TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION OF LIBERIA
DIASPORA PROJECT

PUBLIC HEARING
HAMLINE UNIVERSITY
June 13, 2008
St. Paul, Minnesota

TESTIMONY OF
WILHELMINA HOLDER

TRC Commissioners:
Chairman Jerome Verdier
Vice Chairperson Dede Dolopeh
Oumu Syllah
Sheikh Kafumba Konneh
Pearl Brown Bull
Rev. Gerald Coleman
John H.T. Stewart
Massa Washington

Court Reporter:
Sherri Flagg, RPR, CLR
The following proceedings were had and made of record, commencing at approximately 12:50 p.m.

* * *

WILHELMINA HOLDER,
first duly sworn to tell the truth,
testified as follows:

CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: Please be seated.

Welcome, Madam Witness.

THE WITNESS: Good afternoon, sir.

CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: We are certainly delighted that you took off your time to come and join us at these hearings for the purpose of doing some introspection and reflecting on our past, sharing our experiences in the hope that we can come to grips with the reality of what transpired and find a way towards lasting peace and reconciliation in our country.

We also want to establish the truth because a lot of myth and falsehood have been formed over time, and at this stage we think that the truth is necessary. And this Commission was established for that purpose, hoping that by an understanding of the truth, we can be truly liberated from our biases, from our faults, so that we can be a better nation that our children and grandchildren will inherit. So we thank you for coming again and we say welcome.

THE WITNESS: Thank you for inviting me. It is a
real privilege.

CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: Thank you. We will use
this time now to personally introduce the Commissioners, and
following that we will ask you a few preliminary questions
and then you proceed with your testimony.

At your immediate right is Commissioner Sheikh
Kafumba Konneh, next to him is Commissioner Pearl Brown Bull,
next to her is Commissioner Gerald Coleman. At my immediate
left is Commissioner Dede Dolopei, at my immediate right is
Commissioner Massa Washington, next to her is Commissioner
John Stewart, and then Commissioner Oumu Syllah. I am Jerome
Verdier.

To begin with, can you kindly confirm your full
name for our records.

THE WITNESS: My name is Wilhelmina Holder, my
maiden name Tolbert.

CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: Your maiden name is
Tolbert?

THE WITNESS: Yeah, my father's name was Tolbert.

CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: Your date of birth,
please.


CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: Where do you reside
currently in the U.S.?

THE WITNESS: I reside in Plymouth, Minnesota.
CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: Vocation?

THE WITNESS: By profession I'm presently the executive director of a nonprofit organization called Women's Initiative for Self-Empowerment. But my profession is I'm a public health physician.

CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: Can you say when you left Liberia and migrated to the U.S.?


CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: You left Liberia August 3rd, 1985?


CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: Thank you very much, and you may proceed now.

THE WITNESS: I would like to first begin by thanking God Almighty for the opportunity to be here in the land of the living to tell my story because, but for the grace of God, I would be dead. That's the first person. I give him the praises and the glory for all He has done for me and my family thus far and all He is capable of doing for all of us in the future.

I also want to thank this Commission. I think it's fantastic and wonderful and is in the interest of Liberia and of our children yet unborn. But what you're doing today will benefit our children, and so I'm here very
excited to tell the story and I hope you will give me leeway
to tell it the way I want to tell it. But it's going to be
completely truthful. I have no reason to misinform because I
know the importance of the truth.

Yesterday I read a passage that I think I would
like to read again, that truth is so obscure in these times
and falsehood so established that unless we love the truth,
we cannot know it. And it is by Blaise Pascal. And I know
that everybody on this team loves the truth. There is a
purpose for you all to be here and I thank you for that.

I thank all the supporters, the Advocate for Human
Rights here in Minnesota, all the international supporters,
the -- many people had to give up their time and money to
make this possible. So I cannot name the names, but I
especially say the Advocates for Human Rights because it was
them that encouraged me to come and speak and people that
supported me, Laura and Mark, they encouraged me to speak and
I'm thankful for that.

And I also want to thank my daughter, Yende
Anderson, who heard about this. And she came forward, she
say, "You know, you have to tell your story, you have to tell
your story." She's a young lady, my daughter, and I would
like to thank her for encouraging me to tell the story.

So I really want to start by maybe a little bit
about myself, my family. My father was a God-fearing man and
my mother similarly; and they were people full of love and
devotion for truth, devotion for education, devotion for
sharing. And those people have inspired me and I'm standing
on their shoulders today because what I am, I'm their
product, I'm their fruit. And anybody knows by your fruit,
you will know them. If you want an orange, you go to an
orange tree. And I represent my parents here today and I'm
pleased I can speak on their behalf.

I also want to say why I wanted to talk to this --
to this body because I know the truth is important and we
have to find the truth in order to heal. It's like the
analogy of an abscess. There's this pain and suffering but
you have to cut the abscess to get out the pus, get the pus
out and clean it out in order for healing. And I know this
is painful for many people and -- but the cleaning and
telling the truth, that's the only way we'll heal. So I'm
happy to be part of this.

And I'm also concerned that a member of my family
speak. Many of us had to leave. We parted the Diaspora out
of Liberia so I want to represent my family. I'm not
speaking for all of them because everybody's an individual.
My story I tell is my story. But I can represent people that
were being -- a lot of violence and abuse were perpetrated on
us, and I wanted to tell the story because -- not because I'm
angry and -- because I'm not, in fact. All my anger and pain
dissipated within a year. I was privileged to have a little Bible like this and I brought it to show, a New Testament. When the coup took place, I read it every day and it, cleansed me and healed me.

So I'm here to talk out of love because only through love we can achieve anything. And I want for people in Liberia to realize that the only way we can achieve is through love. We have to get rid of the pain and the suffering. I've achieved what I've achieved in this country because I didn't carry baggage. If you carry a baggage, if you carry all your stuff from yesterday, we have to -- it's good to tell the truth that we know it. And the reason we need to tell the truth and archive it is so that we can remember that this will never happen again, at least not to this extent.

It's not that we'll always have peace. Of course not. But during time of conflict, there's a way to solve conflict. There's a right and just way, there's a legal and right way. And this is the reason why we have to get this out.

Will I ever forget? Oh, no, why should I forget? It's all right for us to remember because we don't want it to happen again. And history is something that we have to remember. We can't erase history. We've got to remember that we have to remember history because it's important; it
tells us where we came from and those places that we don't
want to go back again. We have to remember so we do not go
back again.

So this is why I'm here to talk in front of this
body and use the time of this lady typing away and the
photographers and all of that, to tell the story not just for
you in this room but for people outside this room, people out
around the world, because what I'm saying will affect other
people in other countries also. So I thank you for that.

And I realize that shortly after the coup, I
learned that you have to love your neighbors and also love
your enemies and do good to them that use you and abuse you.
I learned very quickly that vengeance is mine, I will repay,
you know, the atrocities. I never once thought about picking
up arms and doing anything to harm anybody because I learned
from the good book, the Bible, the Holy Bible, that it is God
that will take care of those that harm you because I also
learned that if you live by the sword, you will die by the
sword. And I learned also that whatever a man soweth, that
shall he reap.

And it's not that I'm happy for evil to come on
anybody. It's not -- because God is just, it's not me. But
I never wish harm to anybody, even Doe. In fact, I was sorry
for Doe. I was so hurt when I -- somebody gave me a video
"From Hero to Zero," that they slaughtered this man. It was
so painful, I cried for him. And funny, when he killed my father, I couldn't cry because I was running for my life. But I could cry for Doe, even though he killed my father. And the reason I wanted him to be alive because he should be here today to tell his story. He has a story, too, to tell and unfortunately we can't hear his story and that saddens me today.

I said about -- Mr. Hunder talked about the Weh Syen murder and we learned that there was 17 men that staged a coup. And out of those 17 men, I believe all of them died within the ten years and it was very sad. And only I believe one is alive in North Carolina. I don't know his name, but somebody told me he's alive and maybe he should be telling his story here.

So that's a little bit to tell you why I wanted to come and testify. I have no hatred in my heart for anybody. Even those people who planned the coup or who led the seed of hatred to have destroyed our country the way it is. Every time I think about it it makes me disturbed, and I would like to ask each one of them individually: Why did they do that? But it's done already so we have to move forward, so we're here to move forward today.

Personally my family was -- my mother, they call her "the Via lady," that's why she wasn't killed when they killed my father. But nobody knew that her father's people
had roots in America, they came from America, Little Rock, Arkansas, in fact. So we were a mixed family, a family of ancestors -- we had ancestors that came from the states and my mother's mother never left Liberia.

But I -- the reason I bring this up, because there was the history that was told yesterday and I wanted to let Mr. Konneh know that I encourage him to get other people together to tell the story because the story cannot be told from one person. There's no expert, very few experts in this world, I would say. But, you know, whenever you want to tell the story, make sure you -- whatever you going to write, do research to make sure it's true and completely truthful.

But I think the story has to be told, it has to be told from different angles and people have to bring many people together to write the story. And this is one of my recommendations: a history book of Liberia, accurate history book, not what some American guy said or somebody that came to visit Liberia for a short time came and said. We need to tell the story, we need to get people from the villages, chiefs and so on, to tell part of the story because there is people out there that can tell an accurate story.

So sorry if I deviate a little bit, but I want to -- so my family: My father, he was a farmer. I think he took it from the farms, he was a -- his ancestor came from South Carolina.
CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: Who was your father?

