11-19-2008

Interview with Charlotte Rutherford

Monica Fields-Fears
Portland State University

Let us know how access to this document benefits you.
Follow this and additional works at: http://pdxscholar.library.pdx.edu/blackunited_oralhist
Part of the Oral History Commons, Public History Commons, and the United States History Commons

Recommended Citation
http://pdxscholar.library.pdx.edu/blackunited_oralhist/6

This Interview is brought to you for free and open access. It has been accepted for inclusion in Black United Front Oral History Project by an authorized administrator of PDXScholar. For more information, please contact pdxscholar@pdx.edu.
MFF: This an oral history interview with Charlotte Rutherford at her home in Portland Oregon. The interviewer for the PSU Portland Civil Rights Project is Monica Fields-Fears and the date is November 19, 2008. And this is interview number one.

Could you please give me your full name, date of birth, and place of birth?

CH: Charlotte Bernadine Rutherford. Date of birth, April 10, 1947. Place of birth, Portland, Oregon. Is there more?

MFF: First, I’d like to gather some family background from you. How far back can you trace your family?

CH: Well, personally, I can’t trace it back beyond my grandparents, but I have information from my mother that allows me to go as far as my great-grandparents and I’ve actually heard my brother is trying to do more research but I don't have access to what he's gathered.

MFF: Would you like to share some of that information with us?

CR: Okay. My father’s name was Otto Rutherford. I’ll deal with my parents and then go beyond to their parents. He was born in Portland, Oregon in 1911. His father was William H. Rutherford, who came to Portland in 1895. I’m not sure without referring to some documents when he was
born. I know that he died in 1955. That was my grandfather, that is. I’ll get back to that. My dad had three brothers and all of them were born here in Oregon, and in fact when my dad passed in August of 2000 we believed he was the oldest African American born in the state of Oregon at the time that he died. He was 88 then. And black people being born in Oregon in the early 1900s was fairly rare. My mother was born January 1, 1913 in Oklahoma. Her parents came to Oregon in that same year after a tornado had lifted up the house that my grandmother was living in Oklahoma and turned it around. By the time my grandfather got back, my grandmother had already packed and sold everything and was on her way as far away from Oklahoma as she could get, which was Oregon, and told him either he could come along with her or there was somebody waiting at the train station to buy the horse and buggy [laughter] that she had also sold!

So they came to Oregon and thought they were going to get farmland with the Homesteading Act. They settled in Marshfield, Oregon, which is now called Coos Bay, and were promptly told black people were not eligible for free land under the Homesteading Act. We believe that my grandmother heard about the Homesteading Act because somebody mistook her for being white. But when she showed up with her husband and children, they recognized that she wasn't and therefore they didn't get any land.

They eventually moved on and settled in Yakima, Washington, but while they were in Oregon they went to Bethel Church—Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church—and through common friends my mom and dad met when they were four and six, or six and eight, years old at Sunday school and twenty years later, married.

Let me tell you what my mother says my grandparents’ parents—my great-grandparents—were about. My mother’s father's family name was Burdine, my mother’s mother’s family name

---

1 The Homestead Act of 1862 granted ownership of 160 acres of unappropriated federal land to heads of households, with certain restrictions and requirements. In 1909, government amended the original act was expanded in the Enlarged Homestead Act, granting applicants 320 acres of land. The language of the act does not categorically exclude African Americans, but implementation likely varied greatly by location. In addition, the Black Exclusion Law of 1857 prohibited real estate ownership by African Americans in Oregon. Legally the law was voided by the 14th and 15th amendments but it would appear the law was still used against African American migrants to Oregon.
Boles. My mother says\(^2\): “History of the Boles and Burdine families from 1904 to 1990”—I’m not going to read that far—“the Burdine family were farmers in the state of Kansas. The Boles family, state of Arkansas. Great-great-grandfather Charles Burdine and wife Fanny Banks-Burdine and family moved from Roxbury, Kansas in 1904 to homestead in the Oklahoma territory. Maggie Boles, who is my grandmother—my mother’s mother—was born in Centerpoint, Arkansas, September 1, 1885, where she was raised and educated. She graduated from State Normal School with a degree in education. In 1906 she moved with her brother Nathaniel and sister Minnie to the Oklahoma territory. There she taught school until she met and married Earl Burdine in 1907. Earl was born in Roxbury, Kansas on June 28, 1881.”

