Interview

with

Rembert Coney Dennis

(1915-1992)
[TAPE TWELVE BEGINS]

ROSENGARTEN: Senator, our last conversation, I think we talked for a little while after the tape about, you had the notion of someday uniting the school populations of Cainhoy and Hanahan? Would you just describe that idea again for the tape because I don't think I got it on the last one.

DENNIS: I said I might do what about them?

ROSENGARTEN: You said that you could foresee a day when the school populations of Berkeley and Charleston counties were connected by that bridge.

DENNIS: Oh yes. That's been a prediction of the people who study populations. That came up when we were in the process of school integration. The question specifically was about the Hanahan situation -- cut off from Berkeley County by the river. What we were going to do to take care of that population down there when we didn't have the means to take care of what we were assigned to at that time, when we were in court. What we suggested was that there would be a merger, there'd be a time to come not far down the road when the Berkeley county schools and Cainhoy and Wando would have to integrate with the North Charleston area schools because they'd be connected by the bridges over, in order to make it much closer together than they are now. I think that day is coming.

ROSENGARTEN: Would you foresee opposition to that idea?

DENNIS: Not any more than the usual opposition to merging two counties. I think it would have some advantages for Berkeley county rural schools. They'd be connected with more city-wide type schools. The objections would come from them rather than from us. But I think that's in the future. I won't have to handle it, but it's coming, I'm sure.

ROSENGARTEN: Back in the early seventies, you strongly advocated reinstating the death penalty and even suggestion televising executions. What was your reasoning in this, and what did your opponents say?

DENNIS: Of course I was personally influenced I'm sure by the tragedy that I was aware of, in my own family, my father being killed. I maintained then, and still do, a rather tough stance on prosecution in murder cases, high-crime cases. I had been doing some reading and come to some ideas that perhaps I had as strong a case you could for that. A penalty rather, in a case, how strong a penalty would be for the future murderers if some were around to see the execution. There are instances of where that's done. Executions used to be witnessed by a lot of people when they had them outside on the cross and so forth. Most anybody who wanted to see one, I just suggested it, sympathy for it. I went to one.

ROSENGARTEN: You have been to one?

DENNIS: Yes. I went to the one that involved the defendant who killed a storekeeper at Cainhoy. I didn't plan it a long time. I was riding to Columbia to the legislature, at that time I was a member of the house, and I was riding with the senator and other representatives. I learned that on that Tuesday morning we were going up, they were going a little early for the execution of this fellow who killed .... at the store at Cainhoy. They asked me if I wanted to go and I accepted. It wasn't pleasant to see.

ROSENGARTEN: Was that a hanging?

DENNIS: The electric chair. The executioner asked him a few questions and then they put the pail on his head. His arms and legs were already strapped. The executioner tapped the cane three times and you could see him pull the switch. The charge hit the poor fellow, and it didn't take long.
ROSENGARTEN: In the case of your father's murder, as I remember your describing it to me, the man who actually pulled the trigger you didn't really hold morally responsible because he had been put up to it.

DENNIS: That's right. I'd have to hold him morally responsible, but he was just barely legally responsible because he didn't have it up here.

ROSENGARTEN: What would you think could be done in a case like that?

DENNIS: Well I guess the jury system is about the best way for it to be handled. He was tried and found guilty by a jury in another county. There was a change of venue to Orangeburg County. I don't have any suggestions for improvement in the way the trial is handled. I was merely suggesting perhaps some edification could come out of allowing people to see it. Especially those that were likely to be put in a position where they'd want to do it themselves.

ROSENGARTEN: But if you, if the men who were behind your father's assassination could have been brought to justice, the men who had put this guy up to it, they couldn't have been charged with murder. They would have been charged with conspiracy or accessory or something.

DENNIS: Same penalty though.

ROSENGARTEN: Same penalty?

DENNIS: If you arranged the gun and equipment and everything for a fellow to go kill somebody, you're equally responsible with him. You're charged with a conspiracy to murder, and that's what several of them were charged with.

ROSENGARTEN: So there were, some of these men were charged? I didn't realize that. What was the outcome?

DENNIS: Found not guilty. By the judge, not by the jury. There was a big newspaper exploration of the whole thing, whether or not the judge had been bought off by the defense. Horrible situation. Suspicion developed strongly that he was. Under the influence of alcohol, he made some statements later to people that in the case he may have been approached. At this time I wouldn't like to revive the details of it. I'll tell you, but I wouldn't want there to be a spokesman for a printed passage saying that Judge Grimball from Charleston was the judge, but he was.

ROSENGARTEN: But there was no legal recourse? You couldn't have a mistrial declared, or...

DENNIS: No. No way to declare the trial a mistrial.

ROSENGARTEN: Must have been very frustrating.

DENNIS: It was very aggravating.

ROSENGARTEN: You know, for someone who's spent his whole life writing laws and upholding the justice of the state, to see a situation where you know justice is not being done, but there's nothing you can do about it.

DENNIS: That's right. That's the way it happened.

ROSENGARTEN: Going back to the seventies now. In 1973, rumors of the utility companies purchasing the Santee-Cooper co-op created a fair amount of political flak. Do you remember what the issues were here?
DENNIS: The Santee-Cooper was getting into the retail electrical business to some extent, and they were furnishing the electricity for a big area of the co-ops. The legislature was confronted with questions about an introduction of legislation to investigate what all the circumstances were. Santee-Cooper was actually investigated. The upshot of it was that there wasn't anything to legally prosecute anybody about. Turned out to be a regulatory matter, and special legislation was passed for Santee-Cooper to operate an electrical system for residences as well as for big business. It had been a constant tug-of-war between Santee-Cooper and the private power companies. How far should public power be allowed to go to serve industry, and to some extent to serve dwellings? Santee-Cooper was created to do things other than to furnish electricity for household and business purposes. But of course when the law had been opened up for it, they wanted to get in it, and they did get in it to some extent. The Public Service Commission had no jurisdiction over Santee-Cooper, a state agency, and that's where the real problems came. It was a problem for the legislature to act rather than a regulatory body. The parties got together and agreed on legislation. Legislation that set up regulations for that operation of a state agency selling public power to industry and to home-owners. Friction occurred in the legislation and the operation of it. The battle between public power and private power developed this pretty well. You don't see much of it anymore. There's room in the marketplace for both.

ROSENGARTEN: The first Hell-Hole Swamp festival took place in 1972. The program that was published was dedicated to the memory of L. Mendel Rivers, who had died the year before I believe. Were you there? Can you remember these early festivals?

DENNIS: Oh yes. I went to all of them.

ROSENGARTEN: You went to all of them? What do you remember best about them? This one I think was the second one, because it's 1973. There weren't any pictures of that first one, but I thought this was amusing. There is a picture of your family there.

DENNIS: I think the headline's very appropriate.

ROSENGARTEN: What does it say?

DENNIS: "Festival offers something for everyone." Rivers had died then, and Mendel Davis was the congressman. It was a good place for a politician to be. Talk to everybody, claim credit for the good things, discredit for anything not good. What they did at Jamestown where they had the festival, one big exhibition was liquor stills. They had them set up just like they were operating, and they had all sorts of activities. Some, but not a great deal, of carnival activities, rides and so forth. Mostly exhibits. We'd have varied days, and specialize certain functions on those days. It took a week of activity.

ROSENGARTEN: Was there ever a snake pit when you were there? Did you ever see that?

DENNIS: A what?

ROSENGARTEN: A snake pit.

DENNIS: I didn't see it, but it was there.

ROSENGARTEN: I've been, more recently, not back in those days. I was never so fascinated by anything. There were hundreds and hundreds of rattlesnakes and moccasins and some pretty, couple of exotic snakes like pythons, and these guys walking around picking them up.

DENNIS: I'm scared to death of them.
ROSENGARTEN: They're frightening, but fascinating. You almost couldn't pull yourself away. Who's idea was the festival?

DENNIS: Somebody in the town of Jamestown. I wouldn't be surprised if Cecil Guerry wasn't one of the first ones.

ROSENGARTEN: So for a political person, I guess it was what they call a photo opportunity now.

DENNIS: They had a big parade. Politicians were prominent in that. At times that I went, they had a real sizeable parade. Other times, it was not so, other things claiming interest I guess. Always had a show of various communities. Just like any local parade. Communities would have a sign. The utilities would participate, various businesses and organizations, Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts. Just like you'd have a community parade now, but on the edge of Hell-Hole Swamp. Where it was being held was a big attraction I guess. Had square-dancing, and other activities that were going on in connection with it.

ROSENGARTEN: You've talked a little about Mendel Rivers, maybe a couple of months ago. This first festival being right after he died, soon after he died. Would you describe him as kind of a hero in Berkeley County? Was he...

DENNIS: Very much so. He was a very attractive man from the standpoint of the public. He always could make a good speech teeing what some of the things that... He was a very humorous speaker.

ROSENGARTEN: Among the other members of the so-called Hell-Hole Gang, Robert McNair and Lester Bates, what were your relationships with them like? Were they also friends of yours?

DENNIS: They're very close friends. We always participated in the parade. Lester and Bob both were very popular with the public of Berkeley County. Of course Bob McNair had his family plantation there right on the edge of town of Jamestown. He always participated by having the authorities of the function to use his place for some function like a lancing tournament, horse racing. The last day, Saturday, is when they have that, and that's when they'd have the big crowd down there.

ROSENGARTEN: Did you know McNair and Bates from Berkeley County before you went into the House?

DENNIS: Yes, I did. Matter of fact I'm one of the few politicians in South Carolina, so it's said, that told Mr. Jim Byrnes I couldn't support him [Bates]. I was going to support Bob McNair, a local man. I didn't think he could win, but I thought he deserved the support of his community. Mr. Byrnes came to my office, law office, on a visit down here as the campaign was getting under way, and I thought the best thing for me to do was be honest with him. He was shocked that a local politician would tell a great national politician like Jim Byrnes that he wasn't going to support him. I told him. He promptly went up the street to talk to Fishburne, who was his main supporter, and was county health doctor. They were personal friends, and he couldn't understand how I could pass up the opportunity of supporting Jim Byrnes. I didn't make any headway, but I did everything I could for...

ROSENGARTEN: This was in a gubernatorial primary?

DENNIS: That's right. Yes, I didn't tell you what it was. Byrnes had been, he had dropped out of the national picture and had come home to run for governor. Sort of stepping out of the picture.

ROSENGARTEN: So, in other words, your so-called hometown loyalties came first for you?

DENNIS: That's right. I told him I knew he was going to be elected; he had no problem, but to consider my
situation. A local politician with a local candidate who had the qualifications to be governor. I felt it was my obligation and responsibility to do what I could for him.

ROSENGARTEN: Bob McNair did win eventually.

DENNIS: Eventually. This was Lester Bates' race, when I had that conversation with Byrnes.

ROSENGARTEN: You had talked some about the little Greek restaurant that was near the capitol, where as a young legislator you sort of struck up a friendship with the owners. In the early seventies, there [was] a bill to create a mall near the capitol, which apparently threatened the Capitol Café. Do you remember what happened with that bill?

DENNIS: Either withdrawn or defeated. What the bill did was .... a lot of people, and the legislature, who ate and participated to some extent in the weekly Tuesday night gathering at the, at Momma and Poppa's place. I first knew the place as just a café when I was a page, and it was a favorite eating place of my father. I went with him there many times. Then as a legislator I enjoyed going and the V...., they did some picking and singing. I didn't have a great voice, but I could sing some of the songs that they liked at the time. They still ask me to do it when I, an occasion is going on sometimes, but I haven't tried it since I got weaker. You can't sing those kinds of songs when you're not real strong.

ROSENGARTEN: And someone would play an instrument? People would play instruments also?

DENNIS: People would what?

ROSENGARTEN: People would play instruments?

DENNIS: Oh yes. Some of the legislators and some of the public officials, the Public Service Commissioners. Always had a singer and a instrument player. They just had a small string band is what it was. Lewis Moss, member of the Public Service Commissioners, had a tremendous voice and he entertained there at the Capitol Cafe and other places, too. Bringing it home, our delegation had [E.] Jarvis Morris who could play a guitar and sing country music, and they called on him. I joined in it some. It was a great place for a legislative gathering every Tuesday night.

ROSENGARTEN: So you felt that whatever the plan was to create this mall would disrupt that business.

DENNIS: Yes. We, the legislators liked to go there to eat so much and other occasions, too. Had a great regard for Papa Siokas, who was the owner. His son operated it after his death, along with his wife. They were great people.

ROSENGARTEN: I was looking for some notes. I remember taking, long time ago, now this is a little out of order because we would get up to it in the eighties, it happened in 1981. This is a propos of your singing. There was a newspaper article describing the dedication of the Alumax plant, where apparently you gave a solo rendition of "Your Cheating Heart"?

DENNIS: Yes. That's what I used to sing at the Capitol Café sometimes, too.

ROSENGARTEN: That was one of your favorites?

DENNIS: My favorite. My wife didn't like it so much, but it was what was done by legislators, some special song they could sing. I don't know a whole lot about music, but I could get by with singing a little bit.
ROSENGARTEN: Do you remember this event, the dedication of the Alumax plant?

DENNIS: Oh yes. They had a country singer and some of my crowd got me to join him in that song, and that was what was publicized. They got him to sing “Cheating Heart.” He sang the first verse, and then I took over the second verse. Some of the dignified people, including my wife, didn't like it too much, but it was fun.

ROSENGARTEN: Did you sing in church?

DENNIS: I didn't sing in the choir, or soloing, but I participated in my pew as extensively as I could.

ROSENGARTEN: See, when I read that I didn't know, I didn't know about the Capitol Café. I didn't know you'd been practicing. I thought it was an unusual...

DENNIS: Well we did at our church have occasions and a group of us would sing together, a quartet.

ROSENGARTEN: One of the legislative changes that occurred in the early seventies was the beginning of having open meetings. For example, the conference committee on the budget. This was something I believe you opposed when it was initially proposed, but after you actually sat through an open conference committee meeting, you were quoted as saying, "My thinking about it has really changed." Could you describe what changed your mind about these open budget meetings?

DENNIS: I was afraid it would be too much interference with the job of the committee. I'd taken too long to write it's version of an appropriation bill. It was quite a task; I had to go over the whole bill really. I just thought there would be interference by the audience with the stern legislative process that was writing the report on the budget. We decided later we so had so many who asked to come in for special purposes that we may as well open it up anyhow. But control it. And that's what we did, we didn't let them interfere, but we let them come in. An open-door policy in politics, on any matter at any time, is always good. Recently we just, I say recently, I'm talking about the last ten years. In the Senate for example, we still have the executive session when certain private matters are to be taken up. To allow the committees to hold executive sessions is becoming more and more operational. Don't have executive sessions in committees except in very rare instances. One being on appointments. The idea there is not to allow something derogatory to be publicized about the selection of the governor for a state-appointed position. We saw too much abuse available. The best plan would be to have it in secret, and it's been done that way. They haven't changed that.

ROSENGARTEN: But after you had actually sat through an open budget meeting and saw that it wasn't disrupted, you no longer...

DENNIS: That's right. Stop having the budget secret session as you indicate. They're all open. We didn't have room for everybody, but we let in who we could.

ROSENGARTEN: Do you recall a heated exchange with Representative James H. Moss over payoffs on pinball machines? Specifically he made a remark that you took exception to. The remark was about "one or two influential senators who peddle their wares around the state."

DENNIS: I remember the run-in I had with him. It was in the entrance-way to the café we were talking about. I had a very hot temper and remarked to him about the matter. I didn't have any handcuffs or anything.

ROSENGARTEN: What was it he was accusing you of, or criticizing you for?

DENNIS: Let me think now, the first question...
ROSENGARTEN: It had to do with pinball machines. This was a little bit beyond me, frankly, because I didn't... It had to do with support of gambling payoffs on pinball machines.

DENNIS: I remember the incident. I made a reply to him. Probably at the time in my committee, had the matter, the finance committee, had pinball machines up.

ROSENGARTEN: It was some way of getting state revenue. But I didn't quite understand. I'm not a pinball enthusiast, I don't follow... But you know, I knew it had to do with some licensing procedure. He called it payoffs.

DENNIS: Called it what?

ROSENGARTEN: The word they used in the newspaper was "payoff" but it had to do with a licensing issue. Of course this was the period when the Watergate scandal was breaking, which, I think people were, politicians were more vulnerable to accusations of, you know, being either corrupt or underhanded or...

DENNIS: There were rumors of big money being made by the gambling operations such as the pinball machine. It was unpopular with the public, largely. Folks couldn't have them successfully unless the public participated extensively. It was one of those, you take your chance and you get money for it. That doesn't sit well with the church-going public. Pinball machines were outlawed, except in big gambling places over the country. Think of the places at Las Vegas.

ROSENGARTEN: So today they're not legal?

DENNIS: They're legal. You'd have a public outburst...

[SIDE ONE ENDS, SIDE TWO BEGINS]

DENNIS: Nightclub owners can have a pinball machine, but they never were made legal in this state. There was just a little roar, gambling participation.

ROSENGARTEN: Well, as you said about the lottery, it is one way the state can make revenue. It's complicated, who it does the most harm to.

DENNIS: That's right. I was always opposed it because it was objected to by my church and by my closest political friends. Personally I didn't feel it was as strong an issue as it was made.

ROSENGARTEN: Going back to the Watergate scandal for a minute. What was your reaction to that whole unfolding of Nixon's administration, and do you think it had an effect on state finances?

DENNIS: In what way would that have an effect?

ROSENGARTEN: Well, there was one article in the State in which they blamed the fiscal slowdown, South Carolina's fiscal slowdown, on Watergate. I didn't immediately see the connection, but I thought as Finance chairman you probably had some sense of whether, you know, the crisis of confidence on the national level was affecting the economy.

DENNIS: It affected the politics strongly, but I don't know about any real bearing on the economy.

ROSENGARTEN: How did it affect the politics?

DENNIS: It caused the political demise of those who supported it and who tried to make room for it.
ROSENGARTEN: As a Democrat, your political future, I presume, could only be, helped.

DENNIS: Yes, it was a political opportunity for the Democrats. I guess it had a lot to do with Nixon's, what to call his, upturn of things for him.

ROSENGARTEN: Even before the scandal did you have any... What were your feelings about President Nixon?

DENNIS: I thought he was a good president except for mistakes like that that he made. I was in communication with him just a very few times.

ROSENGARTEN: So you see the Watergate thing as kind of an error, not as a systematic corruption?

DENNIS: That's right.

ROSENGARTEN: I never trusted him. Just from his looks more than anything. He looked so sneaky to me.

DENNIS: I thought he does have that appearance. As a Democratic office-holder, I didn't have any great pains about his troubles. I thought at the time that he was persecuted a little bit. .... ugly .... at Watergate, you can't be trusted as President of the United States.

ROSENGARTEN: About this same time, this was in September of seventy-three; your acquisition of lands from the public service authority was called into question. How did you answer these charges?

DENNIS: Accusation of what?

ROSENGARTEN: Acquisition of lands from the public service authority.

DENNIS: Did it say what the lands were for?

ROSENGARTEN: At least one tract they mentioned specifically. The man who was making the acquisitions, accusations, was Columbia's Audubon president Robert Porter. He said that in 1950, two hundred and seventy-three acres on the Cooper River and Tell Race? Canal were purchased by yourself and two of your brothers, and that in forty-one, you had sold it in forty-one for sixteen thousand, and bought it back for three thousand. Something like that. There was a transfer of land here on the Cooper. Close to three hundred acres.

DENNIS: That's a part of Stony Landing plantation. Actually six of us owned it. My two brothers and I were title owners, but we considered that our three sisters were owners too. So anything that we got in that transaction, we later gave them their part of it.

ROSENGARTEN: Is this accurate, that you had sold this piece of land in forty-one for sixteen thousand, and bought it back ten years later for three thousand?

DENNIS: Yes, that may well, very well be true. Because it was filled in. It was .... low lands, swamp and rice fields. The canal dredging caused it to be filled in, that's what caused the difference in value. It is now a subdivision.

ROSENGARTEN: This seemed to be typical of a kind of line of attack that people made on you in a public position. That somehow you benefited from your position in acquiring land.

DENNIS: Yes. It wasn't really true. I ended up without any except the little bit that's left that's heavily mortgaged.
They thought I was getting rich off of it, but I didn't.

**ROSENGARTEN:** How did you respond to attacks like that though? I mean, did you feel that you were being persecuted or that this was somewhat taking a cheap shot, or...

**DENNIS:** I thought it came out of politics. I'd seen my colleagues from the various areas receive the same kind of attack. I just didn't let it bother me too much. Or maybe it did bother me, I had two heart attacks.

**ROSENGARTEN:** That's right. You don't know where the stress is going to take its toll. Well in a lighter moment, I saw this picture you have out in the hall. You and Mrs. Dennis portrayed Peter Timothy and his lady at the Exchange Building commemoration in December of seventy-three, in full dress. Where did you get the costumes?

**DENNIS:** They furnished them for us. You'll have to ask Natalie, I doubt if she knows.

**ROSENGARTEN:** Mrs. Dennis, do you...

**MRS. DENNIS:** I heard.

**ROSENGARTEN:** You heard that? I love that picture. The Gressettes also were all dressed up.

**MRS. DENNIS:** You know they got them for us. I think they rented them. Everybody rented them that year. They evidently brought in a lot of them. Dock Street Theater I think lent some of theirs.

**DENNIS:** Somebody else located them for us.

**MRS. DENNIS:** That's right. We didn't know what they were until we got there. We just told them what our size was. We looked... It was a fun weekend. We felt like we looked terrible. Everybody didn't wear hair and stuff, but they wanted us, some of them too. So that's how we happened to get into it. I heard you all talking about Hell-Hole. When was the first Hell-Hole?

**ROSENGARTEN:** Seventy-two. I think that's it.

**MRS. DENNIS:** I went upstairs to look for a cookbook. Couldn't find anything. I was going to do a crab thing I had. I got started looking at the books. I've just got to finish getting that book. Some of them were damaged, you know the books, the real high books here, and some of them got water-damaged.

**ROSENGARTEN:** From the fire?

**MRS. DENNIS:** Um-hm. The girls put it back, we put it back upstairs. The girls put them back, but they didn't put some that were damaged or if they had more than one, and they didn't know what to save, so they're just stored in boxes. I happened to see that, made me...

**ROSENGARTEN:** I enjoy that festival. It's always the same day as the Shrimp Festival in McClellanville, so I try to go to both, but to me this one has more local color.
MRS. DENNIS: Well, I thought the first year they had it was the best year. They still have the grease-pole where you go up? Did they still have it the last time?

ROSENGARTEN: They might.

MRS. DENNIS: That's an old thing. You try to climb a greased pole.

ROSENGARTEN: They had the moonshine exhibit, and the snake pit that I just couldn't take my eyes off of. I was just riveted.

DENNIS: I haven't seen one like this in a long time.

MRS. DENNIS: No, keep that one down here. There happen to be two. I don't know how we happen to have them. You know, I save things, it's like a scrapbook. Anything to do with books. I've got books I know that some of them are probably valuable. I always hated to part with any of them.

ROSENGARTEN: We're the same way. We probably lost two hundred books in the hurricane, just because we were too stupid to move them upstairs. We moved most of, almost everything, but we left a couple of shelves and...

MRS. DENNIS: You thought they would be alright?

ROSENGARTEN: Yes, we did. I mean, they were high, very high. But, you come back and you see this book all smashed on the floor and wet, it really breaks your heart.

MRS. DENNIS: To think you didn't...

ROSENGARTEN: Yes. It would have been so easy.

MRS. DENNIS: I'll keep it down here and let you look at it. Well, some of them... They're fascinating. The children's books, I lost just about all of those because they were upstairs. I've been wanting to get some to read to Luke. The Little Red Hen. That is an old, old one. I bet you all hadn't seen it.

DENNIS: He's just about getting to days now where he'll listen to you for the whole hour.

ROSENGARTEN: You mean the little red hen who wants to bake the loaf of bread? Oh sure.

MRS. DENNIS: You can still get it?

ROSENGARTEN: Oh yes. It may be a modern version, but...

MRS. DENNIS: Can you still buy Little Black Sambo?

ROSENGARTEN: That may be a collector's item.

MRS. DENNIS: That to me is one of the most fascinating books. Now why they object to that, because that really is good book.

ROSENGARTEN: Well, it was a stereotype, like Aunt Jemima...

MRS. DENNIS: Yes, I guess so.
ROSENGARTEN: ...that, I think people objected to. But now, Sambo, the name Sambo, is one of the African day names. I forget whether it means Monday or Tuesday, but now there's a whole new idea about...

MRS. DENNIS: Some of the things. They wanted to do away with all of them, and really, they should have saved some things like that, because that's history.

ROSENGARTEN: Well, I'm sure that will be a collector's book if you can find one. There is a wonderful bookstore in Charleston that will look for you if you have a book you wanted. An old book you want. I just bought called *Azaleas and Old Bricks*. It’s a photographic book that the text was written by Samuel Gillard Stoney.

MRS. DENNIS: Yes, and you found that?

ROSENGARTEN: Yes. I went in there -- the photographs are by Bayard Wooten? I went in there to find it for her, but then I remembered... Did you know him, Stoney?

DENNIS and MRS. DENNIS: Yes.

MRS. DENNIS: He was a fascinating character, wasn't he Rembert? You knew him better than I did.

DENNIS: Very fascinating.

MRS. DENNIS: Sort of an eccentric really, wouldn't you say Rembert?

DENNIS: Yes he was eccentric, but he was charming too.

ROSENGARTEN: Eccentric in what way?

DENNIS: Well he,...

MRS. DENNIS: Am I wrong in saying that he was always right, too?

DENNIS: I'm trying to think of something he wrote about that was considered...

MRS. DENNIS: Some of his history?

DENNIS: ...eccentric.

ROSENGARTEN: See, I think he's a very good historian. He's colorful.

MRS. DENNIS: Well he is good.

ROSENGARTEN: His writing is very colorful.

MRS. DENNIS: Okay. That's it.

ROSENGARTEN: But that's better than being boring.

MRS. DENNIS: ...the truth. You can't read some of it.

ROSENGARTEN: How did you know him?
DENNIS: Just casually. Through the family.

MRS. DENNIS: I'd see him at one or two things. Oh goodness, when did he die?

DENNIS: In the early forties, I'd guess.

MRS. DENNIS: I didn't see him but once or twice I know. I remember seeing in Charleston one time. In the street it seems like. But he was good. I think, you know, how some people in the... He would tell you, all right.

ROSENGARTEN: Would you describe him as a kind of aristocratic kind of a guy?

DENNIS and MRS. DENNIS: Oh yes.

ROSENGARTEN: Is that what you mean by eccentric, or...

MRS. DENNIS: Well...

DENNIS: Perhaps so.

MRS. DENNIS: He had ways, different from a lot of people. You know, you might say, and I think that's why I said that.

ROSENGARTEN: Kind of old-fashioned maybe?

MRS. DENNIS: Maybe that's what I thought at that time. But they listened to him. He was a good historian.

DENNIS: Like Isaac Porcher.

MRS. DENNIS: Yes.

DENNIS: I considered Mr. Porcher very eccentric. He was, kind of dressed that way.

ROSENGARTEN: Are you saying Isaac Porcher? I know Richard, the young...

DENNIS: This would be his great-uncle.

MRS. DENNIS: That'd be his great-great-uncle, wouldn't it Rembert?

DENNIS: Well, let's see. The one you know is Dwight Porcher's son?

MRS. DENNIS: That's the one she knows. He's a professor at the Citadel. Does he live at Mt. Pleasant? Where does he live? Somewhere down there.

ROSENGARTEN: He might live near the Citadel. I don't remember. So this is also you think, Isaac Porcher, another kind of aristocratic sort of character?

DENNIS: Yes, he was aristocratic..

MRS. DENNIS: It seems to me that the times I saw Mr. Stoney, he always had on a, he was dressed in a white suit, dressed up. Do you remember him like that Rembert?
DENNIS: Yes.

MRS. DENNIS: He dressed the part. He might not have been what you'd really call eccentric.

ROSENGARTEN: I probably would. I like eccentrics.

MRS. DENNIS: Yes, I don't object to it.

DENNIS: A lot of them are great people.

MRS. DENNIS: I was sort of in awe of him in a way. I heard him talk the few times I saw him.

ROSENGARTEN: Because of his education?

MRS. DENNIS: No, I don't think so. I think because he was really... You would be afraid to say anything because you felt like he knew, if he was talking about history, I'm sure. What happened?

DENNIS: I got to get up.

MRS. DENNIS: You need to get up.

[Tape stops, then resumes]

ROSENGARTEN: I think it was a good way to publicize what I called local color.

DENNIS: Yes it was.

MRS. DENNIS: And you said they had Mendel Rivers' home down there. Didn't you say they moved it there?

DENNIS: His birthplace.

ROSENGARTEN: There's a picture of that in this book. So Cecil Guerry was president, he was clearly the first...

MRS. DENNIS: For years and years he was.

ROSENGARTEN: G-U-E-R-R-Y. That's a French name maybe.

MRS. DENNIS: Good family.

ROSENGARTEN: That one on the top. That was one in Gumville?

MRS. DENNIS: Gumville. It was not far from Jamestown.

DENNIS: I remember it quite well.

ROSENGARTEN: You said Guerry was involved starting the museum?

MRS. DENNIS: Well, he, you know, he worked with it. He was not the head person, but he did have something to do with it.

DENNIS: He attended the last meeting we went to, and has died since.
MRS. DENNIS: You mean at Stony Landing? When they had the groundbreaking, he was there. He didn't look well. You know, you get certain people who help with things in the community, you know you can count on them.

ROSENGARTEN: Every community has a couple of people who do everything.

MRS. DENNIS: The busy people are the ones who get things accomplished. Doesn't seem fair sometimes.

ROSENGARTEN: All right, back to politics here. You were on the honorary inaugural committee for Governor James B. Edwards and Lt. Governor William Brantley Harvey, Jr.? What were your feelings about the first Republican governor in a century?

DENNIS: I had known, I had gotten to know Jim well in the Senate. He and I got off originally in politics, to a bad start. I was opposed for the Senate by a young Charleston, North Charleston, attorney, and I was told that Jim Edwards had sponsored his entrance into the race against me, so I didn't feel too happy in my relations with Mr. Edwards before he was elected to the Senate. I found out that he was a good senator and a good man; our differences were strictly partisan politics. I became a supporter of him.

ROSENGARTEN: Did you expect problems between the Republican governor and his Democratic lieutenant?

DENNIS: Not other than the usual problems that came up between the parties. I didn't, it's hard for anybody to be angered at Jim Edwards because he handled his politics so smoothly. He knew where there was a door open, and a door closed. He conducted himself on a tremendously high plane.

ROSENGARTEN: In the 1975 legislative session there were a couple of new caucuses, the Black Caucus and the Freshman Caucus. What role did they play in that legislature?

DENNIS: See, that was in the house. I was glad to see the, think that kind of organization is of help to its members to get together on public issues. But it had no real interference with the Senate work. It had recognition from the Senate. When the spoke for the black minority, they got attention from the Senate members who knew that we were on the way to full black participation. They began coming into the Senate, the first senator being Fielding from Charleston. That has gradually broadened out and has developed into a number of black state senators. At least one you're going to hear from in the elections next time, senator from Greenville (Theo Mitchell?) is going to make the effort to be the Democratic nominee for Governor.

ROSENGARTEN: Who is that?

DENNIS: Senator, I didn't call his name right.

ROSENGARTEN: He's the current senator from Greenville?

DENNIS: He's what?

ROSENGARTEN: He's the current senator from Greenville?

DENNIS: Yes. I'll tell you the name in a second.

ROSENGARTEN: I've read that...

DENNIS: Excuse me just a second. Natalie. Natalie!
ROSENGARTEN: Mrs. Dennis!

MRS. DENNIS: Yes?

DENNIS: Who is the senator from Greenville?

MRS. DENNIS: What darling?

DENNIS: The senator from Greenville.

MRS. DENNIS: You talking about Bradley Morrah?

DENNIS: No, the black senator. I just...

MRS. DENNIS: Mitchell? The one running for governor? Is he running for governor or lieutenant... Governor.

ROSENGARTEN: I've heard that Andrew Young is running for Governor of Georgia.

MRS. DENNIS: He is? He's here now? I heard he was, thinking...

ROSENGARTEN: Well, I heard on the radio the other night, I think they had a campaign manager or somebody talking so he's going to run.

MRS. DENNIS: Who would he be running against? I don't know who, I can't think who's governor of Georgia now.

DENNIS: Black fellow.

MRS. DENNIS: No, white.

ROSENGARTEN: A white guy now.

MRS. DENNIS: They never have had a black.

ROSENGARTEN: No. Young is mayor of Atlanta. He ran against John Lewis for the state Senate, I mean for the U.S. Senate and lost.

MRS. DENNIS: I don't know who's governor now. Since Maddox. [laughs] That doesn't matter.

ROSENGARTEN: I'll have to look the next newspaper article I see on that. I'll see if I can clip it. Following the 1974 single-member district election, a concerted campaign by the Young Turks challenged the so-called, this is a quote, "iron-fisted rule of the rural Old Guard." As a ranking member of the old guard, how did you respond to this insurgency?

DENNIS: I would treat it just as another phase in politics. It was to be expected. We, I say we, I'm talking about the incumbent senators, I don't think we got offended by it except in one illustration. That was Turnipseed. He got obnoxious, but he didn't really make any progress in the Senate. Although for a while he was articulate enough, and enough of a performer to gather some support in South Carolina. He still talks, but he's not doing anything much lately. He had a brother in Spartanburg that's, I thought may make some headway in state politics, but I think probably the brother disenchanted some of the people.
ROSENGARTEN: I think he has an organization now called Fair Share?

DENNIS: I don't know what it's called, but it sounds like it ... be his. He's a professional organizer. He learned it in Atlanta, or in Georgia.

ROSENGARTEN: One article I read about him, this was during his 1978 campaign for Governor, described his mystical conversion to "populism without racism". Do you know what they're talking about there?

DENNIS: Well, he was active in South Carolina before he moved to Georgia temporarily. He was an anti-black politician when he went to Georgia and came back a white speaker of leadership for the blacks. Didn't get very far.

ROSENGARTEN: Had he been involved with George Wallace's campaign? Do I remember that? Was he a campaign manager or something?

DENNIS: He worked for Wallace's supporters in Georgia. They had a bad falling out and when he got established in South Carolina, or came back to South Carolina and got his hat in the political ring and had some success, elected to the Senate of course. He didn't get along in Georgia. Didn't get along with the Georgia politicians. They didn't have anything good to say about him being from over in South Carolina.

ROSENGARTEN: Would you agree with the columnist who called him a "pariah in the Senate"?

DENNIS: Called him a what?

ROSENGARTEN: A pariah. Someone who, you know, an outcast, so to speak.

DENNIS: I would. Although he had his brother there, and he had a few senators there that were against the senatorial policy of seniority.

ROSENGARTEN: Well, Harvey himself, you know. Brantley Harvey proposed an end to seniority rule. Did that surprise you?

DENNIS: The outcome?

ROSENGARTEN: Well, for one that Brantley Harvey would propose it?

DENNIS: What did he propose? I didn't get that.

ROSENGARTEN: He proposed an end to seniority rule. He said that committee chairmen should be appointed by ability, not seniority.

DENNIS: I thought there was a strong connection between ability and seniority. That is from the standpoint not superior individuals, but experience being a .... teacher.

ROSENGARTEN: That remark that Harvey made, something you took strong exception to in the press. Do you remember that your peace-making meeting with the Lieutenant Governor and Senator Gressette over that remark?

DENNIS: I didn't remember that we had a meeting, no.

ROSENGARTEN: The newspapers reported that.

DENNIS: Well, Senator Gressette was a close friend to Brantley Harvey's father.
ROSENGARTEN: There was another issue where you sided with Harvey against Gressette and Governor Edwards. That was the Equal Rights Amendment, when you changed your mind in favor of the ERA. That was a position that Harvey had taken, and Gressette and Edwards were on the other side.

DENNIS: I didn't do it because of Harvey.

MRS. DENNIS: You remember when Brantley went in? He made some wild, at the time you all thought they were sort of wild, things that he thought you all ought to do in the Senate. I remember Marion got real provoked with him, because, probably more so, because I think he thought he was the son of a very, very close friend of his.

ROSENGARTEN: He took it more personally?

MRS. DENNIS: Do you think he did, Rembert?

DENNIS: Yes.

MRS. DENNIS: It was hard for him.

ROSENGARTEN: Why did you come out in support of the Equal Rights Amendment?

DENNIS: I was trying to think when you mentioned it. What did it involve?

MRS. DENNIS: I can't think myself, but I'm sure it must have been that you felt like that was the right thing to do.

ROSENGARTEN: It was an issue that came up year after year. I don't think it ever, I'm not even sure if it ever came up for a vote, but it was on the agenda year after year and finally it was... It must have been women's groups trying to get enough votes to make it a constitutional amendment...

MRS. DENNIS: In Washington.

ROSENGARTEN: ...in Washington. Each state had to come out either in support of it or not.

DENNIS: Equal female rights was what...

ROSENGARTEN: Yes, that was one of the big...

DENNIS: Yes, I remember.

MRS. DENNIS: I think to begin with you felt like that they had, you know, full rights in South Carolina anyway, they didn't need it. Wasn't that what you, the way you felt?

DENNIS: Didn't need the legislation.

ROSENGARTEN: But then you changed your mind, or at least this is what the newspaper...

MRS. DENNIS: I'm sure Marion was provoked with your if you changed your mind.

ROSENGARTEN: Well, this is one issue that, there were several issues we talked about where Senator Dennis was on the opposite side from Gressette.
MRS. DENNIS: There's a cartoon in the office that you need to look at, of Rembert and Gressette in his office.

DENNIS: I had the nerve to fall out with him sometimes. Took a good bit of slapping around by him, not particularly by others. Senator Gressette had confidence in his ability, and he had a right to have, because he had a great ability. But even the smartest can be wrong sometimes.

MRS. DENNIS: He had a hard time changing to anything. Rembert was more of a compromiser in a lot of ways. Marion was not a compromiser at all, wouldn't you say Rembert?

DENNIS: I wouldn't say at all. He'd compromise if you'd give him nine points out of ten.

ROSENGARTEN: He drove a hard bargain.

MRS. DENNIS: A capable person. He's been good for our state.

ROSENGARTEN: I think it's especially hard for people in the public eye to say that they're changing their mind, or that they're backing down a little, because they look weak, they look indecisive.

DENNIS: That's a point you've got to be careful about.

MRS. DENNIS: But there were a number of times through your political career that you changed your mind.

DENNIS: It had to be for a general benefit that I could define, not for personal reasons.

MRS. DENNIS: Or for... Well, you compromise.

ROSENGARTEN: No, I've been struck by the number of times in these news articles that you actually say... You know for example on the open budget hearing where you say well, I was against it but then we had it and it turned out it was okay. You showed flexibility.

MRS. DENNIS: Every politician can't do that.

ROSENGARTEN: But I gather that the ERA was not a big issue for you.

DENNIS: Not really.

MRS. DENNIS: But they were very active, the women were up there a lot.

[TAPE TWELVE ENDS, TAPE THIRTEEN BEGINS]

ROSENGARTEN: We had talked quite a bit last time about your role as Finance Committee Chairman. You were largely responsible for what I believe you called the "belt-tightening" of the mid-1970s. What remedies did you prescribe for the state's financial problems?

DENNIS: Be more certain about the estimates in the appropriate bill and realistic estimates of revenue. Had a lot of "no-ers" to say, "No, you can't do it, you can't do it." It was a rough time.

ROSENGARTEN: Why were revenues down?

DENNIS: Well, I don't think it was so much revenues were down as our government was growing faster than the revenues. Various programs of the government, some under federal leadership, and some under our own. We were
inclined to be a little bit over-extended.

ROSENGARTEN: Just using this one example as an instance. What were the arguments for and against an increase in retirement pay for senators?

DENNIS: That was pay for retirees or... An updating proposition, bringing them high up into the economics of the day. Might say a cost of living. It was always a problem with how much can you supplement them to keep them on a market scale.

ROSENGARTEN: During these years the number of Senate committees was reduced from twenty-six to fifteen, and a limit of one chairmanship per senator was set. Did this rule change actually result in a change in power in the Senate?

DENNIS: I don't think so. It was to spread the work of it more, and it did that. Veteran senators continued to do the same amount of work with their various committees.

ROSENGARTEN: At that point did you drop your other committee chairmanships besides the Finance Committee?

DENNIS: Yes, I did like the rest of them, reduced it down to the total number. I didn't feel like I shared very much, there was plenty left for me to do. I think it was for the part of the senior senators that been years and years... The senior senators, particularly the three senior senators, chairman of the biggest committees, were doing more and more work, and that's just leveled that off a little bit.

ROSENGARTEN: Would you say that you were relieved to be shed of those other responsibilities, or did it...

DENNIS: The chairman of the Finance Committee had the basic responsibility for the balance of the appropriation bill each year, so that'd give him a little better chance to live up to what was expected of him. By getting rid of some of the other work.

ROSENGARTEN: It sounds like you had more than you could do in any case.

DENNIS: That's right. That's exactly right.

ROSENGARTEN: In response to a proposal to eliminate Jefferson Davis and Robert E. Lee's birthdays as legal holidays, you were quoted as saying, "I haven't forgotten enough history to do that yet." Would you explain your point of view, and also the impulse to eliminate those holidays?

DENNIS: What I meant was, I was, tried to be a good history student. I developed an appreciation for the public servants in this country who had contributed so greatly. I was against doing anything that was going to belittle them in any way. We could have used two or three of them at that time.

ROSENGARTEN: They must have succeeded as eliminating those birthdays as holidays, because I don't... Since I've been in South Carolina I don't remember an official celebration of Davis and Lee.

DENNIS: During my lifetime we didn't have any big state affair for them.

ROSENGARTEN: But by legal holiday, they must have meant a bank holiday at least?

DENNIS: Yes. Wasn't any overextension of the holidays from work. What they did was try to develop a plan that would not have too many holidays a year. People would be away from their jobs, talking about government
workers.

ROSENGARTEN: Who was trying to eliminate these holidays? Was this an economy measure or was it a political thing?

