker. He didn't come up and say, you know, "I, I need a love, big love offering." And his offerings were good but not that, not that big but we was very evangelistic.

**Walters**: (48:37) Now, he passed away some time ago.

**Knowles**: (48:39) Yes.

**Walters**: (48:40) How did, how did his ministry kind of fade out of the scene as the '60s or as the '70s approached? When did he stop coming? Was it due to health or?

**Knowles**: (48:51) He, he came...yeah he, it was due to health. He came...I don't know how many revivals he held. He was...came, he came back after the first time and we did, we did a week's total tent revival on side of, of Thomas Road where now it's, now it's where the main auditorium is now. He held great revivals at, at Thomas Road and um...but then later in life he, his health...traveling so much, his health, he faded, faded out and passed away. And then Jerry picked up Lester Roloff from Texas who had the girls' homes. We had those girls to come. We've had Bob Harrington, Bourbon Street...

**Miller**: (49:33) The Chaplain of Bourbon Street.

**Knowles**: (49:34) Chaplain of Bourbon Street. That was a great pastor, I mean a preacher; could hold your attention with young people. And Jerry had a knack of finding these people, you know what I mean? I...you know, you wonder where all, all...

**Miller**: (49:44) Alm...well, now, now there's the, the well known and then like, Harrington for instance, had more of like celebrity factor. Were there any other celebrity type people that, you know, I know later on he was, he would have Anita Bryant in...

**Knowles**: (49:57) Yeah.

**Miller**: (49:58) and, and things like that but in those early days was it mainly just well known preachers or?

**Knowles**: (50:03) Well, he had a, well, I remember one meeting we had. We had a, a country singer named Connie Smith, we had the Kentucky Colonel...Kentucky Chicken uh...Sanders...

Miller: (50:12) Oh, Colonel Sanders.

**Knowles**: (50:14) Sanders. We had him come up. And um...but as far as celebrities, I, I think it was later in life when he would have...I know he had Elizabeth Taylor. And uh...he had uh...Kennedy, Ted. But Jerry, Jerry...

**Miller**: (50:28) I was there one time when he had Mickey Rooney [laughter].

**Knowles**: (50:30) But yeah, I was too. Mickey had on those uh...and sung and had on his tennis shoes. Had Mickey Rooney, of course, well, you know a couple years ago we had uh...Chuck Norris [*laughter*].

**Walters**: (50:42) Now, going back to the religiously, more religiously oriented side of things, what about Jack Van Impe? Did...wasn't he here a few times or?

**Knowles**: (50:50) Yeah, oh yeah. Jack came many times and held, held a conference, a prophecy revivals and taught prophecy.

**Walters**: (51:01) And then how did that relationship evolve through the '70s and '80s into the '90s?

**Knowles**: (51:05) Well, you know, I, I've wondered that myself and I've, I've asked some questions around a few years ago. Jerry uh...I think Jack Van Impe got too much um...I don't know how to say this. On prophecy, he got too far out with it and Jerry quit having him because it was some things controversial that I can't put my finger on but he got to saying some things that uh...Jack got to where he was setting, at one time, I don't thing he does now, he was setting dates...

Walters: (51:38) Right.

**Knowles**: (51:39) when Christ was coming back because of the events and Jerry says "no, the Bible says, you know, no one knows the time or place...time when he's, he's coming back." And the fact Jack Van Impe got into some of that dates.

**Walters**: (51:51) Sure. What about folks like Richard [DeHaan] and some of those folks? Did he ever have any of those?

**Knowles**: (51:55) No, I don't remember [DeHaan], no. [DeHaan] never came, that I know of, no. I'm trying to think of some others that came down. But see, but in my life with it, I was in

and out because I went to school, came back to Lynchburg under Sears and then Sears transferred me to Durham and then I came back in the early '70s when school was starting.

**Miller**: (52:18) So what years were you gone then, kind of, from? You came back after Tennessee Temple...

**Knowles**: (52:21) I came back and then...

**Miller**: (52:22) This, this is where your folks still lived.

**Knowles**: (52:24) Still lived, came back, uh...went to work for Sears, uh...Sears transferred me to Durham, and then I came back in the early '70s when school was starting and stayed here through '75-'76, and went to work with Best Products Company. Best is out of business now but it was uh...like Best Buy to a place and then we, then we came back to Lynchburg in '78 and I've been here ever since.

Miller: (52:54) If you have recollections about the bus ministry um...

**Knowles**: (52:57) Yes.

**Miller**: (52:58) How soon after the starting of the church did they start with the buses and Jim Vineyard, wasn't he a big...

**Knowles**: (53:03) Right. Jim Vineyard was a big name in busses and Jerry hired him to come in. We started uh...of course in the early days, you know, the Elim Home was started right away.

**Miller**: (53:13) Tell us about that. We'll, we'll stop for a minute before we go to buses and...tell us about the Elim Home.

**Knowles**: (53:16) Elim Home was started uh...since my mom and dad were, were...had been, were alcoholics too, mom and dad loved that idea because they had a lot of friends that needed that help. And Jerry's dad was, was more of an alcoholic too and Jerry started...actually I, I...you might...I might be corrected on this, it was almost in '56-'57 when we did a big house down below Appomattox. We would take the young people down in those days, I was working with the young people many times, we would take them down for, for picnics, cookouts, sing, and meet with the men and give them something to do. That became a very, very well known arm of Thomas Road.

**Miller**: (54:01) Can, can you talk about what they did at the Elim Home? I mean, I'm picturing a variety of...you know, was it like a rescue mission like the, like, you know, that people would drop in and drop out and people could just come and eat meals? Or was it a residential home or,

you know, was there treatment going on that, that...or was it just a place where they could live till they would sober up? Tell us a little bit about...

**Knowles**: (54:21) Yeah.

**Miller**: (54:22) what you remember about that.

**Knowles**: (54:23) Well, it, well, it was more or less, it was more or less it was a residential thing because they, they would live there. But as far as treatment, I don't think anyone in, in our circles uh...a guy named Green, I can't think of his name now, was a first director of it. I don't think they were qualified for treatments, you know. And I don't think Jerry got involved in that until later like they would do now. But they were there to get away from...they were, they were not allowed a car. We did not bus them in uh...we bused them into Thomas Road like we do now. But they were more or less isolated down there. They were Bible...

Miller: (55:03) So it's more or less get away from, get away from the bad influences and...

**Knowles**: (55:06) Bible studies.

**Miller**: (55:08) and, and have a place where you can kind of make a fresh break, get sober, and be ready to lead a productive life.

**Knowles**: (55:12) Right, and then when we had some cleanup days or, or started building some buildings at Thomas Road, those guys were carpenters, a lot of them were. A lot of them were workers, we'd bring them come over and let them work during Saturday and bring them to church Sunday. But the rest of the week, they were just, more or less, isolated and having Bible studies and just fellowship and just get them away from their old, old life.