So those are my mother’s mother and father. She goes on to say: “In Muskogee, Oklahoma they lived through terrible dust storms, high winds, and terrible droughts. Years,” she said,—she being my grandma Maggie Burdine—“when could you look at a tree just standing there and just watch leaves dry up. The last year that they were in Oklahoma, a cyclone picked up the house and turned it completely around and reduced it to a heap of wood. That was enough. That was when Maggie decided it was time to go west. She had been reading about Oregon territory where a couple could get a homestead in Bend, Oregon; 320 acres of land, live on the land for three years, make improvements, and own it after that, not knowing, at the time, that Oregonians voted to accept and submit to the Congress of the United States in 1857 a statehood Constitution that outlawed slavery, but the concept of total African American exclusion from residence in the soon-to-be-created state was also adopted.\(^3\)

“They moved to Oregon in 1913, spent seven happy and prosperous years in Marshfield\(^4\). In 1920 Earl Burdine decided it was time to move again so he rented a boxcar, shipped household belongings, animals, etc. to Yakima Washington, where he had purchased ninety-six acres of farmland adjoining the Yakima River, a small town called Union Gap about ten miles south of

\(^2\) Here Charlotte reads from a document written by her mother, Verdell Burdine Rutherford, chronicling family history.

\(^3\) In 1857 Oregon inserted a third Black Exclusion Law into its constitution (the first two were passed in the 1840s provisional government). African Americans were prohibited from owning real estate or entering into contracts. The state constitution banned slavery but the exclusion law also aimed to discourage African American migration to the new state.

\(^4\) Now called Coos Bay.
Yakima. The spring of 1921, less than a year after their move to Yakima, the Yakima River went on a rampage, flooded the property, washed out all the crops. Animals were marooned on an island and nearly carried the house downriver. They moved from that place next year.

“After the flood, father Earl was very discouraged and depressed. He lost some of his fight. Things seemed to go from bad to worse for the next three or four years. In the winter of 1928 he caught the flu which went into pneumonia and he passed away at ten a.m. Monday morning, December 31, 1928 at age forty-seven years, leaving seven children ranging in age from three to eighteen years. Mom always felt he died of a broken heart.” That’s my mother calling her mother “mom”. My grandmother went on to live to be a hundred years old—actually one hundred and six months—in Yakima Washington.

My father’s family, on the other hand… This is the history of the William H. Rutherford family. William H. Rutherford is my grandfather and my dad dictated this and my mother wrote it for me to have in posterity. He says: “My great-grandfather was a slave owner in Macon, Georgia. He educated and emancipated four of his children: three boys and one girl. One son became a doctor and lived in Kingston, North Carolina. Second son became a doctor, a graduate of Howard University. He moved to Oakland, California: first black doctor west of the Mississippi. One son became a teacher--my dad's great-grandfather--and moved to Columbia, South Carolina where he married my grandmother.” (He’s jumping around on generations here.) I believe my dad is trying to say his “grandfather” not his “great-grandfather.” Anyway: “The daughter married successfully and moved to Harrisburg, Mississippi.

“My grandmother Cornelia Hunt was born in slavery in 1851 in Columbia, South Carolina, of an Indian mother. She was educated and emancipated by her mistress. Her grandmother married Teacher Rutherford and to this union were born three sons: William, Edward, and Harry; one daughter, Mamie. William, who was my grandfather and Edward, being barbers, were persuaded in 1897 to move to Portland, Oregon to be house barbers in the newly constructed Portland Hotel⁵. They decided to remain in Portland, so returned to Columbia and William Rutherford and

---

⁵ The Portland Hotel opened in 1890 and occupied the block of downtown Portland that is now Pioneer Courthouse Square.
Lottie White were united in marriage on December 31, 1902 and returned to Portland.