DENNIS: Entirely economy. I don't think it was political at all. Course if you had twelve a year and you wanted to reduce it to ten, or they wanted to add people some more and you wanted to decline it, you had to take a position of against one or against the other. I know it was a difficult thing to do, how you were going to decide who would be retained by the holidays. We didn't have any excess holidays, as far as honoring the people were concerned, it was just a matter of updating the government, and not having too many a year.

ROSENGARTEN: So this was not a civil rights thing.

DENNIS: No, I never saw any...

ROSENGARTEN: I didn't quite understand. I thought this may have been part of the black rights movement to eliminate the Confederate heroes as...

DENNIS: I don't think that was really in that particular movement.

ROSENGARTEN: What was your opinion of Richard Riley, the senator from Greenville first elected in 1967?

DENNIS: He was impressive from the beginning. A hard worker, very intelligent. He had some adjustments to make. Being a senator from such a large county. He was, his county was used to retaining, used to getting annually a good bit of money from the legislature based on its high population and various kickbacks of... That's what they called it, kickback, state money going back to counties. He was a big fighter for Greenville and the big counties like Greenville, for instance Spartanburg, Greenville, Richland and Charleston getting all the annual money out of the state they could. Of course I was from a much smaller county and chairman of the Finance Committee. I had the responsibility of making it, trying to make it, as fair as possible. Make adjustments, but make them fair. It was quite a squirmy proposition to carry out. It really brought about in the course of the legislating on it. Riley and the other large county senators had been opposing some of the legislation that would give some money to counties much smaller than they were. Under the various distribution programs. Highway money for example, and various other appropriations based on units other than population. The big legislative floor charge, they called them "kickbackers" then. Senator Gressette and I were supposed to be the leaders of the "kickbackers", that is, all state revenue that wasn't particularly needed for state purposes let it fall back to the county for school purposes, road purposes or some other purposes. We obtained the reputation of annually getting back a pretty good little percentage of state money for the various counties. The big problem was what basis we were going to use for distributing it. You couldn't use area; you couldn't use size of county because there are a lot of elements involved in what you needed monies from the state for. Most of it was for education and highways. That's were the big battles were. How much you were going to get per pupil, or how much you were going to get per highway commission. Those battles over the school and highway money were terrific. Senator Gressette and I gained the reputation for being two of the legislators who were most successful with the kickback system. But that was under threat by the big counties, and we worked on various formulas that would be fair to the big county and the small county, too. School money per pupil was about the best way you could figure that. Roads per mile was not always fair. There are certain costs in highway construction that varied in whether it was a country road or a city road. So working on the formulas for state money going to counties and districts took a lot of legislative time and effort. Of course the first thought was it being fair, but then you had the additional thought of how you can pass it. You had to have enough votes. It was a difficult job.

ROSENGARTEN: Getting back to Dick Riley for a minute. As a leader of the "Young Turks," was he a thorn in the side of yourself and Gressette? We're talking about as a senator in the seventies, not as a Governor.
DENNIS: He was smart and articulate. He was a good leader for the forces, but he was always intelligently realistic. Give and take with the other side. With the stakes being as high as they were for local government or state government, I think it finally wrestled itself into a fair proposition. As a matter of fact, Riley was against the so-called kickbacks that the large counties used to pull out against the small counties. Anything that was on a basis other than population. Wasn't much around to... The kickback being a firm annual proposition with the budget. It was going to be so much, just how much it was going to be on this item, how much goes to these purposes in these counties. Riley was accused of joining the kickbackers, asking for more funds for local governments. Some were state items, but... Per pupil appropriations or per patient appropriations. Welfare programs came into it.

ROSENGARTEN: In general, the big counties felt that the system worked in the favor of the small counties?

DENNIS: That's right.

ROSENGARTEN: When was all that eliminated? We don't have kickbacks anymore, is that right?

DENNIS: Well, they're not as individualistic and pointed as they were. Have it by way of appropriations for various programs. The program end of it is based on the services to be provided. It's those services that are varied. Some of them, every county's got to have a certain amount. Rural counties have to have a little bit more here and there. It's a big system, it's hard to pinpoint. The principle involved was were you going to be for dividing the money fairly and sending it back, or were you going to be for getting a-hold of what you can like the big counties were accused of doing. I would say it worked out to be a fair exchange between them. The law now like you say is not, there's not a big fight there. Your own individual program is just, come out of it, and letting state money be for state purposes and not too much of it diverted for county purposes.

ROSENGARTEN: Do you remember the fracas over what was called in the newspaper "Rembert's Railroad" or "Remtrack?" In particular you came into conflict with a Greenville News reporter named Henry Eason(?). Can you describe that series of incidents and exchanges?

DENNIS: Well, the issue was brought about by the efforts of Berkeley county to furnish what would be necessary to get an industry down to the Cooper River. In order to, I'm trying to think of the name of the company.

ROSENGARTEN: The company? It was Amoco I believe. Amoco Chemical.

DENNIS: They had to be given special rights on the river. I ought to know everything about it because at one time I spent a part of every day in trying to help Amoco work out their problems, to get their plant. To get from the state sufficient rights to operate a, and use so much river front. We got it worked out. Did it mention any particular features of it we had trouble with?

ROSENGARTEN: Well, this story in the Greenville News said that you at one point called this reporter Henry Eason an "unmitigated liar" because he had reported that you were on the Amoco payroll. There was a lot of mudslinging going on. You came back and said that it wasn't logrolling, that it was good for the whole state to bring Amoco to Berkeley County.

DENNIS: I said what, now?

ROSENGARTEN: First you called Eason a liar for having reported that you were in the pay of Amoco, and then, this is a little bit, like two days later, the State reported that you had said it was not logrolling for Berkeley County, that the railroad, this seventeen-mile spur, would benefit the whole state, because it would bring Amoco into South Carolina.
DENNIS: That's right.

ROSENGARTEN: Do you remember the compromise that was finally worked out?

DENNIS: I spent days and days on it, I ought to remember it.

ROSENGARTEN: It had something to do with... The Senate approved five million dollars for the Amoco spur, but then I think that, let's see. "Amoco will pay...", would reimburse the state, basically. Amoco agreed to reimburse the Treasury for that amount.

DENNIS: I think I presented the idea that state help for Amoco was like state help for other plants that had located as a result of being helped by the .... society. That's really the way it was. The state stretched its interests or its actions to some extent in helping locate industry on the water along the road down there through Charleston agencies of the state. It was really similar to Bushy Park.

ROSENGARTEN: Why do you think it created such an uproar then? I agree it seems to me a very similar situation.

DENNIS: Oh, just politics.

ROSENGARTEN: Meaning what?

DENNIS: Meaning people from other areas fighting it because it wasn't in their area. With the accusation that we got for the Charleston port facilities money that the rest of the state was entitled to.

ROSENGARTEN: By the time of the Hell-Hole Festival that year, the railroad issue was seen in a somewhat lighter vein. I think last week I showed you the picture from the newspaper with... I think you and Mrs. Dennis were in a railroad car with engineers hat's on and all. Do you recall that Festival?

DENNIS: Yes. I don't know what we rode in. What did it say we rode in?

ROSENGARTEN: It looked like an engine, you know, an engine car. It was probably right on that railroad track that goes through Jamestown.

DENNIS: Natalie, do you remember the Jamestown annual?

MRS. DENNIS: Jamestown what?

DENNIS: Fair, when we were celebrating getting to Bushy Park.

MRS. DENNIS: And riding in the railroad?

DENNIS: Yes.

ROSENGARTEN: Last week, I mean two weeks ago, I had that newspaper story, I think I took it out of my bag. It has the two of you in that...

MRS. DENNIS: I remember riding it.

DENNIS: We rode it from, wasn't at Jamestown though.
MRS. DENNIS: Well, we did ride the Amoco one, but that Jamestown thing it seems to me it was just a... Was it on a flatbed?

ROSENGARTEN: No, I think it was an engine car. I remember the senator had an engineer's hat on. This was right, just months after they finally settled the Amoco thing. So it was obviously a joke.

MRS. DENNIS: That's right. It was. The picture of the Amoco one is out here. I just cannot recall Rembert.

DENNIS: We rode from... Jim Edwards was on that trip.

MRS. DENNIS: Down at Amoco. But this is at the Jamestown festival. Isn't that what she's talking about?

ROSENGARTEN: Yes. This was at the Hell-Hole Festival.

MRS. DENNIS: I can't remember what that was that they had that year.

ROSENGARTEN: I'll have to bring that back. I thought it was kind of an interesting way to... What I imagined by seeing the picture was that it was the way that everybody buried their swords and it was kind of accepted, because they'd worked out this compromise where Amoco would repay the Treasury.

MRS. DENNIS: The state. But that was a good thing. Even though it looked bad in the papers that Rembert got a track [laughs], it was really a good thing. But you don't always see things like that, and they were going to... The state didn't pay for it as it ended up. Wasn't that right, Rembert?

DENNIS: That's right.

MRS. DENNIS: Would you like me to close this curtain, darling?

ROSENGARTEN: Would describe for me the ceremony at which the portraits of yourself and Senator Gressette were unveiled? This is, I didn't want to go through the entire book, but there's -- Mrs. Dennis had given me this description. Very moving talks.

DENNIS: The ceremony was in the Senate. The guests were in the Senate chambers and they opened up the big doors and they extended out into the lobby. The ceremony was the hanging of the portraits on the walls, covered up. They had the speeches, special remarks by three of them for me and three for Gressette, in addition to the ones who spoke for both, like the Governor and officials. They had the unveiling of the portraits and more remarks by some people. It was a ceremonial affair. The portraits are still there.

ROSENGARTEN: Was this a very meaningful event for you, or as you say, was it purely ceremonial?

DENNIS: Was it what?

ROSENGARTEN: Was it a very meaningful, what did it, what kind of meaning did it have for you?

DENNIS: The other portraits in the Senate of senators or lieutenant governors that had served either for a long time or with a special connotation of attainment by them. I wasn't certain that I would be chosen because Senator Gressette was a good bit older than me and had served a lot longer. But when the Senate adopted a resolution to put a portrait in the Senate dedicated to him, they did the same thing for me. At that time, I was trying to think whether Gressette had been pro tempore of the Senate, at that time. I think Senator Gressette had. It was a Senate recognition of service rendered in behalf of the Senate and I wasn't sure whether I was going to be fit into or not.
Gressette was, had been there much longer than me, and chairman of the Judiciary Committee, went into a lot of legislative prominence. I was a, Senator Brown had had a long service in the house and Senate. I didn't know whether I could cut the mustard or not. I was very proud when they included me. It still hangs.

ROSENGARTEN: What struck me also was that in 1975 you were really at the height of your career. You were not at the end of your career. You know even, well, as you said yourself, except for the accident ten years later you would still be there today.

DENNIS: That's right.

ROSENGARTEN: So it seemed like, comparatively speaking, you were fairly young, and a senator who had a long career ahead of him as well as behind him.

DENNIS: That's right. That's the way it I see it really. I was much younger than him and Senator Brown and the others who had obtained it.

ROSENGARTEN: When the Senate went through an all night filibuster, did you stay in the chamber?

DENNIS: Most of the time. Sometimes you went to a committee room to try to get a little bit of sleep. If you were in the debate at all, one of the strongest supporters for one side or the other, you had to either be there or have someone there, to be sure that rights were protected. That was a tough assignment anytime.

ROSENGARTEN: Are there any memorable filibusters you remember?

DENNIS: Oh yes. I was in the role of assistant, I didn't lead a filibuster myself, but I helped when I was with Gressette and others, for one side or another. Trying to think of one specific one.

ROSENGARTEN: Let me see if I can see where... Oh this one. The article that provoked that question was on the railroad funding. "All night filibuster failed to keep Senate from approving railroad funding."

DENNIS: Yes, that was a hard-fought one.

ROSENGARTEN: It seems like such a peculiar custom to me.

DENNIS: It what?

ROSENGARTEN: It seems like such a strange custom to me. For people to argue to the point of exhaustion. It's happening now isn't it, in the Senate, the U.S. Senate, with Dole's measure to create that Armenian holiday or whatever. That Armenian memorial.

DENNIS: It certainly is a strange process, but it has won battles for both sides.

ROSENGARTEN: You think it works?

DENNIS: Some of them work, yes. Buying the time, and the outlying efforts to get more support were the big features of it. The speakers didn't change many opinions, because the issues were solidly set. Just a matter of a minority trying to .... the majority. When you won one, that's what it was. I'd take a filibuster against passing money for...

[SIDE ONE ENDS, SIDE TWO BEGINS]
ROSENGARTEN: I'm anxious to get up to the eighties, now that we're most of the way through the seventies. You made a statement, in this same year, 1975, that if South Carolina lost its triple-A credit rating you would resign. What was at stake for the state in maintaining that rating?

DENNIS: The problems of the state were deeply involved. The cheaper rate on bonds enabled the state to carry on our program of improvement. It was essential for education and other state development.

ROSENGARTEN: What did it actually mean? You know, for a person who doesn't know anything about state finances.

DENNIS: It meant that any money that the state...

ROSENGARTEN: I forgot to put this back on. [the microphone]

DENNIS: I forgot it, too.

ROSENGARTEN: I think it's all right. Excuse that interruption. You were explaining what the triple-A credit rating meant.

DENNIS: It meant that the state could bill improvements at a much lower cost that in many instances dictated whether a project would be attempted or not. Money was -- South Carolina's always been a poor state. South Carolina's financial handling of its affairs was of utmost importance in every respect, and particularly in stretching its dollars as far as it could. Having them pinched off by high interest rates was something we couldn't do with.

ROSENGARTEN: So this rating kept the interest rates at a low...

DENNIS: Oh yes. The rating would allow the state and all of its political subdivisions to borrow money for permanent improvements at a cheaper rate of interest. Educational institutions would have been struck with a terrible blow. So would any other facet of South Carolina's government improvement.

ROSENGARTEN: And how do you maintain a rating? What are the criteria?

DENNIS: You maintain your record for prompt payment of bond obligations and other state obligations. The financial people, trying to think of them, ordinarily it'd be right there, but I just...

ROSENGARTEN: You're thinking of specific individuals?

DENNIS: No, I mean a firm. The firm that'd give your state the rating.

ROSENGARTEN: Oh. That wouldn't be the Federal Reserve.

DENNIS: No. Natalie!

ROSENGARTEN: Mrs. Dennis. Mrs. Dennis!

MRS. DENNIS: Yes?

ROSENGARTEN: We want to ask you a question.

MRS. DENNIS: Okay.
DENNIS: I can't think too good this morning.

MRS. DENNIS: [laughs] That's all right. I can't either.

DENNIS: What are the big money firms that determine what our rate is going to be?

MRS. DENNIS: Oh. You mean like the state's rates? Like four-A? Triple-A?

ROSENGARTEN: Triple-A, right.

MRS. DENNIS: Golly, Rembert.

ROSENGARTEN: Is it a federal agency?

MRS. DENNIS: It's on Wall Street, isn't it? Yes. The National... I can't think.

ROSENGARTEN: I'll make a note of it and we'll see if we can find out by next time.

MRS. DENNIS: Yes. I will.

ROSENGARTEN: Did you say there, is there a higher rating than Triple-A, or is that the highest?

DENNIS: That's the highest.

ROSENGARTEN: So it's a private firm. That's very interesting. You see this was the first time I knew, and I'm...

MRS. DENNIS: Is it a private firm, Rembert? Is it a private firm?

ROSENGARTEN: Like Moody's or...

MRS. DENNIS: Yes. We'll put Bea on that. Don't recognize that name.

ROSENGARTEN: They're the ones who put together the directories of, corporate directories. Well, that's something we can...

MRS. DENNIS: I'll ask Bea that tonight. Let her look up that for me.

ROSENGARTEN: You all speak on the phone most every night?

MRS. DENNIS: Terrible. We try to take turns. It started from Rembert's wreck, you know. Try hard not to. But my sister and I don't talk that often, but when we do... She calls me often.

ROSENGARTEN: My sister lives in France, so when we get on the phone together it's a major expense. We do it once or twice a year, but it's always fifty dollars. It's worth it. Senator, in this period of time the News and Courier described Governor John C. West as quote, "an authentic disciple of FDR and LBJ." Do you agree with this?

DENNIS: Well, he believed in progress by growth of the state's economy, and of course the government growing along with it, and financing to do it.

ROSENGARTEN: So he would be regarded as a spender.
DENNIS: That's right.

MRS. DENNIS: But we had money during his...

DENNIS: Income was good. Efforts to put some of it aside didn't meet with his approval. His philosophy was spend what you get to improve yourself. You can't save and do it. It'd be thrown away for something.

ROSENGARTEN: Was this a policy that you went along with, or...

DENNIS: Well, it wasn't a policy that I liked, but in my position as chairman of the Finance Committee, my committee couldn't be successful without working with the Governor. So I yielded my personal feelings at times for the overall interest of the committee.

MRS. DENNIS: But there were things that were really needed.

DENNIS: No question about that, there always are.

ROSENGARTEN: What is West known for in terms of new programs?

DENNIS: School improvements would be number one. That includes higher education of course. All of them in the last thirty years that didn't put it a top priority, improvement in education, wouldn't have made any impressionable records.

ROSENGARTEN: This is a question I meant to ask you, but actually it would be better for me to ask your wife, if you don't mind. Again, from a newspaper article, four Senate wives, yourself, Mrs. Gressette, Mrs. Harris P. Smith and Mrs. James M. Morris, were described as regulars on visitor's row? I was going to ask the senator, but I should really ask you, what the role of a senator's wife was? In particular, what your working relationship with your husband was?

MRS. DENNIS: Well, I didn't tell him what to do. [laughs] Not that he would have listened. I started going to Columbia with Rembert most of the time in seventy-six, after he had his first heart attack. When was this?

ROSENGARTEN: This was seventy-five, about that time.

MRS. DENNIS: I always went to Columbia. He would call and say come up. The majority of the Senate wives did not go. I've always been interested in politics, I guess married to a politician. Actually there was no role other than supporting him. There was really... I felt like I had a share in what he did though. An interest. I helped him. I didn't get a salary though.

DENNIS: You got some .... .... salary. [Mrs. Dennis laughs]

MRS. DENNIS: I think I helped you. You'll have to answer that though.

DENNIS: .... .... the help of a good wife when you're working hard and decisions are hard to make. You're worrying about your own finances a little bit, but you got the state of South Carolina's financial welfare pretty well on your shoulders or your committee.

MRS. DENNIS: Rembert was fortunate, he had a home secretary. I will say that I served as his secretary at home. Wouldn't you say, Rembert?

DENNIS: Yes.
ROSENGARTEN: Did you have a special relationship with these other three women who were also more or less attentive?

MRS. DENNIS: Oh yes. I was close to all of them. Mrs. Gressette, Florence Gressette, probably more than the others. By the way, Mrs. Harris Smith is now a senator. Her husband died, had a heart attack and died, and she ran for his seat. She had said she would never run. That was interesting.

ROSENGARTEN: So she was in training all those years she sat in the chamber.

MRS. DENNIS: That's right, she was in training. And Mrs. Morris now, her husband is now a judge. Very few of the wives come and take an interest. They might come and go shopping. I think the reason they wrote that is because we did stay there. I'm not a shopper. I enjoyed it though, I'll have to say that.

ROSENGARTEN: Did you have a role in terms of entertaining?

MRS. DENNIS: Well, you know Rembert was so busy. I know that the papers say what all the legislators are invited to so many things. Really, and a lot of them do go with lobbyists to lunch every day. We never did do that. Occasionally. Rembert was too busy really to take the time.

ROSENGARTEN: But you aren't obliged to throw parties for other people.

MRS. DENNIS: No, no. Didn't have to do that. Here in Moncks Corner we may have done some, we let Boy Scouts use the place, or church groups use our various places. That sort of thing, where we could help. But I learned that, in a lot of ways you were better off not to have, people couldn't say well I wasn't invited, to have too many big things.

ROSENGARTEN: Were you involved in the campaigns?

MRS. DENNIS: Oh yes. I did work during the campaign but you didn't really have to do so much yourself other than go out and speak to people, and go to the meetings, go to a lot of things.

DENNIS: You went to Hanahan on election day and worked handing out posters and shaking hands.

MRS. DENNIS: I went with him to a lot of the things, a majority of the things, when I could. To work the crowd. I remember they said in Charleston those wives didn't know how to do down there. I remember Don Fowler, who was Democratic executive, what was he? Head of the Democrats? South Carolina? Don Fowler? Anyway, I remember him saying that he wished they had had the training that I had had. I'd been doing it a long time.

DENNIS: He was executive secretary of the party.

MRS. DENNIS: I used to consider myself a shy person, but I guess once you get in politics you get out of that. When you speak, generally people are nice. But as far as entertaining, really I would say we've done very little through the years. Rembert had a big barbecue after his first election didn't you, Rembert?

DENNIS: Yes.

MRS. DENNIS: He entertained to take men hunting and things like that maybe, but not on a big scale, for me. Thank goodness.

ROSENGARTEN: Yes. That's a tremendous burden. You need a staff to do that. Senator Dennis, at the
dedication of the Edgar A. Brown building, you described your mentor as a financial genius. Would you elaborate on that?

MRS. DENNIS: Talking about Edgar Brown?

DENNIS: Finding a way to cover big appropriations, when the money doesn't seem to be in sight anywhere, is the kind of genius I was talking about.

ROSENGARTEN: He'd find it where it wasn't there?

DENNIS: Yes.

ROSENGARTEN: Maybe you should have called him a magician.

DENNIS: He knew how to rob Peter to pay Paul, too.

ROSENGARTEN: I'm looking for something here because I had wanted to ask you who your speech writers were at this time, and I remembered this fellow who interviewed you in the seventies mentions one guy in particular, who you had a lot of respect for. See if I can find it. Can you think of who I might, who might have...

DENNIS: Phil Grose?

ROSENGARTEN: That might have been it. Who was working for you at that time?

DENNIS: I don't know who he was working for, but not my speechwriters. He was working for the state, but not for me.

ROSENGARTEN: Philip G. Grose. G-R-O-S-E. He was described here as an aide, and you said that you occasionally used Mr. Grose's services as an aide.

DENNIS: He was a big help.

ROSENGARTEN: In what ways?

DENNIS: His ability to put into words the analysis of problems and solutions that were being attempted. He didn't originate the process, he just described the process. Of course he was very knowledgeable about state government; that was an important thing. He worked with the State Development Board, and he knew the problems of proper state supports for institutions and agencies to an extent better than anybody in South Carolina probably at the time.

ROSENGARTEN: He was Governor McNair's aide at that time?

DENNIS: Yes.

ROSENGARTEN: Did you have any other, either staff people or aides who you felt were exceptional?

DENNIS: Not for the final product. I had them to get information, but to help with the words or presentation, Phil was all I had.

ROSENGARTEN: Where is he today?

DENNIS: At the statehouse. Natalie, who is Phil Grose working with now in the state government? The
Development Board?

**MRS. DENNIS:** What darling?

**DENNIS:** Phil Grose is working with who?

**MRS. DENNIS:** At that time?

**DENNIS:** Now.

**MRS. DENNIS:** Now. He's with the Budget and Control Board, I think.

**ROSENGARTEN:** So he stayed sort of as a behind-the-scenes person?

**DENNIS:** Yes.

**ROSENGARTEN:** Just six weeks after the building was dedicated in honor of Edgar Brown, the senator died from injuries sustained in a car crash. Do you remember the memorial service held in the Senate for this in his honor?

**DENNIS:** Yes. It's like the other memorial services. Certain senators that were very close to the deceased had words of praise to say. It was part of the custom of representatives of the honoree picking out the people who were going to speak in behalf of the deceased.

**ROSENGARTEN:** I believe this was the first time a memorial service had been held in the Senate chambers.

**DENNIS:** No, I don't think so. Matter of fact, that couldn't be true. They had one for my father after he died. I remember either as a page or a legislator attending services for Senator Harris Smith from Florence, and several others.

**ROSENGARTEN:** Maybe there hadn't been one as elaborate. That was from a newspaper, I don't even know what newspaper. Maybe it was the biggest, most elaborate. They reported that it was attended by five former governors.

**DENNIS:** I'm sure that's right.

**ROSENGARTEN:** Did you attend the funeral of Johnny Siokos? The fellow who ran the Capital Café?

**DENNIS:** Yes I did.

**ROSENGARTEN:** What do you recall about that?

**DENNIS:** Multitude of people. He was a well-loved person. His father ran the café, I think I've told you before, when I first went to Columbia as a page and had some meals in the café with my father. Old man and his wife were there, and along came, after his death, she stayed right there and helped Johnny develop it. After Johnny left they selected somebody who was very similar in characteristics. Personal attraction is a ....... His name is John. What is it? John what?

**ROSENGARTEN:** It didn't say who replaced him. I think there was a story about his mother saying she couldn't carry on without him. It was about three years later in the Senate Journal. There was a letter from Amelia Siokos, S-I-O-K-O-S, about her retirement from the restaurant. I imagine you weren't the only legislator at that funeral.
DENNIS: It was almost a quorum.

ROSENGARTEN: You called the ratification of home rule before an implementation bill was designed "the greatest mistake we've made since I've been in the legislature." Why? Why did you consider this such a dire mistake?

DENNIS: Because it took from the debates the personal feelings of people. Legislators were, thought differently about a number of the issues of the time if they were being visited by their constituency. A tendency to accept things as being necessary without more careful consideration.

ROSENGARTEN: Among the five options that were proposed for home rule, you came out in favor of the council supervisor form of government for Berkeley County. Would you just describe what that option meant, and why you supported it?

DENNIS: That was Berkeley County’s plan of operation with the delegations. The delegation depended on a supervisor that would run the county. They would represent the county legislatively, but the operation of the county, roads, bridges, and ferries and so forth, was under the supervisor. It had been proven in my judgment, to be a good plan of operation.

ROSENGARTEN: Was it hard for you as a member of the legislative delegation to relinquish responsibility for county government?

DENNIS: It was welcome. Still had a voice in it as a legislator, but it was one of the biggest improvements South Carolina made during my time in office. County councils in many counties have not proven to be too good, but that's to be expected.

ROSENGARTEN: Did Berkeley adopt the council-supervisor formula?

DENNIS: Yes.

ROSENGARTEN: So that was decided on a county-by-county basis? Some counties would go with the administrator, some with...

DENNIS: Yes, and they still have that.

ROSENGARTEN: So you weren't against home rule, you were against passing it without having the implementation in place.

DENNIS: That's right. Exactly. We had to have it by the order of the court. Just a question of what kind we were going to have.

ROSENGARTEN: In line with attacks on old guard power and privileges in this period, the appointment of Senate pages was called into question. Do you remember which of your sons and nephews were pages in the 1975 session?

DENNIS: It would have to be Luke. My daughter, she hadn't been a page; she'd been an employee of the legislative council. But my sons in their time served brief periods as pages. I didn't have people object to me too strenuously about it. Mostly it those who wanted their children to have the same opportunity. I provided plenty of those.
ROSENGARTEN: So nothing ever came of this? They didn't change the appointment procedure?

DENNIS: .... didn't change it.

ROSENGARTEN: Were any of Markley's... They mentioned nephews here.

DENNIS: His son was a page.

ROSENGARTEN: There was a Democratic fund-raising dinner that year at which representative Ernest A. Finney served as master of ceremonies, and a Furman professor named Huff talked about the legislators’ efforts to seek solutions to the race problem. Did you feel that a new era of racial politics had begun?

DENNIS: A new era of what?

ROSENGARTEN: A new era of racial politics?

DENNIS: Oh yes. I felt like it had been begun. I think the new era of racial politics had begun when I was elected, or was in the process of being implemented. Some of the first problems I faced was how are you going to handle local government. I think Berkeley county came through it fairly well. We tried to abide by the law, and we tried to have the most important decision of the county, schools or otherwise, to have some black representation. I guess our county was one of the first to put blacks in position to, decision-making for the county. School boards, other county boards. We had the first black highway commissioner. It was very much of a favorable step for the blacks.

ROSENGARTEN: You see this as a process which began as far back as the late, say, 1930s?

DENNIS: For what year?

ROSENGARTEN: You said right from the beginning of your election.

DENNIS: I mean my election to the Senate in the forties.

ROSENGARTEN: Well, it certainly is true, the impact that World War Two had on race relations in the United States was probably the turning point. And Truman, who the South fought so hard.

MRS. DENNIS: But he really ended up being a good president, has gone down.

ROSENGARTEN: Do you remember how you learned about the fire at the Dennis Wildlife Center in Bonneau in November of 1975?

DENNIS: Do you remember?

MRS. DENNIS: Rembert (Junior) was living here and they called him to come up there. Was it June? His office was there. I'm sure that's how we first learned because they called him. It seems to me it was during the night. I remember that. I remember him leaving to go. I don't know how that started. They didn't lose everything.

ROSENGARTEN: No. I think they lost one building. Administrative building and lab.

MRS. DENNIS: Yes, because Rembert lost a lot of things in his office. Personal things, you know how you take...

ROSENGARTEN: See at that time they reckoned the damages were $250,000. That fire, I don't know if you read
in the newspaper, in the Second Presbyterian church? My god, the millions that they've... They had over a million dollars of Hugo damage. It sounds like it was arson, it really does. There's no heat in the building, no electricity turned on.

MRS. DENNIS: What is this world coming to? Those children who, whoever it was that took the heads off the... I don't know whether they did just that, but some, the damage to the church, yesterday or the day before. Did you see that?

ROSENGARTEN: No, I didn't.

MRS. DENNIS: The statues in, those were in two churches. Do you know what churches they were? Catholics I'd guess because it was the...

ROSENGARTEN: Saints.

MRS. DENNIS: Just, vandals. Terrible.

ROSENGARTEN: It would seem that a church would be the last place...

MRS. DENNIS: I'd be afraid the Lord would strike me.

ROSENGARTEN: Hard to understand.

MRS. DENNIS: I wanted to come back in and say that we did entertain. I can remember entertaining people who were coming in for, looking at places to develop, like Albany Felt people, and... We did a lot but didn't do anything on a big scale, and I tried to do what I did on a small scale so that you would enjoy... We always did that, because see we had no development board. So I wanted to correct a lot of that. So we did do some, but I did it... When you do it on a small scale you can do it without a big staff.

DENNIS: Took people to athletic events, and...

MRS. DENNIS: But we had them to dinner at home, too. I remember that particular thing. I'm sure there have been others down through the years that I've entertained. I had many a, for Rembert, people coming for lunch. So I'm sure that there were a lot of things, but nothing on a big scale to say.

ROSENGARTEN: You didn't throw any banquets.

MRS. DENNIS: Formal banquets and parties, and formal dinners. What I did was generally on a.... I had a lot of coffees and teas and things like that. Not on a big scale. With six children I guess you do things a little simple.

[TAPE THIRTEEN ENDS, TAPE FOURTEEN BEGINS. The audio quality of this recording is quite poor. Dennis' comments are sometimes completely incomprehensible]

ROSENGARTEN: Senator Dennis, we ended off last time, it was almost a month ago, talking about home rule, if you remember, and the shift of responsibility from the legislative delegation to the county government. The other big issue of the 1976 legislative session was judicial reform. On this issue you wound up breaking with Senator Gressette and allying with Governor Edwards. Do you remember why you were willing to give up the legislature's right to impeach judges? I believe that was the major reform issue.

DENNIS: I don't remember the specific reason that I gave.
ROSENGARTEN: Was this going to give the governor the right to impeach?

DENNIS: Give the legislature .... impeachment .... by trial by the Senate. It was voted on by the General Assembly. For judges to be sought be impeached, it takes a vote of the legislature to order the impeachment, and then the trial is held by the Senate. I guess the great changes in the law caused me to think that the wrongdoing charge by the judge was more lack of proper training than it was any criminal desire.

ROSENGARTEN: I think I have here that it was giving the right of disciplining to the judge in the Supreme Court, taking it away from the legislature. Some of the speeches that I read, which your wife loaned me, you had an interesting phrase in several of them when you didn't side with Gressette on an issue. Do you remember the phrase that you used? "United we stand, divided I fall?" I thought that was very clever. Yourself, Senator Waddell and Senator Gressette all supported the tidelands bill of 1976, creating a 15-member coastal council, yet all three of you were on a so-called "black list" of the Conservation Voters League. Wasn't the tidelands bill considered a conservation measure?

DENNIS: I'm trying to think specifically what it did.

ROSENGARTEN: I think it established the Coastal Council. It was the enabling legislation. [long pause] You know one of the reasons that these issues may be a little hazy to you is this is, these all immediately followed your heart attack in January 1976. Would you describe the events surrounding your heart attack?

DENNIS: I'm trying to think of exactly what I was doing at the time.

MRS. DENNIS: It was the first heart attack? Well, your only heart attack.

ROSENGARTEN: January 1976.

MRS. DENNIS: We had been out to dinner. It was the night the governor spoke at the legislature. About two or three o'clock in the morning... You probably remember now. Woke up, said his back hurt him. It was not in his heart, so I didn't get excited at first, you know I didn't... He said I'd better call somebody.

ROSENGARTEN: If you don't go to a doctor, he'll get what you have.

DENNIS: .... .... heart attack. Got the ambulance here, took them a good while to get the ambulance, too. I had a good bit of pain at that time.

MRS. DENNIS: We tried to get his brother. I was short of every number. I don't know why we couldn't get Billy's number. But I did get, he has a, his niece married a surgeon, a heart surgeon in Columbia, Johnny Sutton, and he met us at, told us to go to Providence Hospital and he met us there, so we were very fortunate. To know somebody.

ROSENGARTEN: You had enough of an idea that it was a heart problem to...

MRS. DENNIS: Well, see, those were the only doctors you know, I knew. I mean that I, I could have called some of the doctors there in Columbia or the one who comes up to the statehouse a lot. But by that time I was concerned, I felt like it might have been his heart. Johnny was in the family too, you know, so... I knew he would direct me to the right doctor, because that was about two-thirty or three in the morning. Back then they kept you in the hospital. He stayed in the hospital three weeks. Governor Edwards had just gone in as governor. They are both just lovely people. He was a Republican, of course. They came to the hospital that day. Anne didn't come, she came the next day. I was at the hotel. They invited me to stay up at the mansion, which made it so much easier for me, so I did stay there.

DENNIS: .... .... the Governor's mother came to town. They brought her to see me.

MRS. DENNIS: No, they didn't bring her. She came, the chauffeur brought her, or somebody brought her. They told her not to come in, just to speak to me. She came right on in. They were apologizing for her coming. They have a room at the mansion; they have two bedrooms on that first floor that they used for guests. I told them if they ever
needed, please let me -- I could go with one of the children. I have a daughter, Dorn is there, but she lived about eight miles out, and it did make it easier for me. They were having a lot of trouble around the hospital then, too. With, seems to me somebody had been raped. I was going early in the morning, and staying late at night, so it really made it nice. They kept you in the hospital then, for three weeks. Then they let him come home. He was to take it easy, you know, but he went on back to work soon afterwards. I don't mean to take over. [laughs]

DENNIS: As long as you're telling it right, I don't ....

MRS. DENNIS: Then we went in the mountains that summer, and he started having angina. They said if you started having angina they'd bring you back in and do the catheterization. That was not just an everyday thing then. We went into the medical university that time, and they did the catheterization and realized he had to have it. They didn't do that in the operations... You know back then it was fairly new, and Doctor [Denton] Cooley in Houston was, he and Doctor [Gazes], forget the two doctors they said walked on water, thought they walked on water. Heart doctors, I know you'd recognize the name, were out there, and they were the ones really who did this operation first. So Doctor Gazes felt like Rembert ought to go out there. I think they were afraid to, they didn't want...

DENNIS: When I had the second one?

MRS. DENNIS: That was the first one. But you went out there for both of them though, darling.

DENNIS: Of course I remember that. I'm not going to forget.

ROSENGARTEN: You had two surgeries? I didn't realize that.

MRS. DENNIS: One in seventy-six.

DENNIS: I remember when I had after the first one .... ....

MRS. DENNIS: You mean that you had the other one? Eighty-four.

DENNIS: Eighty-four and what?

MRS. DENNIS: Seventy-six and eighty-four.

ROSENGARTEN: So the pain in your back was just kind of a pre-warning?

MRS. DENNIS: I guess so.

DENNIS: It was what they called an angina heart pain. Chest pain, after taking medicine and sitting still for awhile, it'd pass off. .... .... just like it was going to take your breath away. Went down to see Dr. Gazes? When I had a recurrence of it. After the operation it still was, how many months was it?

MRS. DENNIS: It was a number of months, Rembert. I don't believe your operation was until, I'll have to look it up, but it was that summer because...

ROSENGARTEN: In July, I believe.

MRS. DENNIS: Yes. Because we walked, we were in the mountains, and that was the first time he had felt the pain. Do you remember that?

DENNIS: Yes. Seems I told Dr. Gazes(?) how I felt. He got out his stethoscope and listened, and looked at me. I knew it was bad news. He said you're going to have to have another operation.

MRS. DENNIS: The second time. But the first time they did the catheterization at the medical university. They told
us at Houston usually when people had had a catheterization, they had to do it over again, but they said we know if you had it at the medical university there, they wouldn't have to. They had had some patients from there.

DENNIS: They knew Doctor Gazes and had a lot of respect for him.

MRS. DENNIS: They also said he didn't have to come back out there for a check-up, that Doctor Gazes was as good as they come. One of the best in the nation.

ROSENGARTEN: So they just had you on medication from January until July.

MRS. DENNIS: That's right. But now, when you have a heart attack, they usually go ahead right then and do the catheterization.

ROSENGARTEN: What is catheterization?

MRS. DENNIS: They insert a needle... Rembert, you can probably tell that better than I can.

DENNIS: Where do they stick the needle?

MRS. DENNIS: In your leg or your arm, I know, but they did yours in the leg.

DENNIS: That big vein that comes up...

MRS. DENNIS: The artery.

DENNIS: Yes. Stuck it in there and pumped the fluid into the heart. It's a coloration isn't it?

MRS. DENNIS: Yes, it is. They can see on the screen, and they told Rembert he could look, and he said no he didn't want to look. They can tell what you have. He had four. They did three in Houston, I think, and decided the other one didn't need doing, the first time. Then when he went back in they did the other one.

DENNIS: Had two when I went back in.

MRS. DENNIS: Either two or three, but I know you did that one that was left.

ROSENGARTEN: The idea is to clear the passage?

MRS. DENNIS: No. It's to allow them to see what's in there, in that one, in that test. But now they have an angioplasty that will go in and clean it out. When Bob McNair had... If you have just one or two, they would go in and clean it. They might have tried him on that. Some people have had two or three of those, and you get out the next day or two when they do that. When they clean them out.

ROSENGARTEN: Six weeks after your hospitalization your daughter Mary Kathryn died. Was this an unexpected blow, or were you...

DENNIS: It was unexpected. At the time she had a... They never, a long life expectancy. Matter of fact I think that they told us that the average age with the condition she was in was...

MRS. DENNIS: Eight or nine.

DENNIS: ...eight or nine years.

MRS. DENNIS: But she was twenty-something.
ROSENGARTEN: What did she have?

MRS. DENNIS: She really had, I really think it was more like pneumonia that she had.

DENNIS: It was very difficult news.

MRS. DENNIS: She was a micro-cephalic. She never moved her back; she was lying flat in the bed. So she had had some kidney problems, and some of the other, but I think it went into the kidneys. They called me on her birthday, which was the eleventh of March, to say that she was sick. They usually, if they got sick, they would call. Then she died on the thirteenth, Luke's birthday. They told me when they called that first time, that...

DENNIS: She was at Whitten Village.

ROSENGARTEN: Excuse me?

DENNIS: She was at Whitten Village.

ROSENGARTEN: Whitten Village.

MRS. DENNIS: Its up by Clinton. You know at that time, South Carolina did not have this, the coastal center over here at Summerville. I don't know whether you're familiar with the coastal center? Well, it's for retarded children. We now have that one. They told us we could move her when they built this one, asked us if we wanted to. But she had been there for so long, and there were so many of them that loved her there, you hated to, even though you could have seen her more, you hated to do it. So she stayed up at Clinton. Its between Columbia and Greenville. She died on Luke's birthday. Luke's birthday is the thirteenth. So it was just two days after her birthday that she died. In a way it was not, you know, unexpected, because you... She always got sick some. She lived longer than they thought.

ROSENGARTEN: Was she coherent, could she talk to you?

MRS. DENNIS: The one thing about it that bothered me, about her, they asked us when she was about four or five, maybe older than that, a little older, if they could try her... One of the medical companies wanted to take a number of them, twenty or twenty-five, and give them the liquid food, to see if they could, give them that and get them strong enough and then take them off of that. Because she was not eating a lot. They did, and they were able to take the majority of them off of the food, but they never could take her off. That was the only thing that I felt quite, was not good. I would not have started it.

ROSENGARTEN: So all her life pretty much, she was on liquid food.

MRS. DENNIS: Yes. I felt like that was not good. But you couldn't do anything about it by that time. You'd already let them start it.

ROSENGARTEN: I can imagine this must have been a very stressful time for you?

MRS. DENNIS: Well, it seemed like seventy-six, everything happened that year. There were other things that happened, but I can't remember quite now what they were.

DENNIS: Stressful time.

MRS. DENNIS: Did you go to her funeral? You did go to the funeral didn't you?

DENNIS: Yes.

MRS. DENNIS: I remember I did ..... pretty well. It was, even though you expect something like that, you know
you... She was a blessing. Rembert became a lot more interested, I think, in mental problems. Was able to see when we first went to Whitten Village they just had so little, it was almost pathetic.

DENNIS: I made it a special legislative concern of mine.

MRS. DENNIS: There was only Whitten Village and Pineland? Was it Pineland, darling?

DENNIS: Yes, Pineland.

MRS. DENNIS: And that was really for the blacks. But that was changed you know, to mix... It's a good one, now. They are all integrated. So we have the three in the state. And I really don't believe that we would have had all that if it hadn't been that Rembert was vitally interested in it. You see the need.

ROSENGARTEN: There certainly is a need. One of the speeches you gave, I read the first half, the ones from the seventies. You said something about, when Wilbur Mills was supposed to come to the Senate and didn't come, to talk about alcoholism. You made a speech and said it was a problem that had touched just about everyone in some way, either through family, friends, or in some way, including yourself. Is there anything specific that was going on at that time?

MRS. DENNIS: I can't place it...

ROSENGARTEN: It was about this same time, right in the mid-seventies.

MRS. DENNIS: You remember Wilbur Mills, don't you, darling? The fellow from Washington. Was he a senator?