THE WITNESS: My father, William Tolbert. He didn't come from there, his grandfather came from there. But they were from South Carolina and they were farmers, and my father and his father were farmers. They were first farmers; they had horses, cattle. And so no wonder he thought rice -- that we should be able to produce our own rice. But he was first a farmer at heart. He became a businessman, a politician, and finally vice president for 19 years and finally president of Liberia. But deep at heart, he had a love for his country.

And I mean, I can't -- I couldn't understand it when I was smaller because my house was always full of people from all tribes. Nobody ever talked about tribes in our house, but people talked different languages, different dialects that we called it then. But it was okay. People were bringing the children to my father to send to school. Some of them came young, some of them came while they were in college.

Elijah Taylor were one of those that came from -- his father, the chief, Tamba Taylor, he came to our home, he stayed with us, he went to college in Monrovia. So -- but my father's base was in Bensonville, they call it Bentol as a city. But in Bensonville, that's where we lived and grew and that's where I have a love for -- for everybody. I mean,
there were people in my house who -- and also I thought it was important that my father -- we prayed every morning, every evening. In the morning there was prayers, in the evening there was prayers. And that's when I first got to know about God and everybody in my house, we all learned.

And so a little background, my father being vice president for 19 years, of course he saw -- and during that period he was prepared to know what to do for Liberia. So when he became President, when Tubman, when President Tubman died, he already knew certain things he wanted to change and he tried to do things rapidly. And -- but obviously it wasn't rapid enough for people, but he had wonderful plans for Liberia.

He felt that there should be change in the strict code of ethics, professional ethics. People should go to work on time. A few people were fired from their job. If he found a minister not in office when they were supposed to be in office, I think one or two people lost their job. So in the meantime trying to change Liberia, he was also creating enemies.

Another thing that he got rid of was the public relation officers who were people that were being paid to be watchmen in the community. But he thought that was not right, he got rid of that. And then there were a lot of -- a group of people that didn't like that.
He also changed the dress code. Official of government, most of them had to wear coat and tie and if you went to a big ball, it was tailcoat and so on. And he -- when he was sworn in as president to take over after Tubman died, he was in the sweatsuit and he just thought that was the most comfortable dress so he continued wearing it. So the dress code changed to be more casual, which was good because then every single person could come to the table, to balls and parties, and they were comfortable. And I thought that was a good thing.

But as all these things -- first he spoke about the youth as the "special jewels," he had scholarships and a whole lot of things. Vice President Bennie Warner spoke about it yesterday, so I will not repeat about it. Maybe it's because they say she would speak good about her father, but I would speak good about anybody, whether it's my father or not.

So the Rice Riots, we heard about it yesterday so I'm not going to say much. But it was then -- when I got to Liberia in 1973, after graduating from medical school, I -- I was -- I had the opportunity to stay in Canada where I studied medicine. And I could have done my internship, but I was so eager to go back to help with the development of Liberia. I left everything, rushed to Liberia, I said I'm going to do my internship in Liberia.
And while I was there, I realized that preventative medicine was the best. Children were dying from measles, whooping cough, tetanus, all of those things, diarrhea, diseases. So I wanted to help the children of Liberia, so I went to London School of Hygiene. I did tropical public health and I thought I was in my dream job when I came back and I became the Deputy WHO Program Coordinator for Liberia. I worked tirelessly, tirelessly. I worked within -- I became the National WHO Program Coordinator, World Health Organization Program Coordinator in 1978 and the coup took place in 1980 but during those two years, were able to write the first health plan, national program plan for Liberia with the assistance of the UN DP, the international health establishment in Liberia, and the Department Ministry of Health. So I was very pleased for that.

The reason I brought that up because I wanted to show you that -- and how did I even become a doctor? I remember when I was just finishing high school, my father told me, "Hey, what are you planning to do?" And I was -- at that time I had just learned German and French, and I was the only one in my father's -- among my father's children that left Liberia to go abroad to study before I finished my first degree. And I would say that the reason I left was because my best friend, Wilhelmina Tubman, President Tubman's
daughter, was going to Switzerland and his father -- her father, President Tubman, asked my father for me to go with her, so I went with her.

And it was a blessing for me because I learned how to -- I learned about diversity. I mean, I saw diversity in my home, but I learned about diversity outside Liberia. I was in the International School of Geneva. But just to say the reason I brought it up, I wanted -- at that time all I knew I loved to see interpreting. I went to United Nations, saw the interpreters. I said, oh, I want to be an interpreter.

And the reason I say that, I remember now I liked to talk a lot. But my father said, "Interpreter?" And I say, "Yeah, I want to be an interpreter." He said, "Well, how will you help Liberia? How will you help your people?"

I looked at him -- I mean, at that time I was 16 or so. I said, "Well, I can represent Liberia at United Nations." He said, "Oh, think twice about it."

So I went back and I said, well, you know, I'm good at science and my mother told me I was good at caring for people; maybe I should look at science. So I went and started studying science and then I became a doctor. But I say this because my father was the type of person he would encourage people to get the best out of themselves. And he went to different places in the rural area, like Vice
President Warner said he went to Vahun; yes, he went to Vahun. He got a young fellow from Vahun called Armah and James Armah was in this area; he would have never gone to school. And James Armah was brought and he studied in -- he was living with my sister, Christine Norman, Christine Tolbert Norman; and now he's in the states and he's an engineer.

But my father took people from different areas. He had a knack of finding people that -- he said this person is bright. He always said this person is bright. I think I got some of his tendency because now I sense people's spirit. I can see somebody that's evil and I can say, oh, and shun him. But he had a knack of saying this person would be achieving.

And he loved Liberians. And when I say he loved the youth of Liberia, he knew that our -- our future depended on the youth and education was key to that. He even went to the rural area, brought a fellow that had no arms. In fact, he said e was traveling and they had this fellow in the kendijah. He didn't know, the people say it was meat. He say, "No, no, no, let me see what's in that kendijah." And they opened the kendijah -- and by the way, he spoke fluent Kpele because he lived with the people. My mother spoke Kpele and Via because she lived with the people, too.

"So take that down," he say. He spoke to people
in Kpele. There was a human baby that they were going to throw away, and this fellow, he didn't have arms. So my father took him and he stayed in our house. He went to school, he was his clerk. He used to type with his arms, with his nubs.

So that's the type of person, the father, I knew. And because of that, I myself, now I'm working in this country working -- I've worked with all groups; people in prostitution, people that are drug addicts. I help in directing refugee immigrants to get integrated in the community, helping foreign-trained professionals get their license. So I learned from my father to help others who are less fortunate than myself.

So I gave you a background like that because I wanted to at least tell you where I'm from and who I am. So where do I go on. (Examining document.)

The 1979 riot, we heard about it yesterday and we also heard a little bit today about -- there was a question about Baccus Matthew and whether they wanted to kill Baccus Matthew. There was no plan to kill Baccus Matthew. That was a rumor. My father released Baccus, was forgiving Baccus Matthew. Baccus Matthew aunt was related to my father somehow or other. I mean, grandmother, sorry, his grandmother. And his grandmother came and asked forgiveness for Baccus, even though Baccus Matthew himself was not
repentant. His grandmother and my father pardoned Baccus Matthew. There was no -- there was going to be no execution of anybody.

So the atmosphere in the Liberia Rice Riot, I always wonder why it was staged at that time. We were right about to have the OAU in Liberia, Organisation of African Unity, a great period of our history and development. And it was -- the Rice Riot was about three months before July, I think, if I remember right, the OAU was coming to Liberia.

So it was really sad. But, you know, Liberians rally around and the OAU was a very -- I thought it was very successful. The Hotel Africa were built, all those villas were built, and it was a wonderful celebration.

And right about that time, the rumors about coup were coming out. I mean, people were saying the coup -- there would be a coup. And I was a bit worried. I went to my father because my mother-in-law, Burleigh's mother, Catherine Holder, used to have dreams. And she came and told me that she had a dream and she said she saw five groups of people plotting against my father. So I said, "Yeah, we've been talking." And then there were some strange things happening in the government. I don't know the -- people were dissatisfied.

And she said, "But the strange thing I saw -- four of them I know, I know the groups, but the fifth one I do not
know." And then everybody knows the outcome. The fifth group was -- she said when the coup took place, she said, "Oh, that's the group I didn't know, the soldiers." And she didn't know them and neither did I know Doe. But when I saw him that morning, I was sorry for him because I knew he was not capable of ruling a country. He was not, because he was one of those that wasn't fortunate to get educated. And I'm sorry that he wasn't, he didn't. But time -- if only the coup hadn't taken place, he would have probably gotten educated. But this man with barely a high school -- he wasn't even a high school graduate, was then celebrated to be our president. And I was saddened to hear even from this United States people saying that for the first time we have a native person ruling Liberia.

Now, don't ever think I don't believe that everybody has a right to govern the country. But why would you want a person that's not literate? There are a lot of -- there were a lot of educated people that could be said that he didn't have ancestors that came from the United States but they celebrated the man. And now people are saying he was not good. How did they expected him to be good, a good leader without education? So that's why I felt sorry for Doe. He was bound to fail.