**Walters**: (55:34) Was that the first thing that drew the attention from people outside of Lynchburg, that ministry? I think I may have read somewhere that people from outside started seeing what he was doing, what Jerry was leading in that ministry. Do you remember anything about that?

**Knowles**: (55:50) Not a whole lot. I know, I know that Jerry got a lot of help. I know there's a man that came uh...don't know his name, but he owned a fencing company, a chain link fencing company, and came in and spent a couple of weeks there to see if he could sober up and get off. And then he...the Lord saved him and took away drink from him and he came back and when we had Treasure Island Youth Camp, on Treasure Island, he, he put up a lot of...came in one day with some loads of fencing and put up fencing around inside the island where they wouldn't, kids wouldn't wander off. Things like that happened. Jerry seemed like God always opened the doors for the men, you know. And uh...but had some people down there that had some money and that came in...you wouldn't know it, but they were, they were alcoholics and they felt like that this is, this is good for me.

Walters: (56:44) Tell us about...were you here when Treasure Island was purchased then?

**Knowles**: (56:48) Yes.

**Walters**: (56:49) And tell us about what that looked like. We'll have to come back to the previous question but...

**Knowles**: (56:55) Well we went, you know, uh...the island was, years ago, was called the YMCA Island; the YMCA owned it. And if you go back into, there into Jones Memorial Library, you can find some books or some actual pictures of that big house that was down there. Jerry, I don't know how he came about purchasing it, but it was going to waste. And Jerry, as, as aggressive as he was, somebody said, you know, "this thing's for sale and you started a school" and, you know, you know, some of the first classrooms were down at the island and football practice was down there. So we bought the island and then we had a lot of picnics, church meetings down there. I remember, I remember we had a huge fish fry and Lester Roloff flew a plane in down and hit that island bringing the fish in and coming down landing on that island and...

**Miller**: (57:57) Did he actually land on the island?

**Walters**: (57:59) Yeah he did but it took him three or four times to come in and land on it but he actually landed on it and finally...and then, and then he offered people a ride out of there on it with him but I don't think he had any takers.

**Miller**: (58:09) [*laughter*]

Walters: (58:10) [laughter]

**Knowles**: (58:11) But we had a big fish fry and people would fish and boat and then the school started, we, and then we had youth camps down there in during the summer too. And the youth...and then when Liberty was started, there were, some of the buildings were used for dormitories. And then, of course, the flood got it and it became no good [laughter].

**Miller**: (58:29) Now you never played on Treasure Island?

**Knowles**: (58:31) No.

Miller: (58:32) You, would you ever go to the YMCA camp? No...

**Knowles**: (58:33) No I didn't.

Miller: (58:34) So the first connection you had was when Li...was when TRBC owned it.

**Knowles**: (58:38) Yeah, I lived off of Cabell Street and Rivermont Avenue. I knew it was there because the playground, the place, Riverside Park, where I grew up around in Rivermont, you go through the park over to the bridge that lead into there. So we knew it was there but we never, we never, I never, my family and I, we never had anything to do with...the YMCA I went to was on Church Street for the swimming classes after school.

**Miller**: (59:04) Ok. Well let's go back to the bus ministry then. Any idea what year that might have started?

**Knowles**: (59:10) I, I would sa...yeah I would think it would be about '65.

**Miller**: (59:16) Ok, so it wa...

**Knowles**: (59:17) No...

**Miller**: (59:18) it was before the college though?

**Knowles**: (59:20) Oh, it was before the college, oh yes.

**Miller**: (59:21) But it was still going when the college was here because they used a lot of...

**Knowles**: (59:24) Used the buses to transfer the students.

Miller: (59:26) To transfer the students and they also had students doing bus routes and things.

**Knowles**: (59:29) Bus routes. We started uh...Jerry, Jerry had...I, I don't know where Jim Vineyard was working, but I know he and...Jerry enticed him to come full time here. And it did, it was very successful.

**Miller**: (59:40) Later he went to work for Jack Hyles didn't he?

**Knowles**: (59:42) Jack Hyles, yeah. And it was very successful. We brought a lot of kids in and um...then it became, it became very expensive for insurance and if, you know, if uh...we fed them. And Jerry was criticized for that.

**Miller**: (59:57) What, I mean, what kinds of things...were you buying hamburgers from McDonald's or were you grilling your own stuff? What, what were you feeding them?

**Knowles**: (1:00:02) We were, well no, they were, they, more or less, feeding them Kool-Aid and, and doughnuts or, or small, small stuff.

Miller: (1:00:08) Just a snack.

**Knowles**: (1:00:09) Just a snack. Jerry, Jerry had written a gospel track called *Let Us Hang Together or We'll All Hang Separately*. And in that track, he mentions other churches and other people criticizing him for having a bus ministry. You know, taking the kids out of their community and bringing them over to Thomas Road and enticing them with food. And some of these kids didn't have...on Sunday morning, a lot of the kids that was picked up did not have food. I mean, they're, they're, they came from bad, poor families and that was a plus for us to feed them. And they might have fed them more, more stronger stuff later on but then, then just doughnuts and Kool-Aid.

**Miller**: (1:00:48) And so didn't they have what they called an A and a B Sunday school?

**Knowles**: (1:00:51) Yes, yes.

**Miller**: (1:00:53) So, one, one was the, the church family kids and the other one was mainly the bus kids that...they weren't bringing all of the kids, that weren't accompanied by parents, they weren't bringing them into the main service. They really kind of started a junior church basically?

**Knowles**: (1:01:09) Junior church, yeah. They didn't bring them in, oh yeah, they didn't bring them into the main service. We did have a junior church. There were all the kids stayed in another auditorium once, once Thomas Road grew and we had the space, we didn't bring them in the main auditorium. But we, we did have a junior church. And we had a Sunday school but I don't think they ever separated them from, you know, whatever age group that child got off the bus on is what age group he went in regardless or how he...

**Walters**: (1:01:35) There was not dichotomy between churched kids and unchurched kids.

**Knowles**: (1:01:39) People...no, never ever, ever. Because Jerry knew that, his days at Park Avenue, we went after the, the kids that needed help whether they were rich or poor and uh...no, we just...when a kid got off the bus, "what is your age? You go here, you go there." And they were mixed, in other words, church family and...

Miller: (1:01:57) And bus kids were...

**Knowles**: (1:01:58) and bus kids were not, not separated.

**Miller**: (1:01:59) I, I was thinking of another ministry then that, that did, did that. That, that kind of separated those juniors.

**Knowles**: (1:02:04) Yes. No, we didn't do that, no [laughter].

Miller: (1:02:06) Ok, alright.

**Walters**: (1:02:07) Now, now, you mentioned, you know, from the very earliest days of Thomas Road, Jerry was doing radio broadcast and then he went into, fairly quickly, into television broadcast...

**Knowles**: (1:02:19) Sure.

**Walters**: (1:02:20) too. Didn't he go to Roanoke...

**Knowles**: (1:02:21) Roanoke.

Walters: (1:02:22) to do that? Tell us more about what you know of those days and.