ROSENGARTEN: I think so.

DENNIS: House.

ROSENGARTEN: House.

MRS. DENNIS: He really carried on. I can't think of anything.

ROSENGARTEN: Anything going on with your sons?

MRS. DENNIS: I can't place... Seventy-six?

ROSENGARTEN: Well it might not have been right then. I think this was in that batch of undated speeches, but it was in the seventies.

MRS. DENNIS: Can't place it right off.

ROSENGARTEN: The thing I couldn't get over was, I guess it when you returned from the heart surgery, they started all those attacks about using the state plane.

MRS. DENNIS: Yes, it was a terrible thing.

ROSENGARTEN: I couldn't believe that. I think I wrote it down here someplace.

MRS. DENNIS: But he did use it. And really they ought to let Jack Lindsay, one of the senators is going for a lung operation if they can locate a lung for him, a transplant, in Mississippi or somewhere down there, wherever Floyd Spence went. He was in the Senate the other day with his oxygen, did you read that? He said, "I might just go on the state plane." You know Jack, he was laughing. Of course he wouldn't go because there's been so much criticism. But you know they use the state plane sometimes to take, they've used it to take people like, girls who are in the Miss
America contest, which I think is utterly ridiculous. To, wherever it is, Atlantic City? And here a man, who has given his life, Rembert did, for the state, to serve the state, and the criticism. Jack Lindsay's the one I'm really talking about. But he's not going to use it. But he said I might tell the press. Might even use it.

DENNIS: [mumbles]

MRS. DENNIS: Yes. .... the truth.

ROSENGARTEN: There was another thing you made some jokes about in those speeches, I forgot which one, but you opened up and said that you had just arrived and you'd make your remarks brief because you needed to catch the state plane, waiting for you. Then at the end of the speech you said, "Well, I've got a plane to catch."

MRS. DENNIS: Well, they gave him a fit. He's got a plane in yonder that they gave him as a joke. In the kitchen.

ROSENGARTEN: A plane and a railroad. Well, back to politics here. How did you respond to charges that you wielded too much control over the state wildlife commission, specifically throwing your weight in favor of your home county?

DENNIS: It was usually explained that the charges they made against me for favoritism toward my county were tied up in Santee-Cooper and the special situation you have there with the lakes that had to be, had to have a certain number of game wardens to protect a large body of water. It finally leveled off, the legislature and the people generally accepted the fact that special efforts had to be made for Santee-Cooper lake protection. We put on special fees for it; we didn't pay it out of the regular license fee. Every now and then the politics would come out in it - Berkeley county's got twenty-five game wardens and some .... were twice as big didn't have but three or four. That was the special situation of protecting the lake. They kept me on the hot seat.

ROSENGARTEN: Speaking of the hot seat, here's another one. Veteran legislators Ralph Gasque, James Stevens and James Harrelson were defeated in the primaries in June of seventy-six. Two weeks later you and Sol Blatt and A. Lee Chandler were criticized for providing legal services to the utility companies. The Greenville News saw this as a power shift away from the quote "rural barons." Do you agree with this analysis?

DENNIS: Tell me what it was, the News and Courier says what now?

ROSENGARTEN: Gasque and Stevens and Harrelson were all defeated, in the primaries. Veteran legislators. Then you and Blatt and Chandler were on the hot seat in regards to the utility companies. So the Greenville News reported that this was a shift away from the "rural barons."

DENNIS: That was the position of most of the newspapers in the state, and it was a... Any favor a politician got out of a power company was wrong. Can you elaborate on it?

MRS. DENNIS: What was that? I heard you talking about utilities.

ROSENGARTEN: Well, this, Senator Dennis just said that he was on the hot seat again in terms of the wildlife commission. You said that seventy-six was a hard year. There would seem to be this series of attacks. So, this one was the criticism over legal services provided to utility companies. Not just Senator Dennis, but Sol Blatt and Lee Chandler, and at the same time several veteran legislators were defeated in the primaries. So the Greenville News, that's right, I was...

MRS. DENNIS: That's always the worst paper.

ROSENGARTEN: They seem to have it in for you, I must say. Why?

MRS. DENNIS: For most anybody, they were, they had a rot... The paper may be better now, but they had some reporters who were really terrible, and an editor too, who was terrible.
ROSENGARTEN: Well, anyway, they reported this series of attacks and defeats as a shift away from, a shift of power away from the rural barons. They saw this as a trend. So my question was, do you agree with this analysis, or was this just trumped up?

MRS. DENNIS: Who lost in that election?

ROSENGARTEN: It was Ralph Gasque, James Stevens and James Harrelson.

MRS. DENNIS: I don't believe that was the utilities though, do you Rembert?

ROSENGARTEN: No, that didn't have anything to do with it.

MRS. DENNIS: Oh, that was the rule. All those fellows, Gasque had a lot of problems.

ROSENGARTEN: He did?

MRS. DENNIS: Personal. I don't agree with them on that.

DENNIS: If what they said happened, so many rural legislators would have lost, but it wasn't any...

MRS. DENNIS: No connection with the utilities.

DENNIS: No.

MRS. DENNIS: I don't believe it was either.

ROSENGARTEN: I think what they're getting at was, you know, this whole idea of the old guard and the Young Turks. I think what the newspaper was getting at was that it was a sort of passing of the flag, so to speak, or a change of guard.

MRS. DENNIS: That was when the Turks came in, wasn't it? Dick Riley, and...

ROSENGARTEN: About this same time, in the early seventies.

MRS. DENNIS: They'd stay there about four or five years, and then they would become part of the old guard. I hate to say that. Didn't they, Rembert?

DENNIS: Right. The fight centered around Charleston senator Goodstein. He attacked the old senators and the system he said of the disadvantages of the young senators, and that's when they put the old Turks and Young Turks. It was done on a national level, too. First Democratic convention I went to, there was a fight between the old Turks and...

MRS. DENNIS: That wasn't your first, but I know the one you're talking about, when Mennen Williams was there, and he was Governor of, Michigan? But Arnie Goodstein, you going to tell her about Arnie Goodstein?

DENNIS: He resented not having the same rights as senators with years of service to being recognized for appointments, committee service and anything he didn't want any distinction in it. But after he'd been there, to be a sort of an old Turk himself, he used to laugh about and say I'm with you now, I think it's a good thing. Edgar Brown used to put the knife to him, just kidding. I mean he had a lot of fool talk about it.

ROSENGARTEN: You feel that a lot of this, this kind of criticism and attack was a kind of resentment over the younger member's lack of power?

DENNIS: It was to some extent.
ROSENGARTEN: Still on the attack, the Young Turks criticized you and Gressette for becoming too close to Republican Governor Edwards. The *State* reported that you attended at least one private quot "off-the-record meeting of the Young Democratic senators." Do you recall this meeting? A kind of strategy session I presume.

DENNIS: Yes, I recall the meeting. In the committee room upstairs. It was really a sort of pep rally for the Democratic senators. The governor was becoming too popular, as a Republican. Still a lot of them took the position, and Gressette and I were two of them that Edwards was just making a good governor, and he didn't need any special deference from the Democrats. He didn't ask anything special from the Republicans. He was the first governor that -- our experience was in recent years in South Carolina -- that got along well with both parties. Sometimes you couldn't tell whether he was a Democrat or Republican. In other words, it was the man and the issues, not... Byrnes was that way for a time, and Edwards was that way all of his administration. He got as much Democratic support as he got Republican support.

ROSENGARTEN: That was true of Jim Byrnes too, you said?

DENNIS: Well, I think Edwards was a little bit stronger coalition than Byrnes.

ROSENGARTEN: When you walked in on this, a meeting of the Young Turks, what... Would they be cordial, would the tone change, were you able to persuade them of your position?

DENNIS: The contest kept continuing, but it didn't grow into anything like a serious legislative situation that would affect the passage of legislation. It was more sparring than it was fighting.

ROSENGARTEN: Now in the midst of all of this you went to Texas for the surgery. What was your experience of open-heart surgery? Was it a frightening event, or...

DENNIS: Well, the prospect of it, expectation of it was right frightening. Medical people always give you cases to consider with. Operations that had been successful. It was, and is now, quite an experience to have your chest opened up and your heart found .... I think every individual that went through it, like I did, prepares themselves the best you could for death, thinking that it very well, you may very well not come out of it. You're very thankful when you can walk again after one of those operations, and not be too painful.

ROSENGARTEN: Did it give you immediate relief?

DENNIS: Oh yes. The very week of the operation, it took a long time to get strength back, the relief, lack of the, not having the pains was a big relief. Natalie, I'm going to have to get me up here to go to the bathroom.

[tape stops, then resumes]

ROSENGARTEN: Let's see. You had been describing the heart surgery. So you had the summer to convalesce from that?

DENNIS: Yes.

ROSENGARTEN: The fall of that year, seventy-six, you were honored twice. Governor Edwards dubbed you the "Knight of the Red Pen," and Greenville Mayor Max Heller proclaimed October 22nd "Rembert Dennis Day." Do you remember these two events?

DENNIS: I remember going to Greenville for the Max Heller day. It was a very nice affair. My friend Marion Gressette .... .... speak. Had my old football coach to speak, at Furman, and they just were very, very nice to me. What did Governor Edwards do? I forgot what we did.

ROSENGARTEN: It was kind of a jokey award, the "Knight of the Red Pen." It was obviously a fiscal, for your
fiscal responsibility. I think that in the scrapbook there was actually a mock award with the state seal on it, or something like that. Was Max Heller a Jewish mayor?

DENNIS: Yes. A very fine gentleman, too.

ROSENGARTEN: Is he still living?

DENNIS: I think he is. I was trying to think of the state position that he had. I was at some of the meetings. What was his position?

ROSENGARTEN: Besides being mayor of Greenville, I don't know. He worked in Columbia?

DENNIS: Well, at the special meeting... Natalie!

MRS. DENNIS: Yes?

DENNIS: Help us here a minute or two. I'm not doing good today. What position did Max Heller have?

MRS. DENNIS: He was mayor of Greenville.

DENNIS: Why did we go to an occasion when he was speaker and they called on me? Like at Myrtle Beach?

MRS. DENNIS: That was the city; that was Don Ray...

DENNIS: Municipal association.

MRS. DENNIS: ...municipal association. They really were the ones who invited him to come, I'm sure. They asked Rembert to speak at a number of affairs.

DENNIS: We went to a national affair...

MRS. DENNIS: In San Francisco one year.

DENNIS: ...and I spoke there. Measured up the relationship between the state government and the cities and the federal government.

MRS. DENNIS: Joe Riley was instrumental in your going to San Francisco.

DENNIS: [SIDE ONE ENDS, SIDE TWO BEGINS]

ROSENGARTEN: ...the talk you gave in San Francisco? Because you made the comment that coming from a small rural county the only reason you could reckon that they invited you to this municipal meeting was that they'd seen you came from Berkeley and they thought it was Berkeley, California, [laughs] and they thought they'd save on transportation. That was something I noticed. Every one of your speeches, you had up at the top either "humor" or some notes for a kind of humorous remark.

DENNIS: Yes.

MRS. DENNIS: He didn't follow those speeches just like they are.

ROSENGARTEN: I could tell that.

DENNIS: I generally always tried to start off with some humor.
MRS. DENNIS: Oh yes. He was good on telling jokes, and he could bring it in better than... You know a lot of those speeches were so dry. You had to put a certain amount of it in. He was pretty good. Good speaker.

ROSENGARTEN: That was a funny one.

MRS. DENNIS: They always said he spoke differently, or you did. When you spoke in the courthouse, you had a different tone, and when you were on the political stump... You used to say that though, didn't you?

DENNIS: Yes. Tried to have the speech for the occasion.

MRS. DENNIS: That's right. So he always told jokes.

ROSENGARTEN: It's a good way to start.

MRS. DENNIS: Get people interested.

ROSENGARTEN: Yes, I always get nervous if I'm giving a lecture or something and I say something that's supposed to be funny, and nobody laughs, I think, uh-oh, this is going to be a difficult one.

MRS. DENNIS: I've used Rembert's jokes, and they really don't turn out as funny as Rembert's, the way he... I think it's the way he tells them. I remember speaking to the Garden Club in Charleston, at the country club. I remember they didn't laugh at one of my jokes there.

ROSENGARTEN: I must say I'm notorious...

MRS. DENNIS: And it was his.

ROSENGARTEN: Oh yes?

MRS. DENNIS: One of his jokes.

ROSENGARTEN: One of his jokes. I can't tell a joke. I don't have a sense of timing.

MRS. DENNIS: That comes naturally, I think.

ROSENGARTEN: It's like singing, you've either got it or you don't have it. What were the differences in your schedule and your lifestyle during the legislative session and the off-season?

DENNIS: Well, the legislative time of the year was completely tied up with some activities either in Columbia or at home involving my responsibilities as a member of the delegation, ... In those days I was chairman of the delegation, and I had quite a busy schedule. I had to set up all the meetings by the delegation where we'd pass on school budgets and other local business. In Columbia I was completely tied up with state business, but I always managed to have a pretty good hunting arrangement while I was home. I hunted year-round, there was some hunting season all the time. I hunted deer, turkey and quail, dove and everything you hunt. I tried to divide my time between my legislative requirements, my law work and get as much hunting in as possible. I hunted one day a week. I belonged to hunting clubs and I hunted with friends. I had a fabulous hunting experience.

ROSENGARTEN: Was there a time once the legislature adjourned that you could actually call a vacation? I mean, did you take time off, or did you have a pretty busy schedule even in the off-season?

DENNIS: I had a busy schedule in the off-season. I never took time off... Day-by-day basis. I wouldn't take off to go hunting for a long period, although we did have our two-week period, I mean our week period at one hunting club. That was the one down on the river. Called it Hagen, I don't know if you've ever heard of the name Hagen?
ROSENGARTEN: Hagen?

DENNIS: Hagen and another club at Mepkin. I turned the Mepkin club over to a group of my fellow hunters and let them have that because I went to Hagen and I couldn't hunt both of them. I did plenty of hunting. In the spring and summer I did some fishing at least once a week.

ROSENGARTEN: During the middle seventies, you reversed your position and came out in favor of a second medical school. What made you change your mind?

DENNIS: I became convinced from legislative experiences, talking to representatives of both sides, that a second medical school was needed by South Carolina. No criticism of the one that was there, just the fact that I believed that it had its hands full, doing all it could, and the state needed more doctors, more medical people. So I did change.

ROSENGARTEN: Do you think your own medical experience increased your sensitivity to this issue?

DENNIS: That probably was an influence with me, but I had to try to withstand undue pressure, though. I had the value of advice from doctors in connection with my family life, watching their experiences. I had a brother-in-law who was the local, every-disease doctor, general practitioner. I saw how that work was going on, and I had a brother that was a specialist. I learned a lot about the activities of that specialty. It was just question of what could the state afford. I don't think there was any doubt that we needed both medical schools, but it took us some time to decide and get the legislature to go along with the idea that a second one was an economic feasibility.

ROSENGARTEN: I know you gave a welcoming speech to the first entering class of the new medical school.

DENNIS: I got some help with that speech from the president of the medical school. It was of course saying complimentary things about the medical school and how it had grown and how it was fulfilling its job. I had nothing to say about a second one at that time.

ROSENGARTEN: Do you recall the problems that were brewing with the Department of Social Services at this time? Specifically financial difficulties, the great deal of trouble the legislature had replacing Ellis as commissioner of DSS, and expanding the Board?

DENNIS: The legislators from the various counties were telling the statehouse about cases they saw of too much pay for too little aid. I'm not aware of a divided program with the money available for all the welfare needs. Annually we had a legislative fight over more money for the aged and for certain categories of health. There was a subject that people were very, had strong heart feelings on. The legislators were doing their best to have the program each year include raises for the old people, elderly, as well as sufficient funding for special programs such as the children and medical programs, farmers, welfare. It was and it still, problems of a reasonable welfare system, and be able to pay for it....

MRS. DENNIS: What was that on welfare?

ROSENGARTEN: We're talking about the difficulties that DSS was having in this period. It seems to be a kind of chronic problem area.

DENNIS: Through the years the legislature didn't accomplish a great deal in removing its legislative fee(?) from annual consideration. Additional money for the elderly, under welfare, is sort of an annual fight for a certain amount of money. The schools usually went to an annual fight on what the schools teachers' pay was going to be raised. The legislature got all of it on a professional programming basis. A reduction of the annual infighting among legislators. Still some of it, but my goodness it used to be, you'd have to give several weeks to fight on teachers pay and other many.... needs in the educational field. Things have improved along that line. Teachers were also professionalized - examinations set up, they were classified. I think it improved the quality of teachers. They were required to do specified amounts of improvements in their own education to rise up in their classification.
ROSENGARTEN: During these years, Berkeley County continued to develop its industrial base. In fact, the assessed value of manufacturing companies in Berkeley rose from 1.5 million in 1967 to more than 27 million in 1977. How do you account for this phenomenal growth?

DENNIS: New industry coming in. Bushy Park, St. Stephens area, Moncks Corner area. The Mt. Holly situation, big plant there. That was the biggest one. What's the name of it? Can't think of that right now.

ROSENGARTEN: Which one was this? Which one?

DENNIS: One in Berkeley at Mt. Holly.

ROSENGARTEN: I wrote down some of the ones that were... DuPont, Amoco, Uniroyal, Alumax? Is that it? Any of those? And of course the lime mine came in during that period.

DENNIS: Alumax was the one. We got some big ones. .... think that time about Bushy Park, .... .... before that?

ROSENGARTEN: I had mostly before that, but did any of these, did DuPont come into Bushy Park?

DENNIS: No.

ROSENGARTEN: I might just not have noted that because it happened before.

DENNIS: We had previously talked about the development of Bushy Park and the battles we had in connection with that.

ROSENGARTEN: Did you attend Jimmy Carter's inauguration in seventy-six? Did you attend the inauguration of Jimmy Carter?

DENNIS: Oh yes.

ROSENGARTEN: I think there was an invitation in one of the scrapbooks.

DENNIS: I was working in Washington at one of the Roosevelt presidential affairs, and... I don't believe I went to Lyndon Johnson's. The Democratic people... Natalie, what presidential inauguration did I go to? It wasn't Roosevelt.

MRS. DENNIS: Okay.

ROSENGARTEN: There must have been an invitation for the Jimmy Carter inauguration because I wrote to ask if you all had attended that. You probably were invited to all of them.

MRS. DENNIS: We did. Yes. Even the Republicans we've gotten invitations to. I guess maybe it was because you were pro tem? We never did go, but he went to Roosevelt's. You never did go but just to Roosevelt's, did you darling?

DENNIS: I'm thinking I went to it.

MRS. DENNIS: That you went to? You may have. You may have been there. But you're talking conventions?

DENNIS: Inaugurations.

MRS. DENNIS: Inaugurations. That's the only one that I know. But I'm sure it might have been another one.

ROSENGARTEN: Were you enthusiastic about Carter's candidacy?

DENNIS: No, I was not.
ROSENGARTEN: Not very much?

DENNIS: I got to see him and to meet with some of his people on projects during his term. His office was always cordial to me, and I developed a great deal of feeling for him as being a much better president than he was given credit for being.

ROSENGARTEN: He's coming into his own now.

MRS. DENNIS: Oh he is! I'm so proud.

ROSENGARTEN: Me, too. Ted told me the other night that his popularity rating, or whatever its called, approval rating, has just gone over Reagan's, as an ex-President.

MRS. DENNIS: A write-up either in Newsweek or in something on him, too, that I saw. I admired him. I think he really tried to do... He'll go down as a better man than they claimed he was when he was there.

DENNIS: .... .... .... his record has been examined and found to be more highly favorable than a lot had thought.

MRS. DENNIS: There was a write-up in Sunday's paper, did you see it? I bet it was in the State.

ROSENGARTEN: On Carter? On his work in Central America?

MRS. DENNIS: Told about him helping, complaining to, might not have been in that one, might have been in the newspaper. Complaining to Israel about the way they're treating the Palestinians.

ROSENGARTEN: Amen on that.

MRS. DENNIS: Terrible.

DENNIS: You ought to get you some medication.

MRS. DENNIS: Got to get me some what?

DENNIS: Medication.

MRS. DENNIS: Yes. I just cough, my throat gets... I either get hot or cold.

DENNIS: [mumbles]

ROSENGARTEN: Have you tried just lozenges? Because some of them are very, you know the ones that produce vapor like Halls. That's what I use. I suck lozenges all day long.

MRS. DENNIS: They just make me ill. I've gotten so sick of them. But I'm going to have to go back to them. Carter, he's worked there and in a lot of other areas, and I'm sure he didn't ever get a million dollars a speech, like Reagan.

ROSENGARTEN: Well, you can tell in everything he does that he's a man of principle.

MRS. DENNIS: That's what I said when he went in. He means to do well.

ROSENGARTEN: The display of the Confederate flag on the statehouse and in Senate chambers was challenged by twelve members of the black legislative caucus in this year. How do you feel about this issue, which still is a very hot political potato?
DENNIS: I was in the age group that favors keeping it there because of some of the experiences of the people in this area as result of the war, during the war and as a result of the war. It's right for some people to talk about changing it because it does, and will continue from time to time, contribute to unpleasantness. My grandfather was a Civil War general. My knowledge of the history of the war convinces me that it's not wrong to have that much living observance of the general, of the war.

ROSENGARTEN: Is this an issue you would say you have, not changed your mind, but sort of bowed to political necessity on?

DENNIS: I think the political necessity is to stay away from it as much as possible. When you know about the experiences of the Southern people in the war and after the war, I don't feel like just breaking it off.

MRS. DENNIS: It's partly history. They brought that battle flag back from...did you see that in the paper? Back from Iowa. It's in the museum in Columbia now. The flag in the battle of Columbia, you know when Sherman, you know, went through Columbia. This fellow from Iowa took the flag, and it's been in the, in somebody's closet, the man's closet, folded up. When he died, his son or grandson gave it to the museum. They didn't bother to put it out because it was of no interest to them really either. You've still got to keep some history.

ROSENGARTEN: Well, I think the argument would be, its one thing to keep history in a museum, it's another thing to keep it flying from the top of the statehouse.

MRS. DENNIS: I think the white people feel, down here, feel that that really didn't have anything to do with the war, in a way. Don't you Rembert. I mean it’s the blacks, I should say. But it was the flag. They don't feel like that slavery had anything to do with that war, it was not .... some accounts later.

ROSENGARTEN: There was just a letter in the paper about that. Last week some time, in the News and Courier.

MRS. DENNIS: Some of it was. It started with the, I guess it started with the slavery issue, maybe.

ROSENGARTEN: This man was saying, he was disputing some historical editorial. Well, maybe it wasn't an editorial, a column. It was about the movie "Glory." Saying that the war was not about slavery, and that his grandfathers, obviously he was the descendent of Confederate veterans, his grandfathers wouldn't have fought to preserve slavery, and slavery was on the way out anyway. That's not true, by the way. Historically, I don't think slavery was on the way out. The South was in very good shape economically, in 1860. Cotton and, Sea Island cotton and rice were all doing very well. It was complicated.

MRS. DENNIS: Which side were they on?

ROSENGARTEN: You know, it's surprising to me though that the blacks... You know to begin with they wanted to do away with all of their, songs, you know the choir, the group in Charleston who sing spirituals? I forget the name.

ROSENGARTEN: Society for the Preservation of the Spiritual.

MRS. DENNIS: That's right. In a lot of ways, if it hadn't been for the whites, they wouldn't have kept those songs. Because the blacks, the majority of them, wanted to get away from their heritage, really. But I'm surprised when they accept some of these movies, you know, with blacks. Do you think they do? What do they...

ROSENGARTEN: I think times are changing. You know, what you were talking about, the generations make a difference. It depends what generation people are in.

MRS. DENNIS: They accept it better than they did. I remember they were very critical, it seems to me, of "Porgy and Bess" when it first was presented in Charleston. I doubt if any blacks went to see it. We went, I remember.
ROSENGARTEN: When was that?

MRS. DENNIS: The first play. When was that, Rembert? That's been a long time ago. Goodness knows its too hard to...

DENNIS: You're talking about the...

MRS. DENNIS: Not talking about going to hear the plantation, the singers. I'm talking the play "Porgy and Bess" when it was in Charleston years ago.

DENNIS: What was the singing thing called?

ROSENGARTEN: The Society for the Preservation of Negro Spirituals. They had a...

MRS. DENNIS: They had another name. They sang for Roosevelt, I think. I know it was back then. I think I'm right on that. Don't quote me. They used to go to the Baptist churches, I mean the colored churches, to hear them.

DENNIS: .... .... they had in Charleston ...., talking...

MRS. DENNIS: You're not talking about Porgy and Bess the play, it's down there now. Has it started?

ROSENGARTEN: Oh yes. It started last week. I was planning to go but couldn't make it.

DENNIS: You're talking about the one about the crippled black that was a singer.

MRS. DENNIS: That's who this is. That was Porgy. You remember going to see it?

ROSENGARTEN: I believe when Porgy was first produced they couldn't show it, or wouldn't show it in Charleston.

MRS. DENNIS: That's right. It was not first shown in -- it was shown in New York. Then I've forgotten when they brought it down.

ROSENGARTEN: There was a big fight, reported in the newspaper just endlessly, about the hiring of a man named Edward Francis as public information officer for the legislature? I gathered that he was a black man.

DENNIS: He was a black man. He was from Moncks Corner.

MRS. DENNIS: Rembert got him on.

ROSENGARTEN: You...

DENNIS: I recommended him. He didn't along politically here. He was making an effort to be recognized.

MRS. DENNIS: He didn't get along with the blacks, did he darling?

DENNIS: Some of them he didn't.

ROSENGARTEN: So what was the, all of the hoo-ha about? The newspaper was saying things like we don't know what a public information officer is supposed to... They made it sound like it was a made-up position.

MRS. DENNIS: For him.

ROSENGARTEN: Right. That's what they made it sound like.
MRS. DENNIS: Well, it was a new thing. But I believe that's the up and coming thing now, isn't it? That went into the computer thing. The information that they have on the first floor of the statehouse? It turned into that. They were critical about it, I think partly because he was a black too, though. I may be wrong. You didn't read that into anything?

ROSENGARTEN: No, they didn't, it wasn't, they didn't bring up anything racial. They had a picture of him at one point, so I realized he was, maybe they talked about that in the newspaper.

DENNIS: I helped him and then he turned on me.

MRS. DENNIS: He really did.

ROSENGARTEN: Is that so?

MRS. DENNIS: I think he sort of lost his mind, though, Rembert.

ROSENGARTEN: What happened?

DENNIS: He went in something else. He wanted more than I could recommend him for.

MRS. DENNIS: He wasn't that smart a fellow, I'm afraid. Now I think Clyburn is good.

ROSENGARTEN: Jim Clyburn? He's great. Very sharp guy. Is he in that position?

MRS. DENNIS: No, no, he's not.

ROSENGARTEN: No, he's a, what is he?

MRS. DENNIS: What is Clyburn's position?

ROSENGARTEN: He's a commissioner?

MRS. DENNIS: Tries to get people together. Head of the Human…may be it’s Human Resources or something like that.

DENNIS: Human Services.

MRS. DENNIS: Human Services. That's what it is. He heads that.

DENNIS: Clyburn's a good man.

ROSENGARTEN: What became of Francis?

MRS. DENNIS: He was in jail one time here, wasn't he Rembert?

DENNIS: .... .... experience, I don't know what he does now.

MRS. DENNIS: I don't know either. But he was criticizing Rembert. You know if you're not able to provide somebody a job that they want, a lot of times they turn on you even though you've gotten them jobs before. Isn't that true, Rembert? You don't get them what they want, they... You'll find that. You don't help them, you know, you're not able to help them, no matter what, get on DSS or whatever, provide welfare, they feel like you aren't any good. Some of them.

DENNIS: .... .... and I recognized him for consideration and he got into a row with the state over his job. I quit
fooling with him and he turned on me.

MRS. DENNIS: He went to jail. He had some problems. I think maybe he was drinking, I don't know.

ROSENGARTEN: The Budget and Control Board, perhaps the second most powerful body in the state government, was termed in an internal report, "ineffective, inadequately staffed and not equipped for leadership." As a Board member, did you agree with this assessment?

DENNIS: When was that?

ROSENGARTEN: This was sometime around seventy-six or maybe seventy-seven. [long pause] I'm not putting my finger on it right here, but I think it was seventy-seven.

DENNIS: It's an important organization in state government, being chaired by the governor. When there's a change in governors there's bound to be some differences occurring in the Board, but as a basic organization for the assistance and operation of state government it's indispensable and it's made up as good as it can be.

ROSENGARTEN: I think I have time for one more question and we'll end today. I don't know if you recall the Public Service Commission hearing that you and Senator Gressette attended to explain, so-called explain the fees your law firms collected from utility companies? Would you describe what happened at that session?

DENNIS: Senator Gressette and I both gave statements that....

[TAPE FOURTEEN ENDS, TAPE FIFTEEN BEGINS]

ROSENGARTEN: Senator Dennis, at the end of the last interview, we were talking about the Public Service Commission and the various accusations against you and other legislators about taking corporate fees from the utility companies. The end of that answer that you were giving me, I don't think we recorded. Would you talk to me again about, you were saying that some of the attacks you felt were purely political, particularly the one by Tom Turnipseed.

DENNIS: Yes. I reiterate that. The basis of the attacks was that to be a legislative influence, to get an opinion from the...

[TAPE STOPPED, THEN RESUMES]

....legislators handling matters before the commission, but the real undergirding support of the attacks was straight, was politics. Political opposition. But it was an issue that the critics of the legislature could get attention from the public... serious matters handled by the commission were important to the lives of the people. As you know, it ended up in legislators having to get out of representation in matters before the commission.

ROSENGARTEN: What became of Turnipseed? He eventually left the Senate, didn't he?

DENNIS: He's still practicing law in Columbia. I read a little bit about him every now and then. He's lost the public interest that was in him.

ROSENGARTEN: So you feel that he didn't, he was not basically sincere in his claim that there was a conflict of interest?

DENNIS: That was exactly the way I felt. It was simply political jealousy.

ROSENGARTEN: In a somewhat more humorous vein, when it was first proposed to name the Boykin spaniel the state dog, you made some very funny remarks disparaging the idea. Do you remember what you said at that time, and what persuaded you eventually to change your mind about the Boykin state dog?
DENNIS: I knew when I started it; it was going to probably result in personal charges because I have that kind of dog. But the dog was, that breed of dogs was so smart and unique I just thought it'd be a good, reasonable thing to do.

ROSENGARTEN: The quote that the newspaper printed, this is when the idea first came up, you said, "If we get into the domestic field, what kind of state cat are we going to have, and what kind of state chicken?" Do you recall that? But then on second thought, you decided that...

DENNIS: It wasn't worth fighting for. Too easy to misconstrue what you were trying to do.

MRS. DENNIS: Arnie Goodstein was in on that, seems like.

ROSENGARTEN: He was promoting the Boykin?

MRS. DENNIS: I'm going to run to the gate, pick up a scrapbook. Inez is going to bring it by.

ROSENGARTEN: Oh great. So the Boykin was one of the types of dogs that you preferred.

DENNIS: Yes. Very smart dog. Not a tremendous advantage in hunting, more of a show dog. Used them for special retrieving. But for having a dog to go out for an all day bird hunt... Wouldn't be any good with quail, and with doves they'd just be retrievers for a brief time in the dove field. But they were such a companionable animal. Almost felt like they were going to talk to you sometimes when you're talking to them. Real intelligent. I had a handful of hound and bird-dogs, but, certain appeal to the Boykin because, I guess because it was unusually intelligent and responsive to special training.

ROSENGARTEN: Did it eventually become the state dog?

DENNIS: I gave up the idea, I don't think it did. It may have, I don't really remember.

ROSENGARTEN: I have friends who bought some land near Camden from the Boykin family. That dog was developed, is that not right, right there in Camden?

DENNIS: That's right.

ROSENGARTEN: During the seventies you were very well connected at the University of South Carolina. What positions did your brothers hold at this time?

DENNIS: In the seventies? I guess Markley may have been on the Trustee Board at that time. My other brother didn't have any position at the University.

ROSENGARTEN: Was he a physician?

DENNIS: Right.

ROSENGARTEN: Was he at MUSC?

DENNIS: Yes he was there. He was at Charleston. He left Charleston, went to Columbia, took up residency at a Columbia hospital and taught some classes at the University.

ROSENGARTEN: Here it is. "Dr. E.J. Dennis was chair of obstetrics and gynecology at the new USC medical
school." That was in Columbia?

**DENNIS:** Right. That's what brought the question forward.

**ROSENGARTEN:** Do you recall the move to pass a constitutional amendment allowing a South Carolina governor to succeed himself, and what position did you take?

**DENNIS:** I opposed it for a long time. I finally decided to support it. I supported it when the stage was set for Riley to run. I thought, and still do, that position is so important to the state. Everybody's interested in who the governor is and what he's doing and going to do, so I thought four years was long enough for a person to be in that position. I just came to the conclusion that it was a little bit of a penalty to put on a person if the people really wanted to re-elect him though. It appeared that they did want to re-elect Riley, so I went along with it.

**ROSENGARTEN:** You didn't feel that it would sap the legislature's power, or give the governor more power in regard to, in relation to the legislative power?

**DENNIS:** I wasn't concerned about it, that's for sure. Actually, what gave him, really, as he finished out his first term, the latter years of a one-term governor, found him in a position of not too much influence with the legislature. I thought that extending the time was going to extensively extend his influence with the legislature, but it really didn't work out that way. This state is set up so that the governor has a lot of power, but he's limited, and he's limited by the legislature. If I was the governor, I would... more pronounced in the field appointments.

**ROSENGARTEN:** That's where the governor's power really lies, in the field of appointments. Well, Riley proved to be a great leader in the field of education.

**DENNIS:** Yes he has. I thought his second four years as governor were very helpful to the state. He used his experience wisely, and he led in a commendable manner. He was actually going out, and after serving two terms, there were many who spoke along the line of I wish he could serve for eight more years. He was a real satisfying governor, to the general public and the politicians.

**ROSENGARTEN:** What do you think he will do?

**DENNIS:** I expect him to; I did expect him to if his health holds out, to run for United States Senate. Of course that depends on a lot of things. When the opening is there. The opening is going to be there when Thurmond gives it up.

**ROSENGARTEN:** But that may never happen. [laughs]

**DENNIS:** It seems like that sometimes.

**ROSENGARTEN:** He may live to be as old as Methuselah.

**DENNIS:** And remain forceful. He's done a tremendous job. I get this thing about him leaving.

**ROSENGARTEN:** Have you seen the TV ads for him? With him doing weightlifting in the gym and...

**DENNIS:** I really [want] for him to live to be vigorous enough to run again. All he's got to do is live and he'd win.

**ROSENGARTEN:** You and Senator Gressette suffered a barrage of criticism over the purchase of furniture for your new offices. Would you describe this conflict, and how you felt about it?
DENNIS: I felt there was no basis for it, because Gressette and I were not the ones doing it. .... .... had a committee doing it. We were blamed for prompting the committee, but actually, we were not. We left it, unless they came to us with a question about our office. Furniture here or there, or some specific plan they had. I didn't enter into any influence on that office building, and I don't think the Senator from Calhoun did either. It was such a tremendous change from what we'd been going through, using committee offices, or using the Senate itself. For my part, I didn't, at that time I hadn't come into use of an office prior to .... elect, the pro temp office, which I got later. Very fine to have. The office building I think ended up being reasonably furnished. First one for South Carolina; bound to be criticism. But I don't think it was overdone. We had such a difference in the caliber of service you could render, too. Having room to work, and have others work for you, you could better supervise the work.

ROSENGARTEN: At this time the state, there was a proposal to shift from a fixed reserved fund to a five percent reserve fund. From a twenty-five to thirty million dollar fixed reserve fund to a five percent reserve fund. In other words, something that would change with the budget. Would you explain what the difference is, and why you supported this change?

DENNIS: The main purpose of a reserve fund was to keep the state from getting in the red. Having to put on a flock of additional taxes at one time. Also have some money for special matters that would come up, and they always did, every year. Some request that would require new money, or use up over what was on hand. I'm thinking about those amounts, not the total, but the difference in the two, what would the percentage be as against what we were setting up at the time. We had a thirty million?

ROSENGARTEN: It was thirty million, twenty-five to thirty million, versus five percent. Let's see, the state budget was what, about two billion then? Is that right?

DENNIS: I guess so.

ROSENGARTEN: Well, depending on... It was five percent of the budget, of the total budget, was that the plan?

DENNIS: Five percent of the income.

ROSENGARTEN: Of the income, okay.

DENNIS: I don't think there was a great difference in the flat amount and what five percent would have been. It was considered better business to have a percentage rather than a flat amount so if you ran short on income for a year, you used the money rather than setting it up in a surplus.

ROSENGARTEN: Has that plan remained in effect? Do we now have a percentage?

DENNIS: It's not a, it's really an annually fixed percentage. You start your budget off with the percentages in the statute, but the total of a budget depends annually on the amount of money appropriated for the purposes of state government. It's got to be, under our constitution, a balanced budget. That's what fixes the amount. I think when you don't appropriate money to borrow, turns out that you run short during the year and have to borrow what you don't actually appropriate and figure in the budget, money that you're going to borrow. Unless you have a special provision for borrowing for schools or a specific purpose. Bonded debt.

ROSENGARTEN: There was what was described in the paper as a state tax revolt in this period. Like Proposition 13 in California. For example, you proposed in June of 1978 a school governance bill which was defeated in the house. Was this a particularly straight-laced time for the, financially for the state government?

DENNIS: It was a time when there was a lot of public criticism about high spending. The idea was to try to put some hampers on government to keep it from going out of, getting out of bounds. But in government financing on a
state level, there's got to be an annual approach to it. It boils down to ending up spending what you have to spend, having financing for some capital improvements, but try not to have financing for the operation of government. Let government operate in its annual operation on the money it takes in. Paying along with it, installments on any money it had borrowed and owes. South Carolina is a poor state, and always has been, from the standpoint of having more state obligations to pay than it really had anticipated income to pay. It was always a struggle in balancing the budget.

ROSENGARTEN: Every once in a while there's a surplus, though. Is that not so?

DENNIS: Well, that used to be. That's right. Those were greatly heralded events. What the battle among the Finance Committee and the other committees in position to try to use the unexpected, not totally unexpected, but to a degree unexpected, little bit more money than you needed to operate the government for that year, under the appropriations. That way you found a way to amend an appropriation and put a little more money in it, because we were a small, poor state, and there was always something that needed to be done for the people in a greater way than was being done, in a appropriation bill. So when we had a little extra money, most of it I recall being expended by way of unexpected surplus, that at the beginning of the fiscal year was unexpected. But then you realize you're gonna have it long about the middle of the year, and the fight was on, who was gonna get it. The hands were out and the pressure was on. The state, during my entire membership in the General Assembly, always had so many demands, requests and demands I'd say, for additional appropriations, that we never had any problem disposing of any surplus.

ROSENGARTEN: It melted away. I found that now in our domestic budget as well.

DENNIS: No trouble finding place to put it.

ROSENGARTEN: No, it disappears pretty quickly.

DENNIS: The economists .... .... always is don't spend surplus money in the budget to the extent that it's going compel you to raise your taxes to get additional revenue. Spend it on something that's expendable, you don't have to do it next year if you don't have it. That would be our same advice for the individual. If you've got special needs in this year, and you've got a little extra money to do it, do it but don't tie yourself to that, knowing you may not have it next year.

ROSENGARTEN: Does the state government have a debt to retire the way the federal government does? Is it always trying to reduce its indebtedness?

DENNIS: The state operates a little different from the federal government. The state has a debt service of a fixed amount. Goes up some, comes down. There are annual payments on that debt service; the federal government doesn't have that. They push the button for more money if it's needed. It doesn't have to be passed by the Congress. It does have to be passed by the Congress, but it's not passed by the Congress to take care of the future. It's needed annually. Is that clear?

ROSENGARTEN: In other words, the state has a limit; it can't get into as big a trouble as the federal government can. Well, wrapping up the seventies, if I had to pick a theme for these ten years, it would be the struggle between the old guard and the Young Turks. Symbolically perhaps, one of the Young Turk leaders, Dick Riley, assumed the governorship as the decade ended. Did you support Riley and Nancy Stevenson's campaign for state office, and had his attacks on the old guard alienated you?

DENNIS: I supported him. Not at first. His statements and his attacks on the old guard, so to speak, were offensive and made some of us cool towards him. He got elected, we worked together a while, and I found out that he was very, very sincere in what he advocated. He was a hard fellow for anybody to fool on something that wasn't
sound financially.

**ROSENGARTEN:** Didn't I read somewhere that you actually contributed to Nancy Stevenson's campaign? Yes, contributed a hundred dollars to Nancy Stevenson's campaign for Lieutenant Governor.

**DENNIS:** That was a courtesy. She made a good Lieutenant Governor. I can't say too big for her britches, but she got too big for some of her clothes. She tried hard. All in all she made an excellent Lieutenant Governor.

**ROSENGARTEN:** She must have been the first female in that position.

**DENNIS:** Right, and she did a good job. She spoke when I, was one of the speakers when I was honored. I'm trying to think. It wasn't the portrait. Natalie!

**MRS. DENNIS:** Yes?

**DENNIS:** We had a meeting at the new office building and I was being honored for something and I can't think what it was.

**MRS. DENNIS:** At the new office building?

**DENNIS:** Yes. Nancy Stevenson was one of the speakers.

**MRS. DENNIS:** You mean in Columbia?

**DENNIS:** Marion Gressette was one of course.

**MRS. DENNIS:** That wasn't for you. That wasn't your building.

**DENNIS:** Yes it was, that's what it was; it was the building.

**ROSENGARTEN:** When the Rembert C. Dennis building opened.

**DENNIS:** That's what it was.

**ROSENGARTEN:** So she was one of the presenters?

**MRS. DENNIS:** At that time she was Lieutenant Governor.

**DENNIS:** She was very complimentary, but very, very brief.

**MRS. DENNIS:** Well, the others were too long. You know how it is. [laughs] She was brief.

**DENNIS:** West made the best speech of the morning.

**ROSENGARTEN:** Who did?

**DENNIS:** Course, Gressette was good.

**MRS. DENNIS:** John West.

**DENNIS:** Made the longest in talking about me.
MRS. DENNIS: You liked that?

DENNIS: It upset me being long.