And then he had people around him that were hypocrites. And I know some of the things they told him.
mean, we saw after the coup took place, there were --
apparently I heard there were supposed to be three people and
there ended up 13 people. And I know it because my husband
was supposed to be the 15th to be executed. He said he was
in this room and that day Doe called them out, they called
the 13 people. And then, by the way, the historian yesterday
said it was 14. There were not 14 that were executed, there
were only 13 people. And Johnny McClain was set free, the
14th. And they told my husband, "Your day's coming tomorrow.
You go right back." And they closed the door behind him.

I have to jump because the story is a lot. But I
wanted to bring that out, that I don't know the details who
put those names on; but I believe because they said it's
true, apparently Doe called for Frank Stewart not too long
afterwards--he was the budget director--to ask him questions
about the budget and Frank Stewart was no more.

Also, and somebody said that -- okay, anyway.

Okay, let me say a little bit about what happened, what the
experience I had, the violence against my human rights and
the torture I experienced. Fortunately, by the grace of God,
I didn't experience physical torture. I mean, I wasn't
beaten. But I know family members that were beaten. My
husband explained his torture, and in a way I'm sorry he
cannot be here. I was trying to encourage him to come but
this weekend he -- his -- both his feet were swollen. He had
a sore on his foot and his feet got swollen so he cannot put
his feet in shoes. He's not going to come because of that.
But I have his book here and I'm not trying to
sell his book, but I gave a copy to the Commission so they
can read his experience from this book. And he had no reason
to tell the story. This is a vivid book. And there are
parts of the book that I can -- I will try to put on a sheet
of paper so that we can make copies for the Commission to
have if you so desire. But his story is told in this book
and he was beaten every day from April to December by
different people with sometimes he said the inner rim of a
tire. He said one day they beat him so much he passed out.
And as they were beaten, they would put inside his
ear. And there was some -- one or two people that knew him
that started the beating, and they were putting inside of his
ear and he fainted. And then he didn't die, thank God. But
he tells his story. And he was in post stockade, too. He
said they gave him dry rice. He asked a question about what
was happening there. He was on the floor, he had nowhere to
sleep. And he said after the execution of the 13 people, he
was taken to Belle Yallah, I think, he and Wilfred Clark were
on the same plane. And Wilfred Clark was saying, "Why are
they taking me to Belle Yallah? They made a mistake, they
made a mistake." So my husband -- anyway, he thought it was
funny that this man would say they made a mistake. He was in
charge of the security at the mansion, and he -- my husband
was wondering: Why is this man telling me these things?

Anyway, he went to Belli Yallah. He said when he
got there, he had on some trousers. They took a razor and
cut the trousers on his body, they cut the leg of the
trousers and they gave him a short trousers out of that. And
that's the pair of trousers he stayed in for about 15 months
or maybe close to that. But he said he was on the floor all
the time. There were 15 to 20 in one room, barely could make
it. The bucket would be full. People had to use the bucket
in the room for bathroom.

But it's a long story and I cannot go into it, but
people were beaten physically. Fortunately I wasn't and my
sisters weren't. We were not raped and I'm sure many people
wanted to but they didn't. God covered us, I'm telling you,
and I believe he did.

So I will tell you a little bit of my experience
in just pieces to tell you my experience. When the coup took
place April 12, I was home. My husband was called by my
father to the mansion and he went, a very brave man, he went.
And all I knew he came back and said, "You have to leave
right away." So I said, "What?" And then the telephone was
ringing. So my sisters were saying they're shooting at the
radio station. I had to pass by the radio station, but I
decided I would leave. And my marriage vows say you have to
honor and obey your husband so I said I would so I did. And
he saved our lives because he kept saying, "You have to leave
now, otherwise anything happens, I won't be responsible." So
I left.

But just go back a little bit: Two days before
the coup, my husband and I realized that they had changed the
guard. The soldiers, they were -- they didn't usually have a
weapon with them, but this man -- there was a new guard on
post. That was the -- I believe the Thursday we noticed
that. And Friday was this big 100-voice choir because they
were celebrating the centennial celebration of the Baptist
church in Liberia and we went to that.

But this guard was there on Thursday. My husband
said, "You know, I'm going to change him on Saturday." But
this guy was -- he had a gun on his side all the time. And
my husband said, "Where's the old fellow?" He said, "Oh,
they just changed us, you know."

But that night, my husband -- because he noticed
there was different guy, when he came in the yard, he jumped
over the fence to come and tell me to leave. And he said,
"Be careful, but I will be trying to protect you all." So
when we left out of the yard, I had to tell this man the
story. I said, "Well, you know, I'm just going for the
weekend." He said, "Where are you all going this time of the
morning?" I said -- well, because by then it was -- must
have been about 2 a.m. in the morning. The coup took place
maybe an hour before then.

"Where you going?" I say, "I'm -- I'm going to my
mother-in-law but I'm going for the weekend. We always go
for the weekend." But he was new so he didn't know what I
was saying anyway, but he knew I was leaving. And so I left.
It must have been 3 or -- I don't know.

But as I was leaving, I could hear the gunshots at
the -- at the radio station. But do you know, once I got in
the car, there was myself; I had a lady that was taking care
of the children, Mary, Mary Smith, she was with us; and I had
six children, I had three biological children and three other
children I was caring for. The oldest one was a girl whose
father worked with my father, and when he died, my father
promised him that he would take care of her. So she came --
before I even had my first child, she came to my house so I
took her as my child. Her name is Mary and now she's a
master's -- she has a master's in special education. She
lives in Atlanta. And then I had my three biological
children and two, a niece and a nephew.

So we all got in one car and we drove. I was
petrified, most of the children were sleeping. My youngest
was 11 months. So I had to take these six children plus Mary
to safety and I was scared. So all I could tell them, "Mary,
let's pray." So we were praying. And we didn't see or hear
a thing from the time I left my house until we got to Crozerville. And I know there were fighting around, so that's why I know God took care of us.

So when the coup took place, the next morning at -- when I got to Bensonville, first when I got to Bensonville, Bentol then, some of my father guards was outside his house because we had to pass his house to get to my mother-in-law's house. And they asked me, "What happened to Monrovia?" I said I didn't know. They said, "Oh, we hear there's a coup." And I said, well, I didn't know which side they were on because, as I told you, we know there were a lot of plots but some people were in the government, in my father's cabinet. Vice President Bennie Warner said the information about the rice got out before they even made a decision.

But so I said I didn't know. So he said okay. I've forgotten his name now but he said, okay, wherever -- I said, "I'm going to my mother-in-law's house." He knew my mother-in-law's house. He said, "We'll take care of you, you will be okay." I was saying I hope he doesn't "take care of me."

Anyway, I went to my mother-in-law's house and I stayed there that day. My mother-in-law, when I got there, she was awake. We got there about 5, about 5 a.m., and she said, "You know, I just had -- woke up from a dream." She
said, "There will be a lot of death." I said, "Oh, I think something has happened, I mean, they're shooting in Monrovia. There's -- I think there's a coup." She said, "Oh, my God." But she said the meat -- they were throwing meat to the dogs, there was so much meat. She said, "Oh, there's a lot of death."

So 6:00 we're waiting for the radio, it didn't come. 7:00 Samuel Doe said the country belonged to the soldier and everybody heard that news. So my first thought was, oh, I want to get my father's body because my father always told me that he wanted to be buried right away. He was not afraid of death. I told him every time my mother-in-law had those dreams, I went to him. He said, "I know your mother-in-law, she sees things, God speaks to her in dreams," but he said, "I'm not afraid of death."

You know, when my father became president, the day he swore in after Tubman's death, that evening he came and gathered the -- his children together and he said, "You know, I've educated all of you"--and many of us, some of them were married, many of us were married--he said, "Now I want you to realize that Liberia comes first and -- God first, Liberia and then you all third." And at first I was hurt, but then I realized what he meant because he had given us the education. He told us, he said, "You know, whatever is in here (indicating), if you don't crazy, you will always have it.
But material things you will never have. So get an education." So he told us that, so we knew Liberia was first and he really died for his country.

So when he died, that's why I say I couldn't cry because I cried the day he was sworn in as president because I knew he would be killed. It's strange because we see from history people who are selfless, gave themself up, and people think that they're weak. They're not weak. Because you're meek and humble doesn't make you weak. You're meek and humble because you're strong and he was strong and good.

So that day when they killed him, all I wanted was to get his body, to bury him. So that's -- that's Saturday. I said, "I'm going to find my father's body." I laugh now because it was foolish. I left my six children with Mary. Mary, she never went to school but she had a heart of gold. And I left Mary with my children. And then -- no, no, sorry, I told Mary, "Can you go with me?" I wanted somebody in the car with me. So I left the children with my mother-in-law and Mary was 12 years old, and I said I was going to look for my father.

So we drove to -- and then I didn't know where my husband was because he told me to leave and he said he was following us, but he never followed. So I say, "I'm going to find my father's body and find my husband." So I drove to my house and I got there. Just before I reached my house -- my
house was on Sugar Beach Road going to Schefflin Road going
to the airport. Just before I reached, Ms. Mary, this lady,
she was very wise, she said, "You know, just wait, don't go
to the house yet. Let's talk to my friend."

And she had -- there was a group of small homes
before my house. We stopped and she had a friend and she
spoke in Basso and the friend was just crying. And I said,
"What she's talking?" She said, "Oh," she said, "don't go to
the house. Yesterday the whole day there was shooting at
your house, they were destroying your house. People were
moving things out and it was full of people, soldiers,
everything." Then I said, "What?" So I turned around. Mary
never -- we didn't know where my husband was and we sure
weren't going for my father because I realized I had to now
live for my children. So we didn't go.