**Knowles**: (1:02:24) Well those days we were able to be a part of that and with a singing group. We, we had a group quartet of, of...a mixed quartet with girls and guys. And we would drive over to Roanoke and do a 30 minute live program on Sunday and then later on when the taping thing came we did it on...went over and somebody taped it. It was, it was, uh...it was a few years after we started before we became, became live from Thomas Road with the cameras actually live.

**Walters**: (1:03:00) Ok. Well when you went over to Roanoke, were you part of that quartet then?

**Knowles**: (1:03:04) Yes.

Walters: (1:03:05) And then you sang off of sheet music or did...

**Knowles**: (1:03:07) Sheet music.

**Walters**: (1:03:08) or did you write music?

**Knowles**: (1:03:09) No. I sung off of sheet music and Macel played the piano and we did sheet music. And I went to the studio...today it's called uh...what's Roanoke's station?

**Miller**: (1:03:24) WDBJ?

**Knowles**: (1:03:25) It is WDBJ? I don't think it was that then, it was...had another, had another...W. I'm not sure but it went to that studio which was basically like this with a piano and a camera, a huge camera [*chuckle*], and recorded from there, from that station, yeah.

**Miller**: (1:03:42) So now once WSET started or was it going, this small...the local Lynchburg station that's...

**Knowles**: (1:03:48) Alright, once it was started and became to where Jerry could...we switched. Yeah, Jerry would switch and came up...yeah WSET became, it was WLVA and they, they

offered facilities where Jerry would go there to their station but then we became live at Thomas Road and with our own cameras.

**Walters**: (1:04:05) Now, tell us about how that affected the nature of the service and the people were...were people kind of worried about sitting straight or keeping their kids from chewing gum or?

**Knowles**: (1:04:15) Yeah.

Walters: (1:04:16) Tell us about that dynamic when that first happened.

**Knowles**: (1:04:18) Well, you know, you know, the difference between the cameras now and then, the cameras were very large if you. If you, and if you had three cameras, one on, on the left, one in the center, and one on the other side, they were huge cameras with, on, on, large tripods and you could, if you would, if your camera was in front of you, you blocked about...I don't know how many, how many people were blocked. That was a problem and people walking around. Jerry always said "don't chew that gum, don't get up and go out unless you have to." And always when the camera went on somebody, quickly they were sleeping [laughter]. And uh...but it did, it did...but then later on it became a norm, I mean, it became...everybody got used to it. It was, it was no problem there.

**Walters**: (1:05:03) Now, in those early days, did you have some folks from the church who had some previous professional experience or was it learn as you go, we buy the equipment and good luck and we'll make it as good as we can?

**Knowles**: (1:05:14) No, we had a couple of...Jerry had a couple of men. There was a guy that worked at the radio station here. His name slips my mind right now but WWDOD, WWOD radio station. He was an engineer uh...cause, you know, in those early '60s, television was really coming into color and, really, more, more equipment; better equipment. So there were several men in church who knew electronics and knew, knew about TV, the early stages of it. And so he had his own church members that were knowledgeable and, of course, as it grew, then they got some professional people in there to help.

**Miller**: (1:05:57) So now, over there, there was what we, you know, later would call the Pate Chapel in the old Thomas Road, is that where the television broadcast really started?

**Knowles**: (1:06:08) Yes, yes.

**Miller**: (1:06:09) Ok. And so it was there and they built the new auditorium with the intent of having television...

**Knowles**: (1:06:16) Cameras in there, yes and which would made it a lot easier for people to, to sit around where they knew, they knew where they cameras were.

**Miller**: (1:06:23) Tell us a little bit about...as, as I recall, there was something where there was kind of a split. Jerry was very careful about watching the clock and ok, we come up to one minute before, you know, noon. He would kind of have a sentence where he would break away the, the camera...the television station would know to break away and then what would happen? Didn't they do something with the rest of the auditorium with having the invitation and so forth?

**Knowles**: (1:06:49) Yes.

Miller: (1:06:50) Tell us, tell us how that happened.

**Knowles**: (1:06:51) Well, you know, of course, Jerry had the monitor in front of him with a clock and he always...Jerry, Jerry was always one for time. I mean, if you're supposed to be off at 12, you were off at 12. But then, from then on when the cameras went off, that's when we did the invitation. And basically the church service would go on to maybe 12:15, 12:20 and we'd be out about 12:30 but always the cameras went off at 12, then Jerry would go, go to the invitation. Sometimes he maybe would not uh...he would stop early so the audience, TV audience, could see the invitation. Yeah, so he would keep that going afterwards though.

Miller: (1:07:29) And so now, one thing that could have had an impact on the church was the television cameras and all. Another thing that I see that could have an impact on the church was when the college students came in that, ok, now college students are required to attend Thomas Road. I, I guess the question that I'm going to ask here, and it's not really on the sheet of questions that I had for you, but it seemed as though...was, was Jerry really in charge and kind of he's our pastor, we love him and so we're just going to follow him in whatever he does? Were, were the people bothered by some of these things or was that that's just the next step uh...were, were people ever skittish about some of these changes and the new things or did they just go along joyfully with whatever he proposed?

**Knowles**: (1:08:18) No, not at first. But, you know, Jerry was a great leader and they did follow him very well and um...my mom and dad got, my mom especially, got irritated at...the students would come in and some how before the 11 o'clock service and put their books and, and stretch out all the uh...

Miller: (1:08:38) Oh, to save seats.

**Knowles**: (1:08:39) Save the seats which became very irritable to a lot of older church members and my mom and dad were one of them. Mom especially was more outspoken than dad. But there's a lot of...yeah, they, they resented that at first. And, but then Jerry's such a great leader, had great leadership, that, that he smoothed that over, you know. You could, you could see Jerry kill your own mother and he, he would say...

**Miller**: (1:09:02) [*laughter*]

**Knowles**: (1:09:04) you know, "I forgive you. I don't believe you really did that." And uh...but they smoothed that over to where they...it didn't matter, it didn't matter because they saw in him that he really wanted this school and to have it...having them come to Thomas...he would get up and say "do you want them to come here or do you want them to go somewhere else? But we've got to put up with their books and got to put up with them taking up these best seats" and uh...but they got used to it.

**Walters**: (1:09:29) Well and then the town had to deal with strings of yellow buses every Sunday, right?

**Knowles**: (1:09:33) Right, exactly.

**Walters**: (1:09:34) How did...tell us about the town as, as Thomas Road builds the building and all this starts happening, eventually up here on Candler's Mountain, Liberty Mountain.

**Knowles**: (1:09:47) Yeah.

Walters: (1:09:48) Tell us about how the, how the town folk dealt with that.