“My mother”—this is my dad speaking—“Charlotte Elizabeth Delcinia Shannon—had two brothers. One’s name was Campbell who dropped dead on a New Jersey street from heat exhaustion and Jesse, a cavalry sergeant who was killed in the Spanish-American war. My mother and her brothers were reared in a foster home and took the name of “White.” Mother had a foster sister who married CC Spaulding, founder of a very successful insurance company. Mother was a graduate of Scotia Seminary in Columbia, South Carolina. My father was a graduate of Allen Union, Columbia, South Carolina. To the union of Lottie and William Rutherford were born four sons: William, Allen, Otto and Donald—my dad being Otto. To the union of Edward and Octavia Rutherford were born for daughters and one son…” and so on. My grandfather was licensed under the State of Oregon to be a barber February 23, 1899 and he died on June 12, 1855. Lottie Rutherford died on October 30, 1835.

So, that’s my parents and their parents’ and the little bit I know about my great-grandparents. And I have to say that I’m reading information from a book compiled by my mother, where she took all kinds of old family photos and mementos and labeled and explained who the people were. It’s an invaluable treasure of family history that she put together during the last ten or fifteen years of her life.

So that’s a long explanation. I have a lot more that I can say about my parents if you'd like me to.

MFF: Yes, please!

CF: All right. My mom and dad—okay—Let me phrase it this way. I was the last child born, so I came along a little later in their development as adults. When I was born my mom was a full-time housewife and my dad soon thereafter became a master knitter but in their earlier years Oregon had incredibly racist practices when it came to employment and only allowed black

---

6 The narrator says 1855 but the transcribers and auditors believe the correct date is 1955.
7 The narrator says 1835 but the transcribers and auditors believe the correct date is 1935.
8 “Master knitter” is a certification awarded by The Knitting Guild Association. A master knitter has completed several levels of competence and been evaluated by a committee.
people to work in service industries such as being domestics and chauffeurs. So in their early years, that’s the kind of work both of my parents did. Then as the years wore on my dad worked on the railroad and it wasn’t until the very early ‘50s that jobs began to open up thanks to the efforts of the NAACP and the Urban League. Fair employment laws were passed I believe in 1949 or 1950 although they were not enforced with any rigor. But my dad did get a job as a master knitter which he did for twenty years for Dehen Knitting Company which was a business that made letterman sweaters and jackets for the high schools. He also helped organize the workers into a union of the Amalgamated Clothing [and Textile Workers] Union and as a result got squeezed out of his job. Literally. But at the same time he got squeezed out of his job the OEO programs were opening up. So he was able to find desk work for the first time in his life.

In the ‘50s my mom and dad were the... My dad was the president and my mom was the secretary of the NAACP at the time that public accommodations laws were passed in the state. They were very active in the NAACP for a long time, but happened to be running it at the time they were successful. A bill had been, as my dad put it, “in the hopper” thirty-three terms [of the state legislature], from 1911 to 1953 before it was finally passed. And the significance of public accommodation laws at the time...my dad would talk about remembering seeing signs that said “We cater to white trade only.” “No Black”—no colored I believe it was at the time—“no colored, Jews or dogs” on white establishments. He would talk about Chinese restaurants would allow Black people service, but that theaters wouldn't unless they had a balcony area for Blacks only.

I can remember that. I can remember when I was eight or nine—and this is after the law should have changed—that there was a theater called the Egyptian Theatre on Martin Luther King Blvd it’s now New Song Church, I believe, on Russell off of Martin Luther King. That building has become a church, but it was a theater when I was a kid and you could only sit in the balcony. I can also remember when I was a teenager, my early teens, twelve to fourteen, somewhere in there, there was a skating rink called the Imperial Skating Rink and they set aside one day a

---

9 Oregon passed the Oregon Fair Employment Practices Act in 1953. It barred employers from discriminating in employment on the basis of race, religion, color, or national origin.
10 The Office of Economic Opportunity was the primary agency for administering War on Poverty programs during President Lyndon B. Johnson’s presidency.
week for Black kids to skate. I didn’t realize at the time that it was a concession to segregation. One of the ministers went down and talked the guy into making one day available for us. Prior to that we couldn’t go at all. I just thought it was great that everybody got to go on the same day! [chuckles] I didn’t find myself oppressed by that at all!