MRS. DENNIS: Well, I don't think John's was necessarily that long, but I think he always...

DENNIS: Expresses himself.

MRS. DENNIS: ...expresses himself, that's it, that's the word I want to say.

ROSENGARTEN: Well, what exactly did you mean by saying that Nancy Stevenson had gotten too big for some of her clothes?

DENNIS: She got smart-alecky. She cut off her political head is what she did.

ROSENGARTEN: Her own head? How do you mean?

DENNIS: I mean she got in a .... with a strong politician. What did she run for?

MRS. DENNIS: She didn't run for anything after she came out of...

ROSENGARTEN: She declined to run for a second time.

MRS. DENNIS: She talked about running, but I think she...

DENNIS: Found out she wasn't popular enough to run.

MRS. DENNIS: Yes.

ROSENGARTEN: You think she kind of got a swelled head from having reached such a high position?

DENNIS: I think she got it right after she got elected, but she controlled it up until the end of her career.

MRS. DENNIS: I think I see that in some of the women, and it always bothers me. Because you can tell it more. I think men must be able to control that better than women.

ROSENGARTEN: Well, maybe they're more used to having accolades, or having power, and this was the first woman in this...

MRS. DENNIS: First time.

DENNIS: She was good when she was handling the job. Her philosophy got a little mixed up in her political philosophy. Not to a great extent, but to some extent.

MRS. DENNIS: But you got along with her.

DENNIS: Yes. That's what brought it up.

ROSENGARTEN: I had read that Senator Dennis had contributed a hundred dollars to her campaign, which apparently was newsworthy enough to be reported. It was unexpected, I guess.
MRS. DENNIS: The papers always said you all didn't get along, I mean the old guard.

DENNIS: We had some disagreements, that's right. I didn't know what she was going to say when she spoke. She didn't give me a sheet of it in advance.

MRS. DENNIS: Yes she did. I want you to read hers over.

DENNIS: In advance?

MRS. DENNIS: Oh, no she didn't.

ROSENGARTEN: I know her son quite well. I've never met her, but her son, David Moltke-Hansen, do you know him?

MRS. DENNIS: I think maybe he's been up there, but I don't really know. Wasn't he the one in Charleston?

ROSENGARTEN: He was the director of the Historical Society for years, and now he is the director of the Southern Historical Collection at UNC in Chapel Hill, which is probably the most important Southern archive, the largest Southern archive. So he's...

MRS. DENNIS: Very capable.

ROSENGARTEN: ...he's capable and it's a political position in a sense that a lot of it has to do with raising money. You know it's not...

DENNIS: I don't know remember how he looked.

MRS. DENNIS: I can't tell you. I've forgotten, too. I knew he was in Charleston; he was one of hers that was in Charleston. They're not all there, they're scattered. Her children.

DENNIS: How many children did she have?

MRS. DENNIS: I believe she had five, I may be wrong.

ROSENGARTEN: She was married several times. David's father was Norwegian, I think, and he was an important diplomat. He was a highly placed official. He died about two years ago. Then she had another husband, and didn't she break up from that husband when she was in Columbia?

MRS. DENNIS: But they were really living separate down here. I think that just, sort of did it. Separate parts of the house I think is I think what they always said.

ROSENGARTEN: One of David's, I can't remember if there's a sister whose husband got into drug trouble?

MRS. DENNIS: That's right. One of her children had problems.

ROSENGARTEN: Had trouble up in Virginia or someplace, not in South...

MRS. DENNIS: That's right. Not here. But Nancy was very capable. She wrote a couple of books with Patricia Robinson. Did you read that write-up on her in the paper? ... Robinson's wife? I don't know whether you knew him. In Charleston you know, he was at Dock Street Theater for years? Wrote plays.
ROSENGARTEN: No, I don't know about that.

MRS. DENNIS: His wife, anyway, was friendly with, they went to school together. She and Nancy wrote a couple of books together. Her daughter married Graham Tew, who works for the governor. I couldn't think of Graham's name the other day. One of their daughters, that's who.

ROSENGARTEN: One of the, Robinson's?

MRS. DENNIS: Robinson, yes. I guess they have, got stopped. He died a couple years ago.

ROSENGARTEN: Well what is Nancy Stevenson doing now?

MRS. DENNIS: She's in Washington, sort of like a public relations... I think that's it, but I may be wrong. She was in the paper not too long ago, about something, but I think that's what she's doing.

ROSENGARTEN: I'll have to ask David.

MRS. DENNIS: She is very capable, you know.

DENNIS: .... she run for Congress .... ....?

ROSENGARTEN: I don't think so.

MRS. DENNIS: She talked about it.

ROSENGARTEN: By the way, since we're reminiscing about old... You had asked me to find out about Judge Morrison? I asked Jackie Morrison, Lee Morrison's wife, who's on the Arts Council, the McClellanville Arts Council, with me, and she said he is doing just fine, he's still driving. She said he's a terror on the road, but if you give him a call, he'll come visit you and he'll drive himself. [laughs] But she said he's doing very well.

DENNIS: I'm glad to hear that.

MRS. DENNIS: Isn't it funny how you lose... Not the thing you least... It's a shame, I've lost track of so many.

ROSENGARTEN: I'm sure he'd be tickled to death though, if you...

MRS. DENNIS: He would come see you.

ROSENGARTEN: Maybe you need to send someone to pick him up.

DENNIS: .... .... go hunting with me after...

MRS. DENNIS: He became judge?

DENNIS: After he became judge. .... he came down .... Hagen.

MRS. DENNIS: His wife I always thought so nice.

ROSENGARTEN: Is she still living?
MRS. DENNIS: I thought she was, but you know how you...

ROSENGARTEN: I'll ask Jackie again, because they live right down the street. Jackie and Lee are the people who restored the Laurel Hill plantation house and lost it in the storm [Hugo?]. But they're going to rebuild it.

MRS. DENNIS: They are going to rebuild? Completely lost it?

ROSENGARTEN: Gone. I mean, unbelievable. She said she found one silver spoon. And you know that house was just crammed with antiques, because she ran an antique store. Everything was lost.

DENNIS: It was a house at McClellanville?

ROSENGARTEN: It was the house that all the Morrisons came up in. It sat on the highway on a big brick pier foundation. Jackie and Lee bought it, not that many years ago, and moved it to the creek, to where Dohall(?) and the rest of the Morrisons have their houses. They restored it, it was in terrible shape. They restored it beautifully. She stenciled all the walls; you know she's a real decorator. Filled it with antiques. They were running a bed and breakfast; they put an antique store in the basement. Every one of those houses, not just Laurel Hill, all of the Morrison's houses were gone.

MRS. DENNIS: Hope she had insurance.

ROSENGARTEN: They got insurance. That's what they...

[SIDES ONE ENDS, SIDE TWO BEGINS]

ROSENGARTEN: ...talking about Riley's first term in office. Did you feel at this point that the political world was changing profoundly?

DENNIS: Yes. I observed Riley's change in the Senate. Large county senators and small county senators had some differences over state money, of course, and they were always working on formulas for distribution. Riley's changes, it became noticeable during the years just before his, left the Senate. That he was more receptive to the ideas of distribution of any money from the state to the counties. Giving the, not taking advantage that the larger counties had if it was going to be done on population. Use more than their share. That problem of the legislative division of money between small counties and large counties was a big problem. Riley was a big fighter for getting all he could for the large counties. He and his Greenville delegation, perceptively made a change in their attitude about it, and that was more reasonable as I saw it. More reasonable idea about the obligation of the state to local governments. He became an exponent of division of state revenues that was not to be strictly on population basis, looking at some of the other factors involved. I think it was his perception changed, now that he was going to try to represent the state, not just one area.

ROSENGARTEN: What were some of the other changes you saw in the political world at this time?

DENNIS: My political world was Columbia.

ROSENGARTEN: Did you feel that there was a changing of the guard, that the "Young Turks" were replacing, or were coming into competition with, the older...

DENNIS: Yes, they were coming into competition is right. But I didn't have anything personally to be worried about with it. I thought they would find out that things weren't easy for the old guard, and tough for the "Young Turks," and that they'd be...it wouldn't be long before they'd be changing over. A little bit of experience would convince them that their perceptions of the, of a big fight between the experience and inexperience was based on
factors that they would agree were being handled fairly. I'll have to say that's what happened. A typical example of
an individual who showed the experience of it happening was a senator, a Jewish senator from Charleston.

ROSENGARTEN: Who was that... Schwartz wasn't from Charleston was he?

DENNIS: Had a big law office out on, near the airport?

ROSENGARTEN: Was there a Rubin?

DENNIS: No, he was in Columbia. Natalie! Natalie!

ROSENGARTEN: Mrs. Dennis! She might have stepped out. Go on, I'll fill it in later. You explained he was an
example of someone who gained experience and became, what, less...

DENNIS: ... They didn't just, ... just for a year or two, he suddenly became an old guard. He understood now
what his errors were. He was one of them that was against everything that was being done because it was...
Natalie!

MRS. DENNIS: Okay, hold on.

DENNIS: ...being formulated and shaped for the old, old experienced senators and no regard for the young ones.
Who is the senator from Charleston?

ROSENGARTEN: The Jewish senator.

MRS. DENNIS: Arnie Goodstein?

DENNIS: That's it.

ROSENGARTEN: Oh. The fellow you've mentioned before. He's from Charleston?

DENNIS: I was telling about his change from being a big attacker of the Senate, and the veterans of the Senate, to
one of the .... .... that they took advantage of the rest of the Senate and the rest of the state.

MRS. DENNIS: The majority of them saw the light.

DENNIS: We showed it, and he admitted that he was wrong, and became an old senator right quick.

MRS. DENNIS: He was married to a veterinarian, too. That's why he was particularly interested in that bill. With
the dog. They're divorced now. She was the one that was killed in that wreck. In that plane. His first wife. His
daughter was killed I believe. His daughter was killed and the wife lived, his first wife. I think she was in bad
shape. I don't know how she is now. They were on the plane. Sad.

ROSENGARTEN: Well, we're finally into the eighties. We've made progress.

MRS. DENNIS: That's good.

ROSENGARTEN: Yes, it is. I thought, you probably thought this would never end. You've had a long life, and a
very full life, and I didn't want to leave anything out. It seems that through the 1980's your critics remained on the
offensive, at least through the early years. How did you respond to charges of patronage when you lobbied for a
judgeship for your brother-in-law, N. Luke Brown, Jr.?
DENNIS: What did I do for?

ROSENGARTEN: There were several stories about your lobbying for his appointment to a judgeship, and I think Turnipseed was still in the Senate, so he started raising a ruckus again.

DENNIS: My brother-in-law called me for somebody else when the vacancy occurred in that circuit. It was impending because of ...'s announced resignation of a future date. I said, well why don't you run, you're qualified. He called me back in a few days and said he decided that it was a reasonable thing, and he might could get it. So of course I went to work for him to help him. There's not much a brother-in-law can do for you or anybody. You've got to get the votes yourself, and that's what he did. He traveled over the state and talked to the people, and legislators, and he got enough commitments. I did tell him he was going to have to do that.

ROSENGARTEN: What exactly were the, your critics objecting to? If this had been someone, let's say, who was not related to you, and someone that you thought would make a good judge. You would be within your rights to campaign for him, correct?

DENNIS: Yes. It's something that has gotten fixed in Columbia pretty heavily. In the newspapers, legislators are guilty of being unreasonable at times about people who were related to legislators, closely related. Being helped for election to office or .... .... .... can handle it. I don't know what it was about Gary at this time.

MRS. DENNIS: You mean Luke?

DENNIS: I'm talking about Luke now? Read your question again.

ROSENGARTEN: This was when your brother-in-law was looking for the judgeship.

MRS. DENNIS: That was Luke.

ROSENGARTEN: Yes. I had, if you read through this list of questions, this issue comes up over at least three or four years several times.

MRS. DENNIS: They felt like Rembert just handed him the judgeship. That was not really so. Luke was well known over the state.

ROSENGARTEN: He was an attorney in McCormick?

MRS. DENNIS: No, he was an attorney in Ridgeland.

ROSENGARTEN: Is he your younger brother?

MRS. DENNIS: No, he's older than I am. He had gone back to school and he worked at SLED when in he was in law school. He went back to school with four children. Five. He was well-known, really, having worked in Columbia some.

DENNIS: He worked with SLED.

MRS. DENNIS: He was a well-liked person, I would say, even though he's my brother. They say he's done a good job.

ROSENGARTEN: It's the legislators who choose the judges, is that...
MRS. DENNIS: That's right.

DENNIS: That's right.

MRS. DENNIS: That's why the criticism. When you support someone in your family.

ROSENGARTEN: In January of 1980 the composition of the Public Service Commission changed to a five-member merit selection panel. That's what they called it. Appointed by the legislature. Who proposed this change, and what was it's significance?

DENNIS: I think there was a group of legislators that proposed it, and the idea was to try to eliminate the criticism that members of the commission were strongly influenced by legislative friends, those who had helped them get elected. It didn't change the final election, nominated by the legislature and elected by the legislature. The commission was under attack in those days by political office-seekers like Tom Turnipseed. That upset me a little bit, that question. I'm going to have to get up.

[tape stopped, then resumes]

ROSENGARTEN: So you're saying that this change in the composition of the Public Service Commission didn't actually make a difference in how the members were appointed?

DENNIS: They were still elected by the house, by the General Assembly.

ROSENGARTEN: What does the word "merit selection panel" suggest?

DENNIS: That they choose them on their experience and education, training, and experience that would be calculated to qualify them for the job.

ROSENGARTEN: The word merit refers to the members of the panel? That they are chosen...

DENNIS: They would choose the members on the basis of merit. Choose the candidates, rather. Instead of every individual having the right to run, you'd have to clear this panel that just... Hard for them not to have enough training and experience to be considered for it.

ROSENGARTEN: I get it. So, in other words the merit selection panel is a group of legislators who make the nomination.

DENNIS: What was the question?

ROSENGARTEN: There was a change in the composition of the PSC to a five-member merit selection panel. "Change in PSC selection procedure." Okay, that's my mistake. "Change in PSC selection procedure to a five-member merit selection panel." In other words, the composition of the commission wasn't changed, it was the way that...

DENNIS: They were selected.

ROSENGARTEN: ...they were selected. Okay. I'm sorry, that's my fault. Well, how had it been done before?

DENNIS: Wide-open for anybody who wanted to run. It's really that way now. Have to have a recommendation by the panel, but if somebody else wanted to try it on their own they could do it.
ROSENGARTEN: So this is sort a screening committee. Turnipseed again was called quote, "the most clamorous of the interveners" in an effort to subpoena yourself and five other legislators to a PSC hearing early in 1980. Please describe his tactics and your response.

DENNIS: I got to remember I did answer some questions from him when I appeared on matter before the commission, but it wasn't on this particular question.

ROSENGARTEN: This I think was the second time he did this, is that right? This was the second...

DENNIS: At least the second.

ROSENGARTEN: At least the second. [laughs] The other legislators were Solomon Blatt, Marion Gressette, John Martin, John Long and Robert Lake.

DENNIS: What is your question now?

ROSENGARTEN: What were his tactics in trying to get you to appear, and what was your response?

DENNIS: I think I just ignored him. I made statements about the Public Service Commission, the plan to change the matters that could be considered by it. Eliminate some matters that could be carried to them... plan of selection of candidates and election by the legislature. I didn't participate in any efforts to change that. They've made changes in the number of commissioners.

ROSENGARTEN: I get the impression that this issue that Turnipseed kept bringing up over and over again didn't really concern you very much. It was not...

DENNIS: No. Like most everything else he brought up, it was a pure effort at disruption in government to give him and his friends a better chance.

ROSENGARTEN: About this time, there were also charges, I don't think Turnipseed was involved, but I don't really know, charges of preferential treatment for a company called Home Investments, of which you were a partner, I believe. That built Conifer Hall. How did you respond to these accusations of preferential treatment?

DENNIS: I made statements about what the facts were. I joined Allen Carter, who was then senator from Charleston, and William Bowen who was in it for a while. He was a businessman in Columbia. The purchase of Conifer Hall, Carter and I later bought out Boyd. One of the issues that arose, and politics that was being used, was charged to certain Charleston legislators, charging that special governmental privileges were given to Conifer Hall. Not available to ordinary business.

ROSENGARTEN: Specifically having to do with the paving of roads, I think?

DENNIS: That's right.

ROSENGARTEN: Use of c-funds, or something like that?

DENNIS: That's what it was. I took the position that I didn't, it wasn't wrong for me to participate but I did participate in the selection of the roads for state taking over. That right, Natalie?

MRS. DENNIS: Yes.
DENNIS: Who was the legislator raising so much hell about that?

MRS. DENNIS: Ravenel. He was trying to get elected on it.

ROSENGARTEN: So are you saying that the company, Home Investments, did not have to apply for the funding to pave the roads, or... It was just something that was given out?

DENNIS: It was done by some ...., done by the money that was run, controlled the delegation. I did not participate in the selection of it, I let the other members of the delegation handle it when Conifer Hall was involved.

ROSENGARTEN: Conifer Hall is what, a residential development?

DENNIS: That's right.

ROSENGARTEN: In the Moncks Corner area?

DENNIS: Just on the edge of Moncks Corner.

MRS. DENNIS: They had to apply for it. You know you applied for the paving, and the c-funds money was used for the county, various roads and what needed to be done. They, I'm sure they had a number; you had to pick the ones that were...

DENNIS: The c-funds were set up by the legislature for country roads, and then they were changed so that it could be for city streets. Most of the money really, later, became devoted to opening up new territory, subdivisions. The delegation did have something to do with annually setting up what c-funds were going to be used for.

MRS. DENNIS: The Highway Department had to O.K. it.

DENNIS: It was a recommendation by the delegation to the Highway Department.

MRS. DENNIS: That's what he beat Alan Carter really on, I think.

ROSENGARTEN: Ravenel?

MRS. DENNIS: Used it, yes.

ROSENGARTEN: So he was running against Carter?

MRS. DENNIS: He was running against Alan Carter.

ROSENGARTEN: So he was, maybe he was more after Carter than he was after you.

DENNIS: He was.

MRS. DENNIS: That was what it was. I'm wrong. Georgetown beat Alan. They said Alan didn't work for Georgetown. Georgetown was with him that year in the, you understand, with Charleston? We had been with them, and Alan Carter had gone in with Rembert, was elected with Rembert when Rembert was in Charleston. Then two times around I think is when Ravenel ran. Charleston was with Georgetown then.

ROSENGARTEN: And the folks in Georgetown said he wasn't working hard enough for Georgetown?
MRS. DENNIS: Well, that was the complaint. That Alan didn't work over there; that he didn't try to come get their vote.

DENNIS: That's what beat him.

MRS. DENNIS: Yes, Georgetown.

ROSENGARTEN: That's what beat him. I see some of the reasons that Arthur Ravenel is not your favorite person.

DENNIS: I think he's a skunk.

MRS. DENNIS: Not on account of that though. He was always sort of like that in the legislature. You know how he does in Washington. He acts like he's from the country and acts like a hick.

DENNIS: A skunk or something offensive to me. Arthur Ravenel is very offensive.

MRS. DENNIS: Don't quote me on it. I just said he...

ROSENGARTEN: I can't say one way or the other about his personality, but it just seems, politically he seems to switch from one position to another, kind of.

DENNIS: Exactly.

MRS. DENNIS: Whichever way the wind blows.

ROSENGARTEN: Right now he's coming on strong as an environmentalist?

MRS. DENNIS: Might see that that's the way he's going to get his votes.

ROSENGARTEN: Also, he, I think he has a couple of staffers who are very committed environmentalists. Maybe they're writing his pol... I know they are. You know, they write his speeches on those subjects.

MRS. DENNIS: He thinks too, that the field... Get a big vote like that.

ROSENGARTEN: It's sort of like Mom and apple pie. You can't exactly be against the environment, these days. Did anything ever come of this business with Conifer Hall, or did it just...

MRS. DENNIS: No. He just used it for his advertising. There was never anything done that was wrong.

DENNIS: I didn't get into it, and called him and asked him on it, that was the big thing.

MRS. DENNIS: It was not against Rembert.

DENNIS: If I had been in the race myself, I would have stood toe to toe with him and slugged it out. And tell the general public that he was lying, because that's what he was doing. But I couldn't participate.

MRS. DENNIS: He's what you call a politician. He's not a statesman, is maybe what I want to say.

ROSENGARTEN: There's a big difference between those two things, definitely.
MRS. DENNIS: He's well-liked.

ROSENGARTEN: You think so?

MRS. DENNIS: Gets the votes, he's got to be. Don't you Rembert? A lot of people like him.

DENNIS: I would say he fools a lot of people.

ROSENGARTEN: In November of 1980, you attended the dedication of the Alumax plant. I think we've talked about this once before, but would you describe that event? It seemed to have caught the attention of the media.

MRS. DENNIS: You sang that day. I don't know why I didn't go.

ROSENGARTEN: You weren't there?

MRS. DENNIS: I don't know what happened to me.

DENNIS: They called on me for a few remarks, and I had a... Political friends liked to hear me talk about certain things. There had been several occasions that I had been called on to join in song. The song that I liked, and seemed to get a response from whoever was there, whether the hunting club or... They wanted me to sing it that day. Actually I didn't start the song. Those pushing me up to it, making the arrangements, like Sheriff Hill? and Sheriff Rogers and others, talked to the leader of the music that they had furnished, the band, and he knew it. He started it off, and he kept needling me until I got into it. I sang some of it, and the newspapers had a story that I had led the dedication of the new plant with "Your Cheating Heart."

MRS. DENNIS: Is that what it said?

ROSENGARTEN: It made a big deal about it, and said that you had, that your voice was clearly audible above the band.

MRS. DENNIS: He was just welcoming them.

DENNIS: Well, one of the Japanese emissaries got a kick out of it. He came up and put his arms around me after I finished singing. Of course that brought a response from the crowd.

ROSENGARTEN: The newspapers described 1980 as a "watershed" year in terms of the increase in the governor's power in a state that was traditionally dominated by the legislature. Do you agree with this observation?

DENNIS: It was a direct effort on the part of the legislature to do that. Those of us who supported the bill didn't agree that the situation really existed as it was charged. That is, that the legislature did everything, and the governor didn't, had no power. There were certain things that the legislature did do that the... It was a good idea to let the governor have a stronger hand in. His appointment power was always considered by the legislature as being about equal to the total legislative power, when it came to operation of government. But, we made a special effort to change the picture some, so that the governor had, would have more power.

ROSENGARTEN: Why was this considered a good time to make that change?

DENNIS: I don't know whether Riley pushed it behind the scenes or not. He probably did. If I'd been running for Governor, I think I would have encouraged it.
ROSENGARTEN: Would you say that today the power of the Governor and the power of the legislature is close to equal?

DENNIS: I think we have a good balance. The Governor got plenty of power.

ROSENGARTEN: Would you recount the events surrounding the plot to kill you that was uncovered in February of 1981?

DENNIS: I was attending the legislative session. The chief of SLED had something very important to talk to me about. He and his chief deputy came to see me, and made an appointment to talk to me at my hotel. He came and he told me that the threat had been made. Coming from a group right next to me there at, the house where the meeting took place in their talks about it. They got a SLED agent to come down, and he hooked all the recording features on it, so they could make a record of what the fellow said. He got the individual that was supposed to kill me, and the vehicle with him. The fellow had a neighbor who was being talked to by SLED, so he could report to them what was going on. Well, the whole upshot of it was the fellow said he was going to shoot me. I said you could come to the house and come right on in. Well, they put me under guard, and I had an agent assigned to me, and I wouldn't go in public but except with him. The .... .... .... ......, I went on the plane he went with me.

[TAPE FIFTEEN ENDS, TAPE SIXTEEN BEGINS]

ROSENGARTEN: ...started talking about the plot that was uncovered in February, in 1981, to take your life. You told a little bit about it, but I'm not sure how much we got on tape, so I'd like to start over with that. Just describe the events surrounding the discovery of the plot, and what happened.

DENNIS: The SLED officers came to see me in Columbia one day while we were in session. They wanted to talk about something very important. They told me that this fellow, a SLED agent down here, had made a threat that he was going to get rid of me. They were upset about it. I knew the people. They had lived on Highway 52, not very far from my gate. I didn't know of any real difficulties between us. He was .... .... about who hunted everywhere. Used to hunt on this property when Jones(?) was on it. Still hunted on it. I remember one morning when ..... ..... with Jones(?). Five or six of us. I drove out the entrance to the property, saw this fellow go across the road with a gun and a deer. Jumped in a ditch. That's really what started his animosity toward me I guess. I didn't do anything with him. I made him ride with me to where the hunters were. We took the doe deer away from him and gave him a piece of meat. He had killed three I think. But he killed (mumbles) after that. He had the reputation for being a night hunter. I didn't really live here at the time this occurred; I lived at Stony Landing which was the other side of Moncks Corner. But when I moved out here, I figured that he was going to be a factor in trespassing and ..... ..... go on. Chief Strom and Lieutenant Gasque were very much concerned about it, because they were told that the fellow would kill you, but he never had killed anybody. So they set up security for me. I had to go with a SLED agent everywhere I went.

ROSENGARTEN: How did they catch on to the plot?

DENNIS: The fellow was talking to a friend at the beer bar. I have to get this...

MRS. DENNIS: You might be too far back.

DENNIS: The owner of the beer place, by coincidence, was named Dennis. He was a Darlington native who came in, opened his business, and he hunted all... I knew he hunted the property. Everywhere he could. Of course ..... .... he sold game, and game fish. He encouraged this fellow. I didn't know how far he'd gone, but there was evidence that he definitely had encouraged him to take care of me. We set up the contact arrangements. I didn't do anything particularly but except I had to ride with a SLED agent. We had some incidents that occurred, showed that the information they'd gotten was correct. One incident was, I was coming in from hunting late one evening and this
fellow was parked at the head of the road.

ROSENGARTEN: This was Floyd Wenningham(?)?

DENNIS: Yes. He had with him one of his .... from the .... that had had some background of either killing somebody or being in a shooting affair. I recognized him and I just drove on and drove to my steps. I got out, looked back to .... at the gate. I just came on in the house. Next morning Natalie and I went out for a walk. There were the tracks in the roadway turning around.

ROSENGARTEN: So you think this whole thing started with his grudge against you preventing him from stealing deer?

DENNIS: He was that kind of a fellow. He didn't, he worked a little outside, but all his life he practically lived in the woods. Didn't like me because I found out political groups that were against me talked to his family from time to time. Poor fellow, he was uneducated. The fellow just lived with the idea that I'm going to get rid of Rembert Dennis.

ROSENGARTEN: Did you attend the trial?

DENNIS: Yes I did. His lawyer kept talking to the state attorneys and me. They talked to me of course. One morning I went to court .... talking to the state solicitor and his associate. He wanted to know what he could do to get rid of the charges without going to trial. I agreed to not write him off entirely, but reduce the charge and let him go to jail for a reasonable time, and that's what was worked out.

ROSENGARTEN: So he pled either guilty or no contest?

DENNIS: He pled guilty.

ROSENGARTEN: Do you think he was deranged?

DENNIS: He wasn't normal. He had a complex personality. He didn't do anything, he didn't have nerve enough to shoot anybody except when he got hold of some liquor.

[phone rings, tape stopped, then resumes]

ROSENGARTEN: ...that Wenningham wouldn't have had, didn't have the nerve to kill anybody unless he'd had some liquor.

DENNIS: I realized I got myself in this situation by living here. I had a potential danger for my life, everyday like my father had. It's not a good feeling. Nothing you can do about it but be careful. That's what I did, and then when I saw him in the car with this fellow at the head of the road that night I figured somebody was going to get shot. I wasn't worried about myself on that occasion, because I had my shotgun, but I didn't want to shoot him. I sure didn't want him to shoot me. So I just, .... totally truthful with you. I'd had a couple of drinks myself. I was in a position where I would have shot him if he'd have made the slightest move toward me. It's that thing that I thought about later that made me sick. Every time I'd think about those two men coming at me in that automobile, I would have probably killed one of them with each barrel of my gun, and my life would have been ruined sure enough. Guess that's makes .... like that .... got to go through with. You know that they, in politics all the time since my father's experience, I knew that I had a lot of people, I'll just call them people, who'd do me harm because of politics, if they could do it and get away with it.

ROSENGARTEN: So what was the outcome of the trial?
DENNIS: The solicitor who was representing me, state, .... .... but a certain period of time.

ROSENGARTEN: Do you remember how many years he actually, he served?

DENNIS: Natalie, you might could help.

MRS. DENNIS: Okay. I'm coming.

DENNIS: I believe he served for three years.

ROSENGARTEN: Three? Oh really? I thought more. He got nine years, he might have served three.

DENNIS: I thought he served a third of them.

ROSENGARTEN: He only served three. It says that the charge against him, the actual charge, was solicitation of murder for hire. In other words, they charged him with trying to get someone to kill you. He wasn't being tried for attempted murder.

DENNIS: That was on the information they got. That he was at fault, that his interest to kill me one night. He had with him the same fellow that was with him on the other occasion. He told the fellow, said, you can go right on in the house. They got a black woman there, but she won't stop you. Talking about our, Esther. They got the conversation from him through this other party, that he had in writing. .... unquestionably established the fact that the fellow wanted me dead. He didn't quite have the fortitude to do it himself.

ROSENGARTEN: He only served three years. That's amazing.

MRS. DENNIS: Rembert agreed...

ROSENGARTEN: I'm amazed that he only served three years.

MRS. DENNIS: Rembert agreed for him to get out.

DENNIS: I agreed to the sentence, and I agreed to, when the time came, that he'd served his third, to get out, I agreed to it.

MRS. DENNIS: He got married in jail, didn't he, Rembert?

DENNIS: Yes.

ROSENGARTEN: But he's since passed away. Didn't you tell me that last time?

MRS. DENNIS: Yes, he did. He died.

ROSENGARTEN: I remember reading an article about his wife was killed in a car wreck. Some years after...

MRS. DENNIS: She came to Rembert and talked to him, or either wrote him, to please let him get out. Didn't she, Rembert?

DENNIS: She came to see me.
MRS. DENNIS: Said he wouldn't drink.

DENNIS: He wrote me a threat .... again even after he got out.

MRS. DENNIS: Yes he did.

ROSENGARTEN: He wrote a threat?

DENNIS: Yes.

ROSENGARTEN: Really? He continued to threaten?

MRS. DENNIS: Well, he didn't say in these that was going to kill you, did he, darling? What did he say? You know, he could have scared you.

DENNIS: He was blaming me for him having to serve. He shouldn't have had to go... He was crazy.

ROSENGARTEN: But that's the typical profile of an assassin. I mean, if you look at the people who've killed our prominent politicians, they're all crazy.

MRS. DENNIS: That's exactly what Chief Strom told him. That's what he told him the night that he talked to us in the hotel room. That even though you don't feel like it's, you might not be afraid, you still have got to be careful, because this is the kind of man that...

DENNIS: I didn't want to give up my public life or law practice, or anything on account of it, but I wanted to do what they said about protecting myself. All I did was, I got the SLED agents to .... me fishing. I enjoyed a period of time when I was supposed to be shot anytime. I caught some of the best fish I ever caught in my life.

ROSENGARTEN: Now, Chief Strom is the fellow who was in charge of the...

DENNIS: SLED. He was the chief of SLED.

ROSENGARTEN: ...SLED during the Orangeburg incident. He was...

DENNIS: That's right. He and I were friends. He was from McCormick. His family and Natalie's family were very close. So he was extra precautious about our safety.

MRS. DENNIS: That was a bad thing in Orangeburg, but you know, on the whole, South Carolina didn't... That was the only bad incident, wasn't it really?

ROSENGARTEN: That was the worst.

MRS. DENNIS: That we had, during that time. We did do better, we shouldn't say it like that, but we did do better than some. I think it was because of leaders... Because Chief Strom did try hard. You know, maybe that, was not good.

ROSENGARTEN: Well they didn't have a whole lot of experience in managing crowds. For example, I read that they were using buckshot instead of birdshot. You know, lethal force, which, in the manuals that are written about riot control you're supposed to use just enough to stop somebody, but not to do serious harm.

MRS. DENNIS: I'm sure they were not as well trained as they are today.
ROSENGARTEN: Also, this book that I read, I think you know the authors, Jack Bass and Jack Nelson?

DENNIS: I know Jack Bass.

ROSENGARTEN: You know Jack Bass. They quote people from the college saying that they felt if the governor had actually come in person when the thing started heating up, that he could have cooled it. That a personal appearance would have helped.

MRS. DENNIS: That was Bob McNair.

ROSENGARTEN: Yes. He knew it, he was kept informed continuously on the phone, according to this book. People, I don't know if it was Strom or other people, continued to call him every thirty minutes or hour or whatever, told him what was happening.

DENNIS: Didn't scare Bob I'm sure.

MRS. DENNIS: That he didn't come? Where'd Jack Bass work? Was he with the newspaper? Or was he with the state government?

DENNIS: He was with the newspaper.

ROSENGARTEN: He was the Columbia bureau chief of the *Charlotte Observer*. At that time.

MRS. DENNIS: AP, or...

ROSENGARTEN: No, he was the, he was like...

MRS. DENNIS: The Charlotte...

ROSENGARTEN: ...he covered the Columbia beat for the *Charlotte Observer*.

MRS. DENNIS: He's written a number of books on the side.

ROSENGARTEN: That's the only one I'm familiar with. They recently updated the book and the most ironic thing to me, the fellow that was running the bowling alley, immediately, as soon as the federal authorities said you must allow Negroes into your establishment, he did. He didn't fight it, once there was a direction from the courts. According to this appendix, the guy who initially, the black man who initially tried to get in and was refused, is now a regular customer. He bowls there all the time, and they're kind of friendly. There was no animosity once it integrated. There were never incidents or problems. It was just making him do it.

MRS. DENNIS: I think Southerners have gotten along better with blacks, on the whole, than a lot of Northerners. Like you say, once they were told you do this.

DENNIS: That was a big epic in my life.

ROSENGARTEN: The incidents at Orangeburg?

DENNIS: No, this thing here.

ROSENGARTEN: Well, it wasn't the first time was it? You've told me of other times that you've been, that
you've felt genuinely afraid for your life.

DENNIS: Had a casket drawn in mud on my office door.

MRS. DENNIS: He had a man in St. Matthews who wrote him terr..., you know, letters. Then he got real crazy. Do you remember that one? He even brought you a, what do you call it, a jar? A chamber?

ROSENGARTEN: A chamber pot?

MRS. DENNIS: Yes. It's an old-timey one, I was delighted to get it. But, that got crazy. This is the man in St. Matthews that wrote you and Marion terrible letters. Do you remember him?

DENNIS: Yes.

MRS. DENNIS: Then you had one that brought you a crooked -- I don't know whether this is the same fellow -- brought you a crooked walking stick. You know, you knew that these kind of people were crazy because you knew they had written you .... kind of letters. We just threw the letters away.

ROSENGARTEN: Now that's the kind of thing you shouldn't have thrown away.

MRS. DENNIS: I doubt if I've saved any of those.

ROSENGARTEN: Tom Johnson would be fascinated. I mean that's such an interesting...

MRS. DENNIS: I know it. Shouldn't have thrown any of those, but they probably all got thrown away.

ROSENGARTEN: Now what did you say about a casket?

DENNIS: .... drew a casket across my office to my, going upstairs to my office.

ROSENGARTEN: On a piece of paper?

DENNIS: On a door.

ROSENGARTEN: About this same period of time the Rembert C. Dennis building was opened in Columbia. Would you talk a little about the ceremonies at the opening?

DENNIS: They had a ceremony held on the first floor of the building. Senator Gressette and Lieutenant Governor Nancy Stevenson and Governor West... Natalie, was John governor then?

MRS. DENNIS: When?

ROSENGARTEN: I think it was in eighty-one.

MRS. DENNIS: No, John wasn't...

DENNIS: Dedication of the office.

MRS. DENNIS: Your office?

ROSENGARTEN: Dedication of the Dennis building.
MRS. DENNIS: He wouldn't have been governor then. I wonder if that wasn't...

DENNIS: I was thinking about a dedication outside, Natalie.

ROSENGARTEN: I think you were right that it was Nancy Stevenson, because last time you told me that you were a little nervous about what she was going to say.

MRS. DENNIS: Rembert, you were right. Yours was on the outside.

ROSENGARTEN: There was a picture of it. Of all of you all sitting on a podium in the outdoors.

MRS. DENNIS: It was on the outside right in front of it. Behind the statehouse? That's where it was. I believe Jim Edwards was...

DENNIS: I know what was confusing me. I was thinking about the one we had in the Senate chambers, the portrait. I remember this clearly now. It was outside and Nancy and Gressette and John West were speakers besides me.

MRS. DENNIS: When did Jim Edwards, no Jim Edwards...

DENNIS: That was before Jim Edwards.

ROSENGARTEN: When was Riley's first election?

MRS. DENNIS: I was thinking. Jim Edwards was governor, and went in that year that you had your heart attack.

DENNIS: Got to get me a pencil and I've got to right down dates, I'll tell you that.

ROSENGARTEN: You want a pen?

[tape stopped, then resumes]

MRS. DENNIS: That's when Governor Edwards was...

DENNIS: Edwards was governor?

MRS. DENNIS: That's when Governor Edwards was sworn in, the night before Rembert had his heart attack.

ROSENGARTEN: In seventy-six. I've got all this, I just didn't bring my other set of questions. Let's go back to the seventies.

MRS. DENNIS: You don't need that right here anyway.

ROSENGARTEN: Seventy-five. Inauguration of James Burrows Edwards as governor.

MRS. DENNIS: Seventy-five? Must have just been a dinner that night, a speaking, I'll bet that's what it was.

ROSENGARTEN: He might have been speaking at the...

MRS. DENNIS: At the statehouse. That's what it was, I'm sure. I just know I stayed at the mansion, and I knew
they were there. While Rembert was in the hospital. I stayed at the mansion while you were at the...

ROSENGARTEN: They'd probably been there one year. So it was Edwards and William Brantley Harvey. Then Riley followed Edwards.

MRS. DENNIS: Riley came in in...

ROSENGARTEN: And his first lieutenant governor was Nancy Stevenson.

MRS. DENNIS: ...in eighty.

ROSENGARTEN: It is hard to keep track of the order. I mean, I've lived here this whole time and it's difficult for me.

MRS. DENNIS: To keep them in order.

ROSENGARTEN: So John West was just there as a friend or former official.

MRS. DENNIS: Riley must have been governor during that time.

ROSENGARTEN: You think Nancy Stevenson acquitted herself well enough?

DENNIS: I think she did a good job. She couldn't be masculine, she was a female. She made a few mistakes, but she did real good.

MRS. DENNIS: [laughing] We're going to shoot you, you'd better be careful.

ROSENGARTEN: That's a dangerous kind of comment to make. That's enough to put somebody out of office these days. That fellow in Texas hung himself. This, having the building, the opening ceremony and all that, was this a significant kind of honor for you, or all in a day's work?

DENNIS: What was it?

ROSENGARTEN: Was, did you consider this a significant honor, to have this building dedicated in your name?

DENNIS: I was very much pleased with it, because I didn't think I was going to get one. The Budget and Control Board began talking about it, the controller general did. Right at the outset. We just had Brown, Blatt and Gressette. Where were we going to put it? I wasn't sure it was going to be done at all. We had a Republican governor. I knew he personally was for it, but I didn't know how his party was going to react. Jim Edwards and I were as friendly as I was with Bob McNair and the other governors who were Democratic. The controller general suggested a, what building was on that corner, Natalie?

MRS. DENNIS: It was the Highway Department building...

DENNIS: Highway Department building, that's right.

MRS. DENNIS: The Highway Department built another building. This was their building. They needed some office space. Seems they were spread out all over Columbia. So they decided to do this building over. That's what they did.

ROSENGARTEN: I know one of the things in it was the Wildlife Department.
MRS. DENNIS: That's right. That was pleasing for Rembert.

DENNIS: .... .... to indicate that Edwards didn't support it fully. He did, but he was a little dubious at first. Because it was so much at one time. Brown, Blatt, Dennis. Then the newspapers were knifing it a little bit too, there.

ROSENGARTEN: I guess it's a little bit risky to name a building or a highway or something after a living person, because they always might mess up. They might get caught in a scandal and then you're in trouble.

DENNIS: That thought was voiced in the debate.

ROSENGARTEN: It was? That came up?

MRS. DENNIS: They've had bills that .... in Columbia along that line, not to, they never did pass anything, but along the line you're talking about. Not to name it for any living person.

ROSENGARTEN: I'm thinking in New York State, where I grew up, things were always named after people after they passed, like JFK, LaGuardia... Although it seems to me there is the Jacob Javits Center. That's a big center. He's still living.

MRS. DENNIS: Yes, Jacob Javits...

ROSENGARTEN: I don't recall his... They have a big convention center in there.

MRS. DENNIS: He did get sick though.

ROSENGARTEN: He left the Senate.

DENNIS: Who was that?

ROSENGARTEN: Jacob Javits, the senator from New York.

MRS. DENNIS: I know you remember him.

DENNIS: Oh, yes. I remember.

ROSENGARTEN: I'm trying to think of different buildings in New York that were named after living politicians. Robert Moses State Park; that probably was named when he was still living. During this period, you supported, and Gressette opposed, a plan to set a limit on state spending. What were the pros and cons?

DENNIS: What were the what?

ROSENGARTEN: Pros and cons, what were the...

DENNIS: I had the responsibilities of the Finance Committee on me, and I was looking for help to carry out a tough job. Gressette really felt like the state had gotten along all right without limits, through real tough times. Just the fact that the chairman of the Judiciary Committee and the chairman of the Finance Committee found an issue they didn't agree on. The newspapers played it up.

ROSENGARTEN: I believe they quoted Gressette as saying the measure would give the government too much
DENNIS: The governor's veto could be handled so that the bill would be a governor's bill rather than a legislator's bill was what the issue was. Always has been a battle in state politics, all the states, between the legislature and the governor. Some constitutions and statutes in some states give a little advantage to the governor; some give a little advantage to the legislature. In this state, it's always been called a legislative state. The legislature did have last minute powers that were stronger than the governor's. At the same time, I've always argued that the governor of this state, even though he didn't have some of the powers that other states gave their governors, had tremendous power in his appointive power. Various positions he could appoint, he could control the state pretty well, and that's what happened with Dick Riley. Two terms.