**Knowles**: (1:09:50) Well, you know, uh...as the church grew, all the other churches that I, I remember around town were very jealous. They, they didn't, they didn't know, you know, they, they thought Jerry used a lot of gimmicks, which he did. I mean, he a lot, he brought a lot of people...different speakers in, we had a lot of great music, we were on television, we were on radio, we have Elim Home starting and we, later on, we had the Godparent Home starting, and then Jerry became political. One of the first time he was on a nationwide magazine, maybe it was *Newsweek* or whatever, he called me up and asked me to meet him out somewhere. He was very proud of that magazine when he got it. And people around...

**Miller**: (1:10:33) I think you might be thinking of the *Time* cover?

**Knowles**: (1:10:34) *Time* cover.

**Miller**: (1:10:35) Ok.

**Knowles**: (1:10:36) It was *Time*. First time, yeah, he came to the *Time* cover. And very proud of that but he never let, let that...he never let stuff like go to his head. But...and he never let...the town people were critical, especially the City Council and the City Fathers uh...you know, we, we pay taxes. You know, a lot of times people think "well, you know, you're a church; you don't pay taxes." We pay taxes on some of the property that we had purchased, houses around us that we're not, were not being used for church, quote, church stuff, and we had to pay taxes on it. And the City Fathers gave us a more, more rough time maybe than regular, than, than people, citizens of Lynchburg, yeah. And then ,of course, the buses...of course parking on Thomas Road was a, was bad because of the hillside and people live right there and

they didn't want you to park in their driveway or block their driveways and finally Jerry, you know, Jerry would plead "don't park in their driveway. Don't park in their, in front of their house." Parking was a premium at, at Thomas Road but it, it was well...

**Miller**: (1:11:42) When, when did they get that extra lot kind of down the hill there... **Knowles**: (1:11:44) Down the hill was super. They, that came in later in the '80s. That was, that was not there uh...that, that lot was vacant for a long time before anybody even thought about....and, of course, then we bused them; park there, bus them up the hill. But that was a super, super plus.

**Walters**: (1:12:01) Well now, Dr. Falwell always used to talk about Donald Duck Bottling plant being the original building...

**Knowles**: (1:12:06) Right.

**Walters**: (1:12:07) that you had purchased, but other than that, today it still looks like mostly residential and then...

**Knowles**: (1:12:11) It is.

**Walters**: (1:12:12) Lynchburg College being located up on the other hill across the way there. So, was that all part of you strategy at that time when you had founded the church? I know we're going back chronologically but, did you look purposely in that community or did you take the best building where you could get the best deal?

**Knowles**: (1:12:29) Took whatever he could, he could get. In fact, Ms. Thomas that owned, owned the building and that Thomas Road was named after uh...was told she would, she would never ever sell that to a church. But Jerry, you know, with his personality and so forth, he did purchase it. It was just available.

Walters: (1:12:47) I see.

**Knowles**: (1:12:48) It wasn't...and no, and no, if you go back over it um...you know, Jerry said "if, if you thought about, if God thought about," this is just joking, "if God had thought about it, he wouldn't have made a camel like looks like two humps. If He had planned a little bit more, He wouldn't have made a two hump camel." But if he had planned a little bit, he wouldn't have built the church on the side of that hillside.

**Walters**: (1:13:06) [*laughter*]

**Miller**: (1:13:07) [*laughter*]

**Knowles**: (1:13:08) And then, I mean, when, when we went into the second Sunday, we went into Donald Duck building, you remember that on the side there was a 7-Eleven store in full operation and a gas station on the corner there too. So you had a lot of, lot of other traffic in there. Plus you got a church that's growing. Plus you've got, later one, you've got buses lined up all over that place. So that, that, I'm sure those people, those, especially those neighbors, were not...were going crazy. I met a lady, if I can insert this real quick, I met a lady up in Gainesville, Virginia recently. One of uh...great donor. She's 83, husband died about ten years ago. She's leaving Liberty a great...a, a nice, a nice estate of money. She told my wife and I, I took my wife over to meet her after I had done some estate planning, she said that when she lived in Lynchburg, she went to the church around the corner. I don't know what the [mumbling] on...Perrymont Avenue. It's got the red doors, a church around the corner from there, I forget. She went to that church and she said they would have to drive up through there, and this was like in the early '80s when the church was...there's a lot of people there too. She would drive through there to get over there from her house. And she said she would see people walking in that church carrying their Bibles. And she would say "what are they trying to prove? Who does Jerry Falwell think he is to have people walking in," because they carry their Bibles at the church she was going...she told me this last week that she was she said "who do they think they are? You know, trying to prove what with walking their Bibles under their arm and coming to church all hours of the night and day?" And they, that church, she said they were very critical of Thomas Road because of parking. Because people would park around there by that church, in front of that church, which was not illegal but, we didn't park on the, they didn't park on the church grounds but I, I remember her saying that last week.

**Miller**: (1:15:03) Well now, a couple things you said have, have sparked some other thoughts in my mind here. Ok, I can picture the old Pate Chapel and I can picture the old big auditorium there but when you were meeting in the Donald Duck Company before what was called the Pate Chapel was built, is there any kind of an auditorium there?

**Knowles**: (1:15:22) Yeah.

**Miller**: (1:15:23) In, in those early days...tell us about that Donald Duck building.

**Knowles**: (1:15:27) Alright, the Donald Duck building, it seated about a hundred and fifty maybe. And we got oh...a theatre went out, went out of business downtown; it was called the ISIS, I, S, I, S. And we got their theatre seats. And it was such that if when you, when you...maybe it was about 20 seats tied together and, and it was such that if somebody stood up you better all stand up because when one section got up, the seats were so that this section would, could fall. They weren't attached to the floor. You could fall backwards. But it was, it was a messy place when it was, when it first moved in there. It was very, very dirty.

**Miller**: (1:16:09) Now were you around when they were actually getting the pop, you know?

**Knowles**: (1:16:11) Yeah. My mom, my mom did...in fact, I, my, when my mom died in '83, I had a plaque put up on the building in, in memory of my mom at cleaning that building. And then when Jerry died, they took it down; thought somebody was going to steal it for a souvenir. And I've been pushing...they're going to put it back now. They don't think anybody's going to steal it. But my mom when in there with her, her, took a la...group of ladies and cleaned that stuff off the floor and the syrup and...

**Miller**: (1:16:38) Isn't there some sort of a plaque about that in the prayer chapel over in the new Thomas Road? I, I thought there was something about "these are some of the planks from the original..."

**Knowles**: (1:16:48) Oh, something like...yeah, yeah. I thought you meant the plaque was over there.

Miller: (1:16:50) No.

**Knowles**: (1:16:51) We did a, I did a uh...it was on the...it, it says "this is the Donald Duck building and in the memory of Ruth Knowles who helped clean this building and start a church with Jerry Falwell." And they removed it when he died but um...but you've got to realize that, that the building, the um...Donald Duck building was running like this facing, facing Thomas Road. It had about a hundred and fifty. Now, the next building is a building that's between the Pate Chapel. The auditorium went this way to the left of it. And that was the first, really, auditorium that we built. And that's between the Pate Chapel and the Donald Duck building. That was the main...that was, that was a new, a new auditorium with Mr. Pate Sr. had a lot to do with that, building that building.