At the same time, Jantzen Beach used to have a swimming pool and black kids couldn’t go in the pool. Oaks Park wouldn’t let you ride on the rides. I remember my dad talking about hospitals would not give black doctors, the couple of doctors we had—who came here as doctors—the schools would not admit Blacks to the medical school—but getting hospital privileges was a problem for doctors. And getting service was a problem for black folks. Those hospitals that would admit you would not admit you for elective surgery. You had to have had an accident or something serious to be done. And then they would segregate you within the hospital. Women didn’t go to the hospital to have babies, they would use midwives; he talked about that.

So the public accommodations law not only made going to social events and and restaurants possible but it also made access to hospitals possible, and I think that’s an area that people don’t really consider when you talk about public accommodations. You think of hotels and restaurants you don’t think of hospitals. So I grew up basically watching my folks have meetings in their house because our house was the NAACP office. Our dining room table—which is actually the same dining room table we’re using here now—was constantly full of papers of some kind or another. My mom took typing and shorthand in high school and thought she would be a secretary of some sort, but then could not find anybody who would hire her as such. But her skills were extremely beneficial to the NAACP. I can remember as a kid, my mom had a mimeograph machine, which most people don’t even know what they are nowadays. It’s the old-style copier or copy machines. You used a stencil and ink and a drum went around and you’d crank out one page at a time. And my job would be to slip sheet between the pages so that the ink would get soaked up on a slip sheet of paper rather than the back of the page that went before. And I can remember as a kid, she would be cranking the thing and I would be slip-sheeting it and then we would take them all upstairs and have the whole living room and dining room floor spread out, where it was an assembly line of kids from the neighborhood--nearly all white kids from the neighborhood—folding these mailings all around the state trying to get the public
accommodations law passed! And you had to label them with the address. You had to staple them. You had put them in piles with zones—which is what we had before zip codes—before they could be mailed. And we would do this stuff seemingly every weekend. It’s really just emblazoned in my head all that printing and folding and stapling and carrying on. But they were successful.

To attest to their success, Senator Avel Gordly¹¹ has installed the picture commemorating the passage of the Public Accommodation Act¹² that has the six or eight NAACP members, my folks included, with Mark Hatfield and the state senator, I think his name was Hitchcock, who sponsored the legislation. The photograph has been enlarged and is now hanging outside the entrance to the House of Representatives in the state capitol, which I think is just wonderful. I just wish my folks had lived to see that.

Anyway so my childhood was filled with issues of race because of their activities with the NAACP, and as a result issues of race have dominated a large part of my life, either in my occupations, which include working as a civil rights investigator for the Bureau of Labor and Industry Civil Rights Division or as a civil rights attorney for the NAACP Legal Defense Fund. And then even in my own personal interests, the issues of race have always been paramount. And I’m sure it has a lot to do with my formative years and seeing my folks as active as they were during those years.

I think the only thing I haven’t mentioned that probably should be mentioned is World War II, which made a significant difference in Portland's black population. Prior to World War II there were just a couple of thousand black people in the city, but as a result of recruiting workers to work the steel industry during World War II, a significant number of black people were recruited to the area. They were isolated and placed in segregated housing in Vanport, which is the area between the edge of Portland and Vancouver—Delta Park area—and kept there, kept out of the city limits because the city fathers did not want that influx of new black people. But a flood

---

¹¹ State Senator Avel Gordly was the first African American woman elected to the Oregon State Senate, in 1996. She is also a community organizer and activist.