So they destroyed my house that very day. So it
was good I left the house. Otherwise I would have been
destroyed, too. So we went and I was so stunned. I just sat
down because I just didn't feel -- there was nothing I could
do. I thought this coup was to just take power and they
would take Liberia to the next step. I was very naive.

So I was sitting on the -- Sunday night there was
a lot of shooting at my brother's, A.B.'s home. A.B. house
was not far from my mother-in-law's home. And I -- I didn't
sleep for the first five days after the coup. So I was awake
and I heard all the gunshot and I was praying for A.B. So Monday when I got up, my one -- Mrs. Oshoko, she's a nurse in Bensonville, she came and said -- you know, I'm -- I know her very well, close family friend. She said, "You know, they went to pick up A.B. yesterday but he disappeared, I mean, he escape."

And I was thankful. I said, "Well, at least they didn't kill him." She said, "No, they didn't kill him but they're coming for you today." I didn't believe her. I said "Why? What did I do?" I mean, I never worked in the government, I've been working in healthcare. She said, "Oh, they said they will find you and skin you alive." So that's when I really got scared. My mother-in-law said, "Oh, you have to go in hiding." I said, "Why?" She said, "You have to." I say, "But where?" So she say, "Just go to the neighbor and tell them who you are and they will protect you."

So I left in faith. To cut it short, these people I didn't know, but they took me in. I was 35 years old then. My angel sent by God, a 17-year-old boy, they call him Du Boy because he set up a plan, he said, "When the soldiers come for you, I'm going to lock you up in the room upstairs and you stay there until I take you out." I said what? So I -- then he said, "No, you just do that." I said okay.

And there I was, I mean, I had to surrender myself
and I did surrender myself because then I had nobody but 
myself and God and I had this -- the Testament. My 
mother-in-law, just before I left, she said, "You take this. 
It's okay and you will be okay and the children will be 
okay." And I said okay. And I really trusted that I had 
nothing else. 

You know, it wasn't even half an hour after I went 
to that house Doe came on to give his message to the nation. 
And while he was speaking, he said that he took over to help 
the poor and it was good that the family heard that and he 
was there to take people out of poverty. And I didn't -- I 
can't remember the details, but the part I remember because 
the family used that when soldiers came. So half an hour 
later the soldiers surrounded my mother-in-law's house and 
they started shooting in the air. I was already up in the 
room locked under lock and key by this 17-year-old I never 
knew before. But I heard my children screaming and shouting 
and I just knew they were all dead. 

And then I heard them knocking and kicking things. 
You know, the houses were thin houses, very thin, you could 
hear everything and they were close together in Crozerville. 
And then it was quiet. And then the same group of soldiers 
came to the house I was in, and I heard the children 
screaming again. There was shooting in the air. This family 
had, I believe, seven or eight children. But the oldest was
17 and the youngest, I don't know, maybe three or four. But
I just felt that, oh, this -- I'm dead, because I didn't even
feel that these people will protect me. But they did. Not
one of the children said a word that I was there.

The soldiers came in the house and were knocking
over chairs and screaming, "If we find Wilhelmina Holder and
Burleigh Holder, we'll skin them alive and bury them." And
my heart--I mean, I can feel it now--those people, they came
to my door and I took my glasses off and I said my last
prayer, gave myself to God, because I said -- well, at that
time I didn't know whether -- I knew my father was dead. I
didn't know what had happened to my mother, I didn't know
where my husband was, I didn't know where my -- none of my
sisters were. I knew my brother was maybe in hiding and
maybe dead, and I just knew my children were dead. So I was
ready to die, took my glasses off, put it down, said my last
prayer and presented -- gave my whole life and self to God.

And then, all of a sudden, it occurred to me:
What if your children are alive? Who will take care of your
children? Then I prayed: Save me Lord. And he did because
this man -- this soldier was outside the door at that time,
and he said, "Oh, there's a -- I'm going to shoot this door
down." He told the lady, "Move, move, I'm going to shoot the
door down."

And as I prayed, I heard him say, "I'm thirsty."
Do you have cold water?" The woman screamed, "Yes, I have cold water," and she rushed to get cold water. And he yelled, "I didn't come for cold water. I came for Wilhelmina Holder and Burleigh Holder." In the confusion he moved from the door and went around the rest of the house, went downstairs, saw another little hut with a padlock and he blew the door down with a machine gun. I heard a loud thump and the gun. And then I -- then I breathed a sigh of relief and for one hour, that family stood still, they didn't move and I didn't move. And unfortunately I needed to use the rest room, so I went to the window and I called and they remembered.

So that was part of my torture at the beginning.

I was -- we had to stay in the bush for three days. In the night I -- the same boy would take me from -- tried to find a place to stay. Eventually I managed to find my children and eventually I left and went to Monrovia.

When I got to Monrovia, I went to my sister, Sadie DeShield's house. And we more or less had to turn ourselves in. I went to the convent first and the convent took me to the mansion. And the mansion then -- they took me to the mansion and we more or less turned ourselves in. And when I went back to my sister, my foster sister's house, in about half an hour they called me back to the mansion to find out why I was at the mansion. And I explained that I was turning
myself in, and they told me to stay at my foster sister's house. So I was under sort of arrest but not quite house arrest.

And from there, I was taken to a house arrest when they wanted me to give up my job. They came and told me I had to resign from the World Health Organization. I said no. And Cheo Cheapoo told me that "If you do not resign, you will go under house arrest and not only that, you have to have your own house to go under house arrest. So I will place you under house arrest." Me and my three sisters, we were placed under house arrest.

And this was horrible because the day we were under house arrest, we were told that only my sister, Wookie Tubman that was free, could come and bring us food. But some family members came and brought us food and they were arrested then. And Cheo Cheapoo called on his walkie-talkie and before long some of the PRC--and George Boley, he came too, to look at us. And they put us in a room and told us that they had to think about what to do for us, what would be our fate. And we were terrified because they could have killed every one of us.

And during the six weeks we were under house arrest, all hours of the night people would come knocking at the door to just gloat at us. The only thing that blessed us, we communicated with the red beret police that were
taking care of us, and they were kind enough to have a sense
of protection to protect anybody from doing any harm to us.
The person that really was harmed was my mother. She was
under -- she was in prison for one month in the mansion jail.
She was on the bare floor, she didn't have even a piece of
cloth to sleep on for over two weeks before one of the
soldiers were merciful and brought her a mattress. But she
tell her story in her book, so I don't have to go through
that.

And she -- her story, she says that when the coup
took place, when they shot -- when they were about to shoot
my father, they told her, "You are Via so I'm not going to
shoot you." And they shot my father, he was killed right in
front of her eye. And she said that after the shooting,
these people were -- she couldn't tell but they had black --
they were all -- they had masks on their face so she couldn't
tell, but she did hear them saying that now -- after they
shot my father, they said, "Now we can get our $25,000." So
for $25,000, that's what he was worth, 25,000.

Anyway, my mother, they call her out to be -- to
say that she had to give $1 million for her release. And she
told Chea Cheapoo, she said, "You know, you just put it on
the radio and tell people that Mrs. Tolbert needs a million
dollars. I'm sure some of my friends around the world would
get a million dollars." So I feel that it was greed and envy
that put lots of this problem onto Liberia, and they were just after money and power.

So I was told that I only have a few minutes so I don't know how to shorten this. But I just want to summarize and say I survived and it was difficult because I didn't have a job. After they got -- after we came from house arrest, after six weeks we were released from house arrest, one of my sisters had to stay in house arrest until December of the year. And I felt that I should stay in Liberia because my husband, when he came from political -- when he came out of prison, which was after 20 months, December the 23rd when he was released, he -- all of a sudden, he felt a lot of pain in his ear and all of that. He wanted to go for -- to come for health reasons to the United States. He was literally driven from the U.S. embassy, told him that he could not get any visa, he was on the black list. So we decided to stay in Liberia.

After a year the government called me for a job. I worked with combatting communicable diseases program for children. I worked with the children's program preventing malaria, diarrhea, et cetera; and I was privileged to travel sometimes because that project was funded by U.S. AID.

So within five years -- I mean, first of all, they call us for a government ID card, national ID card, and this is when I realized this tribalism started. They asked me my
tribe. At that time I was so frustrated. "Tribe?" I said, "I have no tribe." And this one man said, "Oh, don't mind her. She's one of Tolbert's daughter." And then I said, "Yes, I'm the fifth daughter and I'm proud to be his daughter. What else?"

Then he said, "But your father spoke Kpele, your mother Via and Kpele. What are you?" I said, "I don't have a tribe, I don't need a tribe. We are all Liberians." So this national ID card had "tribe" on it. This is when this tribalism started because when I was younger, I mean, we never celebrated the fact that we came -- my ancestors came from Liberia. We celebrated the freedom and the liberty that Liberia -- while Liberia was established for all, all people who were blacks. That's what we celebrated and we were integrated in the Liberian community and that I'm proud of.