MRS. DENNIS: Two terms ruined us.

ROSENGARTEN: In other words, in that period of time he was able to fill a lot of appointments?

MRS. DENNIS: Even though he was a Democrat, and we didn't disagree with him. I never felt like we should have passed that. I thought that was a mistake.

ROSENGARTEN: Speaking of the Wildlife Department, during a filibuster in 1981, you played a practical joke on your fellow senators who were dozing in the chambers. Do you remember the incident with the turkey call? Would you tell that story?

DENNIS: It was an all-night session, and about daylight the next morning I took the podium as if I was going to speak. Instead of speaking, I just gave some good yells. I gobbled ...., too. Heads were popping up all over the chamber. You weren't there were you Natalie? I didn't stay in .... long, I had to sit down. They reacted to me very nicely, but it was time to get them up anyhow. Filibusters had some very light moments in them.

MRS. DENNIS: They served their purpose sometimes.

DENNIS: What?

MRS. DENNIS: I said they served their purpose, filibusters, but they had the times that they were over...

DENNIS: (mumbles) waste of time. Sometimes it caused one side or the other to give a little bit, whatever was best for the people.

MRS. DENNIS: Worked out a compromise.

DENNIS: Tough procedure.

ROSENGARTEN: Did you just happen to have this turkey call in your pocket?

DENNIS: I took my caller with me in my automobile all the time during the turkey season. So I brought it in for the purpose of having a little fun.

MRS. DENNIS: He was always doing that. Showing them what he got.

ROSENGARTEN: The...

DENNIS: I gave, excuse me. I gave the senators a luncheon of a wild turkey too, for several years. Senator Gressette and I gave the luncheon together. Other things were furnished besides wild turkey, but I furnished the
wild turkey.

**MRS. DENNIS:** They always looked forward to that.

**ROSENGARTEN:** And turkey season is in the winter?

**DENNIS:** In the spring.

**MRS. DENNIS:** The gobbling season.

**DENNIS:** I killed the turkeys for the Senate luncheon. It was really a luncheon instead of dinner. In April. Or the first of May, because you keep them in the refrigerator until... How many did we furnish for the senators?

**MRS. DENNIS:** You could freezer them, you know. I don't know, darling. I forget how many... Course there were forty-six senators. Sometimes it seems to me it would be four, no I guess it was more than that. Sometimes he'd have a little help. Friends would...

[**SIDE ONE ENDS, SIDE TWO BEGINS**]

**ROSENGARTEN:** One good-sized venison would take care of, you know, if you needed extra meat.

**DENNIS:** Oh yes. .... .... more turkey.

**MRS. DENNIS:** The hotels would cook them. They don't do that sort of thing now, as much.

**DENNIS:** At the Jefferson Hotel they had a German chef that would cooperate with those kind of functions.

**MRS. DENNIS:** Wade Hampton. At the Wade Hampton.

**DENNIS:** At the Wade Hampton.

**ROSENGARTEN:** The Wade Hampton?

**DENNIS:** I was worried whether he going to get... I know he didn't know himself. Hadn't had experience much with wild turkeys, but he got some help and had it done right.

**MRS. DENNIS:** He said don't worry, senator, I'm not going to rely on my ability to cook this wild turkey, I'm going to use... I don't know who it was he said. One of the southerners, I think is what he said.

**ROSENGARTEN:** It reminds me of the story you told me about the woman the kept that apartment for you all in Washington. I think you brought her a quail to cook and she said she could but she couldn't.

**MRS. DENNIS:** You didn't know how to cook it?

**DENNIS:** Never did.

**ROSENGARTEN:** One issue that seemed to stretch on for months and years in the early eighties was the effort to remap the senatorial districts. What were the issues here?

**DENNIS:** The main issue was which area of the county would have the biggest vote. I took the position, and the majority of the delegation took the position, that we should maintain the old lines .... .... Our friend from Hanahan
took the position that, ought to fix it so the northern end of the county would be as heavily represented as -- the southern would be as heavily represented as the middle of the county. He was fighting against Mosely. So he had a plan to go the long distance, spiral and bypass in the middle and then the two ends of the county, and control both and have more votes.

ROSENGARTEN: This was, was his name Archibald?

DENNIS: Archibald. Course wanted to be senator.

ROSENGARTEN: That would give him...

DENNIS: That would give him a chance at it. I don't think he could have been elected, even then, but we didn't have any idea of letting the county be changed from its historical situation to a new plan of the two ends of the county being the, where the votes were to run the county.

ROSENGARTEN: It seemed to me in Berkeley County the issue was that the county population had overgrown the expected number of people who would be represented by one senator. Is that right?

DENNIS: Yes.

ROSENGARTEN: But there were some places, not Berkeley, but other places, where it seemed that what they were trying to do was to give blacks a chance to elect blacks. In other words, create majority black situations.

DENNIS: That was the situation in some counties.

MRS. DENNIS: In Williamsburg. Various places. They thought a black could have been elected in Williamsburg, didn't they, Rembert?

DENNIS: Yes. In the Pee Dee, Florence...

MRS. DENNIS: They weren't elected that year, but the next time around. You know blacks don't always vote for blacks. But some of them vote straight. I think they would vote for a straight black.

ROSENGARTEN: Well, ideally you vote for the person you think is going to do the best job.

MRS. DENNIS: That's right. I wish that were the way it was. Sometimes it's not, I'm afraid.

ROSENGARTEN: So why did this process take forever, and what finally came of it? The re-mapping?

MRS. DENNIS: Those were the filibustering days.

ROSENGARTEN: Seriously, it seemed to be years, literally years...

MRS. DENNIS: Everybody was fighting for their own life as a senator or... Can I say this, may I?

DENNIS: Sure, you were right there looking at it.

MRS. DENNIS: The house members were usually trying to carve a district for them, just like Rembert was talking about Archibald. He was in the house. Therefore, when the Senate would send them something, see, the house wouldn't be for it. It wasn't just one, it was all of these people trying to get one thing. What they wanted, their individual...
ROSENGARTEN: But then the federal government got involved. The federal government stepped in.

MRS. DENNIS: We had to... I've forgotten what they did. What did they do? We had to do it a certain -- their way. A certain percentage, I think. Was that it?

DENNIS: Yes. The object was to give the blacks a chance to get more of them.

ROSENGARTEN: They were interested in the, whatever, the racial balance issue.

DENNIS: Yes.

ROSENGARTEN: Well, what finally happened with the redistricting measure? Did you get your way, or...

DENNIS: We worked ours out with Charleston and Dorchester. They're trying to take care of the racial situation as well as the county government that we've been having. I've got to get up.

[tape stopped, then resumes]

MRS. DENNIS: I never thought they would re-elect him. You know he did a, tax... He got charged on tax. [Herbert Fielding?]

ROSENGARTEN: Tax evasion?

MRS. DENNIS: Um-hm. [mumbles]

ROSENGARTEN: Yes. He has a big funeral business in Charleston.

MRS. DENNIS: Have you met him? He has a lot of whites for him. I wouldn't mind voting for him.

ROSENGARTEN: Well, he's, what historians call a member of the brown aristocracy. He comes from an old free family, I believe.

MRS. DENNIS: I didn't know that.

ROSENGARTEN: I know a man named Herbert Dacosta(?). I don't know if, do you know him? He's got a huge... He's sold it. He's semi-retired now. He was one of the biggest construction contracting firms in Charleston.

MRS. DENNIS: You know the name, I know. Had a daughter at Furman?

ROSENGARTEN: That's possible. They have two daughters; I don't know where they went to...

MRS. DENNIS: No, this has been some time ago.

ROSENGARTEN: Yes. The girls are grown and out of the house. He's, Dacosta's a member of St. Mark's Episcopal, and he's an old childhood friend of Herbert Fielding. McKinley Washington, isn't he a different sort of politician?

DENNIS: I think he's just a little more intelligent than most blacks.
MRS. DENNIS: You wouldn't think so. My first impression was not that.

ROSENGARTEN: What's that?

MRS. DENNIS: Of McKinley Washington. That he had been very capable.

ROSENGARTEN: Is he more of a, I guess I'd call it a grass-roots, politician?

DENNIS: I think so.

ROSENGARTEN: This came up because Mrs. Dennis said that, we were talking about reapportionment before, and she said that McLeod was the worst one.

MRS. DENNIS: Well, he was the last one, I really, is what I'm thinking. He was not the worst one, but he was the last one. He said they were fixing this appropriation, I mean this reapportionment on his back. You remember? But really, you were in that, too, because you got part of Dorchester and part of Charleston. ..... good.

ROSENGARTEN: You wound up running in three counties?

MRS. DENNIS: Was your portion... Berkeley County by that time had, like, a portion here and a portion there. I guess you did. I guess that was yours.

ROSENGARTEN: What efforts were made to desegregate public schools in the early 1980s?

MRS. DENNIS: They weren't desegregated by then?

ROSENGARTEN: Well, if you go statistically, they're still not desegregated in a lot of places. Legally they are, but in fact they're not.

MRS. DENNIS: I know what you're talking about.

ROSENGARTEN: This was one, an issue that Senator Ravenel got into with Gressette. I don't know if you remember.

DENNIS: I don't remember the details.

MRS. DENNIS: He didn't want to bus them or anything, did he? I don't believe he did. That to me is the worst thing. Think they'd be better off to be all one color than to be bussed. What do you think that .....? [phone rings] Let me get this and you all talk about that.

[tape stopped, then resumes]

ROSENGARTEN: The board of the university?

DENNIS: Yes.

ROSENGARTEN: I didn't know that. So your brother Markley, got defeated. He's been on for years.

DENNIS: He's been on since 1958.

ROSENGARTEN: Oh my lord. What happened?
DENNIS: The Charleston people went against, some of them went against Markley, too. No surprise, he knew he couldn't get the votes from them.

ROSENGARTEN: Was he running against someone?

DENNIS: Yes. He was running, he was a Trustee running against him. The brother of one of the new representatives was running against him. I'll tell you the name in minute, Natalie's coming in.

ROSENGARTEN: I did not realize that was an elected position. I thought that...

DENNIS: Elected by the legislature.

ROSENGARTEN: Is it something he wanted to do?

DENNIS: He what?

ROSENGARTEN: Is it something he really wanted to do?

DENNIS: Just wanted one more time. That's what a lot of them say, but he realized he couldn't keep it. That he'd been lucky to keep it. From a small county, Berkeley against a big county like Charleston.

ROSENGARTEN: While Mrs. Dennis is on the phone, let me just go back one question to the reapportionment plan?

DENNIS: All right, fine.

ROSENGARTEN: When the federal court finally ordered a plan which split Berkeley County into two voting districts, how do you feel that affected you in your political life?

DENNIS: I don't think it really affected me. I was on a, I don't want to sound bigoted about it, but I'd been there for a long, had been lucky enough to be chairman of the Finance Committee, and other things. I believe if I'd run again I could have won alright.

ROSENGARTEN: But doesn't it kind of change your constituency? You have to represent a different group of people, or a smaller area of people.

DENNIS: Mine had been changed by adding a little bit of Dorchester to it, and taking off some of Hanahan and Goose Creek. Both of which moves really didn't hurt my seat too bad.

ROSENGARTEN: You were, I think you were about to describe a little bit about the desegregation plan of the early eighties, of 1981. That Gressette and Ravenel opposed each other on.

DENNIS: Give me a clue to what it was?

ROSENGARTEN: Well, I don't have much. All it says, the State newspaper reported that the effort to kill the desegregation plan failed. It was still alive. I didn't put down who was on whose side. I presume Ravenel would have been pushing for it and Gressette would have tried to... I shouldn't take that liberty, but...

DENNIS: .... .... for me to review it a little.
ROSENGARTEN: I will check that, because I need to go back to the original article, I didn't... One thing I did want to ask you in relation to the Orangeburg Massacre and the effect of that on public opinion. Do you feel that that incident had a long-term effect on the funding of state college and other Negro, predominantly Negro, schools?

DENNIS: I don't think the effect was so tremendous.

ROSENGARTEN: You don't think it had much effect?

DENNIS: No.

ROSENGARTEN: There was an initial increase in funding for State College after the...

DENNIS: That was on the way anyhow.

ROSENGARTEN: It was on the way?

DENNIS: All the governors since reapportionment have been gradually working in support of trying to get things on a better balance. Some of them accomplished more than others. That's dependent on happenings in the black community, and state-wide. The legislature I think has tried to live up to the law and get to integration as quickly as could be practically done.

ROSENGARTEN: In 1981, Berkeley County’s reputation as quote, "a hotbed of sin" was revived by the discovery of an illegal gambling operation and charges against several wildlife officials for conspiring to smuggle 23,000 pounds of marijuana. Did you try to dispel this unsavory impression?

DENNIS: I tried to get it as fully clarified as possible so it wouldn't be a damage to the Wildlife Department. It wasn't any .... of activity to the extent that would show a willingness for unlawfulness on a large scale by the Wildlife officers. In other words, it was just a handful of .... .... to make up a little bit.

ROSENGARTEN: Do you feel that Berkeley's reputation for this kind of outlaw activity is unwarranted?

DENNIS: Do I think it was what?

ROSENGARTEN: Unwarranted.

DENNIS: I think the reputation is not properly characterized. A few incidents, with very few people involved, always seem to, if it’s played up by the newspapers, is damaging. Of course you've got to recognize now that I had a son involved. The allegations of wrongdoing. I took the position at the outset, and we maintained it all along, that any misdeeds on his part, he would have to face up to. Unfortunately, had changes in personnel at Wildlife that caused things to get out of hand I'd put it. I don't mean wrongdoing would be in control, but I mean efforts to get things adjusted, as was being done with officers .... from time to time. ..... .... the chairman of the Commission resigned and drowned at Folly Beach at...

MRS. DENNIS: Isle of Palms.

DENNIS: Isle of Palms.

ROSENGARTEN: Was Rembert Junior implicated in the conspiracy in the smuggling? Or are you talking about the...

MRS. DENNIS: No.
DENNIS: No.

ROSENGARTEN: You're talking about the misappropriation of funds charge.

DENNIS: He approved funds for questionable projects, is what his problem was.

MRS. DENNIS: He didn't overlook the people underneath him. But you're always charged with whatever is going on underneath you, regardless. They just handled some things wrong.

ROSENGARTEN: The articles I read said, were talking about fairly small, to me, small amounts of money being used for personal expenditures but chalked off on the Wildlife account.

MRS. DENNIS: I've forgotten, really. It was very little.

ROSENGARTEN: I think it was either a thousand or three thousand.

DENNIS: It wasn't over a thousand.

ROSENGARTEN: Twelve hundred and seventy-eight dollars and fifteen cents. That fifteen cents, they figured that in.

MRS. DENNIS: He had an officer underneath him who was not well-educated. The officers are trained so much better today.

ROSENGARTEN: Well, when he resigned in July, he cited a quote, "period of personal disability" that was the reason for the resignation. Then a month later he got married right here at Lewisfield.

MRS. DENNIS: Is that what .... ....?

ROSENGARTEN: That's what the... In August they said he was married. What was going on in his life at that time?

DENNIS: Where was he working?

MRS. DENNIS: I don't know where he was working at that time. I didn't realize it was so close. I guess you just forget. He'd been dating this girl a long time. She was married and had two sons. I really never thought he would get married again. His divorce just completely crushed him. You know he was divorced from his first wife, and then his child... That was hard, too. I just know if they were to get married again... You know, you often wonder about that.

ROSENGARTEN: What happened to his child?

MRS. DENNIS: Well, Ruth was mentally retarded. I guess you didn't know that. He had a little girl. She was not like Mary Kathryn. She was a similar child, I guess. Mary Kathryn had a small head. Ruth had something wrong with her back, I don't know. The doctors told them it was not a connection, but I, the girl's mother told me one day in Charleston after it happened that Mary would never any more children by Rembert Junior. They blamed him for Ruth's not being normal. So I think that's really what happened to them, don't you, darling?

DENNIS: Yes.
ROSENGARTEN: And this was...

MRS. DENNIS: This child died about... She didn't live too long, maybe seven years. That was... I've forgotten when that was. He was in his twenties. They say it was not a connection, but you don't ever know. You're always scared.

ROSENGARTEN: Well now they have so many ways of looking. If they suspect something they can look for it.

MRS. DENNIS: ....'s have that. E.J.'s wife is expecting and they... Did you not know that? He's so thrilled. It's a girl.

ROSENGARTEN: So, was this, the divorce or the death of the child immediately preceding the...

MRS. DENNIS: Oh no.

ROSENGARTEN: No, it had happened a while before. The reason I brought this up was you had mentioned quite a while ago when he was having that trouble last year at this time, with the job, the clam inspection job...

MRS. DENNIS: Getting the job.

ROSENGARTEN: You said, just sort of very generally, that it was not to condone him, but to explain that he had been having a lot of trouble in his life, this incident we're talking about now, the early eighties.

MRS. DENNIS: Maybe Ruth just died. What year was that?

ROSENGARTEN: That was eighty-one.

MRS. DENNIS: Ruth died in... No, that was Mary Kathryn died in seventy-six. Ruth must have died in eighty. She did. That's right, she did. You know, you forget how things work.

ROSENGARTEN: I think you had said he was drinking at that time.

MRS. DENNIS: That might have been. Off and on.

ROSENGARTEN: How were the allegations handled?

MRS. DENNIS: You don't have any information on that?

DENNIS: He was...

ROSENGARTEN: I read the newspaper stories...

DENNIS: He was ...., and he went before Judge...

MRS. DENNIS: Who was the judge? Rembert wanted to fight it, Rembert Junior did, but his daddy talked him out of that because he said the newspapers would just crucify him. I think he's always felt glad about that, felt like nothing came out really to explain what really happened.

DENNIS: I told him that it was, took the plea bargain, didn't amount to much.

MRS. DENNIS: No, it was like three hundred, I think, and something.
ROSENGARTEN: The fine was three hundred.

MRS. DENNIS: The plea, though.

ROSENGARTEN: He pled no contest, nolo contendere.

MRS. DENNIS: I know that. No, the amount of money they charged him with finally.

ROSENGARTEN: That was twelve, what they said here in the newspaper was twelve hundred seventy-eight dollars and fifteen cents in reimbursements for personal expenses.

MRS. DENNIS: The man took his car for him. Instead of, those people knew better. It should've been billed to Rembert Junior, and it was billed to the Wildlife. That's Rembert Junior's fault, because he just didn't... You've got to watch everything. He knew he had to watch .... .... Maybe he thought... I always wondered if he thought he could get him into trouble.

ROSENGARTEN: The guy who did it?

MRS. DENNIS: You reckon he did, Rembert?

DENNIS: In .... .... in the department, but other people in similar positions, nothing was done.

MRS. DENNIS: Nothing was done. That's what Rembert Junior says. Except for him to make, except for them to make restitution, they let them stay.

ROSENGARTEN: In other words, you feel they made a special case out of him?

MRS. DENNIS: Well, they did. That's what he said, he should have contested it. He should have done something about it.

ROSENGARTEN: It says here he was represented by Morris D. Rosen, Gedney M. Howe III and Robert Wallace. What was their opinion? Did they think he should contest it?

DENNIS: [mumbles] circumstances, except for one thing, and I made that mistake. Judge...

MRS. DENNIS: I can't remember the judge, isn't that awful?

ROSENGARTEN: I didn't write it down.

MRS. DENNIS: It wasn't Morris, was it?

ROSENGARTEN: Morris was his lawyer. Morris Rosen.

MRS. DENNIS: Yes, but there's a Judge Morris over in Summerton, Rembert. That wasn't who this was, was it?

DENNIS: Yes.

MRS. DENNIS: That's who it was? His name is Morris?

DENNIS: Yes.
MRS. DENNIS: It is Morris? No. No. I can see him right now.

ROSENGARTEN: I'll check that.

MRS. DENNIS: I can see him sitting up there but I can't think of his name. He was in the Senate.

ROSENGARTEN: He was a senator? So what was his, the mistake you felt you made?

DENNIS: He asked me would I terribly object. He said he didn't think it was anything to it at all. Just to keep the public criticism down for themselves they were going to have the circuit judge .... too. A guilty plea on one end of it. I shouldn't have answered; I should have sent him to the three lawyers. I made a mistake of saying it wouldn't be too bad.

MRS. DENNIS: Judges were under pressure. He would have been accused of helping Rembert.

ROSENGARTEN: He had to be especially, appear especially, strict.

MRS. DENNIS: Oh, Rembert was not innocent, because you have to handle whoever's under you. What he said was that so many of these things had already happened and they didn't do anything.

ROSENGARTEN: Well, it was termed an ethics violation, not a crime.

MRS. DENNIS: That's right.

ROSENGARTEN: Well after the sentencing, Senator, you said that you were the quote, "real target in the case." Explain what you mean by that.

DENNIS: There were several other factual circumstances handled in that .... of time, where nothing was done.

MRS. DENNIS: That was when the federal government came in?

DENNIS: No, it was in the state court. They had the fellow at St. Stephen involved. If I had insisted to Judge Morris that he don't put any fine on him, Judge Morris wouldn't have done it, because he said I don't think there's anything to it at all. Just a matter of public policy. I made a mistake. That's the reason he was fined, and he was upset by that. He had a right to be. I should have kept my mouth shut and let the other three lawyers handle that.

ROSENGARTEN: You felt that if he were fined it would be better for the judge? Easier on the judge?

DENNIS: That's what he thought.

MRS. DENNIS: They wouldn't have criticized him, because he was a friend of Remberts.

ROSENGARTEN: But what did you mean by [saying] you were the real target in the case?

DENNIS: Who said that?

ROSENGARTEN: You did. After the sentencing, when it was all over, you said I was the real target in this case.

DENNIS: That came about because of a disagreement I had with...
MRS. DENNIS: Was that the time our phones were tapped, Rembert?

DENNIS: I'm trying to think of the name of the man that was chairman of the commission. Drowned at...

MRS. DENNIS: Oh. Drowned over yonder. Okay. From Columbia.

DENNIS: Edens. [J. Drake Edens was Commissioner of the South Carolina Wildlife and Marine Resources Commission at the time of his death]

MRS. DENNIS: Edens. That's right.

ROSENGARTEN: Edens was the commissioner who drowned?

DENNIS: Edens...

MRS. DENNIS: Didn't like Rembert.

DENNIS: Fell out with me...

MRS. DENNIS: Because you wouldn't let the board room (?) be named for him or something. Was that it? No, that was after he died. He tried to rule the Wildlife Department is really what it was. He would try to do things and Rembert would keep him from doing some of the things, I think too, is mainly what it was, don't you, Rembert? I know there's something specific you're trying to think of.

DENNIS: (mumbles) Department. I don't think it washed itself up to nothing. It should be put aside. Edens didn't agree with that because... I don't want to accuse him of anything, but he was a Republican. I thought it was some politics involved with it. That's what I thought was directed at me.

ROSENGARTEN: In other words, this was kind of a political enemy of yours...

DENNIS: That's right.

ROSENGARTEN: ...getting at you through Rembert Junior.

DENNIS: Exactly.

MRS. DENNIS: He insisted it be pushed. The Department didn't want to push it because they knew that Rembert Junior wanted to bring up some of these other things, and that wouldn't work if they ..... ....

ROSENGARTEN: He wanted to bring up the other people who were running off expenses.

MRS. DENNIS: Yes, he wanted to let them see. I didn't think it was a good idea. I don't believe I could've... The papers are so terrible. Worse than terrible.

ROSENGARTEN: They love anything sensational. Well, speaking of the papers, Allen Morris, H. Allen Morris of the Berkeley Democrat, wrote in an editorial about this case that you had hoped that Rembert Junior would, quote, "someday carry on the Dennis political tradition in South Carolina," and that this accusation and the consequences were a crushing blow to you. Do you think this is true?

DENNIS: No, that's Morris.
MRS. DENNIS: He was terrible.

DENNIS: Trying .... .... hurt me because it hurt my son.

ROSENGARTEN: You didn't have political ambitions for...

MRS. DENNIS: He was not a Kennedy.

ROSENGARTEN: Which one?

MRS. DENNIS: Rembert was not... What was Kennedy's name, John?

ROSENGARTEN: John Fitzgerald.

MRS. DENNIS: Joe.

ROSENGARTEN: Oh, Joe. A king-maker.

MRS. DENNIS: Rembert was not a king-maker. Our children, the majority of them, were really I think, sick of politics. Don't you think they were, darling?

DENNIS: Yes.

MRS. DENNIS: They didn't like the accusations placed against Rembert a lot of times. I don't think that they, none of them, you know, really had that keen an interest. Rembert Junior probably had it more than any of the others, interest at all.

ROSENGARTEN: And yet when you entered politics you were very much aware that you were carrying on the family tradition.

DENNIS: Yes.

MRS. DENNIS: But, I think it might not have been so strong, public .... .... Would it, Rembert?

DENNIS: No.

ROSENGARTEN: And your brother.

DENNIS: That's right. I wouldn't have been involved in it at all, if E.J., my brother had lived.

MRS. DENNIS: That's right.

ROSENGARTEN: But you felt that you had a responsibility to the Dennis family tradition.

DENNIS: That's right.

ROSENGARTEN: But you don't feel that goes beyond you to the next generation.

DENNIS: Yes, I do. But I think they have .... .... Rembert was guilty of something, but he wasn't guilty of the total effect against us, his life. If one of the other boys sought public office, I would hope that Rembert's experience, and that my experience wouldn't be...
ROSENGARTEN: Senator at the end of the last session we were talking about the ethics charges against your eldest son and how they were handled and your feeling that, basically you were the target. That it was more of a political thing. The last thing I asked you was about an editorial that H. Allen Morris had written claiming that you had hoped Rembert Junior would carry on the Dennis tradition in politics, etc. Is there anything else you would like to say about that?

DENNIS: What have I said about it?

ROSENGARTEN: Well, you and Mrs. Dennis both said that this was just not true, that that was Morris' idea, that you had ambitions, political ambitions for your son or for your children in general. We were kind of right in the middle of talking about that.

DENNIS: Politics is a strange game. Chances are that my son has lost out because of events that occurred, but you can't tell, he may come back. I of course would like to see him make a, movement forward in politics, because I feel like he was unfairly treated.

ROSENGARTEN: Of all your children, do you think it's Rembert Junior who has the most interest in political life?

DENNIS: No, you don't ever just think of the oldest or the first. E.J. may very well become interested, and Bea. Luke may, but you go by the oldest one.

ROSENGARTEN: Is Rembert still married to the woman he married that summer, Frances Murphy?

DENNIS: Yes he is.

ROSENGARTEN: The second marriage has been a success?

DENNIS: Yes. They've had some problems. She got in a terrible wreck that almost killed her a year ago. She's in bad physical condition. They live right here at the gate.

ROSENGARTEN: After your daughter Bea passed the bar, she was promoted to the position of attorney by the Legislative Council. Again there were accusations of nepotism. Did you feel that your critics treated your family unfairly?

DENNIS: Not in the final analysis. You expect those things, and we expected it. It all turned out all right. She didn't suffer any loss or damage from it. She's, rates real well with the legislators, apparently .... they would tell me so. I mean what I get around generally. She does the work properly.

ROSENGARTEN: What exactly is the job of an attorney for the Legislative Council?

DENNIS: They draft the bills for introduction. A legislator will go in and tell the legislative lawyer what they want, and then they research the details and draw up the bill for them. They are available to keep advising about the bills .... debate, and the various angles of it come up.

ROSENGARTEN: Is this a position that is normally a stepping stone into politics, or is it...

DENNIS: It's a... Well, it's gotten to be politics. It's the science of government in operation. [Mrs. Dennis comes
Talking about Bea, what her legislative work is. I think she would make a good lawyer practicing with somebody. If I were still able to practice, I'd like her with me.

MRS. DENNIS: But I think she really likes this better. I think...

DENNIS: She doesn't know if she likes it better or not because she never did it.

MRS. DENNIS: Yes, but...

DENNIS: She likes it considerably.

MRS. DENNIS: Having always been involved in knowing about the laws and everything, I think that she finds it fascinating. They seem to like her. She does the majority of the bills in there, so that says something. There's six lawyers.

DENNIS: It wasn't for ...., but she .... .... more than the rest of them put together.

ROSENGARTEN: When she was first, when this promotion was made and the newspapers started charging nepotism, the senator said he just accepted it as the normal course of events, but did it upset Bea? Was she upset by it?

DENNIS: It upset her some, but it didn't terribly upset her. She took it very well. As far as she showed us.

MRS. DENNIS: It didn't bother her. It bothered her that it would bother her daddy. She's a very, she's had this criticism all her life and so, she handles it well. She didn't feel like it was that... They were looking for a woman. Let me just say this. They had no women and no blacks in there, and they had to have one. She had worked up there as a page. Had she worked in there, Rembert? Maybe they worked her one summer. He knew her.

ROSENGARTEN: "He" being the head attorney?

MRS. DENNIS: Yes. Tom Linton(?) was head of Legislative Council.

DENNIS: Had a committee of legislators that .... it, too.

MRS. DENNIS: Yes, they have a group from the house and Senate who handle it really. They could have turned it down. But I'm sure he recommended... I don't know that there were any other applicants, just to tell you the truth. That's not a job that the average... Nowadays they would probably like to go into it to have some experience, but I doubt back then... I don't remember back then being, you know...

DENNIS: They're doing the work that the circuit solicitor used to do.

MRS. DENNIS: Is that right? I didn't realize that.

DENNIS: When Bob Figg was solicitor he drew most of the bills that I introduced.

MRS. DENNIS: Is that right?

ROSENGARTEN: Who was that?

DENNIS: The solicitors served as attorneys for legislators, and rather than drafting their bills for them or giving them information and advice, Bea's group took over from them. They let them go, they got their business as state
attorneys mixed up with legislative business a little too much sometimes.

**MRS. DENNIS:** I need to push that chair up a little bit because it, that's the bad thing about this chair, it slides.

**DENNIS:** .... .... It's not a good chair ....

**ROSENGARTEN:** It slides back?

**MRS. DENNIS:** It'll slide back without your meaning for it to. Maybe if I put this behind your head. This is the Lazy Boy though; your mother could get this. It's so much better than this one. It came from the medical store, but I think that you could get some off on this, too. Maybe your insurance?

**ROSENGARTEN:** She told me they've gotten a number of... Oh, be careful.

**MRS. DENNIS:** Excuse me.

**ROSENGARTEN:** No, no. I'm fine. They've gotten a number of devices free through Medicare.

**MRS. DENNIS:** We're trying to get this, we'd tried to get this chair. See, we had already taken it. This is uncomfortable for him on account of his stomach, which is a problem that maybe your father wouldn't have. But it does not go back. Doesn't go back as much as that. That's why we had to look for something else. They haven't picked up the thing on this yet. I don't know whether they're going to do it.

**ROSENGARTEN:** Senator would you describe for me your vendetta with Allen Morris after the Berkeley Democrat published the long article about your father's assassination? It began a period of letters back and forth.

**DENNIS:** About whose assassination?

**ROSENGARTEN:** It was about your father's assassination. You remember, it was a full page article. I don't remember if it was that article that...

**DENNIS:** That's what triggered it. He came by my office and it was the anniversary of my father's murder, or close to it. Here was people talking about it and he asked me a few questions about it. It really just got out of hand.

**MRS. DENNIS:** Stirred up a lot of...

**DENNIS:** Brought back things that needed to be left alone.

**MRS. DENNIS:** ...animosity and...

**ROSENGARTEN:** I believe he named who he thought was, or who it was alleged, was behind the assassination.

**DENNIS:** Yes, that's what happened. .... .... big families involved. .... some of my brothers and sisters and other relatives associated with them over the town, over the county. Just not a wholesome situation. Shouldn't have been gone through. Should have been left to settle still further.

**ROSENGARTEN:** But what provoked... You responded with a full-page open letter. I don't know if you remember, it took up the entire page. Kind of countering his, what you considered the innuendos against your family.

**DENNIS:** I don't remember the details of it. I know I got considerably upset by Morris. Whatever I said, whatever
I wrote, was in that vein.

ROSENGARTEN: Tell me a little about Morris. Where does he come from? Is he...

DENNIS: He was born and raised right here in Moncks Corner. His father was a small contractor. Allen had some musical abilities, did some singing and wrote for the paper before he became editor. He started other publications before he got into the county newspaper business. He had a school newspaper at St. Stephens. I felt sorry for him, he was paralyzed. I would have thought a person like that would have appreciated how well he was doing in the world and would be thankful to people, but he seemed to have an attitude of extreme criticism of anything and everybody. Unless they did him a big personal favor. He was smart from the standpoint of... ... and use it. And writing.

ROSENGARTEN: Was he crippled from birth?

DENNIS: Yes. [Mrs. Dennis believes he was a victim of polio.]

ROSENGARTEN: I've seen the pictures of him in a wheelchair. It seemed to me reading these, through the Democrat over these years, that after your accident, immediately after your accident, he kind of, just, kind of reversed himself on a lot of things and came... He was almost overly sympathetic in the newspaper.

DENNIS: Yes. He was right about everything; he didn't have any, very few discrepancies. If he didn't like you politically, he sure didn't like me, he wouldn't hesitate to use the newspaper in a personal....

ROSENGARTEN: What exactly, what kind of things did he not like about you? Presumably he was a Democrat.

DENNIS: His father-in-law, who's county superintendent of education, is on the opposite side of the political fence from me. He didn't like the politics of me; I was on the wrong side.

ROSENGARTEN: In February of 1983, both you and Senator Gressette had minor surgery. Who ran the Senate while you were out recuperating?

DENNIS: It was seniority. Senators Lindsay [John Charles] and Waddell [James M, Jr.] did most of it. Senator Smith from Spartanburg also.

ROSENGARTEN: Do you remember whether you kind of followed along from behind the scenes and kept an eye on what they were doing?

DENNIS: Very much so. It's only recently that I've gotten out of it. Year before last, actually it's last year, I followed the newspaper very, very closely every day to see what went on that I wasn't there to see. I don't have the strength to do that anymore.

ROSENGARTEN: What were the major innovations of the state's 1984/1985 $2.6 billion dollar budget? That was the budget, if you remember, that had the educational improvement package in it.

DENNIS: It had the educational money divided out. The new money, particularly with an emphasis on improvements in education, which was a process of giving emphasis from time to time on various facets of it. Higher education went through a period of support, and then a majority decision in the legislature came up that not enough was done for primary and secondary. That's when we had the big... money expenditures for primary and secondary education and the specialties that... ... from time to time. Had a period of special support for...
ROSENGARTEN: Where did the initiative for the education improvement act come from?

DENNIS: Come from the, largely from the Education Association.

ROSENGARTEN: Governor Riley is always given a lot of credit for that.

DENNIS: Who?

ROSENGARTEN: Governor Riley is always given a lot of credit for that bill.

DENNIS: Yes, Riley was a strong gubernatorial proponent of advances in education. The big factor all along has been how much more money can you put in supporting certain facets of education that needed to be pushed. That's the trouble with this state. For the last thirty years, hasn't had enough money to do the job. It's been a matter of pinching over here, and putting over there. I think the state has done a pretty good job of emphasizing the most important with the money. I think back to my early days in the legislature, and what appropriations were going for primary and secondary education, and then for higher education, too. There's been great changes. I think the state has an excellent education record. It's prison system is been a thorn in it's side all the way through, with the cost of it. But it's done a good job in getting the prison system operating in a reasonable legal manner, and taken care of the prisoners remarkably well. I'm afraid that a lot of people are in prison because they're looking for an easy way of life. They didn't care what they did. Disadvantaged people ..., old of course, and then the various categories of the unable, the handicapped. South Carolina's done a good job with emphasizing support for the programs for the mentally handicapped.

ROSENGARTEN: Are there any social welfare issues that you feel the state has not lived up to its responsibility on?

DENNIS: Well, I was there so long, when I think back over it I can remember going from one to the other on the various ones. I think in time the legislature has covered them all. Society changes causes changes in public appropriation needs. South Carolina's had great programs in education, highway and corrections. That's where the bulk of the money goes. Our correctional institutions have been built or improved on each year, and they're now some of the finest in the country.

ROSENGARTEN: But no matter how good they are, surely no one would choose to spend...

DENNIS: What?

ROSENGARTEN: No matter how good the prisons are, I can't believe that anyone would choose to... You were saying that people would take the easy way out. I can't imagine anyone choosing to live in captivity. In a lock-up.

DENNIS: Some don't choose not to give a damn whether they're in or not. The records at the various institutions will show people who are, ..., might even call them professional criminals. Out of one sort of thing into another. I can't, maybe ..., I'm not strong enough.

ROSENGARTEN: About this time, this is, I guess eighty-three or eighty-four, the Berkeley Democrat ran a photograph of Luke and Allison at the opening of Luke's sports goods shop. Was this a long-term dream of Luke's?

DENNIS: What shop?

ROSENGARTEN: His sporting goods store. It was in Moncks Corner, wasn't it?

DENNIS: Whose was it?

DENNIS: Oh yes. He had one. He opened his when he got out of college. After the first year he opened one up at the intersection of old 52 and new 52. Had a hard time. Wasn't big enough to meet the competition of the chain stores. He took a step down, got a smaller place in one of the complexes right across from, what is it? What's the one on the left?

ROSENGARTEN: Let's see. There's S-mart on one side.

DENNIS: What?

ROSENGARTEN: There's that S-mart, K-mart place on one side.

DENNIS: K-mart.

ROSENGARTEN: So this store that opened in the early eighties was the smaller store?

DENNIS: Considering the limitation he had on capital, he did well in a small way with both stores, but not enough to meet the competition of the big chains. Hardware stores are generally a store that could always get along locally on a small scale, regardless of big competition, but sporting goods stores can't do it.

ROSENGARTEN: Was this a long-time dream of Luke's, to have this kind of store?

DENNIS: I think he loved the woods and the water so much, and he loved to fish and hunt. I think he was thinking of doing this, during high school and longer he was thinking about doing it.

MRS. DENNIS: He worked with a company learning the, learning it really, you might say in Charleston for a while. But the times I guess weren't right. We need it, but we were just not quite large enough then. They hated to see him close. You can't get things like he had. The hunters wanted him, but the volume was not there.

ROSENGARTEN: I read an article, I guess it was about a year ago, in, I think it was in Newsweek, or it could have been Time, but one of the big newsmagazines, about what happens when a K-mart moves into a small town or a rural area. I mean, they have statistics to prove this. Thirty percent of all the mom and pop businesses, all the independent businesses, go under.


MRS. DENNIS: That, and then when Wal-Mart came, too. They have...

DENNIS: Then the big one up there on the highway.

MRS. DENNIS: Wal-Mart?

DENNIS: No. Up there at the bridge.

MRS. DENNIS: Oh yes. That...

ROSENGARTEN: S-mart?

MRS. DENNIS: Yes.
ROSENGARTEN: That I'd never heard of until...

MRS. DENNIS: Is it S-mart? No, no. This is the one right there by the Tail Race? Bridge, where you come over the bridge? On your right. It's still not the kind of store that we want. Luke had a store where you could get any of the finer... He carried the finest things that the hunters want. They don't always get them because... The prices are higher than some of the things Wal-Mart and K-mart carry. Even that place up there doesn't carry... Luke thought if he had just gone into it on that scale, but still carried the better things... He tried to put something else in, like gifts. They sold, but... Maybe if Luke hadn't had to borrow money, he could have made it, but not to make any money. He said he just didn't see how they could live on it.

ROSENGARTEN: So what did he wind up doing? He obviously abandoned the idea.

DENNIS: He decided he'd have to go to work for somebody else.

MRS. DENNIS: He works for Santee-Cooper. They like him.

DENNIS: One thing about Luke...

MRS. DENNIS: He's a good worker, too.

DENNIS: ...he's a very sincere person, and a very sincere, conscientious worker. Santee-Cooper doesn't have any trouble sending him to Charleston or sending him to Columbia where he is now. There's just things that you've got to do, and he doesn't have to have somebody to see him every morning and talk to him. His superiors talk to him when he leaves here. He goes up there and carries out they want.

MRS. DENNIS: I think Luke would eventually like to do something on the side, like this, or eventually a combination thing.

DENNIS: You mean have a store?

MRS. DENNIS: Yes. A combination sports and something. Go in with somebody. He and E.J. were talking about it.

DENNIS: He and E.J. talked about it. He did a good job with small capital.

ROSENGARTEN: When they took that picture, I was talking about the picture they ran in the Berkeley Democrat when the store opened, I presume that Luke and Allison were courting then?

MRS. DENNIS: Yes. Was she in it?

ROSENGARTEN: The two of them were in it, but they didn't have, it didn't say Mr. and Mrs. Luke Dennis.

MRS. DENNIS: I think that's what really got him. When he got married and realized...

ROSENGARTEN: Reality?

MRS. DENNIS: ...I don't believe I can make enough money this way. You're right. A lot of these stores couldn't make it.

ROSENGARTEN: I feel like I'm just as guilty as the next person. I run into K-mart. I told you the story about
buying the fern and all that? Which, by the way, the fern, the expensive one, is a big beautiful healthy plant and the other one looks brown. You get what you pay for. But I do, you know for convenience you go into these big stores because you can buy groceries and clothes and...

MRS. DENNIS: We all are. We have tried to shop in Moncks Corner through the years. Rembert always said, he did, his business was here. He made his living here. He thought people ought to shop here. Just like Luke said in this shop. He said people go to Charleston and look at the sporting goods. They compare the prices. Unless you bring yours down, even to the nicer sporting stores in Charleston, unless he brought his down, he couldn't make a go. He said when the women did it, now when the men came in they just bought. People compare prices, and you can't blame people.

ROSENGARTEN: When Senator John Lindsay, this is moving on here to another subject, used a state-owned plane to take him to the 1984 Super Bowl, the whole wasp's nest of legislative prerogative got stirred up again. What were the consequences of this?

DENNIS: A lot of talk and a lot of criticism, but in a reasonable period of time it passed over.

MRS. DENNIS: But you all did tighten up some things, didn't you, Rembert?

DENNIS: There were some changes made. Like you say, tightened up some.

MRS. DENNIS: Had to fill out things and sign them, where before I think they didn't have to do it. Just say where you were going and what you did.

DENNIS: Took away from the state the federal system.

MRS. DENNIS: The what?

DENNIS: The federal system.

ROSENGARTEN: Federal system?

DENNIS: State legislators found out they couldn't do what the congressmen did.

ROSENGARTEN: If I remember correctly, you signed a kind of censure statement about this particular use of the state plane. Is that correct?