¹² The Oregon Civil Rights bill was passed in 1953 and included a prohibition on discriminating in public accommodations and facilities based on race, religion, color, or national origin.
forced them, those who were left after the war who didn't take the tickets they gave them
couraging them to leave, into the city and over time forced the city to open up what had been
twenty-five square blocks designated for black people to increasingly allow blacks to live
throughout the city. It took years—I grew up on 9th and Shaver, Northeast, and my dad grew up
in that same house. When I was first born there were no black people in the neighborhood—and
that's the ‘40s. But by the mid-50s thanks to the building of Interstate 5, which ran through what
was the heart of the black community at the time, and then the building of the Memorial
Coliseum, which took out Bethel Church in what was left of the black community at that time,
the city began to open moving to the east housing for blacks.

But I can remember when the first few black families moved into the neighborhood where I live.
I can remember as a teenager nobody living beyond 15th [Avenue] that was black. I can
remember in my twenties people beginning to move beyond 15th, maybe as far as 33rd, but it was
few and far between. It’s been interesting to see how this town has pushed the black community
around and is still moving it around. It hasn't stopped. It’s pushed it farther and farther out as a
matter of fact, as whites have come back in and claimed what used to be the second heart of the
black community, since the first heart got wiped out with the Coliseum and I-5. Anything more?
I think I’m running out [small chuckle].

MFF: Can we go back to the house on 9th and Shaver?

CR: The house itself? Yeah I can tell you a lot about that house! First of all, at the time my
grandfather bought it which was I believe 1921—my dad talked about how they had lived quote
“the sticks” [unquote], which was North Portland; that’s what my dad used to call it—at the time
my grandfather bought the house there were no housing laws and therefore black people got
housing wherever they could find friendly folks to either sell to them—which was rare—or find
somebody to act as an intervener who would buy a house and then sell to them. And I’m also told
that that there was a very fair-skinned black person passing for white who would buy houses for
black people. And so I believe that is how my grandfather acquired the house on 9th and Shaver
and my dad lived there from the age of eleven until 1987, when he was placed in a care facility.
I now own the house. As well as, the house has been designated a state landmark because of the involvement of the people who have lived in the house. There is an organization called the Bosco Milligan Architectural Foundation and they are all about preserving older architecture. In addition to that a woman who runs the organization was doing a history of the black community through housing, locating where things had been and what was left of old Portland. And she wrote a book called *Cornerstones: History of The African American Community* in Portland. My mom and dad were very helpful to her during her writing this book because as one of the oldest local black folk my dad remembered a lot of who was where and who did what and what-not. So over the years of her writing this book and dealing with my parents, she developed a very strong I think appreciation and respect for them and took it upon herself to apply to turn the house into a historic landmark. There are two ways you can do it. I was familiar with the architecture; who built the house, how the house looks, being a reason to designate it an historic landmark. But there is also as another provision under the legislation that allows for historic landmarks for the occupants and she believed—and it turned out to be true because the state and the city granted historic landmark status to the house—that the occupants of the house and especially my parents’ contribution through those years that they worked with the NAACP—and I also need to mention and give credit to my mom, she was one of the founders of the NAACP credit union, which no longer exists, unfortunately, but did exist for probably twenty-five or thirty years, if not longer. Again, all that was in our dining room also. The organization didn't have an office until much later in time. So because of so much going on in the house and because of the occupants of the house having worked hard to make this state a better place, Cathy Galbraith decided to apply for the historic status and got it. My mom was aware that it had been granted before she passed. My dad knew that Cathy had applied. He didn’t know it had been granted. So the house is historic in its own formal sense as well as the same people having owned it for eighty-five years. I now own it. We've kept it in the family. And I intend to try to keep it in the family.

My grandmother on my mom's side was a big supporter of “Buy land! Buy land!” [chuckle]. So I’m trying to keep the tradition alive. It’s much harder nowadays. Is there more about the house I can tell you?