So within five years after the coup, I was privileged to hear about the Hubert H. Humphrey fellowship program and I applied. And one general at the Ministry of Health helped me out, General Barclay. He said, "Don't worry, you applied. Have some faith." And sure enough, I applied. Out of 27 Liberians that applied, I was one of them. So I applied and this is how I got out of Liberia and I was able to take my children. Otherwise it would have been difficult for me to get a visa and be reunited with my family in the United States.
So my husband would come off and on. And then when the war broke out -- his last visit was in December so I told him, "You're not going back to" -- December 1989. So 1990 when the war broke out, I told him, "You're not going back." So we lost everything we had again. But it was okay. Life in the United States, I got integrated, fortunately. It was a struggle but my children got an education. I visited Liberia twice, in year 2000 and 2006. And I'm pleased to say the first visit I stayed two days because it was hard, I -- it was just too painful to see the destruction. But in 2006 I stayed two weeks and I'm eager and I'm planning to go back soon.

My two children went to -- my oldest and second child went to Liberia, and they are all gear up to help in the development of Liberia. And I'm determined to follow my heart and do something for Liberia. I'm determined to help with the development and I'm determined to empower Liberians in the United States to get profession that will make them ready to go and open small businesses and with grassroots development to grow Liberia. Everybody don't have to be an official of the government or a government person. You can work wherever you are. Each town and village need all of us. So everybody wherever you are, if you can hear my voice: Get your profession. All right, be carpenter, business, plumbers, whatever. But go and be determined to
help develop Liberia. That's the message I've given to my children and that's the message I give to everybody. Thank you.

(AUDIENCE APPLAUSE)

If I have time, I will give my message to the TRC. But you all have questions, so I will give you the privilege to ask some questions.

CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: Thank you very much, Madam Witness, for taking your time out to share your experience with us. You seem to have some perspectives on development in our country over the last period of Tubman. In the same vein, we extend to you our sympathy for the death of your father and other family members who might have died during the course of the conflict. We hope that the blood of all Liberians who have past and gone before us will better (INAUDIBLE) our country and lasting peace and reconciliation can be the resulting fruit. Thank you very much, and Commissioners will ask questions.

COMMISSIONER SHEIKH KAFUMBA KONNEH: Thank you, Madam Witness, for your testimony and for your message. You know, some of us were mature when your father came to power, and there are many Liberians and there are many areas where Liberians can point their fingers of appreciation for the work that your father did for Liberia. But there are also areas where fingers will point at that they express their
dissatisfaction and concern.

For example, your father inherited a story where it was said by many politicians or political activists from the indigenous group that, yes, today you can find native Liberians in the cabinet, in the legislature, in the foreign service; but there is far more important positions in government which were never allowed to be occupied by the indigenous Liberians. That's the Presidency, the Vice Presidency, the Speakers of the House of Representative, the President of Pro Tempore and the -- the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court. That was the complaint that your father inherited; it was not the doing of your father.

But in the case of his administration, two of the five positions were occupied by the Tolbert family from one mother and one father, and the tier of the five positions were occupied by someone who only yesterday I got to know that he was indigenous Liberian but were a closest neighbor to Bensonville that is Bishop Warner.

Your father was president of Liberia, your Uncle Frank Tolbert was president of pro tempore. So your father inherited non-equitable distribution of political power. But with that representation and backed by the fact that two persons from one mother, one father live in the same place were elected as far back as 1943 in the House of Representative, people felt that that was too much for one
family. What is your view about that?

THE WITNESS: Well, my view, my father when he became president, Frank Tolbert was in his position so he didn't elect Frank Tolbert. We hope that the people of Liberia -- it was not in his administration. Frank Tolbert became -- got his position.

COMMISSIONER SHEIKH KAFUMBA KONNEH: The president of pro tempore position, he got that.

THE WITNESS: He was president of pro tem before my father became president. I mean, my father didn't appoint him. People talked about my father appointing Steven Tolbert as Minister of Finance, but Steven Tolbert was qualified to be Minister of Finance. I mean, look at the great United States when Kennedy was in power, his brother was also in the government. I think -- I mean, if that's one of the reasons they had a coup, it's sad because my father, in all intent, he never wanted to be president longer than his term. He had told me and everybody he was leaving, he was going to go back to his farm.

He had intended to help Liberia. I mean, as I say, that he had been vice president for 19 years so he saw some of the problems. You cannot do things in -- he was not even there more than -- not even ten years, so how can you make changes that quickly in ten years?

But I think if somebody's qualified -- you know,
Steven Tolbert was amply qualified. Frank Tolbert -- I wasn't -- I was in school a lot, as I said--I was in Switzerland, then in Canada--and so I wasn't there when all these appointments were made. But I don't think you could just fire Frank Tolbert because I was his brother. People put Frank Tolbert there before he became president. But people talk about nepotism, but I don't think my father was that type. He was looking for qualified people. He looked all around and he represented the diversity as far as he could as fast as he could, I think, and he did well until some of the people in his inner circle was upset with him.

But he was on the right path and if only they had allowed that, not because of his life because I said -- I forgot to say, he even had his own plot, he had his own grave, his own casket. He didn't care. But he was fighting for the Liberian people and he wanted representation. So I can't answer anymore. I'm sorry, I was never a politician, I was a medical doctor.

COMMISSIONER SHEIKH KAFUMBA KONNEH: Thank you very much.

COMMISSIONER PEARL BROWN BULL: Madam Witness, thank you for coming to contribute to history because you were a participant, and thank you for saying what you know. I asked the witness before, Mr. Hunder, since he worked at the Stockade, whether he remembered a list of the names of
those who were in prison. But you just reiterated that
because it was on December 23rd, 1981 when President Doe--I
think he was then president--or Doe declared general amnesty
for all Doe's politicians in the True Whig Party officials to
come home and also to open the jailhouse, and that when many
people came out, including your husband we have just said.

So since he's written his book--and I haven't seen
a copy of it--could you, because we asked him to remember the
names and I'm citing Counselor Holder who also even if he
didn't put the names in the book, just for history because we
are supposed to -- that's part of our work, document those
who died before the period 1979 and to 2003--in fact, anybody
directly or indirectly, as a result of this Civil War--and
declare those missing. So those who we don't know what
happened to them, after a certain period of time, even
legally when someone is missing, you declare them dead or --
so it's in our TRC Act.

So you could ask Mr. Counselor Holder, I know him
as Counselor Holder from State Department, I worked there
since 1970 with him; could he please also, since he couldn't
come, it will be until Saturday, remember the list of those
who were in jail for us to be able to document them, you
know. Thank you for coming to tell your story to the TRC.

THE WITNESS: I will. I will ask him for that.

And the book -- actually I gave a copy of the book to Mark
Hamil who is from Dorsey Whitney law firm, and I said that pages of the book that related to the coup could be printed out and give you copies.

COMMISSIONER PEARL BROWN BULL: How much for that book?

THE WITNESS: It's just $20. My husband was handicapped, he had a stroke when he came to America, and so his left hand -- I mean, it's not working properly. So he had to use his right-hand, one finger. So he took a long time to write the book.

COMMISSIONER PEARL BROWN BULL: I have a copy of Mrs. Tolbert's Lift Him Up book and the speeches of the president and the speech that he made also right after the 1979 Rice Riot at a centennial (INAUDIBLE) in May, that book I quoted three or four times when I had to make speech. It was in there, he talk about unity, reconciliation in that book. So I also recommend those to look at it, if you have a copy, we can make a copy for history.

THE WITNESS: I have a copy of the speeches. I can give you a copy of that.

COMMISSIONER PEARL BROWN BULL: I have the book.

THE WITNESS: You have it, okay.

COMMISSIONER GERALD COLEMAN: Thank you also for the presentation you've just made to us. I just have a few questions. Some may be delicate, but I hope you can just
give me the best you can.

I'm concerned, you know, your father was the vice president of this -- of our country for many years under what Liberians sometimes called Tubmanism. So during that time, was he comfortable in that position? When you consider the changes that he really tried to bring forth to move the country in a new direction, I wonder whether that was just a sudden relapse or change of money or was it something that was really paining him all along and just the opportunity came, you know, et cetera. I don't know whether you'd like to shed some light on this.

And then the other one, you mentioned about four or five groups in a vision. If you don't mind, I would like to know about the other four groups.

And, third, you mentioned the name George Boley who visited you. Is that the same George Boley that is linked to the LPC during this wartime? That's my third.

And the issue of money and greed, I notice you mentioned that some of the soldiers said that now we can get our $25,000. The history will say that this war was just motivated by people who wanted to be liberated from a leadership that was corrupt, but now here the key implementers of this coup are thinking about money business. So somebody had to have the money to give it to them, so it means that we need to start looking at who had that money and
who was really concerned about using the greed or simplicity of the people to overthrow the government.

So those are some of my four or five questions I would like for you to add light on.

THE WITNESS: Please remind me if I forget, I wasn't writing.

COMMISSIONER GERALD COLEMAN: Yes.

THE WITNESS: My father was vice president and I believe he was loyal to Tubman and that was the right thing to do. He believed and I believe that a person, as a head of state, you know, is a position that -- granted by God and nobody should -- there's a way, there's a legal and right way to get people out of power. And he was patient to wait until his time came as president.

I think one of my father's speeches when he was in high school, he felt that he would be president of Liberia so he went through the rank. And so during Tubman time, no doubt there were things he wanted to change but, you know, you can be the change you want right around where you are. So when my father -- where my father live, where he work, people he work with, just ask them what type of person he was. He did that change right around himself even where -- in his office, he had people from different groups working with him, different ethnic groups.