MRS. DENNIS: To censure Jack?

ROSENGARTEN: Well, not censure, but say that it was an inappropriate something or other. I'll have to check that.

MRS. DENNIS: He probably did say it was inappropriate. Do you remember saying that?

DENNIS: After I quit using it.

MRS. DENNIS: [laughs] You didn't ever stop using it. They had to say what they were doing, what they used the plane for.

ROSENGARTEN: Why did Lindsay think he could kind of get away with this? I mean, this is fairly blatant. It's one thing to go to a Ways and Means Committee meeting...
DENNIS: He's just that type fellow. Mischief .... .... a good bit. He's talked about it frankly, says Oh, I know they're going to fuss about it, but there's not anything really wrong with it. He didn't try to break the law; he just tried to overuse the state property for private purposes. That's where the problem comes. As a senior senator you have certain privileges in connection with the state plane. The governor doesn't ever have any problem. It's the legislators that they get on when they use them a good bit. The legislators will be like we've got just as much right to use the plane as the governor or the secretary of state. So it gets a little overdone here and there. But it's generally harmless, it's not...

ROSENGARTEN: But you know, in terms of an ethics violation, and the sums of money involved, it doesn't seem to me that what your son was accused of is any worse than...

DENNIS: No.

MRS. DENNIS: No. .... ....

ROSENGARTEN: ...than using a plane that might cost a few thousand dollars. I don't know what it costs to fly a plane, but...

MRS. DENNIS: I'm sure it costs a few thousand dollars.

ROSENGARTEN: Most likely it cost as much or more than whatever...

MRS. DENNIS: That's right. You're right on that.

DENNIS: I agree with you.

[SIDE ONE ENDS, SIDE TWO BEGINS]

DENNIS: ...finally ending up charging him with nothing more than many others on the left and right were doing. His being my son was what really caused him to have his problems.

MRS. DENNIS: His predecessor had done...

DENNIS: Yes.

ROSENGARTEN: Done similar...

MRS. DENNIS: Oh goodness sakes! That's when they had the gas tank up there at the house.

DENNIS: Luke's [Rembert, Jr.’s] administration was a tremendous improvement on his predecessor's.

MRS. DENNIS: He was. That's awful. I wouldn't want to have to get in there. The gas tank was right there. That's no excuse for any wrong. Like Rembert said, he did make a lot of improvements in that department. Our children knew through the years that anything they did would get twice the publicity that anybody else... They would be... That was just it; that was the name of the game. Don't you agree?

DENNIS: Oh yes. .... .... .... world I guess, certainly all over the country. The politician's children will be accused of great wrong if a simple privilege is given somewhere.

MRS. DENNIS: How sad that they put... I know you all saw it, I didn't say anything to you Rembert, but John Kennedy, Jr. didn't pass the bar the second time, and of course made magazines and newspapers everywhere. I
thought how sad. The poor boy. They said this company's going to give him another chance. He's passed law school, but just hasn't passed the bar. Bea says there are a lot of people who just get real upset when they go to take it, and they do have take it twice. This poor thing, this is his second time, now. I feel so sorry for him being in the paper. I'm sure that there were a lot of others who didn't pass. Hope he makes it.

ROSENGARTEN: At least it wasn't rigged. That much they can say. I mean if he'd passed it, they might have said that it was a matter of...

MRS. DENNIS: The third time they probably are going to say that if he passes.

ROSENGARTEN: Well. I'm sure this is something that you've talked with your children about as well.

MRS. DENNIS: You just have to accept it. I've always told them too, that they have had certain privileges. They've enjoyed seeing history made, they've enjoyed a lot of things that a lot of children didn't get to do. They went with Rembert, we always took them. They've enjoyed a lot of things other young people didn't get to enjoy. They've stayed at the mansion, they've stayed there when I was there, you know they, just a lot of things that a lot of children wouldn't do.

ROSENGARTEN: Senator, did Marion Gressette's death in March of 1984 come as a surprise to you?

DENNIS: Say that again please?

ROSENGARTEN: When Marion Gressette died in March of 1984, did this come as a surprise to you?

DENNIS: No it didn't, because any death of a member of the family or a good friend comes as a shock, I don't care how much you expect it. .... .... was surprised. Senator Gressette left the Senate chamber the weekend before he died. The week before he wasn't sick but two or three days. Said alright Rembert, I'm going to leave you. I told one of the senators I didn't like the way he talked when he left. It sounded ominous. But he may have felt that death was near. He went, he left Columbia, and next I knew over the weekend he was in a hospital in Orangeburg, and died the first of the next week.

ROSENGARTEN: In your eulogy you said we have lost a great American, South Carolina has lost it's irreplaceable leader, and I've lost my best friend. Would you elaborate a little on these remarks?

DENNIS: I do think Senator Gressette had the capabilities and most of the time in his work and discharge of his duties; he exercised full measure of those capabilities as a great American government leader. I can't think of the other part of your question.

ROSENGARTEN: You said South Carolina has lost its irreplaceable leader and I've lost my best friend.

DENNIS: He and I at the time, status of best friends because we were working very closely together, almost daily. I didn't mean my best friend of all time, my best friend at the time.

ROSENGARTEN: You mentioned in another newspaper interview that your richest experience with Gressette was the week that you and MRS. Dennis and both of the Gressettes spent together in 1960. I believe you started in New Orleans. Would you describe that trip?

DENNIS: It was a close relationship trip because we rode the train, slept in the Pullman cars, ate breakfast, lunch and supper together each day. After we got there, we stayed in a hotel together. It was a trip when you feel like you learn to know someone very, very closely, and to appreciate them when they are people of ability like Marion Gressette really was. We had fun with each other with what we ate and what we joked about. I ate some mountain
fish, mountain trout. Marion was kidding me about the difference between those fish and the kind of fish we had in our rivers and rice fields. There was a good bit of difference, but they were good fish.

ROSENGARTEN: What was the occasion of this trip?

DENNIS: Democratic Convention at Los Angeles. We traveled together to that one. I'd been to others when we were together mostly on the convention site. Traveling there and coming home together, along with the trip at the convention, gave you a right long trip together.

ROSENGARTEN: What additional duties did you assume when you were named President Pro Tem?

DENNIS: Principally the role of substituting for the president, for the lieutenant governor, and certain public functions, .... .... When the lieutenant governor doesn't preside over the House of Representatives when you have a joint session, the president pro ten does. I guess that would be the biggest new job taken over, serving as presiding officer of the house when you met in joint session. That wasn't often, but during my brief time there I had occasion to do it. The lieutenant governor, not being a senator, the president pro tem had some advantages on him when it comes to dealing with the members of the Senate. Many times the president pro tem is the leader to help the Senate get together on complex issues that required a decision. He had us help. I was trained trying to help Gressette, as his desk mate when he was pro tem. I shared in a lot of the decisions he had to make for the Senate. Gressette was a great leader. He was a tough fighter. Had a time getting him to agree sometimes, but all in all, he was one of the best.

ROSENGARTEN: The pressing financial issues during the spring of eighty-four were the mounting legal costs of the re-map battle, and the effort to fund Governor Riley's ambitious education program. What was your role in addressing these problems?

DENNIS: As chairman of the Finance Committee, I to take an active role in getting the expense money approved. My chairmanship of the Finance Committee and my many years of service, my many years of being there caused Gressette to turn to me, and me to turn to him to help. That's the way the Senate works. One man would get the assignment, and he'd have several of the veteran senators to help him. I didn't have a long period of that, but it was an enjoyable one. I think I must have taken over sometime in the spring of the last year I was there. I had that session to be the president pro tempore. It was a tough assignment and a pleasant job. I got knocked out of my automobile and had to battle to serve at all. That's hard for anybody to realize. How when you're painful from your head to your toes, how can you do these things you know you have a responsibility for doing. It's tough on you.

ROSENGARTEN: Looking back you can see so much, but at the time we're talking about, six or eight months before the accident, you probably had no notion that this wasn't the beginning of another long period of service. This issue of financing the court battle over this re-map issue, it occupied a lot of news space. I think it was, was it McNair's law office that was handling the case?

DENNIS: Yes.

ROSENGARTEN: What were your feelings about, as Finance Chairman, what were your feelings or ideas about how much that was costing the state?

DENNIS: I really considered it to be a fund? That was going to be considerable, and the best thing to do was try to be as tight on it as possible. Had to have good lawyers to present the matters for the state, for the Senate. When a public body has legal issues, and has to pay lawyers, it's considered by most of them in the light of high responsibility. They've got to be paid, but let's make it as reasonable as possible. A lot of times to reward a lawyer friend was a contract. It's time to get the best legal brains you can find in the state for that particular purpose and pay just as little as you can for it because this is public money. Tough job to have. ..... so many series
of these problems with segregation, reapportionment, what else was it? Re-mapping. One thing I can say, I don't believe any other legislator .... .... through a busier time, considering the terrific changes that went on, and I served. If you look at the state of South Carolina in 1950, and look at it now... Many decisions being suddenly set up in those days, and you know I was a part of that. I was part of that meeting or this meeting or that one when something was done. I hate to be out of it. I got so sick that I couldn't feel like I could do the work. The way I am right now. Meeting with you is very important. Important for me to let the state of South Carolina know some maybe special experiences I had that may be helpful to somebody in understanding where South Carolina government is, and where it's going. It's made it tough when you're sick.

ROSENGARTEN: In one way, maybe the way Senator Gressette ended his career was the easiest way for him. He walked out of the Senate chambers and in a few days he was gone. But on the other hand, you know what you just said, it's important for the men who've led this state to have a period of time of reflection. When they can give back some of their thoughts and experiences to the generation coming up. Sometimes that takes a period of inactivity. If you were in the Senate right now, if you were Senate pro tem, I doubt if you'd have time sit here with me.

DENNIS: Oh yes. I'd be putting everything into that.

ROSENGARTEN: How did you and your siblings come to the decision to sell your childhood home, Stony Landing, to Santee-Cooper as a sanctuary?

DENNIS: Multiple ownership and the difficulty in several people getting together on what's the best thing to do with the property. …is persuasive of thinking, just along the lines of getting a use for it that is honorable and good and that people will get benefit from. The price we got, since it was divided six ways, was nice, but it wasn't fabulous.

ROSENGARTEN: Do you think three hundred thousand dollars was fair market value for the property at the time?

DENNIS: I would think so.

ROSENGARTEN: Had you been considering making this decision for a long time?

DENNIS: Well, ever since my father died, the family had talked about what was going to become of Stony Landing. It was always known that no member of the family would have been the last, one member of the family to have it. It was a question of dividing, which was difficult but not impossible. Or a question a devoting it to some use that would produce a public good. Berkeley county doesn't have a state park. The only county in the state that doesn't have a state park. So, when they talked about a state park that would be tied in with Santee-Cooper and the other state considerations in the area, we thought it was an ideal use for Stony Landing.

ROSENGARTEN: Have your ideas for the place been realized? I've never been there, I confess. Is it kept up well as a sanctuary?

DENNIS: Well, they had a set-back with the hurricane. I think they've progressed tremendously with the construction. The boardwalks and everything. But they were set back considerably by the hurricane, and they've been working hard to overcome that. I think the future of it is fantastic.

ROSENGARTEN: Now did you hold on to part of the acreage there? I know you sold ten acres around the house. Did you retain any part of the property?

DENNIS: We have a very small portion of property left now. .... .... sold to Santee-Cooper, sold to somebody else.
There again, the disadvantage is in three of us now owning it. Kind of hard to get together on a sale.

**ROSENGARTEN:** You remained steadfastly loyal to your friends. For example, Senator Carmichael in Berkeley County, there's supervisor Clyde Umphlett(?). even after there conviction for misdeeds. How important is loyalty in your code of honor?

**DENNIS:** .... what?

**ROSENGARTEN:** How important is loyalty as a... I was struck by what appeared to be your putting loyalty above political expediency in these cases, where Carmichael and Umphlett fall out of grace. Yet you remained publicly their friend.

**DENNIS:** What is the word that you used? I can't hear it.

**ROSENGARTEN:** Loyal.

**DENNIS:** Lowell?

**ROSENGARTEN:** Loyalty.

**DENNIS:** Loyalty. A real test of a man's loyalty to his friends is when his friend is in deep trouble. Many times a person... .... .... more being in an unfavorable light or being friendly who was somebody who'd violated the law in a great way. I was closer to Umphlett than any of the others involved. Frankly, I never felt like Umphlett had acted in a sinful way. He did some things wrong, but he didn't intend to hurt anybody. That's about the only way I can express it.

**ROSENGARTEN:** In the election that occurred after the reappportionment, black Democrats obviously benefited, but white Republicans made even greater gains. How do you explain this?

**DENNIS:** The white Republicans were looking for political advantage that had been lost by the Democrats getting on top. The causes for that largely passed away and boiled down to the individuals and not big party action. The Republicans would have a chance to be elected to office and maintain an equal standing in government with the Democrats. Abilities were being exercised. In this state, we were a part of, and observed, Democratic plurality to the point of absolute control for so many years that it reached a point where so much had happened that each other had been ......, that there wasn't any way for Democrats to become reconciled and join with the Republicans, or Republicans join with Democrats. Had to be a new function brought it. The new function has been in the form of another party, or broadening of scope of the Republican party. In this state right now, state-wide differences are not great. Republicans are in the governors chair and other offices, you see the Republicans have a right strong administration in this state, office-wise. Be tough for the Democrats to come back. I don't know how to predict anything except to say that probably going to be working hard in the offices I know they hold, from the top .... on down. He certainly is going to be hard to beat in the upcoming election. Things that happen, what happens to the economy of the country will be the determiner of what the future's going to be. Right now it's a big reversal of what it was ten, fifteen, twenty years ago. It's an advantage to run as a Republican now rather than Democrat.

**MRS. DENNIS:** In a lot of ways.

**DENNIS:** In some areas, some places.

**MRS. DENNIS:** Money is... That's what you've said.

**DENNIS:** That's what, that's a conclusion that the commissioner of agriculture has just reached.
MRS. DENNIS: That's right.

DENNIS: He's leaving the Democrats, after they elected him commissioner.

MRS. DENNIS: All these years.

ROSENGARTEN: The state commissioner?

MRS. DENNIS: Yes. Les Tindal. He's Commissioner of Agriculture. He was a Democrat, he's been a Democrat all these years, and he's gone over to the Republicans. He owes money from his last election, and evidently the Democrats have not been able to... Or, that lower down they've not been able to contribute enough to probably his... I think they spend too much on the campaigns, frankly, but I don't know what you can do about that. I like Les, but I feel like he didn't treat the party right.

ROSENGARTEN: There was a big national news story last week about where campaign funds come from and how, for national campaigns, Paul Simon I think was the example they were using. The majority, the huge majority of funds come from out of state.

MRS. DENNIS: To pay for them.

ROSENGARTEN: Yes. If Simon is running from one state, his campaign funds will come from all over the country, to a much greater degree than his own state.

MRS. DENNIS: Even the Republicans...

DENNIS: They come from national organizations.

ROSENGARTEN: Or big donors in far-away cities. There's a go-between.

MRS. DENNIS: Trying to beat the Democrats, the Republicans have put so much money in the campaign up there, particularly in the Congressional race that Liz Patterson is, her district Greenville-Spartanburg? This fellow they had running, the Republicans didn't like him, he's Senator David Thomas because he wasn't able to get the money, so they've got somebody else running there, they say he's already getting .... [phone rings, last word unclear]

ROSENGARTEN: In the few times that you had opposition in your campaigns, how did you do your fund raising? Did you have a professional?

DENNIS: No. None of mine was real sizable until I ran for the Senate after reapportionment with Charleston. I was unnecessarily concerned. There wasn't the battle that I thought there was. I set up a campaign fund that was as much as I'd spent altogether on elections before. The big expense of the campaign was expenses of filing fee and advertising, radio. The biggest thing was radio [Mrs. Dennis believes Senator Dennis meant to refer to television]. They sure charge you for that. The Democratic Party then had better political foothold in the state and in the local communities than it does now. That's naturally expected after the first Republican regime in many years, .... .... that many right now.

ROSENGARTEN: You mean with Edwards election. Or, you mean the national...

DENNIS: I meant the state, too.

ROSENGARTEN: When Edwards was elected. I think it was a hundred years. I think so, because the last
Republican would have been a Reconstruction government.

DENNIS: That's right.

ROSENGARTEN: So at this point you feel the future for Republicans in this state is, looks good?

DENNIS: For the immediate future. I really think the Democrats will come back. It's going to be a Republican and a Democrat, Democrat and a Republican, just like we've had in other parts of the country. In the future.

MRS. DENNIS: Are you all hot? I forgot...

[TAPE SEVENTEEN ENDS, TAPE EIGHTEEN BEGINS]

ROSENGARTEN: When we stopped last time we were talking about the issue of reapportionment and the development of a true two-party system in South Carolina. I had one question left from that series, which was about the accident that occurred on December 4th, in 1984. Would you describe that accident, and your long recovery from it?

DENNIS: The accident occurred on Highway 402 between Moncks Corner and Huger? There's a black spot on the highway right in front of ..... gate. This car came around the curve on the wrong side of the road and I eased over as far as I could. Then I couldn't go any further, so I just went in the woods. I remember the car turning over, the motion of turning over, end over end. I wasn't really knocked out. I knew I was not hurt bad because I was numb all over. I remember ..... running from the ..... plantation, coming from the house out to my car, and I spoke to him. Told him I didn't think I was hurt bad. I can see the other, what happened in the wreck. ..... saw the man was unconscious. It's not a nice thing to go through. I was lucky I wasn't killed.

ROSENGARTEN: You were still pinned in the car when your nephew arrived?

DENNIS: I what?

ROSENGARTEN: Were you still pinned in the car when your nephew arrived?

DENNIS: I was thrown out. I was lying in pine saplings. Car was a ...., extra large doors. When we flipped over, I was just thrown out, thrown clear. I had one more wreck after that, but we're just talking about that one now.

ROSENGARTEN: So who finally came upon you to get help?

DENNIS: There were several cars of hunters behind me, coming home from the hunt. Either from an automobile or from a house nearby they called the ambulance pretty quick. It wasn't long before I saw the ambulance there. Luckily for me, my nephew was interning at the ambulance. He and the nurse were in charge of it. He knew my curious situation with my heart surgery, so he knew they had to be very careful, and they were.

ROSENGARTEN: He just happened to come on the scene, it was a coincidence?

DENNIS: Just happened to be assigned to that ambulance that afternoon.

ROSENGARTEN: Oh, he came in the ambulance. And what is his name?

DENNIS: Billy Dennis, Dr. Billy Dennis.

ROSENGARTEN: Is that Markley's child?
DENNIS: No, that's my other brother's. That's Dr. Dennis' son. There's three of us. Markley and Dr. Dennis and myself. Markley [Dr. Billy] Dennis was at Richland Memorial, .... He was at Charleston for a number of years. His son was interning down there, the reason he was on the ambulance. .... experience. You ever been in a wreck?

ROSENGARTEN: No. When I was in college I was on a motorcycle and we hit another car, but it wasn't serious. We walked away from it. It wasn't, we weren't going fast. That was enough.

DENNIS: It's a bad experience.

ROSENGARTEN: Yes. So where did they take you in the ambulance?

DENNIS: They were going to take me to my regular hospital, the Medical College Hospital but they didn't think they'd better go that far. So we went into, what is the hospital at North Charleston?

ROSENGARTEN: Trident?

DENNIS: Trident. I was glad to get there, I'll tell you.

ROSENGARTEN: You were conscious the whole time?

DENNIS: Well, partially conscious. I kept, I guess, losing consciousness, but then coming back.

ROSENGARTEN: Did you go right into surgery?

DENNIS: Yes.

ROSENGARTEN: What were the specific injuries that they were trying to cope with?

DENNIS: My left leg was broken at the knee, my right leg was severely injured, it wasn't broken. My internal injuries were severe in the abdomen area. Had to take out my spleen. I wasn't given much for my life chances at the time really.

ROSENGARTEN: By the time you got to the hospital, were you aware of how seriously you were hurt?

DENNIS: Yes I was. Of course I was all doped up, but I'd wake up every now and then.

ROSENGARTEN: How long were you in the hospital?

DENNIS: The accident was in, about the first of December. I think it was February, out. But I just got out to come into bed. I couldn't get around.

ROSENGARTEN: Did you have professional nursing when you came home?

DENNIS: Have what?

ROSENGARTEN: A professional nurse?

DENNIS: Yes. I had to .... a nurse for a long time. Once a week.

ROSENGARTEN: Once a week. To do the physical therapy?
DENNIS: Yes. I would go down, after I got well and was able to travel again, I'd go down there for physical therapy at the hospital. Then after that I had visitation therapy.

ROSENGARTEN: The whole incident must have been very frightening for Mrs. Dennis.

DENNIS: Yes, it was terrible for her. Natalie, you want to come answer a question?

ROSENGARTEN: She may be all busy.

DENNIS: Natalie!

ROSENGARTEN: We were talking about...

DENNIS: My automobile accident wasn't any problem much for you, was it? [laughs] She had to come in .... .... .... .... you must have been .... ....

MRS. DENNIS: [also laughs] He had just called me on the telephone about, I've forgotten now the timing. Where he called me from, he had a phone in his truck, where he called me from I figured he would have been here in a half an hour. When he didn't come, you know in a half an hour, of course I was beginning to get uneasy. Every time I would call back the truck phone was busy. So I felt like something was wrong. Rembert Junior called me after about an hour, might have been an hour. He said, and I told him, he knew that there had been an accident, and they thought, somebody had called him, they thought it was him. He wanted to, his truck and Rembert's were very much alike, and they wanted to see, he wanted to see if his Daddy was here, and I said no he's not here, and I feel like something has happened because from where he called me, he called me about five minutes before this happened. I know you told her that the man ran you off the road. He was coming around a curve. You've come that way too, right there by Bonneau ferry. Nobody ever called me. No policeman, nobody. To let me know. Rembert Junior said, Well, it must be Daddy. He said, I'll call. This was about an hour and a half. He said, I'll call the hospitals and see what I can find out. So he called and found out they were expecting him at the Medical University. That's where they had intended to take him. He didn't find out it was Rembert, but what they do, Rembert Junior has worked on those, when they used to you know, it wasn't EMS, but he used to help on one of them. What they said was his age, or about his age, I'm sure as much as they could say, but they were expecting, waiting for him to come in. Well, as things happened, he called Trident. Then they told him, I think maybe the next call. You see, we couldn't even find where he was. They said no, he wasn't coming in; they were going to stop at Trident. So, that's how we found... Then I called Luke, I got Luke. I don't know where Luke was, I believe Luke was, still at his store maybe. He came, and T.S. Calhoun came and we went down there. Course when I went in, Rembert looked... They let me go on in. He didn't look that bad, but it was enough to scare you. You knew he was in bad shape, and they told me they have to operate. By then you're numb. I stayed there all that night. The majority of them, after the operation, the majority of them left about three. The hospital was just filled with people, inside and out. His brother, and family, they were all upset because it was just one doctor. We've always used the Medical University. There always a lot of doctors around. Down there when they call in the surgeon, you've got the surgeon and that's it. But Doctor Pardick was very, very good. A good doctor. He, there was a heart surgeon on, and he went in with him. He told me then that he didn't know what was damaged in his stomach, but he thought that he would just have to go in and see. Of course they took his spleen out. We thought during the operation, Billy finally came, Rembert's other brother, a doctor from Columbia, and a cousin came who is a doctor. Jones, from, there were two Jones. Douglas came, or Gene, and they went into the operating room and found out what was what. He was in bad shape. Dorn and I stayed the rest of the night on. You know, you just sat up. Then I was still down there the next day. I had on dungarees. At four o'clock on Saturday afternoon, I still had them on. Then I came home and changed. I went back. I never did leave down there until he left. I stayed. He was in intensive care for a long time. For a month.
DENNIS: I .... she asked me about getting out. The accident was about December the first. I got out about...

MRS. DENNIS: It was after Christmas. The children came down for Christmas. I came home and ate Christmas dinner, darling.

DENNIS: Yes, but I didn't get out the hospital...

MRS. DENNIS: No, you didn't get out of the hospital until January the... I've got the date in yonder, I'll tell you exactly.

DENNIS: .... about the first of February.

MRS. DENNIS: It was two months, wasn't it? That's right, two months.

ROSENGARTEN: Did the accident happen on the first or the fourth?

MRS. DENNIS: The first.

ROSENGARTEN: The first. Some of the newspapers reported the fourth. Better change that.

DENNIS: It was a terrible experience, I'll tell you.

ROSENGARTEN: It makes you think. You just don't know from one minute to the next, you know?

DENNIS: That's right.

ROSENGARTEN: It could all...

MRS. DENNIS: He had the two. December the first. He got out of Trident on January the twenty-eighth. The boys, I think maybe Rembert Junior was driving because .... came for him in the car, and of course he was having trouble bending his knee. He was using a walker. Weren't you using a walker? Had you started using a cane? No, you hadn't started using a cane. He was using a walker. We thought he could have gotten in the front seat, because that seat goes way back and lies down. He couldn't. It was drizzling rain. Rembert said, I can get in. When he started in that front seat, I said, I don't believe he can get his knee in. I think we tried to put you in the back seat first, didn't we? Couldn't get in. He really had a struggle, but he was determined to get in that car, they had said he could go home. He got in. The first time he went to see the doctor, we used a van and took him in a wheelchair. After that he steadily improved. That wasn't a good choice either, was it Rembert? That was terrible. [laughs]

ROSENGARTEN: So the hospital provided a bed for you?

MRS. DENNIS: They said, Mrs. Dennis, that Sunday afternoon, one of the SLED agents asked the hospital if they didn't have just a cot I could lie on, because they couldn't get me to leave. I didn't know this. They said, well, we have a room that, they evidently had a lot of vacant rooms then. It wasn't as full as it is now. They were not crowded. They said we have a room that she can use if she wants to while he's down here. It had a little tiny room to the side; they were very kind and said I could use it. So that's what I did. I wouldn't have been able to stay all the time if it hadn't been for that. They would call me in the middle of the night to come down to the intensive care unit. I, thinking this morning with that dry shampoo, it wasn't dry, this is a liquid, but they knew I'd been wanting to wash his hair. The first time they washed his hair afterwards, they wanted me to see it. That was the first time he'd gotten up I think. He would call for me, and they'd just call me and I'd go down there. I slept in jogging suits, you know, so you could get up.
ROSENGARTEN: So they did all of the repair work in that one first surgery?

MRS. DENNIS: They did that, and then Rembert had an abscess on that side. You know how you have an abscess after an operation? It drained and drained and drained. It was a terrible thing. But Dr. Pardick(?) said, you know he was, Rembert, he really is a good surgeon. He's a good, he said, he came one morning and he said, this is when they found out what this was. He was running a fever and they couldn't find out what it was. He said, last night I couldn't sleep, and I decided what was wrong with Senator Dennis. He has an abscess. I guess they have to just, .... They don't know everything. Three times they thought Rembert was not going to live. The first time they let him, well, I said they thought he wasn't going to live, he had a bad time; they were worried. They brought him to the room after about three weeks Rembert, maybe? Yes. They were trying to get him to eat something, like just those milkshakes? You know what they, I forget what they call them. That's when he had this lung thing that... He got some, he inhaled it, I guess. Course they had to take him back to intensive care again. Then he stayed another two weeks, I believe. Because he was down there through Christmas. Then he came upstairs. It was rough going there for a while. But you know, you just take one day at a time. I felt like he was improving. Did you feel like you were?

DENNIS: [incoherent mumbles]

MRS. DENNIS: We took him back down there. What we didn't know either, was that you could give him a sleeping pill, and he would sleep for three days almost. Any of this medicine that they gave him, you see, that's what he's talking about dreaming, he would just be out of his mind. That's why I say I believe I could do anything. I'm so thankful Rembert was not mentally affected. Because I think a mind thing is the worst .... For people who care for other people, you know?

ROSENGARTEN: That's when you really lose.

MRS. DENNIS: He had one knot right here, on the side of his head. They were worried about it. It wasn't any of that affected your mind and caused you all this, that's what they found out. They found out it was the, what is that pain stuff? Morphine?

ROSENGARTEN: Morphine. It's a medication.

MRS. DENNIS: When we stopped all of that medicine, then he started improving. Let me tell you, to get him out of bed in that intensive care, that's the bad thing about a hospital like that. They had one orderly. I would have to literally go around and beg strange men; I would use doctors, anybody, to help get Rembert out of that bed. The nurses would use a draw sheet, and they would, to pick him up, do you remember that? He was just petrified. That was the only way they could get him up, see. To sit him up straight. So what I did was just finally, when it was time to get him up, I would just round up enough men. You know, you just, usually the children called me, they say that I hesitate to ask people to do things, and I always have, but that was one time I'd ask strange men. Dr. Pardick(?) helped many a time, lifting, you know the just...

DENNIS: I didn't think I had a chance of ever walking again.

MRS. DENNIS: He told the therapist, he said, no way. The first time they took him in there on those bars. You know, really, I did not know how he would do. I really, honestly did not. I didn't tell you that. But I didn't know how he would do it. Dorn came down. She had not seen him everyday, because she couldn't, you know with four children you can't come. She, what upset her, he went in for therapy; well here was this big room. Do you know how, have you ever been in those therapy rooms? Well, you're in a big room, and Trident and the Medical University too, they just have things, it's as big as this house, I guess that room was. Pretty big, you know, open. Some of the people aren't exactly right, and they would sit up there and look at you. Poor Dorn, I just tell you, I had to laugh at her, if I hadn't felt like crying. She was, he was sort of sitting back in a corner, and here she is, it seems
to me she had on pants, she was almost out of her head trying to keep people from looking at you [laughs]. You know, she felt, Oh, how can they look at my Daddy like this? Because you were struggling to do whatever it was they wanted you to do. But we made it. Did you have a crutch when you came home, or were you using a walker? Rembert, I believe you were using a crutch. You went from two crutches, and they got him a walker. That is a nice walker he has. I hope your father has a good one because there are two or three, there are a number of good, of kinds, and some of them are better than others. I'm sure your mother has probably looked at them.

ROSENGARTEN: Yes. Also, she told me that all that equipment is paid for by their Medicaid or whatever.

MRS. DENNIS: That was paid for. Some things, this chair that we got that never has been any good, it came from... Because it bothered his stomach, and we had to buy another one. They never have paid for it, but we think they're going to pay for it. They said that was mistake. A lot of things they don't pay that you think that they would, but a lot of things they do. We came out pretty good. Fair, I would say.

ROSENGARTEN: Well, what happened to the other guy?

MRS. DENNIS: Well, he wasn't that sick. They took him on to the Medical University. I guess people like that, when they cause something... He had a Massachusetts license and he had insurance, but the insurance company never would pay because they said he had insurance up there, and that it was not for South Carolina. I've never been able to understand that. So not one cent did we get from him. He didn't have a license. Wait a minute. They said he would never be able to get a license in South Carolina. But you know, you wonder. I don't know what happened to him.

ROSENGARTEN: Was he from Massachusetts or from South Carolina?

MRS. DENNIS: He was from South Carolina. I think maybe he had been living up there. I don't know what it was.

ROSENGARTEN: What ever became of the civil suit? Didn't you sue him for two million?

MRS. DENNIS: Nothing. You know, how can you get something...

DENNIS: Wasn't anything to .... ....

MRS. DENNIS: The effort was made, but...

DENNIS: The suit was filed, for two million.

ROSENGARTEN: His name was Charles MacNeil, is that right? And he was a black guy? It's interesting to me, I read all those news reports, there were hundreds of them, it seemed. They never mentioned his race, and then I saw a picture of him in the cab of his vehicle, and I said, gosh, this guy's black. I was very interested...

MRS. DENNIS: He was drinking.

ROSENGARTEN: He had been drinking? Oh. I swear, drunk drivers...

MRS. DENNIS: He was drinking. You know, its easy to get on that side of the road anyway. You look when you're coming along like this. Rembert's truck went off the road on this side, and then it turned over and went off on the other side. He was very fortunate to have somebody to come along to find the vein and get the I.V. in.

ROSENGARTEN: That was...
MRS. DENNIS: Billy...

ROSENGARTEN: ...Dr. Dennis'...

MRS. DENNIS: ...nurse.

ROSENGARTEN: ...friend.

MRS. DENNIS: Yes, the girlfriend, who really did it.

ROSENGARTEN: What was her name?

MRS. DENNIS: Isn't it awful not to...

ROSENGARTEN: It's in the news report.

MRS. DENNIS: I've always thought it was very strange that not one soul ever let me know. That was no policeman, nobody.

ROSENGARTEN: But don't you think once he got into the hospital, the hospital would have called?

MRS. DENNIS: Yes. But ordinarily, I asked them about that, and ordinarily they said a patrolman would let you know.

ROSENGARTEN: Especially a state senator.

MRS. DENNIS: Yes. They knew who it was. The only thing I could figure was maybe if they, Billy was there and maybe they thought Billy was going to call. Instead of Billy calling me, or letting anybody know, see nobody let Rembert Junior know, somebody just pulled in at the filling station in Cainhoy, that's where Rembert was living at the time, and told them that it looked like a truck that belonged to Rembert Dennis, Rembert Junior. So they called to, just neighborly, called to check on him, and that's how we found out. I would have eventually found out, because I was getting ready to call. I had already called Luke I believe. That's how Luke knew that I was worried about you.

ROSENGARTEN: Senator, you told several reporters in the weeks afterward, a little about the dreams and nightmares that you had. Do you recall any of those now?

DENNIS: It was just a series of... Let me get my breath.

MRS. DENNIS: He had a problem. They couldn't get the, you know the tube, that's one reason Rembert's voice is weak. They couldn't get the, what do you call that tube they put in your throat? They had to put it in because he couldn't, he didn't, they had to give him oxygen because he couldn't, what is that you couldn't? They couldn't clear him up, that's what it was, his lungs. Had trouble keeping him clear. He would be so terrible in intensive care. Those people with the white coats, you kept saying, they're coming in here to get me to take me away. Everybody who would go in, he would say, please, please take me. He would tell T.S.[Calhoun] to get his car and bring it around. Then, he had sense, he said now you've got to find something to put on my feet to go. He was pathetic. But I guess you... I remember one time a terrible, he was making a speech on the Senate floor, this one wasn't bad, this one was good, he was making the best speech you have ever heard. Dorn and I were in the room with him. Just real good. I was trying to calm him down. He said, Natalie, what are you doing, I be on the Senate floor. Don't you know you're not ever supposed to get up here on the Senate floor? [laughs] Once before they gave him some sort of medicine in Houston, that he would see things. A lot of times at night he would wake me up. He would be
talking, and I would get up. He would see things. You try to... He needed somebody with him, is one reason I think the hospital wanted me to stay, too.

ROSENGARTEN: Of course. You're a lot cheaper than a special duty nurse. They didn't have to pay you.

MRS. DENNIS: I took the Christmas tree down that year for them. I remember.

ROSENGARTEN: Among the things that I read, I think I read something about you're having a vision of your father and also some past governors, during this period of kind of semi-consciousness.

MRS. DENNIS: Hallucination, yes. Do you remember that?

DENNIS: Yes.

MRS. DENNIS: I remember it. It seems to me you dreamed about your family a lot.

DENNIS: I know I did that. I thought in the next room was the family involved in my father's death.

MRS. DENNIS: The people who killed his father. He would want me to do something about these things. It was just, sometimes it'd go on for days. I didn't realize, and I should have, from Houston, that what they were giving him affected him. Finally, I asked Dr. Pardick(?) if he couldn't change some of it. Well, they did try to, but it still affected him.

ROSENGARTEN: This isn't the only time I've heard of this reaction. I have a good friend who was in a near-fatal car wreck. If anything, I think it may have been worse than yours, because they told him, the therapist told him he'd never walk again, and he does walk. He said under the drugs that he was on, he got so paranoid that he thought that someone was coming to get him and he pulled all the tubes, he was on I.V.s, with all these hook-ups, he would pull them all out and try to get up and walk out because he thought someone was coming to get him.

DENNIS: I tried to do that.

MRS. DENNIS: Oh, he did it many a time. You might not remember doing it, but you did it. They finally tied his hands down. He would beg you to take his hands loose. I know you remember that, don't you? He said, I won't do it again.

DENNIS: I was threatening to hit the nurse.

MRS. DENNIS: He did that too, a number of times. It's a frightening thing to them, to see this. It's so real.

ROSENGARTEN: Also, you had an actual threat on your life not long before your father had been assassinated, and then the incident with the guy around here. Then your life was almost taken in a car wreck, so you could understand how...

DENNIS: I lost an older brother by pneumonia.

MRS. DENNIS: The worst thing was those people who would come in, in the white coats. What they came in there to do, he didn't like them to do it, because they were trying to get the film out. They would take, they were trying to get him to breathe right. He wouldn't want to do it, and he was scared to death of them. You forget these things until you... I guess you just put them out of your mind until you start thinking about them. The worst thing Rembert did was in the second car accident. When your mouth was wired? [laughs] They had his jaw wired and they called me to come in, he was in intensive care, and he had taken the wires out, some of the wires. They said,
nobody's ever done this before. We had to call in the middle of the night to get the man to come back up, and he
didn't want to come, this was one of the doctors. The man who did it was not there, that wired his jaw together,
whomever was in with him didn't want to come. They came and they said we'll let him wait until in the morning. I
believe you did it twice. You took that wire out twice. How in the world he got it out, I don't know. He was
terrible. They tied him down again that time. But you survived. He's tough. You tired of being tough?

DENNIS: I think you all are going to have to talk about something else, or you're going to have to carry me to the
hospital.

[laughter]

ROSENGARTEN: Well, in the meantime, back at the Senate, I believe Marshall Williams had taken over some of
the reins.

MRS. DENNIS: He was acting.

ROSENGARTEN: He was acting. One news report described him as a virtual marshmallow of a senator
compared to Gressette.

MRS. DENNIS: That's right.

ROSENGARTEN: How well do you think he and James Waddell filled their leadership roles during this period?

DENNIS: Gressette did about all my work for me.

MRS. DENNIS: Yes, Marshall didn't do anything, he just got the title, I guess. Was Marion living then? Had he
died? You know, I'm...

DENNIS: [mumbles]

MRS. DENNIS: He was living then? I don't believe so.

ROSENGARTEN: No, he had died in March of eighty-four.

MRS. DENNIS: He died in March of eighty-four, and you had your wreck...

ROSENGARTEN: In December.

MRS. DENNIS: So Marshall was really the top man, but you really let Jim Waddell and...

DENNIS: Jack Lindsay.

MRS. DENNIS: ...Jack Lindsay do his work. He didn't even let him do... See, by the time Rembert was mentally
all right, I mean physically able to talk on the phone and everything, they pretty well let them handle what he had to
do.

ROSENGARTEN: You had, in a previous interview, you had expressed some doubts about Waddell's abilities, at
least intellectual abilities. I mean, did you feel that he rose to the occasion? I don't know if that's a hard question to
answer.

DENNIS: .... .... more strength than anything else.
MRS. DENNIS: Waddell was able to do it because he had Jack Lindsay to help him, wasn't he Rembert?

DENNIS: What do you mean I had worried about them being able to do the job? I guess I'd have to say you're right, I didn't. Had some of the others lower down the line that could help.

MRS. DENNIS: Rembert had a staff who could do a lot, the majority of what had to be done.

ROSENGARTEN: So, Marshall Williams got the position on the basis of seniority, and then Waddell would have been right after him?

MRS. DENNIS: And then Jack Lindsay.

ROSENGARTEN: How soon did you start trying to keep up with the legislative business?

DENNIS: (too faint to hear)

MRS. DENNIS: Even before though, he was well enough to do anything, they would call him. Calling me to ask me to ask him if thus and so could, you know, if they could do, if this was all right to do. His clerk handled a lot for him. He came down and talked to him. Frank handled a lot of your work.

ROSENGARTEN: What is his name?

MRS. DENNIS: Frank Cagianno(?)

ROSENGARTEN: Someone mentioned him to me.

MRS. DENNIS: His brother is a surgeon. I guess he's still there. He was a top one there are the Medical University. What kind of surgeon was he now, I'm trying to think. Smart, capable person, but anyway his brother is there. Italian. Cagianno(?) is really the correct pronunciation. He came down, and he talked by phone a lot with me, and I would ask Rembert to, he would tell them what to do. That was before you left the hospital, Rembert.

DENNIS: I was about ready to go back but then I had the second wreck.

ROSENGARTEN: You had just begun, I think, later on I was going to ask you about the first time you went off to Columbia was the Budget and Control Meeting in August, and then November...

MRS. DENNIS: Yes, the first of November.

[SIDE ONE ENDS, SIDE TWO BEGINS]

MRS. DENNIS: We really didn't think there was that much wrong with him. He was wired, his jaw was broken. The reason that we left from there and went to the Medical University was because he had, oh lord, those small blood clots that were in your lungs. What do you call that? Can't think now. I've forgotten for a minute what you call it. But anyway, that was why. I just felt like they had, they might would have a different treatment. What they told me at the Medical, at Trident, was that he had to stay in bed, flat on his back for thirty days. Well, I knew he wouldn't be able to live if he had to do that. So, I just decided I'd better...

ROSENGARTEN: Move him. So the second wreck occurred right near Trident hospital, on the dual-lane?

MRS. DENNIS: Yes, on the dual-lane. In front of, I forget what it was, a truck. They were never really blamed;
they might have paid a little. We didn't get anything out of that one either, except just a very small amount. That truck stopped directly in front of us. No signal whatsoever. To turn left. He'd missed his light and went over to the next turn; of course we didn't know that. I think Lowe's is over on your left. I don't know what's there now. I don't get down there enough. There was a hardware store over on my right, and after this accident I went out there, I knew the children would be upset, while they were waiting to take Rembert well across, and called. Rembert Junior, I got him on the phone and told him. He said he would call the others to meet us at Trident.

ROSENGARTEN: So you were in the front seat?

MRS. DENNIS: I was in the back seat.

ROSENGARTEN: You were in the back seat and the senator was next to the SLED...

MRS. DENNIS: I didn't think Mark was going fast, but I think that he was maybe not paying enough attention. That's neither here nor there. [interrupted by a phone call]

MRS. DENNIS: Even Larry, as tight as he is, Larry D????. You know, I don't mean tight, careful with money. He said you know, to get money you have to spend money. He has overspent. When you pay that much for a hotel room, that's pretty ....