MFF: [pause] I think that’s adequate. Unless you have anything else to say about the house?
CR: No. Not other than I need a tenant! [laughter] I was raised in that house! That house has certainly undergone a lot of changes with the neighborhood. There were periods of up and down. The neighborhood really took a nosedive in the ‘80s\textsuperscript{13}, when drugs became prevalent in the community and there were a number of houses just boarded up. And a number of houses that were obviously drug sale houses. You could look at the doors… I could stand in my mother’s living room and look out the front room window and across the street there was this house where people would walk up to the back door, knock, and stand there. And then they would do something through the mail slot in the door. And then the people inside would do something through mail slot in the door. And then the people who had stood outside would walk away. Well, I’m not DEA agent but it was pretty obvious to me they were passing drugs and money back and forth. Why else would you be standing at the door? Yet the police could never seem to find them.

But in the ‘90s\textsuperscript{14}, for some reason or another I guess they moved to another neighborhood. I’m sure they are not gone. They are gone from my mom’s neighborhood. What had been an all white neighborhood when I was a child turned into an all black neighborhood in my early adulthood and now in my moving toward old age it’s pretty much back to being an all white neighborhood again, which is truly amazing. I mean it’s just really hard to believe.

MFF: How have you dealt with the racial dynamics going back and forth?

CF: Well, I obviously don’t… Obviously? That’s not so obvious. I don’t have any animosity toward white people in general. But I do develop antagonism when new white people come into a neighborhood and try to change it. They’ve changed the traffic pattern. Dogs are very much more prevalent and not always on a leash and I don't appreciate that. I remember when the leash law came into effect. I had a dog that wouldn’t stay home and kept getting picked up. My dad got fined twice and that was the end of that dog! So I don't understand how these people have two or three dogs and quite often not a leash and nobody notices. I don’t understand that.

\textsuperscript{13} 1980s\textsuperscript{14} 1990s
I appreciate the fact that the neighborhood has money so that the property looks better but it would be nice to have black neighbors who could have money and make their property look nice too. I'm sure money has a lot more to do with it than interest and wanting your property to look nice. So that makes resentment, it makes resentment that the prior neighbors who lived there couldn't afford to do the work that needed to be done to make the places look better. I do appreciate having neighbors of any color keep up their property. I also get the feeling sometimes though that the neighbors that moved in are scared of the neighborhood they've moved into, and that's probably why they have dogs to begin with. I don't think that makes me feel very welcomed in my own neighborhood.

But Portland is predominately white; it always has been predominately white and the black community, when it was the twenty-five square blocks, was truly black but it has never been predominantly black, when you talk about Northeast. It has just become increasingly less black as black people have been forced out to the 'burbs. Because Portland's black community has always been so small and isolated--and when I say isolated, I mean it's isolated within the state--you're in Portland and that's about it. You got 175 miles to Seattle; you got 500 miles to San Francisco; and I don't know how far you need to go to east—Chicago? So it doesn't allow… for those black people who don't leave Oregon, it doesn't allow them to believe we really belong. We are truly a minority in the state, but the fact that we are not a minority in the world doesn't occur to people. Certainly some major cities we are the majority in, and until you've been in an environment where there are a majority of black people running things—not just being on the street—there's a different attitude among whites.