So it's not that he didn't try to implement some
of those changes where he worked, he did. Punctuality at his
work, among his children, studying hard; those are the things
that he instilled in us. Now, I'm sure he were anxious to
make changes and so that's what he did. They call him speedy
because he was changing fast and trying to change things
fast, but obviously lots of people thought it wasn't fast
evenough. So that was -- that's all I can say. That's the
first question.

COMMISSIONER GERALD COLEMAN: The second one, you
said a group, a friend or family member had a vision or...?
THE WITNESS: Yes, she -- you know, I don't think
many of them -- some of them are dead now. It's not
necessary to call names, I think, because, you see, what I --
what I believe that many of us had part to play in this coup.
It's not that you -- the person who did the shooting is the
only one that is to blame. But what about people that sat
down and saw things happening and said nothing? What about
people who watched the execution and rejoiced and danced in
the street? How can you execute 13 human being like dogs,
worse than dogs?

And then I was told the day after the execution, a
cousin of mine and another fellow came to my -- to our house,
to Ms. DeShield's house, Sadie DeShield -- Sadie was married
to Leanard DeShield. And they sat down and said--I will
never forget that, that was some of the torture--that they
were looking for a hundred more poles to put up. They could find a hundred poles so they just used the 13 they could find. And all my male relatives were in prison, every one of them, except a few -- not all but most of them were in prison, all my immediate, my brothers, they were all in prison. So they were going to kill a hundred people plus. So you need to look and find out who are those people that were motivated. And they say they had a change. What change they were looking for to destroy people like that? So I'm not going to call names because -- I have another thing I want to read out here: "All there is for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing."

I don't know who wrote that, but it's a saying that all is there is for the triumph of evil is for good men--I include women and men--to do nothing. What happened in Liberia? People sat by. I mean, I remember when they killed my father, did I see anybody to come and bring me water, to even say I'm sorry? Maybe they were afraid, yes, but they still could have lodged a complaint, this is wrong.

You know, and when April 14th took place, 1979 when there were -- my father -- my husband gave a speech to the soldier when he was resigning as Minister of Defense. He said the story was "Rat Trap Not for Rat Alone." And many people have repeated it in different form and fashion. He wrote the story and my daughter illustrated the book because
she's an artist.

But in this book, it was trying to tell Liberians, warning them that the trap you're setting for a group of people like Tolbert and his government is not just for them. It will affect Liberia from time, yes, down -- many years down the road, and that's exactly what happened.

When the coup took place, they said, oh, it's just the Tolbert family. A whole lot of things were crazy, were this, were that. They strip people naked, some of my family members, they strip them. And they had to roll in the street. Some of them, they were raped; some of them branded were stuck in their flesh. A lady crippled, she were pushed down the steps and died. In one month so many of my family members were killed.

My father and with 28 people that were brave enough to fight were all put in one mass grave, and his body is still there. And people say, oh, it's just them. My goodness, Liberians, I'm not going to call the four group, it's not necessary. Many people stood by and watched. And the government -- I mean, Doe took on lots of -- Baccus Matthew, all those -- Chea Cheapoo, all those people were part of this, they organized it. They must not put the blame on Doe. They helped Doe destroy Liberia.

And so we need to have them in front of this tribunal and in front of Liberia to say the part they played
and ask for forgiveness. That's how our country will be
saved. So I'm sorry, I don't want to call the names. I
don't think it would do any justice.

COMMISSIONER GERALD COLEMAN: Yeah, I agree with
you. The next one was about Boley, the same Boley that --

THE WITNESS: George Boley, who was Minister of
State for Presidential Affairs, that George Boley and the
same Chea Cheapoo that killed his own foster father for
whatever reason.

COMMISSIONER GERALD COLEMAN: Okay. And the last
one?

THE WITNESS: And George Boley came and -- in my
presence, when he came to our house, we were under house
arrest, he had the nerve to tell me that my father sent
him -- he said, "You know, your father sent me to school, he
paid my way through school and your brother gave me the first
pair of shoes, Bill Tolbert."

And those boys that came to our house when we were
at Leanard DeShield's house, they kept saying, "Junior will
never leave." They were talking about A.B. They had planned
to kill every one of us like the Russian Revolution. He kept
saying, "Don't you know the Russian Revolution?" Randall
McClain, he asked for forgiveness for coming and doing that
to us, but I will call his name because not that I have
nothing against him; he was hanging with some of those boys
so he came and he revealed things to us that was frightening.

And that day I don't know what, I almost -- I lost it that day. I was so -- he said that "Don't you know that Junior will never live?" So I already knew that A.B. would die. I was under house arrest when they caught my brother, and the night before I dreamed that they caught my brother and I dreamed that he was killed. So when they caught my brother, I cried the whole day. But he was -- and I went to visit him in prison on 18th of July on his birthday. Doe gave us permission to go and visit him.

And I visited him and he shared his -- the power of God, that he was sorry, that he said he couldn't stay still. He had to find out about his mother. He said -- you know, I said, "Why did you talk on the telephone? See, now they caught you." He said, "You know what? I couldn't" -- first of all, he couldn't leave the country. He said, "I didn't want to leave, my mother was still here. I didn't know what were happening to my mother." And he was so eager to find out the safety of his family and so on, that's why he called and that's when they caught him. But they killed him and buried him.

Quiawonkpa, when he came to America, he wrote an article in I think it was Newsweek and I kept the article, but I don't know, I've lost the paper moving from one house to the next. But in this paper, he described that they took
A.B. out and told them to dig the grave, and while they were
digging their grave, they shot them and they cover him when
he was still mourning. And up to this day, we don't know
where my brother's grave is.

If anybody knows, could they please tell us. We'd
tell -- we'd like to put a monument there and we'd also like
to put a monument where my father was buried. And we want
permission now. Hopefully they will grant us permission.

I'm sorry, I deviated a little bit.

COMMISSIONER GERALD COLEMAN: No, thank you.

Okay, another thing I just noticed, you added
something interesting. You said this seemed to have been a
planned effort by those who staged the coup to exterminate
your whole family, in a sense.

THE WITNESS: Yeah, I mean, but you know, those
socialist boys that came from America, those they say that
planned from here, when my father was at the United Nations,
they had his -- they had him in a casket, a dummy in a
casket, and demonstrated in front of United Nations with my
father. So they wanted to kill my father so it's not
anything new, it was obvious, the intention was.

And then they kept -- they had the social -- they
knew about the Russian Revolution. They said they would
exterminate all of us, a hundred more poles. What did you
think they were thinking about? And when they kept saying
"Junior will never live," of course I knew A.B. would die.

COMMISSIONER GERALD COLEMAN: The reason I brought it up is it seems parallel to other issues.

THE WITNESS: That somebody else said, yes, yes. I'm glad -- that's why I didn't bring it up in my testimony because other people alluded to it a little bit before.

COMMISSIONER GERALD COLEMAN: Okay, thank you.

VICE CHAIRPERSON DEDE DOLOPEI: Thank you for coming and my sympathy for the death of your relatives.

I have only one question and it surrounds all of those who died with your father because we are supposed to document all of those who died during the war. And so if you can remember, I'd like you to please share that with us, all of those who died along with your father.

I was living on Gulley Street when they -- how you call that thing they -- bulldozer came in the grave that day and they brought the bodies. I remember a little child.

THE WITNESS: A what?

VICE CHAIRPERSON DEDE DOLOPEI: A child. I saw that child go in there and then I left, so that memory is something that has stayed with me for a long time. And so if you can share that with us, we highly appreciate it.

THE WITNESS: You know, I don't know -- I don't know of everybody that died. I know Charles really was one of them and some of the SSS people on the floor that night.
But -- and one of my -- my brothers, my father's foster children were killed also. There was a child's body, one of them.

Another one my -- at the Executive Mansion where the coup -- where they killed my father, there were a lot of children and one -- whether they intended to do it or not, one of the children were killed. One was killed and another one, a bullet went in his back and he's Blama Tolbert, he's now in Liberia. But he said he had to drag himself from the floor. He pretended he was dead and when they moved my father's body, he said he dragged himself down eight steps with a bullet in his back. So he was one of the brave ones, he survived.

I'm sorry, I don't know. I will try to -- if I can remember, I will try to put some of the names down for you, but I'm sorry, I don't know all the names.

VICe CHAIRPERSON DEDE DOLOPEI: Thank you. Thank you.

COMMISSIONER MASSA WASHINGTON: Thank you, Madam Witness, for coming. You partially answered one of my questions so I will just add a part two to it. You stated that on the morning of the coup, you were going to town to retrieve the body of your father. From all indication, you never had the opportunity. My question is: Did you try to seek the permission from the military government at the time
or any other government to go back and claim your father and give him a proper or decent burial?

THE WITNESS: Well, I -- I -- I would just go -- I was going to go to the military government, but when I found out that my house was already surrounded and the destruction that had taken place at my home and the general atmosphere, Ms. Mary Smith's friend was telling her -- telling us "you'd better go back" because they were yelling and screaming "Death to the Tolberts." So for safety, I decided to leave, not to go.

But I remember that A.B. and I met that Saturday afternoon, and he said that he was going to get in touch with the Baptist convention to see whether they would try. And apparently they tried, at least that's what they said. I wasn't in the delegation that went, never, because I was afraid for my safety so I didn't. So I believe that they did try and they were denied.