**Miller**: (1:17:39) Since it sounds like you went down to Tennessee Temple with the Pates, tell us a little bit...we, we haven't had too many people that know about the Pate family and the Pate history and things like that. What did Macel's father do? Tell us about the brother that you knew that went...Macel's brother, then that went to Tennessee Temple. Talk about that for a moment if you would.

**Knowles**: (1:17:59) Well, the Pate family were uh...you know, when, when the Pate family came out of Park Avenue also, Macel's mom and dad and, and Sam and Macel and then she had a sister named Jean and a sister named Mary Ann. They came out of that also with the, with the split. I don't know if they called it that but that's basically what, what happened. Macel uh...Jerry started dating Macel. Little side story since...I was, I was going to take piano lessons...I was taking piano lessons from Macel in the early days before she was married. And Jerry was dating her but when he, when I was over doing my lessons, he would come in and sit on the piano bench with us and that didn't work at all so...

**Miller**: (1:18:44) [*laughter*]

**Knowels**: (1:18:45) I can't play the piano today because of the courting days that he and Macel. Not that he was jealous of anything. He didn't feel like I was competition but he was just trying to be funny and sat on, and sat on the piano bench with us. But then Sam, young Sam graduated from college...high school and got a job working for a company called Montague-Betts. I'm not sure what he did but he was a little older when he came to Tennessee Temple. But when Jerry took me down, it was Mr. Pate Sr. and Sam Pate's dad, Mr. Pate Sr. and Otis Wright. Then Sam finished, finished Tennessee Temple, came back to Lynchburg, and then later on started his mail order...mail, not mail order, but mail service with, and with um...doing a lot of mail for the Old Time Gospel Hour.

**Miller**: (1:19:39) And he also had a tape duplication type thing...

**Knowles**: (1:19:40) Tape duplication type thing, yeah.

**Miller**: (1:19:41) Ok, and so, and so that's the, that's the brother that's about the same age as all of you guys?

**Knowles**: (1:19:46) Yes, yes.

Miller: (1:19:47) Ok. What, what did Macel's father, what did he do for a living?

**Knowles**: (1:19:51) He was a carpenter, did construction; odds and end jobs. Ms. Pate worked at the shoe factory. And Macel and Mary Ann and Jean all worked at the bank. They were bank...First National Bank in Lynchburg, downtown.

**Miller**: (1:20:08) Something else that you said that reminded me to ask you this question then is...ok, I guess I never really thought of Thomas Road having anything to do with the Thomas family. So there was a Mrs. Thomas there, is that Thomas any relation to the Reber Thomas people?

**Knowles**: (1:20:23) No, not at all. Ms. Thomas uh...I didn't know her, I didn't know her, Jerry didn't know her. She was just a lady that lived, lived near by there and owned that property and that building. I don't even know what they paid for it, purchased it for. But it has nothing to do with Jimmy Thomas and those...no, no.

**Miller**: (1:20:43) And now, it was surprising to me that you said that there was a 7-Eleven and a little gas station and things like that, I mean, right now it's very much a residential neighborhood with just this sticking out, you know, sticking out of the middle of it. Was there some more little shops and things like that in its day or was there just a little cluster of...

**Knowles**: (1:21:02) Just that little clus...in fact, they're still there, I mean, the building is still there on the side. The 7-Eleven building is still there.

**Miller**: (1:21:08) Ok. Is, is that what they use for the choir uh...or, or the bookstore or?

**Walters**: (1:21:11) The youth met in there didn't they?

**Knowles**: (1:21:12) No, it's um...it's um...yeah, yeah the youth met there when Thomas Road was over there.

**Miller**: (1:21:16) Ok.

**Knowles**: (1:21:17) The youth department was there. Now it's where the Senior Saints meet

there.

Miller: (1:21:22) Ok.

**Walters**: (1:21:23) Right. And then the gas station, you can still see the look of the gas station.

They did you that for a bookstore...

**Knowles**: (1:21:28) Bookstore at one time.

**Walters**: (1:21:29) in the early part of this decade.

**Knowles**: (1:21:30) Exactly.

**Miller**: (1:21:31) Ok.

**Knowles**: (1:21:32) There was a bookstore.

**Walters**: (1:21:33) Right.

**Knowles**: (1:32:34) But that was it. It wasn't a cluster. No, right it was nothing...

**Miller**: (1:21:35) There, there wasn't a, it wasn't a little strip of businesses or anything like that, it was just there at the top of the...it's like they put a bottling plant in the middle of a residential neighborhood.

**Knowles**: (1:21:44) Yeah and, you know, growing up in Lynchburg...and I don't remember...of course, I...when I grew up as a kid, we didn't have a car, we didn't, didn't...you know, you went to the school in your neighborhood and we didn't venture over there from my house. You know, where I live off of Timberlake Road now, off near Lowe's, further down, I'm living behind McDonald's, and when I was a kid, to me that far out was way, I mean, that was country. I mean, you were, you were way over here, you were way out of Lynchburg [laughter].

Walters: (1:22:10) Sure.

**Knowles**: (1:22:11) But uh...but we...I didn't even remember the Donald Duck...I don't even remember it, it being in, in use prior to, I mean, really making drinks. But I have some of the bottles so I know it was in existence [*laughter*].

**Walters**: (1:22:25) [*laughter*] Wanted to ask you about uh...you mentioned this lady that you talked with and she talked about the people bringing their Bibles...

**Knowles**: (1:22:32) Bibles.

Walters: (1:22:33) and all that. That's an interesting...

**Knowles**: (1:22:34) It is.

**Walters**: (1:22:35) insight. When did you first notice the first protesters over anything and what was that like for people to come to church and go around people that may be trying to throw something in their face or, you know, literature or something? What was your experience like with that in those early days?

**Knowles**: (1:22:54) I think, I think, from my early time with Thomas Road protestors was when Jerry took a stand on, on the gays; gay rights, homosexuals. And they would march around Thomas Road and we, of course, you might...you...I'm sure you know this, you know, Jerry would have fed them doughnuts and coffee and, and told us to be kind to them. Other than that, I don't remember um...

Walters: (1:23:20) So that would have been in the '80s?

**Knowles**: (1:23:22) That would have been the '80s.

**Walters**: (1:23:24) Ok, so you don't remember protests before that?

**Knowles**: (1:23:26) No, I don't.

**Walters**: (1:23:27) Ok.

**Knowles**: (1:23:29) Nothing that, nothing that I can think of.

**Miller**: (1:23:30) And so now, I'm not sure if...was the whole Anita thing, Anita Bryant, when he went down to Florida, that was down there. When there were these protests, were those national people coming in from, you know, around the country or was...I don't know that there's a large local gay community here in Lynchburg. There is this Mel White who has...