ROSENGARTEN: Have they, is this in response to what's been going on, or has something new happened?

DENNIS: Had enough of it, that's all.

ROSENGARTEN: He's had enough of it. I was wondering, it seemed like they were pushing this...

MRS. DENNIS: .... does, and he .... I thought.

ROSENGARTEN: The Trustees? There were, in that list of expenditures they published in the newspaper, there were only a couple that I knew anything about through my work with McKissick. One of them was the cocktail party for the reception in Washington. Which, I'm not, it didn't say so, but I'm almost sure that that was the opening of the first Egyptian show that McKissick put on. Which was their biggest show ever.

MRS. DENNIS: I think that's what it was, because later on they showed what they were doing. It didn't say McKissick, but it sounded like that.

ROSENGARTEN: It was the only show McKissick's ever had that got to Washington. It was very heavily funded. To be perfectly frank, ten thousand dollars is not a lot for a reception, because for my little basket show, the reception was several thousand dollars. In fact, we spent more on liquor for the reception than we spent on baskets for the show. When I heard that, I said, my God, this is kind of crazy. They said look, you ought to have one big reception a year, we only do it once, and that's the bill. That's what it costs to throw one of these parties, and then we don't do it again until the next year.

MRS. DENNIS: The other thing that they said, that he used a limousine. Well, spent three hundred and something dollars, or maybe a hundred and eighty-seven, in Washington in one day, taking him from one meeting to the other. But Bea said, for her to go into New York, she had to get a car, and she said sometimes they call them limousines. You don't know whether you get a car or a limousine or what. She said a bus, I had to change three times, she said Ed had gone and he told me how to do it, said it was going to cost me thirty-eight dollars just to go in.

ROSENGARTEN: So is he going to announce this?
DENNIS: What?

ROSENGARTEN: Holderman's going to announce...

DENNIS: Four o'clock.

ROSENGARTEN: At four o'clock.

DENNIS: He wasn't going to let anybody find out from him between now and then.

MRS. DENNIS: ... ... ... tell you.

ROSENGARTEN: I wonder if they have someone in mind that they...

DENNIS: I feel sure that they do, but I don't care who it is I'll say before they choose .... .... real big step down.

MRS. DENNIS: He's really brought in a lot.

ROSENGARTEN: Well who's been driving the force to push him out?

DENNIS: I think a combination of... He's lost his support on the board, a lot of it, not all of it. His, what was the man's name?

MRS. DENNIS: Mungo, the chairman.

DENNIS: Mungo hasn't handled it good.

MRS. DENNIS: No, and he's been against him on a few issues, and I thought he talked sort of ugly in the press two or three times, you know. I mean I just thought it was unnecessary. You know, tell the man what he's doing wrong, and tell him where he has to stick, but then, it was too much going on in the press. I think the press can make you.

ROSENGARTEN: They love a story like this. With fiscal irregularities, and...

MRS. DENNIS: I don't blame people who give to Carolina. They don't want it all over the newspapers, another college might feel like they ought to be contributing to them, that much. So, I think for them to have to open that up was not fair. I bet that's what it was, because it was an odd thing.

ROSENGARTEN: Well, there was something else too, which I thought was kind of amusing. They said that he spent forty-two hundred dollars for three hundred and fifty hand-made ornaments. O.K., several years ago someone from McKissick called me and asked me where they could get some of those Christmas bells that the sweetgrass basket-makers make. I told them the lady that I got mine from that were real, real inexpensive, like a real bargain. Katherine said that she was going to go... I don't remember what it was for, but it was a Christmas gift from the president to so and so. I'm sure that's part of it, but, I mean, assuming that it was legitimate to give a Christmas gift, that was a bargain. I mean, we're talking about three or four dollars for a little gift. It's not an expensive gift. So I thought that was kind of strange.

MRS. DENNIS: I think it's hard for people, they feel you ought not to give anything, and you've got to when you, when people give to the University, you want to say thank you.
ROSENGARTEN: Well, I sure hope it doesn't affect...

MRS. DENNIS: The program.

ROSENGARTEN: ...the work that we do. Because when George Terry stepped down, well, stepped off I should say, he used to be the director of the museum, first he went to work for one of the vice-presidents and then he became director of all collections. His salary as director went with him, and McKissick didn't recoup. What it meant was basically their highest paid job left, and they all moved up. The chief curator became director; the curator of history became chief curator... They lost a whole position, they did. Ever since then it's been difficult, very, very difficult to fund anything at the museum.

MRS. DENNIS: It's hard to get money. It's hard for the public to understand money that's spent for art and any of the arts. Things like museums, I think. When they see need in other areas. Well, that's a shame. I knew something had happened to him when he called. See, Markley was close to him and he lost another man. That was the third one on the board this year. .... .... .... on the board who usually would take up for Holderman. Mungo was fighting Markley because, Markley had voted against him. Because I guess he knew, you know, that he was against Holderman, eh, Rembert?

DENNIS: Yes.

ROSENGARTEN: That may be a reason that Markley lost.

MRS. DENNIS: Oh, yes! Because Mungo went there and fought him. That's what Bea said. Bea said Mungo's here every day, working. That's right.

ROSENGARTEN: It's very strange to me to think of the university as part of the political scene. You know, having gone to a private university, I just don't think of politics as being so involved with this.

MRS. DENNIS: Well, because the Trustees are elected by the Legislature.

ROSENGARTEN: And the funding.

MRS. DENNIS: That's right. That's a shame.

DENNIS: I almost knocked myself out with a review of my own problems. [Mrs. Dennis laughs] .... .... .... don't go too much longer.

ROSENGARTEN: Okay.

MRS. DENNIS: Get on something cheery.

ROSENGARTEN: Yes, right. All right. Well, in the spring of 1985, while you were beginning your recovery, the Columbia Record reported a renewed power struggle between the young senators and the so-called "Old Guard." How did your absence affect the political balance in the legislature?

DENNIS: My absence what?

ROSENGARTEN: In that first spring of eighty-five, when you were not in Columbia, the newspapers seemed to think that the young senators were, I mean, they didn't say it, but were taking advantage of...

MRS. DENNIS: That's when McConnell and those tried to take over.
DENNIS: Gressette wasn't there?

MRS. DENNIS: No, Gressette died in eighty-four. Don't you remember they came out in the newspaper with a picture with Drummond and some of them with those t-shirts on? I think that was about that time.

DENNIS: I remember now.

MRS. DENNIS: I forget what they called themselves.

DENNIS: Young Turks. Your question to me about it was what?

ROSENGARTEN: How did your absence from the legislature affect the political balance?

DENNIS: Because of my seniority and chairmanship of Finance, it gave the young Turks, as they called them, a chance to make a little progress.

MRS. DENNIS: You know, Rembert was able to glue them together, the senators, to make them come together with a compromise. It was a void there that...

DENNIS: That's a big point.

MRS. DENNIS: ...a void there that they were not able to pull the people, the senators together, they were going so many different ways.

DENNIS: My not being on the scene to be a...

MRS. DENNIS: Compromiser.

DENNIS: Compromiser. Was a big problem.

MRS. DENNIS: They've had trouble since Rembert's been gone, the Senate has had trouble with that same thing. They are going in different directions.

ROSENGARTEN: One specific thing that I think the newspapers picked up on was how long it took to get the budget passed when you weren't there. The whole budget approval process just kind of ground to a halt.

MRS. DENNIS: They had a struggle. Still are having one.

DENNIS: ... right now.

MRS. DENNIS: They did miss him.

ROSENGARTEN: What was your opinion of Woody Brooks, the director of the division of local government, who agreed to accept retirement in May of eighty-five?

DENNIS: Had a very high regard for him. He was very capable in handling what his job was. The biggest problem he had was when some of the legislators tried to interfere with his discharge of his own duties. Of course he made some mistakes, but Woody Brooks was an ideal man for the job he had.

ROSENGARTEN: What exactly did his job entail?
DENNIS: Well, he was in charge of the, forget the term for it.

MRS. DENNIS: Can't think of the word, but it's the help that goes back to the counties.

ROSENGARTEN: He...

MRS. DENNIS: Coordinated.

ROSENGARTEN: He gave some kind of grants, he was...

MRS. DENNIS: That's right.

ROSENGARTEN: ...granting funds of some kind.

MRS. DENNIS: He coordinated the money. It now comes through, under the governor's office, but at that time it did not, did it Rembert?

DENNIS: Some of both.

MRS. DENNIS: Some of both? He handled the funds that were state money, but came back to the counties.

DENNIS: That was the big thrust of it.

MRS. DENNIS: There was a lot of complaint because some of them would want it for just almost anything.

DENNIS: He had a job of ... proper use of the money between the large counties and the small ones. Be sure that the revenues were used fairly for the various needs in the state.

MRS. DENNIS: They've made a few changes in that, but I think Woody was a fair man. But he was criticized by the newspapers, too.

DENNIS: Woody had nerve enough to speak up when he was unfairly attacked.

MRS. DENNIS: That was the one thing about him. He was a little open. He didn't mind telling the press off. Sometimes he should have hushed. Shouldn't he Rembert? Maybe sometimes he shouldn't have talked to them?

DENNIS: Maybe.

ROSENGARTEN: What was your position on the rolling reserve fund to finance capital improvements?

DENNIS: I was in favor of prioritizing .... it. .... ....?

ROSENGARTEN: Prioritizing?

DENNIS: I was in favor of using it. .... .... benefits. Highest priorities. Keep a good grip on it.

ROSENGARTEN: Senator, if you had been unable to return to the Senate after the car wreck, who would have been your choice as a successor?

DENNIS: From Berkeley, or...
ROSENGARTEN: Yes, from the Berkeley area.

DENNIS: I would have supported Representative Helmly [Robert Linwood] because of his previous experience.


DENNIS: Watson was another one that I would have had confidence in. Gene Williams was another one. But I'd better not name too many.

ROSENGARTEN: Was the Russell person, Imogene Tallin (?) Russell, was that related to the ex-governor? Was she related to the ex-governor?

DENNIS: I don't know.

ROSENGARTEN: Who am I thinking of? Oh, I'm thinking of Russell Williams. Never mind. I didn't recognize these names except a couple of them.

DENNIS: She was a Tallin? She married a local politician and undertaker. But she was mayor of the town, that's the reason they, the way they got prominent; I don't know why they got Russell's name in there.

ROSENGARTEN: When you returned to the Senate for the first time in August eighty-five for that Budget and Control Board meeting, was it a very emotional kind of return for you?

DENNIS: Yes it was. That was my life, had been put on the shelf temporarily. Getting back in harness again, of course it was highly emotional. Now I know why it was. I'd love to get back again.

ROSENGARTEN: One thing I realized looking over these notes was that you actually only had a year as president pro tem, even a little less.

DENNIS: That's right. But I served so closely with Marion Gressette, I was perfectly willing to not be pro tem as long as he was. I wanted it when he gave it up. .... .... .... pretty quickly.

ROSENGARTEN: What was your role in passing the 1984 Education Improvement Act?

DENNIS: What was my what in it?

ROSENGARTEN: What was your role in having it passed, or what were your ideas about how to implement it?

DENNIS: I considered it most important to do it, and I supported it every way I possibly could. As chairman of the Finance Committee I had a big responsibility in .... all the money that way going to be necessary. We were going to use the shifting of some for the education money, not getting it all new, to cut down the costs. Natalie!

[tape stopped, then resumes]

ROSENGARTEN: We don't have long to go here. I won't tire you out too much longer. Isaiah Dequincy Newman died in October of 1985. Can you tell me what he was known for, and what your opinion of the man was?
DENNIS: I think he was tremendous leader for the blacks. He was holding a proper course for changes that were due. He went about it in an intellectual and fair-minded manner. The black race lost a .... .... conservative-led cause in this state when he passed away. I think he was just an ideal man for the blacks to have for leadership of their effort to maintain their proper rights.

ROSENGARTEN: Was he in the Senate?

DENNIS: He was.

ROSENGARTEN: Had he been in the house before that?

DENNIS: No.

ROSENGARTEN: You had, a couple of years after his death, you were quoted in the newspaper. You described him as "a pioneer, a warrior, a crusader who pushed back the frontiers of human justice. He stepped out first and sometimes alone in the quest for human rights and human dignity." What specifically was he known for? [long pause] I can't remember, was he an attorney?

DENNIS: No, he was an educator. Anything that came along that was for helping the blacks make an advance up the ladder. For years and years he was one of the top leaders.

ROSENGARTEN: Did you know him personally?

DENNIS: We sat in the Senate together. I didn't know him, I've never been to his home, but I knew him as a fellow senator. I thought he was a very impressive fellow.

ROSENGARTEN: Shortly after his decease, you suffered a second, injuries in the second auto accident in North Charleston on November the first, and then as if that weren't enough the fire at Lewisfield in January of that year (1986?). In the newspapers you appeared philosophical about what you described as "another hard lick." What caused the fire, where did you live while the house was being repaired? In a way you were still, I'm sure you still were recovering from your accident.

DENNIS: Yes. We moved to the cabin, Mepkin cabin. I had it for hunting. .... .... place for hunting. We just made a home out of it. I was very pleased with it, and appreciative for the use of it.

ROSENGARTEN: This was on property, not your property, someone else's?

DENNIS: It belonged to the monks at the monastery at Mepkin. It was my cabin put on their property. Out in the woods and along the creek. Ideal for me was not life on the river. Moved up the river a little bit and off of it a little bit. Great location for thinking and ....

ROSENGARTEN: Do you know how the fire started here?

DENNIS: The fire started in... [pauses, listening to Mrs. Dennis on the phone] Faulty electrical set-up started it.

ROSENGARTEN: You were in the house when the fire started?

DENNIS: Right. It was in the afternoon about four o'clock. I'd had my afternoon rest. A fisherman came and knocked on the door. By that time it was making a little bit of noise. My wife and I called the fire department, and I was sure there was nothing I could do. I got outside and sat in a chair. Stayed right there within the rocked-in area.
The fire was on the front, and it gradually came on through the back. I stayed there during the entire fire, sitting there in that chair. That was some experience.

ROSENGARTEN: Did they send more than one, what do you call it, truck with the hoses?

DENNIS: Fire-truck. Yes, they had several. They hooked up to the water in the river. Had plenty of water after they got set up. Took them a while to get set up. .... .... another bad experience.

ROSENGARTEN: Well, what amazed me reading the reports of this was your positive attitude. I don't know how you maintained such a positive outlook on things after so many, really severe set-backs.

DENNIS: Trust in the Lord. Depend on him. You wouldn't deserve it, but he'd look out for you. Our home in Pinopolis was destroyed by fire, so it wasn't my first experience. I was at Furman University. My sister and brother-in-law came to the campus that Sunday afternoon that was the day of the fire. Told me about the fire. That's some news to receive, I can tell you. Then my mother and I were living in a garage apartment which was at the rear of the house that we bought in Pinopolis .... .... That caught on fire. So, my third home fire. Two of them complete losses. Those kind of experiences make you a man of God. You develop a stronger faith and greater courage. Not a good way to sharpen up your courage, but you learn how to take it.

ROSENGARTEN: So you see these kinds of, this series of trials as kind of the Lord's way of testing you, or...

DENNIS: I look at it from the viewpoint of definitely it's the Lord's doing. I don't, not capable of figuring out for what reasons of course, but I know it's His will. I can do nothing but accept it. Never got, that I recall. My heart hurt me, I got sad, but I never felt like wrong was being inflicted on me. Look what he's done for me through the years.

ROSENGARTEN: In January 1986, you denied the intention of retiring in eighty-eight, in the next election year. You told reporters, "I've got a lame leg, but I deny being a lame duck yet." At this point were you seriously considering running for the Senate again in eighty-eight?

DENNIS: Very much so. If I hadn't been so physically incapacitated, I would have run again. Things that were happening dictated to me that I needed to run if I could get the strength. Pulled as hard as I could and I couldn't get any more strength than a, than I exhibited.

ROSENGARTEN: What was your reception like when you returned to the Senate chambers in March of eighty-six?

DENNIS: The senators were very wonderful in their attitude toward me. I got a good welcome back. I knew my services would be limited by pain and injuries. Because of my handicap, I got even stronger cooperation from my colleagues. I determined to continue to serve as long as I could produce. I had a number of years of seniority that were advantageous to me, but my county and this state needed things to be done that I in my position would be responsible for. I knew I wasn't going to be them, so I just had plan on stepping out. It was a heart-breaking experience.

ROSENGARTEN: When you first came back to the Senate in March, you really hadn't, you were leaving an open mind about whether you would be able to stay with it?

DENNIS: Yes. I was going to at least try and see.

ROSENGARTEN: What were your thoughts and feelings when you learned of house speaker emeritus Sol Blatt's death in May of eighty-six?
DENNIS: What was the first part of it again?

ROSENGARTEN: What were your thoughts and feelings?

DENNIS: Speaker Blatt and I were very close personal friends. He was very considerate of what I had been through.

[TAPE EIGHTEEN ENDS, TAPE NINETEEN BEGINS]

ROSENGARTEN: Senator Dennis I'm going to begin with the last question we were talking about last week. What were your thoughts and feelings when you learned of house speaker emeritus Sol Blatt's death in May of 1986?

DENNIS: I was very much upset to see that he was going to be leaving us. I was one of his great admirers in the Senate. .... .... .... .... brought back all those thoughts of the experience I had with the Speaker. He was over in the Senate just about two, three weeks before he died. Standing there inside the doorway of the Senate chambers. He'd always hug me and kiss me on the cheek. I knew South Carolina was losing one of its most distinguished servants of all time when he left.

ROSENGARTEN: He was a personal friend of yours as well as a colleague, is that so?

DENNIS: He was. We that sort of relationship develop when I was in the house. The house would go on a bus to Spartanburg or Greenville, somewhere on special trips. .... .... .... lot of good times on the bus, and I learned to sit and talk with him. He was a great personality.

ROSENGARTEN: He described in his, in the interviews that the McKissick people did with him, his father coming into South Carolina as an itinerant peddler. That's quite an achievement for a man with that background to reach the position he did.

DENNIS: Right. By today's paper you can see he left a fine son, too. .... .... a reminder that we still have Sol Blatt.

ROSENGARTEN: Did he just have one child?

DENNIS: That's all.

ROSENGARTEN: Senator, do you recall what settlement was reached with the NAACP over its lawsuit challenging the 1984 reapportionment of the South Carolina Senate?

DENNIS: I don't recall any recall any real concessions. I think we stood our ground pretty well. Some of the complaints that the suit made were taken care of anyhow. As I recall it, they didn't really win anything by the suit. It was sort of a confirmation to changes the legislature was voluntarily making.

ROSENGARTEN: At this, in this same session, Governor Riley vetoed a $4.4 million dollar bond issue for a horse and cattle arena at Clemson University, and at the same time he supported a $2.9 million dollar bond for the Santee Canal State Park. Did you approve of this, of this veto and this approval?

DENNIS: He first indicated to the legislature that he was going to veto both of them. I pointed out to him from our standpoint the significant importance of the Santee-Cooper Canal State Park. He looked into it, and finally agreed that we were entitled to our... Wasn't a matching thing anyhow. Wasn't like Clemson University getting something for the upstate and Berkeley County getting something for the lower state. The Santee-Cooper, was putting in place
a project that had been postponed entirely too long to start with. All the sacrifices that Berkeley County people made for the Santee-Cooper project, Berkeley County location didn't have anything special from Santee-Cooper. Until we got that recognition.

ROSENGARTEN: How did you warrant honorary membership in the so-called "Piedmont Ring," the new set of powerful politicians from the upcountry? They inducted you as an honorary member at this period.

DENNIS: That was just a little legislative, political maneuvering. Had a Rembert Dennis Day in Greenville. I had a talk and a luncheon and speakers were, what do you call it when you're critical of the honoree? [a roast] For example, I remember Senator Gressette my desk mate was the main speaker for the Senate and he had some, in his remarks he included, all because I went to Furman University I tried to favor the Piedmont from time to time in the legislature. It was just a good day of good people. I enjoyed it very much. They were very gracious, and were very hospitable and some of the speakers were very complimentary. We had our football coach, Billy McLeod?, and he gave me a little hard time in a nice way. It was a nice occasion to remember.

ROSENGARTEN: Do you think that there was an increase in power in the upcountry at this point in the early eighties?

DENNIS: Legislatively the political operation, and I don't think any real concessions were made, but maybe a little more consideration was given to being fairer to upcountry by lowcountry legislators. .... insisted on vice versa.

ROSENGARTEN: You met with Governor Carroll Campbell and House Speaker Robert J. Sheehan on the Governor's first day in office in January of eighty-seven. Do you recall what issues you discussed at that luncheon?

DENNIS: Just about everything that was on the front of the legislative program. .... effort by Campbell to open his office to the representative of the house and the representative of the Senate to try to mend any defects that may be in the relationship between the legislature and the governor's office in working together. I thought it was a very good meeting. I'm glad that the governor had it because I remember the .... difference between the house and the Senate .... new speaker of the house... I'm glad for the opportunity of hearing him out, talking with him, letting the governor help bring out any differences we had between the two bodies that could be unstuck, so to speak.

ROSENGARTEN: What was Campbell's attitude at that point about the pending Riley appointments? The people that Riley had appointed, but the appointments hadn't gone through yet.

DENNIS: [mumbles] who was involved, what positions were involved. That's one of the things we talked about. See if we couldn't put together the differences.

ROSENGARTEN: According to the State newspaper, the first Republican governor in this century, Dr. James B. Edwards, was elected on a quote "fluke, Campbell was not." Do you agree with this judgment?

DENNIS: Yes, that's the correct judgment. I don't agree with the word fluke. Edwards was elected after Democrats opened a battle within their own party. That's when .... .... Democratic Party differences in the governor between... Who went to court over it?

ROSENGARTEN: It was the election when Pug Ravenel was disqualified.

DENNIS: That's who I was trying to think of.

ROSENGARTEN: Yes, he was forced to drop out. I guess that's what they meant by a fluke. If he hadn't, if Ravenel had been able to run, perhaps Edwards would not have gotten in.

DENNIS: That's right. I don't think there's any doubt about it. Ravenel could have stayed; he would have won the
Democratic nomination. He did win it, and it was taken from him. That was a big help to the Republicans, and Edwards was ready to take advantage of it and did. It was a good thing for South Carolina. Edwards made an excellent governor.

**ROSENGARTEN:** But you feel Campbell was elected on his own merits?

**DENNIS:** That's right. A political mix-up with the Democrats gave him a better opportunity in the campaign, and of course he took advantage of it and got elected. His service was bipartisan to a great extent, and he just made an A-1 governor.

**ROSENGARTEN:** Do you feel that South Carolina has benefited by the emergence of a true two-party system?

**DENNIS:** Very much so. Keeps the government out... Helps the competitive spirit. Democrats, during their years of monopoly were inclined to take South Carolina, just like in other places where they monopolized, to be a little careless about their policies and providing for progress for the people. A strong two-party system, in my judgment, unquestionably is the best. ... the competition be strong, and effort to make the state better, governmentally speaking, is .... .... stronger with two parties.

**ROSENGARTEN:** Do you think you felt this same way in the early years of your service, in the first the house and then the Senate? In other words, in 1940, would you have said the same thing, that you would welcome a strong Republican Party, etc.?

**DENNIS:** I wouldn't have dared said so publicly, and I don't think I would have said so privately, talking to you. Because it wasn't anticipated, it wouldn't give anything but trouble. .... .... .... office. They gave us some trouble, but they got us out of some. .... .... that we were in, too. It's just like all competitions, athletics or otherwise. Strong competition helps the operation, from candidates and from programs.

**ROSENGARTEN:** Could you have predicted, say in the years just before the Second World War, which party the blacks in the state would align with?

**DENNIS:** I think I would have, it wasn't a surprise to me when they aligned with us, because the South that I was in then, and the attitude between the whites and the blacks, they knew nothing of the Northern big-city politics. I don't think the Democratic Party handled the differences in the races very well. Up until now, it's getting a little touchy on the proposition of whether there's any difference between the Democratic attitude towards the blacks and the Republican. In South Carolina, of course the blacks are a long way from becoming, getting in the front seat politically, but they are getting there. Every paper you pick up .... the rest of the country, coming close in North Carolina now.

**ROSENGARTEN:** The candidacy of Gantt, you're talking about?

**DENNIS:** Yes.

**ROSENGARTEN:** Who's a South Carolinian.

**DENNIS:** That's right. Wasn't he from Clemson?

**ROSENGARTEN:** The first black who graduated from Clemson. It always struck me though that there was really quite an important flip-flop when the Democrats kind of wooed, I guess you'd say wooed, the black vote away from the blacks traditional allegiance in the Republican Party. Until recently, the blacks have been so loyal, in recent years to the Democratic Party, but that's really quite a significant change.

**DENNIS:** There's no doubt about it.
ROSENGARTEN: Do you recall in your experience with the Democratic Party in this state any point at which this was either openly discussed or people in the party were saying now's the time we need to start attracting some of this black vote that's coming in?

DENNIS: Oh yes. .... much talk and action to solidify the... Democrats had the black support, but threats of Republicans taking it from the Democrats began to get stronger and stronger. We first had the political privilege problem, letting them participate in the voting. .... .... voting Democrats, I say we, I mean the Democrats, long before my... Oh, sometime before my run for office. The blacks weren't treated nice by the Democrats. They had to sort of pound their way into the party system. But they .... .... nothing, tried hard and .... .... became real front-line contenders. It wasn't long before Democrats began to see the other parties competing for them and getting a lot of votes out of them. In South Carolina, I can't say, but I think a black running for a state-wide has as good a chance as a white, because there's still a lot of white bigotry that keeps them from working with the blacks except up to a certain degree. Handwriting's on the wall when you just talked about what this black from Clemson is doing in North Carolina. It's not coming this next election in South Carolina, but it's down the road, not too far. It's not quite the right time, and they don't have the right candidate. I've got a .... friend who is, senator from Greenville, in the Senate, and he named me this past week as one of his Democrats that he felt ready going to vote for him. He's right; I am going to vote for him. I don't think he can be elected. Next black that will run is probably four or eight years ....

ROSENGARTEN: What is he running for?

DENNIS: For Governor. I don't think the Democrats could field a white candidate this time that .... win I think. Riley had it so that, ultimately nice for the Republicans, time-wise, and political-wise... He's handled himself well. I don't believe he can be beat by the Democrats, whoever they were to run.

ROSENGARTEN: Campbell.

DENNIS: Yes, Campbell. But we will see an odd election between them four years from now.

ROSENGARTEN: Well, it's very difficult to beat an incumbent, unless he's done something egregious.

DENNIS: Especially when the national ticket is that party too.

ROSENGARTEN: On a personal note, I read that you attended a reunion in July of eighty-seven, a Dennis family reunion, at your summer home, Bonneau Beach. Do you recall this event, and who attended, who was, on hand?

DENNIS: Say that again, I didn't quite...

ROSENGARTEN: In July of eighty-seven the newspaper reported that there was a Dennis family reunion at your summer home, Bonneau Beach? Can you tell me anything about this event, and who came, and...

DENNIS: Well, we had family reunions every year, not just in a campaign year. I attended my first Dennis family reunion at the old Dennis plantation home at Macbeth. The old plantation was Fairsprings. When I first ran for office in 1938, we had a Dennis family reunion. It had political connotations, but the family reunion wasn't called for political purposes. We had a situation in the family that there were strong differences in politics among... A lot of personal differences. The county auditor was a member of the Dennis clan and went to the reunion, but he was an opposite party politician. Whenever we had a family reunion, we called on various ones to speak. You would expect everybody would be listening to see what this particular fellow would be saying politically and what the others were. .... .... was suspicion in the family just like there was suspicion in the party. But after that particular summer, we had it at Fairsprings because Santee-Cooper was just about to .... ...., the dam up. We moved from there to Bonneau, and then after several years we moved in Bonneau from the place we were holding it, .... ....'s
place over to my place. We had it there for a number of years, and had big crowds.

ROSENGARTEN: Was this summer home a family place of yours?

DENNIS: No, it was a place I got from Santee-Cooper. We had, our family had the Fairsprings Plantation. That was in Macbeth, .... further. It was put under water and the lake system. This was a place that the surface property was Santee-Cooper's, was adjacent to the property that Santee-Cooper let the Wildlife people have, and then Wildlife officer Mike Flood began using this place next door to him. I saw it was going get away from Santee-Cooper, so I put in an application to buy it. I was friendly with the chief game warden. Not a lot of opposition to me trying to get it, but I raised a fair price and bought it. It was a wonderful location for a summer home.

ROSENGARTEN: At these family reunions, would there be hundreds of people? I mean, it, this is a very big family?

DENNIS: Yes. Maybe not hundreds, but more than a hundred. I guess we had close to two hundred average number. It would bring together family members who moved as far south as Florida, and some to the Midwest, and bring them together from all over the state. Of course most of them are right here. It was a good day. Especially there where we had it. We had a lake with a good breeze most of the time, sometimes it was hot, but most of the time... Most times the day was cool enough to be enjoyable, and we sat outside under the trees and had lemonade and the usual picnic accoutrements.

ROSENGARTEN: A barbecue no doubt.

DENNIS: Yes, barbecue. Barbecued hog, and barbecued chicken. Good eating, as they say.

ROSENGARTEN: So, by eighty-seven you would certainly be one of the senior members in the family.

DENNIS: That's right. I had a cousin who was a little older than me. He had a bigger family, the Dennis' at V...owens(?). I supported him for the presidency of it, but it fell on me to do most of the work in getting him together. He helped, but it's a lot of chores putting one of those things on. Arranged for so many people. I was fortunate in, that it was next door to me, the Wildlife place. I used my own backyard, had benches and everything, for several years. The Wildlife place was used by other people sometimes; that's why we'd use it for the annual affair. There were plenty of facilities. We had a hundred plus to come.

ROSENGARTEN: I read in one biographical sketch of several of Mrs. Dennis' famous forebears. For example, a great-great uncle who was a gold prospector, and two uncles who served in the state Senate, and a brother in the House. Can you tell me about any of her famous family members?

DENNIS: You've outlined it correctly. I knew, I served in the Senate as a page when one of her great-uncles was senator. One of her, the one that was in the Senate when I was a page there, was killed in an automobile wreck in Georgia. It was his place in McCormick that Natalie and I made our wedding plans. The place was right next door to the church. I was a Baptist, she was a Methodist, but the Methodist church was next door to Senator Dorn's [Joseph Jennings] house, and that's where we got married.

ROSENGARTEN: Was this after he had been killed in the wreck?

DENNIS: Yes. In addition to her uncles who were in the Senate, she had a first cousin who was very active in the state legislature. We had a lot of politics to talk about.

ROSENGARTEN: Well, her brother, who served in the house, must have been in the house at the same time?
DENNIS: That's right. That year. Forgot about him being in the house because he wasn't there very long before he, I think he served one term, maybe two. What did he do, did he go to Congress, did he run for Congress or what?

ROSENGARTEN: I don't recall. This is not the one who was a candidate for the judgeship.

DENNIS: She's got one brother a judge.

ROSENGARTEN: O.K. But this is a different brother?

DENNIS: I'm thinking about the young one. He left, went to West Point, that's what he did. Matter of fact, I think I spread the first suggestion of being judge to him. He wrote me about somebody else in Beaufort for the vacancy that was coming up, and I just said, he was on the telephone, .... .... ...., your county's in that circuit you qualify to be a judge, why don't you run? He took my suggestion, ran, and got elected. He's apparently served well.

ROSENGARTEN: Just for the record, Senator, would you give me the names of the brothers.

DENNIS: All right. Judge Brown is named Luke. Our son is named after him. The other one is Gary Brown. He's a lawyer in .... That's her two brothers.

ROSENGARTEN: The uncle must have been on her mother's side, that was a Dorn.

DENNIS: Oh yes, Dorn. Right. Trying to think were they brothers of Mrs. Brown, or...

[SIDE ONE ENDS, SIDE TWO BEGINS]

ROSENGARTEN: ...working for the legislature when you met her, but I didn't realize... What about this great-great uncle who was a gold prospector? Do you remember anything of, any tales? You certainly wouldn't have known him.

DENNIS: I didn't know him, heard a lot of talk about him.

ROSENGARTEN: Apparently he had one successful strike in McCormick.

DENNIS: I don't know how profound it was, but...

ROSENGARTEN: Billy Dorn, that was his name. Billy Dorn, the gold prospector. [long pause] In August of that year, just after the family reunion, you had a double hernia operation following two months after a mild stroke. Was it difficult to recover from these problems? Were there medical complications?

DENNIS: Very much so. Congressman Dorn was a relative of Natalie's too.

ROSENGARTEN: He was serving at the time you were?

DENNIS: He was what?

ROSENGARTEN: Was Congressman Dorn serving at the same time that you were in the Senate?

DENNIS: Yes, he left the Senate to go to Congress. He had a tremendous record which started at twenty-one. .... .... over the state, tried to go to the United States Senate one time, but he didn't make it. He was a very active Congressman. I was about to get on something else.
ROSENGARTEN: The medical complications of the stroke and the double hernia.

DENNIS: I was painfully handicapped. [mumbles]

ROSENGARTEN: Do you feel that there was a connection between these medical problems, that one thing led to another?

DENNIS: That one thing what?

ROSENGARTEN: That one thing led to another?

DENNIS: I don't think there's a doubt about it. .... .... since I've had the wreck I've been so painfully hurt, until [mumbles].

ROSENGARTEN: Your sister Sarah Dennis Lacy died in September of eighty-seven at the age of seventy-four. What do you remember best about her?

DENNIS: Sarah what?

ROSENGARTEN: Excuse me?

DENNIS: Repeat that statement, will you?

ROSENGARTEN: Your sister, Sarah Dennis Lacy, died in September of eighty-seven. Just a month after your operation. She was seventy-four years old. I'm just asking what you remember best about her. What, how you recall her.

DENNIS: We called her Dick. She was Dick and her husband was Dr. Lacy. She was very active and a somewhat fiery person. If you wanted to get in a big argument, you wouldn't have to do anything; you just raised your voice a little bit with her. She'd be right with you. She was one of three sisters. She lived next door to my office after she got married. Dr. Lacy was of course a very valuable member of the family. Took care of everybody when they got sick. He's still living. She's very much missed, that's all I can say.

ROSENGARTEN: Where did the nickname Dick come from?

DENNIS: I think my daddy started that. His first child was a boy, E.J. Then there were two girls and then she was the third, fourth child. He had wanted another boy, so I think he started, he called her a boy's name.

ROSENGARTEN: You told a reporter at this point, in the fall of eighty-seven, if health permits, I'll complete the term and make it an even fifty years. Did you doubt at that time that you'd be able to complete the term, and when did you actually decide to leave the Senate, or I should say the Senate Finance Committee?

DENNIS: That was when I had the wreck?

ROSENGARTEN: Well, this is at the end of that summer when you had the stroke and the double-hernia operation and these added health problems.

DENNIS: I hadn't had the automobile wreck?

ROSENGARTEN: Yes, it was three years later.
DENNIS: I really had difficulty being real active then. I didn't want to give it up. I had a lot of things I wanted to do. I didn't intend to give it up as long as I could go. I only gave it up when I just couldn't make it anymore.

ROSENGARTEN: What repercussions did your resignation of the Finance chairmanship have in the Senate?

DENNIS: Senator Gressette and I had established strong leadership in the Senate. The Senate didn't operate unless one of us was there really. I mean at full force. He left us in, what year did he leave the Senate?

ROSENGARTEN: I think it was March of eighty-four.

DENNIS: Eighty-five then, was my most active year in the Senate.

ROSENGARTEN: Let me see if I can get this exactly. You had basically that one year and then had the wreck at the very end of eighty-four. So it would be eighty-four when you took over from Gressette.

DENNIS: I just had one year of real active service...

ROSENGARTEN: When you were the Senate pro tem.

DENNIS: ...after Gressette left us. I couldn't see giving it up as long as I could be active at all in it. It was terribly tough.

ROSENGARTEN: You just said that there were a lot of things you wanted to do. Would you be a little more specific? What were your plans?

DENNIS: To continue as chairman of the Finance Committee was one big thing. I thought I wanted to be on the bench at one time. Matter of fact, I ran for the Supreme Court twice. But after that was over, and I got settled to the chairmanship of the Finance Committee, I felt like I was in the right place. South Carolina was struggling every year, trying to make some changes, and trying to advance. Improvement in education was a big theme. Handling school teachers in the elementary schools and ..., improvements in school bus transportation. Oh, just say, elementary education and college education were big legislative financial problems of that time. I was glad to have an active role in changing the legislative programs in elementary, high school and college.

ROSENGARTEN: When you resigned the Finance chair, did you have confidence that Jim Waddell would be able to do the job?

DENNIS: Oh yes, I knew Jim could do the job, but I was worried about Jim's, I wouldn't want this to be published now, I was worried about his second romance. I think he has been handicapped some by having right there at his right arm a girlfriend.

ROSENGARTEN: Handicapped in terms of his credibility?

DENNIS: Right. That's the worst handicap a chairman of a committee can have, particularly the Finance Committee. While Senator Gressette was living I felt like if I had to leave the Senate, things would be all right, but I felt like if both of us went, the Senate was going to be in some trouble, and that's exactly what happened.

ROSENGARTEN: Kind of a body without a head.

DENNIS: Exactly.

ROSENGARTEN: At this period there was a proposal made to sell Santee-Cooper. You called it a 'colossal
mistake, high-handed greediness, and without merit and unfair to the people of South Carolina." This is a powerful reaction you had. What were your thoughts about it, and who was proposing the plan. Who supported the plan?

DENNIS: The support of Santee-Cooper, or .... say the support of public power against the private power companies has been a big fight in South Carolina. As long as I was there and in good strength, I could help Santee-Cooper, and at the same time get along with the power companies, have them work together. As I began to get physically impaired, I decided to use my personal and political strength to try to keep public power and the private industry from fights that hurt them and hurt the general public. I think I was able to contribute something in that direction. As I began to get older so to speak, I don't want to say old, but older, and the wreck and my physical difficulties developed, I found it difficult to be able to walk the middle of the road that I had to walk in my position. That is, between public power and private power. I think up until when I left the Senate there hadn't been fights between the two that hurt the state. [long pause]

ROSENGARTEN: Whose proposal was it to sell Santee-Cooper?

DENNIS: It was nurtured by the public power people. They were very careful in how they handled it.

ROSENGARTEN: You mean private companies like SCE&G?

DENNIS: Yes.

ROSENGARTEN: It seems, as a historian, very significant to me that in your first year in office you were instrumental in the establishment of the Santee-Cooper system, and fifty years later, in your last year in office, there was this attack say, by the private interests. It kind of, it marks the end of an era, the end of New Deal kind of politics.

DENNIS: Which I was a part of. Not the leader like that, but a contributor to that phase of operation. There were a lot of proposals that would have been, come in to the General Assembly, that were considered anti-Santee-Cooper. They were not presented because of me. There were some presented that I was able to stop.

ROSENGARTEN: Were you successful in defeating this proposal to sell the...

DENNIS: Yes, I don't think it was making any headway. That's been brought to me and talked to me by some since getting on the sidelines, but I don't have any power in connection with it now. I can't conceive of eliminating the public power of Santee-Cooper from South Carolina .... ...., but who knows, it might happen.

ROSENGARTEN: At this point, are you fearful of the future, without yourself there to defend...

DENNIS: Not in the immediate future.

ROSENGARTEN: In an interview with the Columbia Record in November of eighty-seven, you talked at length about your attitude toward the tragedies that had beset you. Would you explain how you were feeling at the time?

DENNIS: How I feel about what?

ROSENGARTEN: About the series of tragedies that had beset you. I kept marveling at how philosophic you were able to be at this very difficult point in your career.

DENNIS: I didn't understand then, I don't understand it now. For some reason, I must have been doing something wrong. I lost my health, almost lost my life, and I lost my public office. I lost so many .... .... too. I could have a problem there, I got seventy-five percent in property, but I also got an undesirable number of debts, too. The Lord has been good to me. I've been prosperous, but at the same time I lost my health at a time when I needed it so much
to do the things I was trying to do or about to do. Had to turn that over to somebody else, and that's never good.

ROSENGARTEN: Did you regret any aspect of your Senate career? For example, not having enough time to spend, or not having more time to spend with your children?

DENNIS: I consider that the matter of time required was very difficult to comply with sometimes, but at the same time, I had my pleasures of hunting, fishing. I tried to live a life that included taking care of my legal and political work, enjoying the outdoors, so to speak, in this great county and area. I was doing a pretty good job of taking care of my business and politics, private life, until I started getting hit.

ROSENGARTEN: You told the Berkeley Democrat in December of eighty-seven, speaking about the Senate, your Senate career and the difficulty of balancing that with your family responsibilities, you said, "I won't say it's a complaint, nobody drafted me, but it was a sacrifice."

DENNIS: That's right. I felt that way about it strongly. [to Mrs. Dennis] What's going on?

MRS. DENNIS: Nothing really. Dorn's going to get pizza for lunch. You can stay, Dale.

[tape stopped, then resumes]

ROSENGARTEN: I have about ten minutes on this tape. You supported attorney William Howard in his effort to unseat Judge Lawrence Richter. What was your opinion of the two men?

DENNIS: Both of them were excellent lawyers, and each was well-qualified for the position. I felt like that Mr. Richter had established a controversial situation that the judgeship would be better not to be in. That was, a little bit of a distant .... wouldn't have affected the bar here, either way, but it was a personal choice I made. Both of them lived quite a while.

ROSENGARTEN: In my memory, Senator, it seemed to me that Gedney Howe, Junior, Gedney Howe the third, I should say, was instrumental in unseating Richter. He had been a close friend of Richter's, is that true?

DENNIS: Yes. They had a bad falling out. I'll admit that my friendship with Howe had something to do with who I decided to vote. I had a lot of confidence in Gedney Howe, and I developed a great deal of confidence in this young man as he's come along.

ROSENGARTEN: Did the falling out have to do with the cocaine incident, or was it before that?

DENNIS: Falling out?

ROSENGARTEN: The falling out between young Gedney and Richter.

DENNIS: I don't remember the cocaine incident.

ROSENGARTEN: The controversy you were talking about I thought was when Richter, it was accused that he had been trying to get some girl at a party to sniff cocaine or something like that. That was in the newspaper. I don't know any of these people.

DENNIS: I heard about that. It had nothing to with my position in it. That's something that was reported out in the late stages of the race.