COMMISSIONER MASSA WASHINGTON: Okay. The name George Boley keeps coming up in the story of the coup and your family. George Boley?

THE WITNESS: Yeah.

COMMISSIONER MASSA WASHINGTON: His name keeps coming up in the story of the coup and your family. I'm curious and also because this is a reconciliatory process, I'm just wondering one of the witness stated earlier that
Boley had a relationship with your family, he was an adopted son of your father. And you just confirmed that Boley himself told you that your father educated him, sent him to school, your brother gave him shoes or whatever. It would seem to me—and I stand to be corrected—that a lot of personal issues, you know, spill over nationally. What was the relationship with Boley and your father or your family and what happened?

THE WITNESS: I don't know. I mean, I never -- I didn't know Boley before the coup. I never met him myself. He never stayed in our home. But he -- he told me that he went to Ricks Institute and my brother, Bill Tolbert. Now, all my brothers and sisters went to institution of learning in Liberia. My brother went to Ricks and Boley went to Ricks so that's how they got to know each other. And my brother, he also confirmed that Boley was educated by my father and Boley told me that.

But I don't know what happened. I mean, there were -- there were not much rhyme or reason. I think -- I don't know, envy. I don't know. I don't know what's -- why people did what they did. But I know that the heart of man can be very wicked. And it is only the spirit of God or some inner spirit of strength that can give you the -- can empower you to do what's right. And some people, if they -- if the devil get in them, they can do anything.
But I don't know why -- why he had animosity against my family. I know that he put -- he was instrumental to keeping Christine Norman under house arrest for a longer time than we were because they both work in the Ministry of Education, apparently. But I don't -- I don't know. He can -- I have never had -- if I had -- I haven't met him since the coup, but I intended to ask him some questions and find out. I haven't met Chea Cheapoo, too. I would like to ask him some questions, but I don't know.

COMMISSIONER MASSA WASHINGTON: Christine Norman is your sister?

THE WITNESS: My sister, Christine Tolbert Norman, yes. She's in Liberia at this moment.

COMMISSIONER MASSA WASHINGTON: Okay. What is the relationship now with Mr. Boley and your family? Do you know if --

THE WITNESS: I have no -- we have no relationship with Mr. Boley. But my father educated many -- my father used to spend some of his own money to educate people. Many of them got government scholarship, but many of them he educated himself. He didn't -- I mean, the money he had he shared a lot with people of Liberia.

COMMISSIONER MASSA WASHINGTON: My last question: You said many wonderful things about your father, I mean, naturally. Just out of curiosity, how would you like him to
be remembered, especially by Liberians?

THE WITNESS: A man that was willing to die for his conviction, doing the right thing, and a man that was willing to serve his people, all of his people, and a man that really wanted development for Liberia.

COMMISSIONER MASSA WASHINGTON: Thank you.

COMMISSIONER JOHN STEWART: Thank you very much, Madam Witness, for providing such insight and perhaps another perspective as we engage in this exercise of introspection.

And I'm particularly pleased that you have stated repeatedly that you have no rancor in your heart and you've put the past behind, you've forgiven the past, although not forgetting it, prepared to move on and end this and, in this context, prepared to do a critical examination of ourselves, what happened in the past.

I would like to ask a few questions, one or two.

Your mother, in her book, peace be to her ashes, she states that -- she says that your father was a lonely man, that his officials in his absence would gather on the fourth floor and discuss all kinds of things about him, talk about impeaching him; and there were times when we even learned that there were attempts by people within his ranks to overthrow him by force.

So I use this backdrop. Would you say -- you said that some group of Socialists that were responsible for your
father's death, but against the backdrop of your mother's
revelation that even his own officials were not supporting
him and she even mentioned to him, according to what she's
written in her book, that he was like a lonely tree in the
forest. So how can you reconcile all of what was going on,
attempts by his officials to undo him as against -- as
opposed to what you describe as planned by Socialists to get
rid of him?

THE WITNESS: Well, I did say -- I never said that
the Socialist group was responsible for my father's death. I
said clearly they had a big part to play in the destruction
of Liberia, they have to acknowledge that because they sowed
a seed of hatred--and I repeat that again: They sowed a seed
of hatred in Liberia that will be very difficult to get out
because their truth is not really the truth.

They were the one that encouraged all this killing
in Liberia. Doe didn't even know some of the people he
killed. They identified the people. They had one of them go
to Crozerville to identify where I was. There were people --
I had to hide in the bush because people were then checking
in the different houses, shooting doors down where I went,
where I used to help -- we used to help, my husband and I,
carry rice to people.

So I didn't say that they were responsible for my
father's death. My father was killed by a masked man, my
mother couldn't see who killed him. But they were responsible for the -- for some of the agitation and disruption in the community in Liberia. We cannot -- that's my feeling. If it's my perception, that's how I felt.

But now that my father was lonesome, I did say that my father was a person who wanted a lot of changes. People ridiculed him for wearing the sweatsuit, but he wore it, he told me, it was important to decrease the gap, economic gap. Why shouldn't everybody else be present at the table for discussion? And it helped, I know it helped because I saw people go into functions that didn't normally go.

So there were things he were doing that was disturbing to some of these so-called inner circle. And another thing my father -- my father knew about the PRO in Liberia, he dismantled that. Some people were getting their income from that, so some people were disturbed about that, maybe if not theirself, their relatives were getting income. It was a profession in Liberia which was -- he felt wasn't necessary. And when my mother said he was lonesome, it's because my father -- people would come and tell him stories and he would literally ask the person -- he would call the person and the next person and tell him, okay, you tell me what you said about this person.

And the reason he did that is because he was --
for 19 years he saw that happening, he saw people getting in
trouble, he saw people going to prison, he saw people
disappearing. And he didn't want to be part of that. That's
why I knew my father did not sign any execution order for
Baccus Matthew or those people. He forgave them before the
coup took place.

So the fact that my mother thought he was
lonesome, my father was never a person to have -- I mean, he
wasn't a smoker, he didn't used to drink. So he didn't have
buddies that would come and sit down and drink. He was busy
about his business. He used to stay up nights preparing for
what he needed to do. He was serious about development.

So some people were not, some people were used to
relax. So do you think they would be jumping? Of course,
for them, too, sometime that change was a bit too rapid. So
I think -- I think that's why. He and I never discussed it.

But I, too, when I went to talk to my father about his death,
he looked sad and lonesome. You are lonesome when you --
when you -- he knew his death was imminent. He built his
grave, his own grave. He built it. He had his own casket.
I think he gave it to Green when he died, but he was given
his own casket. But it was useless anyway because he said he
wanted to be buried within two to three days after his death.

So he was different, he was different than many
people in Liberia. That's why he was lonesome.
COMMISSIONER JOHN STEWART: Now, as a student leader in the '70s, I interacted on quite a number of occasions with your father. And I remember specifically in 1979 following the Rice Riots, was then detained. When the late Albert Porte came to visit and said he had received information that your father was about to appoint Mr. Chesson as Minister of Justice and he had warned him against it and he didn't feel that it would bode well, that it would have propelled him in the wrong direction and would have created a crisis in the country.

And in one of his writings, Mr. Porte states that he did go to the president, interceded with him not to go ahead with the appointment, but he still did anyway. And we saw how he conducted himself; mass arrests during his tenure, all of this culminating right there before the coup.

So I want to understand why this situation was so so -- perhaps you were not there because you were so far away from politics. But there was concern that your father was incapable of restraining the excesses of his family members, particularly his younger brother, Steven, who was Minister of Finance. What could you say to that?

THE WITNESS: The excesses? What do you mean by excesses?

COMMISSIONER JOHN STEWART: Like, for instance, there was the case involving -- there was an article written
by "Liberianization of Government Business," in which there was a feud between your uncle and the Whigs concerning monopoly over -- well, it had to do with monopoly. It said Liberianization of Government Business accused him of using his official position to create a monopoly to his benefit, and that's basically what I'm talking about.

THE WITNESS: Well, I don't know -- I don't know anything about that so I'm sorry, I have to pass. I don't know about that. But --

COMMISSIONER JOHN STEWART: And then lastly --

THE WITNESS: Everybody know that Steven Tolbert was -- he died in a plane crash. We don't know how, why, and, you know, whether there was foul play. But he died five years before the coup, so he was not around around the coup time. He was a strong businessman, a man that -- like every businessman, he was seeking his own interests a lot. But he didn't have -- he didn't affect my father. He had his own private business, you know.

COMMISSIONER JOHN STEWART: Lastly, right before the coup in 1980, there was a Congress of the True Whig Party, in which there were many young Liberians at the time, Emanuel Shaw and others, who were agitating for change in the True Whig Party and expected that the Buchanan Congress would deliver on the kind of changes that they were expecting.
And according to them, to their surprise, it was not the case; that rather than change, the current Congress were used basically the same kind of leadership in and the same direction. So don't you think this could have contributed to what eventually led to the coup.

THE WITNESS: I don't -- I don't know about that particular conference. But I know -- I don't really think that's what led to the coup. But I know that before the coup, when Tolbert was -- President Tolbert had organized so many groups to discuss development, to discuss -- they had different focus groups, different task forces about development. And I myself after the Rice Riot for the first time I thought, oh, I should be engaged in order to dispel some of the myths about my father.