**Knowles**: (1:23:52) Mel White who wrote Jerry, you know, who wrote Jerry's book.

**Miller**: (1:23:54) [*chuckle*] Right.

**Knowles**: (1:23:55) Yeah and um...I don't remember any, anybody, coming from...well they might have had, you know, you wouldn't have known them probably. I don't, I don't know if anyone came. I'm sure they came from out of town because I don't think the local people were strong enough to get a group of people to march around Thomas Road but I think they had some influence from out of state, out of p...out of city.

**Miller**: (1:24:17) Ok. Now, as far as local businesses, we've talked a little bit about the whole religious scene in the, the whole um...how the different churches got along and everything but talk about some guy who just runs a hardware store in Lynchburg, what was the, what was the, the attitude, the mood? You were at Sears for a while so um...I was kind of surprised when Dr. Falwell died, that you hear the national news that there were negative things being said...

**Knowles**: (1:24:52) Yeah.

**Miller**: (1:24:53) and as you would just drive down the street, you'd see, you know, "we're praying for you Macel," you know, "God bless you Dr. Falwell. You will be missed" and things like that. What was...in those days from when he first started becoming known in the mid '50s to, let's say, the starting of Liberty University. For that first 15 years or so, what was the reaction of the city of Lynchburg to Jerry Falwell?

**Knowles**: (1:25:17) Well, as I said earlier, the City Council was giving us a rough time on parking, on paying taxes, on property we owned around there that they considered not being used for church related ministries. I don't ever...me working at um...well, when I go...if I can go back to when, when we started in Donald Duck building, we were called, we were called the Donald Duck Baptist Church. We were saying we had bottle crates for pews. The negatism when we were in the Donald Duck building were very highly critical of, of, you know, they made fun of it. But when we started Thomas Road and it grew, the city became very, very favorable of Thomas Road because most, a lot of people attended Thomas Road. Business people and uh...

**Miller**: (1:26:14) And so those are voters and, you know, you, you don't want to do anything to alienate...

**Knowles**: (1:26:17) No.

**Miller**: (1:26:18) and it's not like those are the enemy, they're on the hill in their little barricade type.

**Knowles**: (1:26:22) No.

**Miller**: (1:26:23) No, these, these are folks like us and, and they're, they're voting and shopping and things like that so...

**Knowles**: (1:26:27) Sure.

**Miller**: (1:26:28) you have to be a little bit careful about what you say.

**Knowles**: (1:26:30) They, they would have and we, we became, we became uh...a lot of business people started attending Thomas Road. Business people that supplied the money there, helped with a lot of funds there and became popular in, in the town as, as ownership of businesses. They, they were helping Jerry and then we...we had a lot of donations to Elim Home and the Godparent Home came from businesses. But there was not a lot of negatism. I don't remember any at, when I worked at Sears, I don't remember a lot of criticisms from, from employees that didn't go to Thomas Road.

**Knowles**: (1:27:08) Now, you mentioned that you've had some uh...had some involvement with the music there at Thomas Road Baptist Church and being a musician yourself. The Living Christmas Tree, I read one account where Jerry was really proud of that and that was something to bring people in and kind of "even if you never darken our door or you have another church that you go to in town, boy this is going to be our big show." Do you have many memories about the Living Christmas Tree and could you talk about that?

**Knowles**: (1:27:36) Yes. We, we had a music director here name Jim Soward. And Jim...the first Living Christmas Tree was actually when we were worshipping in the Pate Chapel. Yeah, well...

**Walters**: (1:27:49) That's the one at the old church, not...

**Knowles**: (1:22:51) Old church, yeah. That's what I just...when I said Pate Chapel, my mind went to the new one.

Miller: (1:27:55) Ok.

**Knowles**: (1:27:56) I'm talking about the old building that, that was the Pate Chapel's got the name on it. That was the main auditorium at that time. That's where the first Living Christmas Tree came about. And he was very proud of that. And it did bring in people other than coming, just coming to regular church service. The music was a little different than it is now in the Tree, but it...

**Walters**: (1:28:16) Did it have C7 light bulbs in the tree or?

**Knowles**: (1:28:18) Yeah, probably some...

Walters: (1:28:20) Yeah? Ok.

**Knowles**: (1:28:21) of them big lig...yeah. And, and all run with a, probably, a wire running ram with six plugs into the wall.

**Miller**: (1:28:27) [*laughter*]

**Knowles**: (1:28:28) And the music was a little...if you...and I think I, I know I'll probably have...Jerry made a long play, the long play album.

**Miller**: (1:28:36) LP, LP record.

**Knowles**: (1:28:38) LP's. Got several...I think I've got several of those with the tree on the front. It did draw in people. And then uh...it was, it was good. We were the first in Lynchburg to do it. And it was, it was not...I don't think we were a novelty is a good word, uh...it was a good draw-in card, it was different, and it was entertaining to a point but then there was the gospel preached.

Miller: (1:29:02) Just to kind of get an idea here, with the questions that we have, we're going to kind of split up and today our first segment of the interview, we're going to really deal with the early days and Thomas Road, and then if we can talk about your later ministry with LU and some of the fund raising and things like that. So we're going to, we're going to pick this up again tomorrow but we have a few minutes here left today that I wanted to talk about, about Thomas Road. Here's a question for you as a musician going to Thomas Road. It seems as though the music has always been, you know, very good um...now, but you had Macel Falwell playing the piano. You know, was, was it just that you had very talented people? Was, was there any resentment from the lady who would be able to sing in any other church but she wasn't good enough for Thomas Road or did they let some folks sing on Sunday nights that weren't quite Sunday morning caliber or...

**Knowles**: (1:29:55) [*laughter*]

**Miller**: (1:29:56) can you talk about that from a musical perspective?

**Knowles**: (1:29:57) That was, that was true. Well, you know, everything...when television was started at Thomas Road in, in early...well let's pick the early '70s when the school was started, the, the student body brought in a lot of talented young people; musicians, singers. To me there was not a jealousy as far as Macel playing the piano because they knew, they knew who she was. So, but there was, there was some controversial and there was a lot of jealousy and I was part of the choir, part of the solos. There were certain people that sung on Sunday morning in front of the TV and, you know, that was Sunday night singers and there were Sunday morning singers.

**Miller**: (1:30:34) Ok.

**Knowles**: (1:30:35) Yeah and uh...to me, I, I did them both but I, I did, I mostly did Sunday night. That was my thing. And then when we started the Sounds of Liberty, the Chorales, they sort of took over the Sunday morning music. And then if, then the solos were there, it came out of that...like Robbie Hiner. Robbie was in the first group and Robbie became the soloist. So Jerry basically used a, I'm not going to say star person, but when he brought uh...Doug, Doug Oldham came in, became the soloist and then Robbie Hiner.