ROSENGARTEN: So what was the controversial connection that you were worried about?
DENNIS: Bar? Being involved in tribunal situation where the two candidates were judged fought each other so hard. .... it was Howe involved more than...

ROSENGARTEN: In February of 1988, you announced your intention to retire at the end of that session. How did you make this, what you call the "heart-breaking" decision?

DENNIS: Strictly on an inability to get my health improved enough to consider trying another time. If I'd have had any chance of running again and performing I would have done it, but I didn't think it was fair for me to run, knowing the feeling that I wasn't going to be able to perform. My situation gradually got worse and worse. My pain developed more. You just can't do a good job when you're in pain. I haven't been able to do a good job with you in interviewing because of my pain.

ROSENGARTEN: I think you've done a wonderful job.

DENNIS: Thank you. You've done a wonderful job, asking the right questions. I'm just sorry I couldn't pull back about ten years to give you the answers. In ten years is how I feel.

ROSENGARTEN: I think it would be difficult, well it is difficult, for anyone to accept physical disability. For someone with your energy and power, it must be extremely difficult.

DENNIS: Most difficult. And to, this is more of a personal statement now, to have to give up, I knew I was not being a good friend to the Senate of South Carolina, and my Finance Committee, leaving the job to Jim Waddell and Marshall Williams. They weren't my choice as a successor. Simply a fateful situation. I wouldn't like to be quoted on that. Neither one of them measured up to the standard that should be required.

ROSENGARTEN: I wonder if, given that experience, if you wouldn't support the position, I think was it John West who proposed to turn, to make the Senate chairmanships based strictly on merit, so-called merit, as opposed to seniority. These men moved up because they were the most senior, not because they were the choice.

DENNIS: I would give it strong consideration if I had it to do over again.

ROSENGARTEN: What do you remember about your last day in the Senate, which I believe was June the second, 1988?

DENNIS: That's generally described as a day of heartsickness for me. I was just heartsick. I had so many opportunities right there at my fingertips and a burning desire inside to grasp them, and the physical incapacity. Horrible feeling. Kept putting off the decision and putting it off, hoping I'd get better, but I really got a little worse each time. It's when you wonder if you've displeased the Lord that causes that, and ....

ROSENGARTEN: I also believe in just pure accident. It could have been somebody else on the road that night.

DENNIS: I could have gotten killed.

ROSENGARTEN: You seem to have a belief that everything happens by design, by the Lord's design.

DENNIS: Of course my concern was whether I'd failed in my duties and responsibilities to the point where the Lord wasn't....

[TAPE NINETEEN ENDS, TAPE TWENTY BEGINS]

ROSENGARTEN: Senator, I had just a couple of questions left from this last series. One had to do with when you sold the six hundred and fifty acres of Lewisfield Plantation. Was that a difficult decision to come to? Did you feel
pressed to do that, or was that something you had planned to do?

DENNIS: Yes, that was what we had planned to do. It was a family place that went to three brothers. It wasn't capable of being divided into three places that would have satisfied us, so the best thing to do was sell it. Then we had an opportunity to make the sale for .... .... .... .... We had an opportunity to make a permanent public place out of it. Had an appeal to it. Made a reasonable amount of money for it, so that's what we did. Sold it for it to be developed into a state park.

ROSENGARTEN: What was your opinion of Robert Linwood Helmly, the man who was elected to the Senate seat which you vacated?

DENNIS: I found him a very dedicated public servant. He had previous service as a mayor, and then as a member of the house. He had quite adequate political experience for it. He worked closely with me. If I was a fair senator, he could be a fair successor. I think he's done a good job.

ROSENGARTEN: How old a man is he?

DENNIS: He's in his early fifties.

ROSENGARTEN: Do you expect Helmly, or really any politician in Berkeley County to establish the kind of record for longevity that you had in the legislature?

DENNIS: I don't think so. I'm not taking any credit for myself, or any discredit for them, but times have changed. I don't think there'll be any longtime service. I served fifty years or more. Yesterday's elections, or nominations, there were so many changes.

ROSENGARTEN: In what regard?

DENNIS: .... .... .... .... long service by an individual. The county supervisor here was one example.

ROSENGARTEN: Johnny Flynn? Was that, would you consider that an upset?

DENNIS: I would consider it an upset. It was an expected upset though. Expected by Flynn and by the general public. That's no total discredit to Flynn. [microphone screw up - can only hear scattered words or phrases, gist of conversation unintelligible from 5.45-11.42]

ROSENGARTEN: The fall of 1988 was a season of banquets and tributes to your fifty years of service to the state. What was the most memorable honor? [interference continues]

DENNIS: ...that building, and the portrait in the Senate of course were greatly appreciated.

MRS. DENNIS: The Democratic Party gave you a nice banquet that night out at the fairgrounds. Nice people, I mean nice compliments.

ROSENGARTEN: One remark that really struck me when I was looking through that last album, from John West's talk at the dedication of the Dennis building, this is in July of eighty-one. He said, "The senator has his critics; that goes with the territory. Over the years, the buck has truly stopped with Rembert Dennis." Would you want to comment on that?

DENNIS: What was that?
ROSENGARTEN: "The buck has truly stopped with Rembert Dennis."

DENNIS: [mumbles]

ROSENGARTEN: I don't know if you can read my writing.

MRS. DENNIS: [indistinct due to interference]

ROSENGARTEN: ...? The dedication? I'll read it to you again because I don't think you can read my handwriting. "The senator has his critics; that goes with the territory. Over the years, the buck has truly stopped with Rembert Dennis."

MRS. DENNIS: That was in John West's talk? (I wish I could read it sometime.)? He was very complimentary.

ROSENGARTEN: Yes. I think also because of the Finance Committee that was a particular metaphor. [more interference] These are just notes; that's why I type up the questions. I can write legibly.

DENNIS: They told me .... about that old ....

ROSENGARTEN: Right, right. You were the last court of appeal, so to speak.

DENNIS: Couldn't, didn't have anybody to pass it on to. Had to accept it. Maybe I didn't try to pass it on. I just .... go and wrestle with the ....

MRS. DENNIS: That's right. It stopped with you.

ROSENGARTEN: Also when you get into a position of, basically ultimate authority, for example over the Finance Committee, what could you do?

DENNIS: Financial responsibility for the state's annual appropriation bill is an honorable job to have, and I appreciated it.

ROSENGARTEN: One thing I noticed in looking through the box of papers, kind of a sad note, there was whole file of condolence letters that you sent out to the various people in the late eighties. Did it seem to you at that time that there was a generation passing?

DENNIS: It did. Gressette and I were the last of a .... generation to represent the Senate in such a, at the front situation. I not trying, I lay plenty of credit on Gressette, trying to claim credit for myself but, I'm just saying that we were the last of an era. I could say that its not fair for the future. Its coming to the point now where the Senate is in a horrible situation. These young .... [microphone interference again 17.39-17.48] ...Governor not taking a strong hand. The Governor has got to [interference 17.58-19.09]

ROSENGARTEN: What do you think their problem is?

DENNIS: I'm not referring to myself, I'm referring to Senator Gressette, and... me to say it, but the Senate ran out of the necessary leadership. Senator Waddell, and Senator Williams did not provide the leadership that Senator Gressette and I did, that's the .... of it. Senator Williams the President Pro Tempore to cooperate with you in getting the senators back for a one day session, do it all in one day. You could have done it if everything had been put together. Williams would call senators one by one by telephone. [mumbles] So that's the problem.
ROSENGARTEN: It's too bad in a way that someone like Dick Riley didn't return to the Senate. People with real stature and convictions. I wonder why?

DENNIS: Well, a Senate seat is considered a step down from two terms as governor. He could have provided the needed leadership. But he's .... .... .... now, and he's thinking about going to Washington.

ROSENGARTEN: [Theo] Mitchell, is he the house? The guy who just won the Democratic nomination for Governor.

DENNIS: He's in the Senate.

ROSENGARTEN: He's in the Senate. Is he a potential, true leader?

DENNIS: He can sell things to the blacks, so he's got that automatic draw for support by some of the whites. He's got my support. Gave it to him, and he quoted me as being one of .... .... .... at the time in the Senate. Some of the other white people could not yet accept black leadership even though their capabilities were... He won't have a chance against...

ROSENGARTEN: Campbell. Well, I'm sure that's true, but maybe having, you know, being a veteran of a gubernatorial campaign, maybe his stature in the Senate will be raised. Although I know what you mean. In terms of being a statewide leader, it would be very difficult.

DENNIS: It’s getting more and more tenable, but it hasn't gotten there yet. He was elected, nominated with a good vote, to be Governor of South Carolina. No Carolina black thought he was going to be elected Governor until after a great .... .... .... ....

ROSENGARTEN: Well, I suppose you never can foresee who will emerge, you know, in the future. It may take several years, but surely someone will come forward as being, you know, being able to offer strong leadership. It’s hard to see it sometimes.

DENNIS: I believe right now in the state of South Carolina there's no way...

[the audio quality here is very poor, it is impossible to determine the gist of the conversation from here until it becomes apparent that the interview has ended and the recording continues during a session of photo identification, transcribed below.]

ROSENGARTEN: These pictures are not in any order, that's the way I found them. So, I can't tell you when this happened. [Mrs. Dennis says something] More than were in those folders? What I was going to do was just put a number on the back of them so that when they archive them they can identify which is which. This one has a date on the back. It says January eighty-three. [Mrs. Dennis comments again] Oh, they'll mark them. The only ones that I left back at my house, you had stacks of duplicates like of the senator in the .... You may want some of those for your kids. I mean, there were many.

ROSENGARTEN: Do you recognize that?

DENNIS: [mumbles]

ROSENGARTEN: Salt Point?
DENNIS: .... .... is the plantation straight across from it. .... .... .... at the end of the road .... .... ....

ROSENGARTEN: Is there anybody else in the picture who needs to be, you know, who is especially memorable?

DENNIS: [mumbles, says something to Mrs. Dennis]

ROSENGARTEN: I don't think it's important either, if it’s not somebody that you...

ROSENGARTEN: This does not have a date. [interference]

DENNIS: That's a deer hunt at .... Ferry.

ROSENGARTEN: That's a deer hunt? And this would also be before your accident? This would be in the early eighties. [Mrs. Dennis says something] Right. That had... [Mrs. Dennis again. She is in the background and it is impossible to make out her sentences. Some words come through.] There was a copy of that in one of them. You know, using those last two scrapbooks that weren't burned, it made so sad that the others were, because they were so well done.

MRS. DENNIS: .... .... started something like that and then... It was a good thing. I knew he was going to .... ....

ROSENGARTEN: Right away, huh?

MRS. DENNIS: I'm going to leave these in here.

ROSENGARTEN: This looks fairly recent to me.

MRS. DENNIS: Give me that, I'm going to put those back in the ....

ROSENGARTEN: Those are labeled.

MRS. DENNIS: And these are all [here her voice gets faint, making it difficult to distinguish words]

ROSENGARTEN: That's a great picture. [hear Mrs. Dennis in the background again - can't make out what she's saying, and Dennis makes a comment as well.]

ROSENGARTEN: Yes, I like that... This one, there were a whole series of you fixing his .... [Mrs. Dennis responds] That was with the, what do you call it? The inauguration?

MRS. DENNIS: [says something] Installation? Election? .... .... say election? That's in eighty-four. I wish I had that [can't make out the rest]

ROSENGARTEN: Who else is in that picture?

MRS. DENNIS: No, she's talking about that one.

DENNIS: Lieutenant Governor McDaniel and the Senate members who, senior senators. Senator Williams from Orangeburg, Senator Waddell from Beaufort, Senator Lindsay from Marlboro.

ROSENGARTEN: O.K. That's the one I've put the number four on the back.

MRS. DENNIS: Just put portrait dedication on that.
ROSENGARTEN: Oh, that's great. Now this is an interesting picture. I think I recognize the key speaker in this one. This is number five. Isn't that Patrick Daniel [i.e., Daniel Patrick] Moynihan?

DENNIS: Yes it is him.

MRS. DENNIS: It's in India. We were there, and he was the Ambassador...

ROSENGARTEN: You were in India?

MRS. DENNIS: When John West was Governor, he took a group, the state didn't pay for our way, we paid our own way, but we went with him. He was the Ambassador. He's an interesting person to talk to. I thoroughly enjoyed meeting him there.

ROSENGARTEN: So that was when you said West...

MRS. DENNIS: Yes, was Governor. How do you spell pro tempore? T-E-M-P-O-R-E?

ROSENGARTEN: Right. Did you travel in India?

MRS. DENNIS: Yes. We landed at...

DENNIS: We traveled around a portion of it.

MRS. DENNIS: ...New Delhi, and then we went to the northern part to, Oh, goodness sakes alive, Kashmir, up in that area. It was not the tourist season up there, but we stayed on a house boat. [microphone acts up again] We stayed on the houseboat with Governor Riley and Tunky [Mrs. Riley]. The two couple stayed on, we were assigned this boat, and our cook had... Tunky says to this day she can still see his dirty fingernails. But we ate the food and survived. It was a fascinating trip. I am so glad, and really I don't know that I would want to go back, but it was a good trip, wasn't it, Rembert?

DENNIS: Yes. I wouldn't last two days there now.

MRS. DENNIS: [laughs] The food was... See, I loved the food.

DENNIS: It was a real fascinating trip. Course you get so .... from Red Russia, Red China.

MRS. DENNIS: You get what?

DENNIS: Just over the line from Red China.

MRS. DENNIS: Yes. Up in Kashmir. But see they were worried; they always had fighting up there.

ROSENGARTEN: So you were just over the line?

MRS. DENNIS: No. He said that, just over the line...

ROSENGARTEN: Oh, just over the line.

MRS. DENNIS: ...in Kashmir, was Russia, you might say. That was a dangerous time in that area. [microphone again, 37.48-38.50]
DENNIS: What's the name of ....?

MRS. DENNIS: Let me look at it, I can't see. With Wildlife? Is this Pendarvis right behind you, behind the picture?

DENNIS: Yes, it was a North Carolina fellow. [mumbles]

MRS. DENNIS: Yes, but I don't know who it is.

ROSENGARTEN: Picture number seven. That doesn't mean anything, I'm just going to get that on the tape so they can identify... So this was a presentation of...

MRS. DENNIS: Let me see that picture, because I declare, if that doesn't look almost like that picture in the...

ROSENGARTEN: It's obviously a painting of ....

MRS. DENNIS: There's a picture at the office that...

DENNIS: That is Governor Riley in this picture.

MRS. DENNIS: Is that for the governor?

ROSENGARTEN: Someone is presenting...

DENNIS: President of the Wild Turkey Federation.

MRS. DENNIS: Oh, the president of the Wild Turkey Federation. We've got that same picture.

ROSENGARTEN: They're presenting something to the governor?

MRS. DENNIS: Let me give you these. But you and Pendarvis wouldn't be from the Wildlife Commission in South Carolina.

DENNIS: Yes.

ROSENGARTEN: This looks really interesting. [microphone again - 40.20-40.55] This may or may not have been at the same event, I don't know. That one's got something written on the back of it.

MRS. DENNIS: [laughing] It does. Let me, let's read it. Wonder where you were? Is that when they came to the statehouse? They were advertising something; I think they probably grabbed you to dance. Let's see. Can you read it? They were advertising the... [microphone again]

ROSENGARTEN: Who was doing that?

MRS. DENNIS: A group from Charleston I think had just come to the statehouse to really sort of to advertise Charleston. [microphone again] I didn't write quite enough on them.

ROSENGARTEN: Seventy-five?

MRS. DENNIS: Would it have been the Tricentennial? I declare if I don't believe it might have been, because this
picture of us going to Charleston was in...

DENNIS: At the same time.

MRS. DENNIS: When was Brantley Harvey Lieutenant Governor? We can go back to that.

ROSENGARTEN: Well it says May seventy-five, I assume...

MRS. DENNIS: Oh it does? That must have been then. Doing the Charleston.

ROSENGARTEN: I think that's a scream. It’s a good thing the opposition didn't get hold of that. The Republicans really could have...

MRS. DENNIS: She was really dressed, too. They were in the .... of the twenties. Look at Brantley. [laughs]

DENNIS: I used to sing "Your Cheatin’ Heart" for her.

ROSENGARTEN: And this one, you know when that was?

MRS. DENNIS: Let's see that picture.

ROSENGARTEN: Some sort of banquet, or... That's number eight.

MRS. DENNIS: You know who that is playing the guitar? That's the senator from Charleston. He was a former senator. Tell me his name. His wife...

DENNIS: He married a...

MRS. DENNIS: He married the girl at the newspaper. Her father owned the News and Courier.

ROSENGARTEN: She was a Manigault?

MRS. DENNIS: No. Well, he was the editor, but he owned it too. I can't think of his name. Anyway, he was a senator and elected when Rembert brought in all the senators in Charleston that year, the year that Carter was. I'm going to think of his name. That looks like the lake house of the governor. That's where he was having dinner. I think this was the lake house.

ROSENGARTEN: So you think this was a celebration of the election?

MRS. DENNIS: No, I think the governor just had us for dinner, and I'll bet that's when John West [microphone again 43.57- ] You know who that is over here? That's senator, he's Senator Morris, he's Judge Morris now. You know what this suit right here? Look at that suit, Rembert. I tell you... [laughs]

ROSENGARTEN: The pinstripe?

MRS. DENNIS: Yes.

ROSENGARTEN: I like pinstripe suits.

MRS. DENNIS: I do too. It's got wide lapels.
ROSENGARTEN: This one, you've begun to put notes down. There's a question, a couple of questions...

MRS. DENNIS: I tried to get Cathy to help me, because they were supposed to do it at the office. Then I realized they weren't doing it, and that's when I... See, this is a dedication of a plant. When I knew what they were... This is Aero...? That was another one of the plants. You know these are pretty good, because this is Georgia-Pacific. These are good.

ROSENGARTEN: I'm not, you know, I don't know what the future holds, but if, for example if this transcript was ever whittled down and published in any form, this kind of thing would really make it come alive. You know, you're talking about when the industries stay and whatnot, having photographs like this... Course some of them you probably could get that from the newspaper morgues, but a lot of these...

MRS. DENNIS: Berkeley County's Tricentennial was in 1970, and Leslie Nielsen, you know he played the Swamp Fox in the movies, and he came for that Tricentennial. I remember he was on the platform.

DENNIS: .... legislation .... .... .... ....

MRS. DENNIS: That's it.

DENNIS: Can't tell by that what it is.

ROSENGARTEN: So you, no you don't have... You said you had a question mark next to what the legislation is.


MRS. DENNIS: I don't know what it was.

DENNIS: Senator from Horry. Senator from Georgetown.

MRS. DENNIS: Well, this is when the Albany Felt plant came. That was one of the first plants we got in Berkeley County. Bob McNair's in here. This is really something.

DENNIS: I can tell you they all are, but I can't tell you what...

[SIDE ONE ENDS, SIDE TWO BEGINS]

MRS. DENNIS: ...on the what Board(?)?

ROSENGARTEN: Penn Center, down in Beaufort. I guess I see how every few months...

MRS. DENNIS: She's a capable lady.

ROSENGARTEN: She is. She reminds me a lot of my mother.

MRS. DENNIS: Does she?

ROSENGARTEN: Um-hm. She's from New York, you know. She has this kind of...

MRS. DENNIS: The way about her.
ROSENGARTEN: ...really, businesslike isn't quite the word, but, you wouldn't want to be on the other side of the same issue, if you know what I mean.

MRS. DENNIS: Yes, I know what you mean. Is your mother sort of like that?

ROSENGARTEN: Well, in her business capacity she is. Now, this one, Senator, they, on the back, I don't know if this is your handwriting Mrs. Dennis, but somebody's labeled everybody but four, seven and eight.

MRS. DENNIS: I got Cathy to do a lot of these. I think Cathy did some.

DENNIS: That's Governor Edwards. I can't tell what he's doing. [mumbles]

ROSENGARTEN: Can you identify any of the people that are missing on that Senator? Whoever's sitting next to, standing next to Steve, what's his name? Mason? Between Steve Mason and...

MRS. DENNIS: Seth Mason.

ROSENGARTEN: Seth Mason and Jerry McCord.

MRS. DENNIS: That's right, Rembert, because Mason was with the Alcohol, and Jerry McCord, too.

ROSENGARTEN: Who was between them?

DENNIS: There's Mason and there's McCord.

MRS. DENNIS: Who is between them, do you know? That was Cathy and me doing this, because I wrote this.

DENNIS: That was the Senator from Clarendon.

MRS. DENNIS: What was his name?

DENNIS: He's still there.

ROSENGARTEN: What county is he from?

MRS. DENNIS: That's not John Land?

DENNIS: Yes.

MRS. DENNIS: Let me see it. Seems like Cathy and I would have known that. But that's who it is. Looks like Cathy and I would have known that.

DENNIS: Jerry McCord's on there.

ROSENGARTEN: Seven and eight would be the last two guys?

MRS. DENNIS: Yes. He knows those, I think.

ROSENGARTEN: These two on this side.

DENNIS: That's...
MRS. DENNIS: The fellow from Columbia. Right there. Who took over the prison? Is that who that is?

DENNIS: Yes. McCord.

MRS. DENNIS: She's got that. The only one we need, John Land is in the middle.

ROSENGARTEN: We've got McCord, we've got Silas, Pearman?

MRS. DENNIS: Yes, Silas Pearman.

ROSENGARTEN: Then two blanks.

DENNIS: That's Nathan .... Fellow named Edwards.

MRS. DENNIS: Where? Oh it is. That's not who I'm thinking it was.

ROSENGARTEN: The fellow in the place of number seven, you think it's someone named Edwards? This is on photo eleven.

DENNIS: Yes. He's now head of the penitentiary, Natalie.

MRS. DENNIS: Yes. That's who I'm looking for, but I didn't think his name was Edwards. That's why I'm looking to see. [Long pause]

ROSENGARTEN: We don't have to identify every person. If we don't, we don't. This one is interesting. You had this note on it. Byrnes Fund, is that what it says?

MRS. DENNIS: Let's see.

ROSENGARTEN: This is number twelve.

MRS. DENNIS: Byrnes funeral. Of James Byrnes.

ROSENGARTEN: I was going to say, people looked very grim.

MRS. DENNIS: I don't have anything on the back? That's what it is, that's what it is, I guess. We didn't write it down, but they are. Rembert, and...


MRS. DENNIS: Senator Williams is the first one, Richardson's the next one, Mozingo is the next one and Rembert is the next one. James F. Byrnes’ funeral; that might be an interesting...

DENNIS: When you're coming that way you've got to start with Senator Waddell.

MRS. DENNIS: Where is he? Oh, I didn't see him. Yes, Waddell is, he's looking in the car.

DENNIS: Waddell, Williams, Richardson, Mozingo and me.

MRS. DENNIS: And I don't have the date on that.
DENNIS: You've got a number where you know what it is. Can I save this?

ROSENGARTEN: Yes you can take that off. This one says "Brown Building" question mark. Number thirteen.

MRS. DENNIS: I guess I was going to ask you that. Isn't that the Brown Building?

DENNIS: Edgar Brown Building, that's right.

ROSENGARTEN: So who is this in...

DENNIS: That's...

MRS. DENNIS: The chaplain of the Senate?

DENNIS: Speaker of the House. Carter, Rex Carter, Governor Edwards, Senator Dennis and the chaplain of the Senate. What's his name, Natalie?

MRS. DENNIS: [laughs] What is wrong with me today? Metz. M-E-T-Z. [The Rev. Dr. George E. Meetze]

ROSENGARTEN: Now this is an old one. I don't understand the note. You might have to decipher the note. This is number fourteen.

MRS. DENNIS: Let's see here what I've got.

DENNIS: From what year?


DENNIS: That's my first year.

MRS. DENNIS: Huh?

DENNIS: That must be my first year.

ROSENGARTEN: You think that was that long ago? No, no because it...

MRS. DENNIS: I don't believe so.

DENNIS: Wasn't far from it.

MRS. DENNIS: But you're in the front.

ROSENGARTEN: Your hair hadn't quite turned white. That happened when you were about thirty, is that right?

MRS. DENNIS: Couldn't be. Let me see who those women are in the back. Some of the secretaries back there. I bet we can tell.

DENNIS: I can tell you every one of these ....

MRS. DENNIS: You can tell them all?
DENNIS: Wallace, Mozingo had a bad, I mean McFaddin had a bad night.

ROSENGARTEN: Who had a bad night?

MRS. DENNIS: [laughing] McFaddin. That was a long time ago, because he was a judge later on.

DENNIS: There's a Legare from Charleston.

MRS. DENNIS: Allen Legare.

ROSENGARTEN: So this is in the Senate?

MRS. DENNIS: Yes. They're being sworn in. See, they used to be sworn in like this. I don't know whether they still do...

DENNIS: That's .... That's my first term. [Can't be - Paul Wallace's first term was in 1947, Rembert's in 1943]

MRS. DENNIS: I'll bet that's not your first term, I bet it's your second, at least.

ROSENGARTEN: Yes, because I don't think the suits are old enough to be...

MRS. DENNIS: That might have been in the late forties. You can't tell.
[complains about the noise of the lawnmower, clearly audible in the background]

ROSENGARTEN: The great thing about these mikes is they really pick up what's close; they don't pick up ambient sound. That's why they're so much better than the kind that you, on a stand. See now, if I was one of those people who do props for a movie, I could probably tell you exactly the year, by looking at the clothes.

MRS. DENNIS: Yes. I bet they could.

ROSENGARTEN: I agree with you; that could be the late forties.

MRS. DENNIS: I think that's probably when it was, because Wilbur Grant died in the late forties or early fifties.

DENNIS: Forty-six. [can't be the case]

ROSENGARTEN: You think it's forty-six?

MRS. DENNIS: I can look that up in... That was your second term, is that what you're saying?

ROSENGARTEN: In the Senate. I don't know if this note goes with this picture, because it wasn't clipped, but I think that was where it was.

MRS. DENNIS: Let me look at it.

DENNIS: He's a man that you heard a lot about him in Berkeley. [Richard M.] Jefferies is...

ROSENGARTEN: Oh, Jefferies is in this picture? Okay, seated right next to the lady.

MRS. DENNIS: Cathy picked out a, this is Cathy's writing.
ROSENGARTEN: Let's see, picture fifteen. So if it was Jefferies, that was maybe the same era in the forties?

MRS. DENNIS: Was Jefferies in that other picture? Yes, I'm sure he was. That's Eva May. And who is this, Rembert? They had about four or five secretaries when I married Rembert up there. They looked, I thought they were old women when I went up there, and they stayed for years and years.

DENNIS: [mumbles]

MRS. DENNIS: Yes, Senator [Lawrence Lamar] Hester was there.

ROSENGARTEN: The white-haired...

MRS. DENNIS: From McCormick. When do you think that was?

DENNIS: I would say in the early forties.

MRS. DENNIS: I bet that's one of the committees.

DENNIS: It is.

MRS. DENNIS: Do you know which one? Senator from Bishopville. Isn't that Senator, what's his name?


MRS. DENNIS: Baskin. Was he from Bishopville? Yes. He was the chairman. I don't remember him being chairman of a committee, but I'm sure he...

DENNIS: I think he must have been vice-chairman.

ROSENGARTEN: In the forties, which committee would you have been on with Jefferies?

DENNIS: It's not the Finance Committee.

MRS. DENNIS: You say it's not? You know it's not Judiciary.

DENNIS: [mumbles]

ROSENGARTEN: Well, we can probably check back on the committee list and see if that's what it was. Who's the guy right in the middle with the glasses?

DENNIS: Baskin.

ROSENGARTEN: So he was likely the chairman?

DENNIS: He was chairman or first vice-chairman.

ROSENGARTEN: I think that this one is much more recent. This is number sixteen.

DENNIS: Free-conference committee on the appropriations bill.
ROSENGARTEN: Pre-conference?

DENNIS: Free conference.

MRS. DENNIS: Free.

ROSENGARTEN: Free conference. Are you the chair in that...?

DENNIS: No way to tell exactly what year it is. No way for me to tell. I can tell you the members of it. Lemonde? from Charleston, .... was chairman of the Ways and Means Committee.

MRS. DENNIS: That was like in the seventies then, I bet.

DENNIS: Paul Moore and McMillan from the Senate. .... .... and McMillan from the Senate. [Julian] Leamond, [Thomas Gibson] Mangum and who was this one Natalie? .... from Horry.

MRS. DENNIS: Yes. He died. He died, didn't he?

DENNIS: Yes.

MRS. DENNIS: Can't think of it. I could look all these up, if it's necessary. You could leave them with me and I could... It just takes time. Baskin was chairman, the other picture you were looking at, was chairman of Natural Resources back in forty-three, but whether or not that's when that one was, I don't know.

ROSENGARTEN: Was Jefferies on it? On that committee?

MRS. DENNIS: Yes. Henry Simms... Rembert can look at it.

ROSENGARTEN: This is number, this is the number fifteen again.

MRS. DENNIS: Is J.D. Parler on that one? If it is...

DENNIS: He's not in the picture.

MRS. DENNIS: O.K., then it wasn't forty-three. But I'll bet it's the Natural Resources... That's in forty-three. Forty-four, forty-five, forty-six. Let's look at forty-six. Because they stay on the committees, you know? The legislative manuals were little back then.

ROSENGARTEN: Who's the woman who's standing up there?

MRS. DENNIS: She's a secretary, Eva May.

ROSENGARTEN: Both of them are secretaries?

DENNIS and MRS. DENNIS: Eva May Pruitt.

MRS. DENNIS: I forget who that other one was. Do you know her, Rembert?
DENNIS: Don't recognize her.

MRS. DENNIS: Natural Resources was changed later on to... I think it was incorporated; they put some of them to combine them.

ROSENGARTEN: This is the free conference committee. This is number seventeen. I know who that is, but do you know where it is or when it was?

DENNIS: No way for me to tell at all.

MRS. DENNIS: Let me look at it. No telling.

ROSENGARTEN: Is it from the seventies would you say, just from the picture?

MRS. DENNIS: He's working on Finance though. You're working on the appropriation bill, I believe.

ROSENGARTEN: How can you tell that?

MRS. DENNIS: The thing in your hand. You look like you've got one in your hand. Is that what it is, appropriation bill?

DENNIS: I've got something in my hand.

MRS. DENNIS: You've got something in your hand.

ROSENGARTEN: This is number seventeen. So that, you could be bringing it before the Senate?

MRS. DENNIS: Yes.

DENNIS: I was presenting it to the Senate, whatever it was.

ROSENGARTEN: This is number eighteen, and it has a note on it. Federation man.

MRS. DENNIS: You won the award.


MRS. DENNIS: That's right. You were the... I think he was the conservationist of the year.

ROSENGARTEN: Do you know what year?

MRS. DENNIS: See it up there? I think the year is on it.

ROSENGARTEN: Oh yes, I see.

MRS. DENNIS: "Conservation Legislator of the Year." Would you all believe that the year is not on here?

ROSENGARTEN: Well, from the picture it looks to me like it would be either the late seventies or early eighties.

MRS. DENNIS: I would say seventies. He got another award. This one is legislative conservation award for
1965. Rembert, did you get the bear first? I believe you did. That was in 1965.

ROSENGARTEN: Number nineteen. It's another signing of something.

MRS. DENNIS: John West. That's Joe Riley on the front. Did you recognize him?

ROSENGARTEN: I didn't even look.

MRS. DENNIS: He's so short. He looked like a little boy when he first came up there.

DENNIS: ... ... ... Mayor Riley then.

MRS. DENNIS: Yes. Joe Riley's first wife.

DENNIS: In the house.

ROSENGARTEN: Yes it does. He looks like a college kid.

MRS. DENNIS: And Carroll Campbell's in it, too. He's the third one. That's ... ... ... behind there, Rembert.

ROSENGARTEN: So, John West's signing of some bill?

MRS. DENNIS: No telling what.

DENNIS: No way for you to pick out the year.

MRS. DENNIS: No. No way.

ROSENGARTEN: This one's got another note on it. Governor Russell? This is number twenty.

MRS. DENNIS: I think those are ones that Cathy and I went through. We couldn't do but so many. When Russell was Governor...

DENNIS: [mumbles - sounds like "...shot like it was on the coffee house"]

MRS. DENNIS: That's an old one.

DENNIS: [mumbles] ... ... ... ... ... from Berkeley.

ROSENGARTEN: Which one was that?

MRS. DENNIS: Here's another one, signing the retirement bill with Governor Russell.

ROSENGARTEN: Is it the same picture or is it different?

DENNIS: Can't tell you what he's signing.

MRS. DENNIS: That's when the girl from Charleston [Ruth Williams] was in the house.

DENNIS: ... ... ... retirement bill, that's Taylor Gressette.
MRS. DENNIS: That's Tatum Gressette, that's right. And Ruthy Williams. I don't know whether you know her or not. I believe Ruthy got married. This is the conference committee beginning the appropriation bill in 1971. I guess the governor's signing it.

ROSENGARTEN: I'm going to leave, give you that one so you keep that with your set of...

MRS. DENNIS: These probably ought to go with those, too.

ROSENGARTEN: Yes. I think that these would be... Especially because you've already identified them. This is number twenty-one.

MRS. DENNIS: That was Gordon (Henderson) Garrett a little bit ago, Senator Gordon Garrett from Charleston. Can't think of the girl who married him though, with the News and Courier. 1968.

DENNIS: This is a conference committee.

ROSENGARTEN: That's a conference committee?

DENNIS: Yes. With Senator Bristow and Senator Chapman are the two with me.

ROSENGARTEN: Bristol?

DENNIS: Bristow.

MRS. DENNIS: Bristow. B-R-I-S-T-O-W.

ROSENGARTEN: And...

DENNIS: From Richland, and Chapman from Greenville.

ROSENGARTEN: So that would be in the seventies, late seventies.

DENNIS: Yes.

ROSENGARTEN: Here we go back to some old ones. Older ones.

MRS. DENNIS: I got some old ones here that you all have... Let me show you all one. This is the Budget and Control Board. I want you to look what you've got on. He had been turkey hunting.

ROSENGARTEN: That's great. And that was eighty-two. That's hilarious. That's great.

MRS. DENNIS: He was probably running late, too late to get dressed. He went sometimes in Columbia. McClellan lost the House... I don't know whether you saw it or not. You probably didn't, on the news.

ROSENGARTEN: On the news?

MRS. DENNIS: McClellan, who is chairman of the Ways and Means, lost the election. Very few people voted, it looked like to me. He's from a small district.

DENNIS: I'd sure like to have a copy of this one.
MRS. DENNIS: [laughing] Let's see it.

DENNIS: It's got Dennis Bishop and Joe Platt in it.

MRS. DENNIS: I bet I've got this one in another one.

DENNIS: Henderson Guerry [House member from Berkeley] and Jimmy Barry [Highway Commissioner from Berkeley].

MRS. DENNIS: These are your pictures. We just put them in this.

ROSENGARTEN: Any pictures that you want, all we have to do is make a note of that and they'll make a print of and keep the print and send the original back, or vice versa.

DENNIS: I'm sure I'll do that with some of them.

MRS. DENNIS: Put that one, this one. Because Henderson is in this one, is what it is, isn't it darling? I might have another one, but who knows.

DENNIS: And Dennis Bishop.

MRS. DENNIS: Yes, and Dennis Bishop.

DENNIS: And Joe Platt.

ROSENGARTEN: So what's the event?

MRS. DENNIS: Oh, we didn't say that. Let me see here. It's Jimmy Barry presenting something.

DENNIS: Members of the Highway Commission must be what it is.

MRS. DENNIS: Highway Commission?

DENNIS: The supervising delegation.

MRS. DENNIS: When he was elected to the Highway Commission, I guess. Jimmy Barry was on the Highway Commission for a long time, off and on. Charleston would get a turn, and then I think you all just put Jimmy Barry back on for a long time, didn't you?

DENNIS: A couple of times.

ROSENGARTEN: This one is going way back. "Hanahan school groundbreaking," this one says. I'm calling number twenty-three. I like the hat.

MRS. DENNIS: [laughing] Rembert used to wear a hat all the time. Let me just you something. Hanahan district is down close to Charleston, and it is grown up so, but I believe this is the first school down there, the elementary school, if I'm not mistaken.

DENNIS: That's what it is.

MRS. DENNIS: That's an old picture, because you've got [Stafford] Feagin who was the Superintendent of
Education. She's got ...., I don't know.

DENNIS: .... .... and [Lois] Eargle [House member from Horry].

MRS. DENNIS: Yes, she's got Eargle, who was Eargle?

DENNIS: Superintendent.

MRS. DENNIS: They didn't even have many houses down there then.

ROSENGARTEN: It was a rural area?

MRS. DENNIS: Goose Creek, it wasn't even there, it was really nothing.

DENNIS: That's Calvert Clark in the background.

MRS. DENNIS: Yes.

ROSENGARTEN: Cabot Clark?

MRS. DENNIS: Calvert Clark. He was later Superintendent of Education; I don't know what he was then. These are good ones, because a lot of these are the plant. This is the Hell-Hole group.

ROSENGARTEN: That's great.

MRS. DENNIS: You want to put that with those?

ROSENGARTEN: Well, I think keep them in your filing system and we'll just...

MRS. DENNIS: Know they're here.

ROSENGARTEN: Yes. And these are so well labeled.

MRS. DENNIS: I need to mark a few more of these.

ROSENGARTEN: That's great. That's interesting wallpaper, that lacy...

MRS. DENNIS: I wonder where that was taken, Rembert? I don't know where that was taken. Do you remember that one?

DENNIS: Taken at the restaurant in Charleston.

MRS. DENNIS: Wasn't the Colony House; that was a long time ago. Henry's? Henry's used to be the popular restaurant back then.

ROSENGARTEN: Oh, I know Henry's, down on the Market street.

MRS. DENNIS: Yes, but it used to be very popular. My mother, when she would come and stay with me, even when she was just wearing little flats, because she couldn't walk up steps, we would go to Henry's. That was her favorite place anyway, because you didn't have to walk up, you could just park right, I could park in front.
ROSENGARTEN: So they took the Hell-Hole room at Henry's.

MRS. DENNIS: That's probably where it was. That was where they used to have everything then. There weren't too many restaurants in Charleston.

ROSENGARTEN: Lonnie Hamilton's band plays there.

MRS. DENNIS: Oh is that right?

ROSENGARTEN: Yes. Okay. This one says MacGillison(?), Bradley, and I don't know what that means. This is number twenty-four.


DENNIS: .... Belser.

MRS. DENNIS: Belser.

DENNIS: Rodgers and Gressette.

MRS. DENNIS: Rodgers and Gressette. Do you know what it was?

DENNIS: Must have been reapportionment.

ROSENGARTEN: Reapportionment?

MRS. DENNIS: Bradley Morrah was from Greenville. He really got reapportioned out in a way. What did he do? He ran, for Senator, didn't he? Who'd he run against? He was called a sacrifice. He didn't run against Strom Thurmond did he, Rembert? Isn't it funny how you never think you'd forget things?

ROSENGARTEN: It's the story of my life.

MRS. DENNIS: I don't even know all my children in pictures, you'd better mark all of yours.

DENNIS: Yes, he ran against Thurmond.

ROSENGARTEN: These are the last two in this series, and this one is very well identified. It's a 1980 conference committee appropriations bill. It has everybody's name on it, that's twenty-five. This one, twenty-six is Governor Riley's Order of the Palmetto.

MRS. DENNIS: I tell you, I really thought that they were doing them all.

ROSENGARTEN: You mean labeling them?

MRS. DENNIS: That's my brother-in-law.

ROSENGARTEN: Who's that?

MRS. DENNIS: My sister's husband from Orangeburg, Bill Altman. He was retiring, and I think Bob gave him the Order of the Palmetto, or something. I know that must be what it is. Yes, that's it is, Order of the Palmetto.
ROSENGARTEN: And who is the other fellow, on the other side?

MRS. DENNIS: Bob McNair.

ROSENGARTEN: Oh, McNair.

DENNIS: Gave him a job, too.

MRS. DENNIS: Yes he did.

ROSENGARTEN: Then why does it say on the back Governor Riley?

MRS. DENNIS: But this is... Governor Richard Riley's office. You reckon they didn't even recognize Bob McNair?

ROSENGARTEN: No, that's not possible. But that is one of the big dangers in...

MRS. DENNIS: Oh! You know, I bet Dick Riley gave him the Order of the Palmetto and Bob McNair was there. I'll bet that's what it is. Because he's closer to Bob McNair than... I'll bet that's what it was. But I had kind of thought it was Governor McNair who gave him that. Cathy couldn't be that much off.

DENNIS: That's Bob McNair, is that what you're talking about?

MRS. DENNIS: Yes, but he was not Governor in eighty-one when Bill gave him the... I'll bet he's the one who gave him the job back yonder when McNair was Governor. Don't you? Cathy's got this in Governor Riley's office. Governor Riley would have had to have given him the award in eighty-one, because... And Bob just happens to be in the picture. That's what it is, I'm sure of... He just came to the thing and...

ROSENGARTEN: He was there.

MRS. DENNIS: Yes, and they just took a picture of him I think. That's what that is. Because that's Bob McNair in the picture.

ROSENGARTEN: So of all these pictures there's only one you've identified that you want, which is the one with the, when Jimmy Barrat(sp?) was elected to the [microphone interference] We could do that. You want to take a break for a minute?

[tape stopped, then resumes]

MRS. DENNIS: .... Brown, .... a senator from there. From Georgetown. [more microphone interference] you probably .... ..... you probably don't... I forget, but I [voice to faint and mumbly].

ROSENGARTEN: I know.

MRS. DENNIS: You probably go into Charleston.

ROSENGARTEN: We use Charleston a lot, but in a way I think we'd be better off if we were part of Georgetown County. I know our schools would be better. Do you know that teachers are higher paid in Georgetown County than in Charleston County?

MRS. DENNIS: Bea said, I asked Bea about the play the other night. She said at first they thought about it. After
they thought about it they said well, it was really good. But it was really about Salome from the Bible. She said it was just a little odd, but she said really it was good. She said the jazz was good, and the chamber music was great. But she said the seats at Dock Street Theater [were] just terrible.

ROSENGARTEN: They're hard seats. They're like church pews. I saw the Mozart opera there, but we got to stand through most of it because we were ushering. But it was packed. Every seat.

MRS. DENNIS: It was?

ROSENGARTEN: Um-hm.

[TAPE TWENTY ENDS, CONCLUDING THE INTERVIEW]