So that was the first time I started learning about some of these different parties. And my father encouraged freedom of speech, he encouraged multiparties, PAL and MOJA, everybody know those groups. He encouraged them. He sent -- Vice President Warner talked about him giving these boys some of his own private money, gave them cars to go into rural areas and see his development.

So I don't see what more he could have done, you know, except shed his own blood. But I really believe that this man was sincere for development, I'm telling you he was. He was also -- when I graduated from medical school, he was
so proud. But he still didn't even go to my graduation. He
sent my mother because he was busier with business for
development in Liberia.

So my father was serious. I don't know anything
about a conference that you spoke of. I wasn't there so I
cannot shed any light on it. Sorry about that, Mr. Stewart.

COMMISSIONER JOHN STEWART: Thank you very much.

THE WITNESS: You're welcome.

COMMISSIONER OUMU SYLLAH: Thank you very much for
sharing your experience. We're very sorry about what
happened to your family.

You said all of your relatives were in prison and
you guys were put under house arrest. Besides your father
and brother, did you lose any other relatives during that
time?

THE WITNESS: Yeah, I corrected myself, all my --
almost all my main relatives were -- but my immediate family
were in prison. I lost -- my Uncle Frank Tolbert was
publicly executed with the 13 people, and then A.B. was
privately executed and they lied for over a year about it,
and when all the political prisoners were released, that's
when Doe announced that he was killed. And my mother was
fooled all those years, the whole 20 months, thinking that
her son was still alive. So he was killed.

And as I said, one of my father's younger child
was killed. And who else now... My aunt shortly died, she
wasn't killed but she shortly died. My cousin, she was in a
wheelchair and pushed down--I don't know by who--but she was
killed. So I don't know how many of my cousins were killed,
but I know my immediate family was; my brother, my uncle and
my father were killed around the coup time.

COMMISSIONER OUMU SYLLAH: What's the name of the
younger child, if you remember?

THE WITNESS: It was a foster child, one of my
father's foster children. Mumu, I'm sorry, Mumu (ph).

COMMISSIONER OUMU SYLLAH: Thank you for coming.

COMMISSIONER GERALD COLEMAN: I'm about to say
something, but it's a delicate point but it's an opinion that
I think is important to say at this point. You know, from
1970, every ten years Liberia lost its president, starting
from Tubman's death in '71, your father's death 1980, Doe's
death in 1990 and 2000 the vice president. I believe it's
important that, as a part of reconciliation and healing, that
at least the nation should express to you and your family and
the families who -- all of those other leaders a great
apology. So I'm doing it on my personal behalf now, but I
hope that one day it will be done at a larger level. Thank
you.

COMMISSIONER PEARL BROWN BULL: Madam Witness, you
said that you had an advice or recommendation to the TRC
Commission, but time did not permit you to say it here. We need all the advice we can get because we represent the cross-section of Liberia. So could you please, because of time, maybe you could write it and give it to us, because we really need all the advice and recommendation. So to leave that out because of time would be leaving out part of our history and we need it.

So could you, before you leave, maybe write to us and let us have it? I would appreciate having it.

THE WITNESS: I wrote a statement and you can have a copy of that. But before I leave, I want to say: To accomplish great things, we must not only act but we must dream and not only plan but we must believe. This is from Mr. France. Atolli France (ph) wrote that to accomplish great things, we must not only act but must dream. We must have a vision in Liberia, how we want Liberia to be. We must not only plan but we must believe.

This Commission, I am just in awe of each of you that have taken the time from your life to come and do this, but the Liberian people have to also believe in what you're doing. So I'm -- that's one of my major recommendations that us in Liberia, we have to take this to heart. And I myself, I'm very blessed to be able to come and give my testimony. I'm not -- nothing that I said I want any punishment for anybody because I think there's enough bloodshed. We have to
now look forward and dream about what we want to see in Liberia. And I -- I applaud you and I'm very grateful I had the opportunity.

COMMISSIONER PEARL BROWN BULL: Thank you so much.

CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: Madam Witness, just before you go, we appreciate the context in which you've given your testimony, explaining the good deeds and the dream of the late president for the country which he extended to you as a daughter showing love for our country. There are three questions that I just want to ask you and get very brief responses to them: One has to do with the signing of the death warrant of Yancy (ph) and others. How much did that impact the inner relationship of the establishment at that time? You were very close to your father, perhaps you might have gotten some impressions.

Then, secondly, did you at any point in time notice the exclusivity of rice and privileges in Liberia prior to the 1980 coup?

And then the last one has -- I know you have concern about the country, you have spoken a lot about the root causes of the conflict. Have you had, at any point in time, realized that land is an issue that could be the source of greater conflict in Liberia?

THE WITNESS: Yeah, I was -- I will start with the first question and go back.
CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: Okay.

THE WITNESS: Because that was part of my recommendation, that we have to really look at the land issue and property issue in Liberia because that really will be a source of great conflict if something's not done. There's so -- I mean, we understand a period of some people say 14, some people say 17 years of conflict, things went awry. But the issue about land in Liberia will be a major problem and we have to take that seriously. We have to bring all forces to deal with it as soon as possible before it gets worse.

People are sitting -- many of the Liberians in the Diaspora want to go home, and the challenge is where will they live? Their homes that they thought they have, somebody else is in it or somebody said it was never your home. I have property myself and there's a dispute. My mother gave me a property, one of Charles Taylor's -- I believe his sister has built a house on it and there's an issue. The house where I lived in, there was a grenade went through it. I went there for the second time -- I went in 2000 and 2006. And 2006 this man comes out and says it's his property, that my husband never bought the land. And so this is a situation. If people want to go back to help the development, they don't have a place to stay. So something needs to be done about that.

You talked about -- you asked about the execution.
I'm sure, I mean, I know -- I never talked to my father directly about it, but I know that his heart was heavy because he didn't -- I think it was a difficult decision to make. And the death sentence -- I think that's the only one he ever signed, but I know it bothered him. I don't know the details, you know. And I wasn't in Liberia when it happened. But any time somebody has to be executed, it's -- it's sad because it's not just a person you execute; you have to think about their children.

But it probably was only laws of Liberia that -- and the Old Testament said when somebody kills, he should be killed. But I myself, I don't know, it's something that people have to discuss. And I hope in Liberia there will be a forum where people either are to accept the death penalty or not. And in some countries they don't have that anymore, but in other countries -- but Liberia has to come to a decision one way or the other. I don't know what it is now on the books, whether they still have the death penalty. But it's something -- it's a controversy, so to speak.

But I know it affected some families. Otherwise I don't know the details. And I never asked him about it. And you said something else about...?

CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: The exclusivity of rice and privileges in Liberia prior to 1983.

THE WITNESS: Let's see, history is something we
can't erase, the coming of settlers. The historian was saying you had a group of people that came to Liberia that had more knowledge than those that were actual natives and they came together to form a country. Of course, these people had the education that made them already have -- you've got the disparity already and so disparity persisted. But so, of course, in every country there's the poor and the rich and the rich have certain privileges. And so, of course, there was -- Liberia was no different, there was this disparity.

And, you know, my father knew to get rid of disparity was education. That's why he stressed education. And he was trying but, you know, we didn't have much -- Liberia had very little money, and people thought Liberia had so much money. That's why they were so eager to take over. And within one year after the coup, we saw that they couldn't even pay all the -- they couldn't even pay for Christmas because when my husband was at Belle Yallah, he was sent to Belle Yallah, one of the soldiers came to him and said, "You know, it's Christmas and we don't even have our pay. When Tolbert was there, we had our pay before Christmas." So they thought there was a lot of money but there wasn't.

So people were trying their best and I know during my father's time, his heart was very heavy about that and he did his best to decrease the disparity. But unfortunately
the war has made a disparity even worse. We have more poor people in Liberia who is more disenfranchised. People were living on their farms and growing their crops. They were much better off than being crowded in Monrovia.

The first time I went to Liberia I saw people walking in the street, they had no clothes. They were just walking in the streets. And that was sad. That is why I am trying to see how I can help in the development. We all have a part to play to reduce the disparity, and no doubt there was and no doubt there is something we have to fight even harder for because the disparity is even greater.

CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: Thank you very much.

You have said a lot. One last word before you leave?

THE WITNESS: God bless Liberia and God bless you all. And I pray that we will -- we'll remember that we're all one, no matter what tribe we're from. It's not about tribe and it's not about who you are. We have to look at our character, the content of our character, who -- and we also have to have a vision for where we want to go and let us work together as one people because united we stand. Let us make sure that we don't have external forces coming and destroy our country. We know that many of the big powers have opportunities to help and build us. Let us work together with them for the development of our country rather than the destruction of Liberia.
We thank you very much and we pray for your safety as you go out and in, and we pray that your report will be accepted and Liberian people will together -- because the president alone cannot do it. No one -- you all cannot do it. Everybody together have to first implement the change around themselves and help and be the change, the one to see in Liberia. Thank you very much.

CHAIRMAN JEROME VERDIER: Thank you very much. Thank you, Ladies and Gentlemen, for joining us in today's session. We will take a 20-minute break and resume at about 3:30. Thank you.

(Time noted: 2:55 p.m.)
REPORTER'S CERTIFICATE

I, Sherri Flagg, a Registered Professional Reporter, do hereby certify that the foregoing pages of typewritten material constitute an accurate verbatim stenographic record taken by me of the proceedings aforementioned before the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Liberia, on the 13th day of June, 2008, at the time and place specified.

DATED: July 14, 2008.

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