**Miller**: (1:31:10) Yeah, could you go through that chronology here. Ok, so we start of in '56, who was the first...you know, I know a lot of evangelists that had their musician that would go along with traveling evangelists, who was Jerry's first music man, you know, to kind of distinguish it from just any other church that just had the choir leader or the song leader in, in church?

**Knowles**: (1:31:30) Well that was a man, I don't know if you've ever heard of him, that was guy by the name of Jack Holcomb.

**Miller**: (1:31:34) Right.

Walters: Oh, sure. Right.

**Knowles**: (1:31:35) Recorded for RCA. Jack came here years ago. Jack and another evangelist named Jack...I don't know. He had dark hair, they called him Black Jack and Holcomb had red hair...

**Miller**: (1:34:45) [*laughter*]

**Knowles**: (1:34:46) and it was Black Jack and Red Jack. They held a revival downtown at the, what's that big auditor...the, the uh...the big building downtown and then Paul Donaldson used them at Park Avenue and then Jerry brought in Jack Holcomb. Jack was probably the first major...he was an RCA recording artist.

**Miller**: (1:32:08) Ok, now, was, did he stay for a while then in Lynchburg or...

**Knowles**: (1:32:10) No, he...

**Miller**: (1:32:11) was this just a special...

**Knowles**: (1:32:12) he...just, just special time. He came in and out, because that was his fulltime ministry.

**Miller**: (1:32:16) Ok, but, but on a regular Sunday in October and then, you know, the following February, when did they start having a...it, it seemed like Doug Oldham was the regular Sunday person. Was that not till they went to regularly televising the live services?

**Knowles**: (1:32:33) Live services. Yeah, yeah, Robbie was probably first with the Chorale...

Miller: (1:32:36) Ok.

**Knowles**: (1:32:37) Sounds of Liberty. And then Doug came in as, when television became very, yeah, popular and then Doug became the soloist, quote, of, of Thomas Road Baptist TV program.

Walters: (1:32:47) And when did Don...

**Knowles**: (1:32:48) Old Time Gospel Hour.

Walters: (1:32:49) Norman and Mack Evans com in?

**Knowles**: (1:32:50) Uh...yeah. They came in uh...gosh, that brings up another stories doesn't it? Uh...Don Norman came in uh...gosh, I don't know the dates uh...and Mack Evans was there. Mack traveled. Don became fulltime and Don became the soloist and they switched back and forth with Doug and Mack and Robbie and all, then they formed the trios and...

**Walters**: (1:33:18) Right, and then they used to...tell us about how some of those things came about. There for a while, in the mid '80s, I remember the LBN singers when the LBN first was formed...

**Knowles**: (1:33:30) Formed and came in.

**Walters**: (1:33:32) And wasn't Jonathon's wife in that group...

**Knowles**: (1:33:34) Sherri.

**Walters**: (1:33:35) coming out of TRUTH?

**Knowles**: (1:33:36) Yeah, coming out of TRUTH. I don't know how that came about uh...cause, you know, we had the, we had the Sounds of Liberty and uh...Jerry, I guess they traveled with him, the LBC singers. I don't know his mind thought on that because I felt like that he had, we already had a group like that to, to...in a way. I always felt like that the LBC singers were compared, I mean, the Liberty kids were compared to the LBC singers. I thought they was just as good and had just...the musicians was just as well. But I don't know what Jerry's thought on that was to have this special group come in and, and they were all fulltime, you know, during that period of time.

**Walters**: (1:34:18) And then do you remember anything about the founding of SMITE, the missions oriented traveling group?

**Knowles**: (1:34:26) Not a whole lot, no. SMITE was started from here, Liberty...

Walters: (1:34:28) Right, right.

**Knowles**: (34:29) as a musical group going out for missions, yeah. And then we have them sing...only musical groups that started at Thomas, I mean at Liberty and Thomas Road...or at Liberty, came and sung at Thomas Road a lot, yeah.

**Miller**: (1:34:43) Now were you ever a song leader that you, you know, waved your arms and leading in the songs?

**Knowles**: (1:34:47) I did. I have, in the early, early stages of the Thomas Road, I did. In fact, I just did the music this Wednesday night at, at Pate Chapel because Dave Randlett was out. I do the Wednesday night services a lot if David's not there. But in the early stages I did the congregational song leading, yeah.

**Miller**: (1:35:04) Ok, so when...

**Knowles**: (1:35:05) And then till they got fulltime people.

**Miller**: (1:35:06) When, when did we go from kind of the Bob Jones style, very traditional, hundred year, you know, the songs of Fanny Crosby and the Isaac Watts and that type of thing, to more the style...was, was, did that come along with the television too? Or were...it, it seemed like as I was watching, I lived in a different state here and was just kind of watching from a far on the television, that, it seemed like you guys were always kind of one step ahead. That you were on the cutting edge here at Thomas Road...

**Knowles**: (1:35:36) Bringing, yeah.

**Miller**: (1:35:37) you know, of um...you, you weren't too far ahead in those early days and, and it still is, is not that far ahead but it, it seemed as though you had the more contemporary sound more early on.

**Knowles**: (1:35:53) Right, right, we did. And I think that came out of, of starting Liberty with...I think Robbie Hiner probably had a lot to do with that. Bringing, bringing in basically southern gospel, mixing that with, with uh the other music...

**Miller**: (1:36:06) Traditional hymns?

**Knowles**: (1:36:07) Traditional hymns. And the Gaither music came in, you know. "He Touch Me" was written in '73 [*chuckle*], it's still going good, it's still going strong. I think Robbie and then when Don Norman came in out of...Don came out of a quartet, the Harvesters, which was out of North Carolina was a very popular group in those days, and brought in that music and mix it with church music and then the, then the rest is sort of history, yeah.

**Walters**: (1:36:35) Now the Pantanas, did they, did they come to teach at Liberty and then you found out that they had musical talent or?

**Knowles**: (1:36:40) Yeah. That, that's another group. Yeah they came to teach at Liberty, John and Phil and, and two girls, the two wives and they formed a quartet and they did a lot of singing in the early...when they first came here to school, yeah. The Pantanas were...and they brought in a, a different sound and, and of course then Dave Randlett came in as the music...and Dave was from a different background of Nazarene or Free Will Baptist and brought in music that he had done with them. And sort of a, sort of a mixture of things and, and of course, for me, all the music was great. I enjoyed it in those days.

Miller: (1:37:22) And um...so now, we've talked about the music at Thomas Road Baptist Church, but Jerry Falwell in those days was a nationally known speaker and he was hopping in jets and he would always try to be back for the Sunday services, try to be back for the Wednesday services. But on Monday, Tuesday he was some place and tended to be on Thursday, Friday maybe he was some place else and he would hold meetings and hold "I Love America" rallies and things like that. If he was just asked to speak at a church in Florida or North Carolina or Ohio or something like that, did he typically take musicians along with him? And were you ever one of those musicians?

**Knowles**: (1:38:04) Oh, I, now, now...well, in the early days yes but not, not later on when he would jet out. There was Don Norman, Robbie, Robbie and Don traveled a lot with him and sung. I was there when, when uh...in the early days of...in the '70s when he started his Faith Partner and Door Knockers, we called them, and we would go to Roanoke. We'd go to Richmond. We'd go to towns where we could drive out that night and drive....there's no such thing as...we didn't have an airplane. We'd drive out at night, drive out during the day to Roanoke, Richmond, Danville, and cities that we could drive out to and do music and preach and come back that night. But I did it in the early days and then later on when we got larger and got fulltime like Robbie or Don they traveled with him in the...I call it the jet age [laughter].

**Walters**: (1:38:54) What was he like to travel with in those regional things in the car? Did he joke around a lot? Did he...what'd you t...what would be a typical topic? Would it always be religion oriented stuff or did you talk about...

**Knowles**: (1:39:05) No, we would, we would drive...my wife would comment on that uh...lots of times people today...we were going out of Lynchburg to churches...play games. He had a great memory. One thing we would do, he would, he would ask you uh...you would tell him about a verse of scripture and he would, he could, in the King James actually, he would tell you which side of the page it's on and what's the page number and we'd play games.

**Miller**: (1:39:32) Was that in the Faith Partners Bible [laughter]?

**Knowles**: (1:39:34) Faith Partner...probably then in those days the Faith Partner Bible. But he would, we'd play games. He was a, he was a jokester, he loved firecrackers. He loved to, he loved to throw those things and we would go to Tennessee which all of them are legal and bring them back;

**Walters**: (1:39:47) [*laughter*]

**Knowles**: (1:39:48) those round red cherry bombs and, they quit making them, but we brought him back a lot of cherry bombs in those days. Hopefully...my wife said if he ever hurt somebody it would be my fault. I don't think he threw them somewhere where it would hurt somebody.

**Miller**: (1:40:00) Well that did bring a question up to my mind is, he did go to the Faith Partners Bible, but didn't he, in the very early days, preach from the Schofield Bible?

**Knowles**: (1:40:07) Oh yeah, oh yeah.

**Miller**: (1:40:09) And, and so, was that a definite switch when he went from the Schofield Bible to the Faith Partners Bible?

**Knowles**: (1:40:13) Probably was but it was still the King James, yeah.

**Miller**: (1:40:16) Sure.

**Knowles**: (1:40:17) And see, Oliver Greene uh...when Oliver Greene came, Oliver Greene, one of his number one gift offers was a Schofield Bible. And I think that's where Jerry got his idea from when I went on, when he went on TV, you know, he made, right then, you got a gift offer. Oliver Greene sold a lot of Schofield Bibles in those days.

Miller: (1:40:35) Let, we're going to talk more about fundraising, particularly for the University, which is what you work with now, on our interview the, the next time here but talk about um...as he would go to these local areas, was he just doing pulpit supply to give them a special event or was he trying to raise money for the television time on the television and so talk a little bit about what fundraising was prior to the starting of Liberty and then talk a little bit about these premiums and, you've already mentioned LP records, but I remember in one day getting uh...I bought a little...the whole bible on a two by two inch slide...

**Knowles**: (1:41:15) Yeah, I have those. The little...the Smallest Bible in the World.

**Miller**: (1:41:16) The Smallest Bible in the World. So talk a little bit about fundraising prior to Liberty University and also talk about the premiums and the recordings and that that he offered.

**Knowles**: (1:41:30) Well, when he started out, Jim Soward played the trumpet; Jim Soward has passed away, Joy that, is still around. Jerry would go out with Jim and, I was gone in those days, early day, I mean, the days I'm, I'm talking about, and I, and I was...God blessed me that when I was in the town working with Sears, I worked for Belks Best Products, whatever church I was in, Jerry would come, as a favor I guess to me, and, and bring a...do a night. But he started out, he and Jim started out doing Faith Partners Door Knockers to do a fundraiser for, for the TV program. And Jim would go in and play the trumpet, Jerry would preach and offer, in those days when he started bringing in the Faith, I mean, the Bible...the Faith Partner Bible. That's when he started Faith Partners to get people to supply money to the TV, the TV programs.

**Miller**: (1:42:29) He had some other premiums too I remember. Wasn't there like you could get a little Bible study set that had a concordance and maybe a Bible dictionary?

**Knowles**: (1:42:36) Yeah, still, yeah. Yeah, there would be a three set that and uh...Jerry was, Jerry was great on Bible studies and, and Bible books to, to get people to get into the Word. We used a lot of things. Of course the "Jesus First" Pin came, came out and became very popular.

**Miller**: (1:42:53) Talk about that for a moment. Any...

**Knowles**: (1:42:54) With "Jesus First" Pin.

**Miller**: (1:42:55) any idea when that was first introduced?

**Knowles**: (1:42:57) Early '80s. I remember him, I remember uh...reason I know that is I lived in Fayetteville and there was a company down there that made wooden plaques, wooden...and so we had them to do a, I had them to do a, a plaque, just like the pin, that was about this wide, about 12 inches wide. It said Jesus first and to see if Jerry wanted to use that but that never came, came about. He didn't, he didn't go for that, that idea. So I kept the original. But the "Jesus First" Pin became um...I, I had some pastors, that were in Fayetteville, that were very critical of this ministry. They would see me out and say that, that it said Jesus first but it really, he was promoting himself because it said, it was initials. It was J.F. and they said that's why Jerry did Jesus first cause he wanted to put his own initials in there. But little stuff like that was really, really silly because that wasn't what he was thinking. And there was a lot of promotions that...Jerry was, Jerry was very...number one on promotions, on gift offers. I mean, it was just unbelievable.

**Walters**: (1:44:02) Now what were the...you mentioned Faith Partners was to keep him on TV, correct?

**Knowles**: (1:44:06) Mm hmm.

Walters: (1:44:07) And then there was the 15,000 Club...

**Knowles**: (1:44:09) Right.

**Walters**: (1:44:10) and what were some of the other ones and what, what were those thrusts or focuses?

**Knowles**: (1:44:15) Well, 15,000 Club was to, to, first of all, was to, was to try to get in 15,000 people that would give so much a month or so much for TV. First of all, the early days they were called Doorknockers, where we'd go out in the community and hang, hang a door...a little um...well we called them doorknockers. You hang it over the doorknob and you just advertise the church and the, the TV and uh...that was called Doorknockers. It went from Faith Partners and it went from 15,000 Club um...all those were definitely fundraisers for the television program, to get other people from outside of Lynchburg to support the TV because it was going into homes outside of Lynchburg. That's what the, basically, they were used for.

**Miller**: (1:45:05) Well, and with that, that seems like a good natural place here to split. We've really enjoyed talking with you today. With that we'll conclude today's part one interview with Harold Knowles and we'll conclude tomorrow at this same time. This interview has been conducted as part of the oral history project of the Liberty University archives.

[end of interview]