In my opinion white people in Oregon—to white people in Oregon—black people are still fairly the Invisible Man or Invisible Woman. We really still don't have a presence. When you have a black mayor, a black chief of police, a well-integrated workforce, black superintendent of schools—white people do start looking at you like you're a real person. But the black people who've come into Oregon have not stayed typically. They've come and gone. The presence has always been minimal and it's usually been compromised either by not associating with the black community or living in the black community or identifying particularly as black. You may be
black but you may also think of yourself as a person *who happens* to be black, and in my opinion
that’s different. When you think of yourself as a person who *happens* to be black rather than a
person who *is* black, I believe you have a different view of yourself and your community. Who
you identify as your community. And I think that a lot of the black people who are recruited to
come here who stay are the ones who *happen* to be black. The ones who are recruited to come
here and leave are the ones who *are* black. [chuckle]
MFF: Well put. Can we go back to Vanport? Not specifically the Vanport flood\textsuperscript{15} but Vanport in
general and your knowledge of it?
CR: OK. I don’t know that much about it because it was before my time. I know primarily what
I’ve heard and what I used to hear my dad say. He thought it was criminal that Vanport was
allowed to be segregated. That the housing in Vanport was segregated; the school was integrated
but they had the area for black people and the area for white people [residentially]. And from
what I’m told the quality of the housing was different. It may have looked the same but the
quality of what was inside the places were different. Black people had inferior, compared to
white people, housing. It wasn't inferior housing in general but in comparison to whites they
didn't have the same quality of build inside the house. Because during World War II the numbers
were so big, Portland was a party town! There were a lot of entertainers that came through here,
big name entertainers. Big band stuff, dance bands, Duke Ellington, Count Basie kind of stuff.
And for the first time in the history of black folks in Oregon there was a mass of black people to
support black activities.
I’ve heard people who came here from other places say that black people who were here were
complacent and not agitating enough. I disagree with that. I think that the agitation had been
consistent, it’s just that it was limited because of the numbers. There weren't enough black
people here to make that much of a difference. [They] could not have by themselves done
\textsuperscript{15} Vanport was a war industry housing complex built by Henry Kaiser, shipyard magnate. It was
located outside the Portland city limits, in between Portland and Vancouver, Washington (hence
the name) and was intended to house the influx of shipyard workers Portland received during
WWII. Of the 40,000 residents, 6,000 were African American, and when the complex flooded in
1948, African Americans were disproportionately displaced.
anything without white support. When Vanport flooded, the story was that white businesses gave workers--and I don't mean just black workers because they brought thousands of people black and white—a lot of them from the south—tickets to go, wherever they wanted to go. But they needed to keep going. I believe the number was half took the tickets and left, and the other half stayed in the housing. And had it not been for the flood—which my dad considered to be a blessing—he believed they would have stayed out of the city and segregated in the housing they were in. But by the flood coming they were forced to come into the city and the city of Portland was forced to deal with the numbers.

The story was that the Business League and whatnot sent for the Urban League to come. Let me, before I say this, let me explain the difference between the Urban League and the NAACP. The NAACP was, and still is, a volunteer organization. If you have staff people who are getting paid, it's because the local people have developed some method of paying. Only the national staff—Julian Bond and those folks—get paid. And actually Julian's on the board; I'm not sure he does get paid! But they do have a staff of attorneys and whatnot in Baltimore and they get paid. But local chapters are volunteer efforts, which is why Portland's having such a hard time. Everybody thinks the NAACP should be available for every issue, but they don't recognize that people who man the NAACP most times are volunteers. Volunteerism when it comes to race issues is a hard row to hoe because they are long term activities, intransigent problems that have gone on decades, and a volunteer who's going to work a regular job somewhere else and have a family to take care of when they get home is only going to have a limited amount of time to devote to something that needs a cadre of lawyers and many years' work.

So the NAACP is a volunteer organization, while the Urban League has always been a funded organization with paid staff. Their goal was to find money to provide training and education or whatever, but their whole focus was different. There used to be and may still be some rivalry between the two organizations because NAACPers felt they were on higher moral ground because what they were doing was volunteer and didn't have anything to do with being paid, while Urban Leaguers got paid. It was a job. It wasn't this moral calling. Which wasn't true. They could afford to do it full-time because they were getting paid while the NAACP people were working double time trying to pay for their very existence on some kind of job as well as
volunteer their time. So the Urban League was called in for job training and job placement and
all that and I'm told that Bill Berry\textsuperscript{16} came to town.

I remember Bill Berry from my childhood vaguely—and these businessmen that brought him
asked him how could they go about getting the folks to leave. And he was like, “That’s not why
I came. If you want to talk about integrating them into your community and finding jobs for
them, then sure I'll help you out. If you want to talk about how do you get them to leave, I'm
leaving.” So he recast the thinking of the business community that brought him in and there was
a serious effort to try to integrate jobs and open up housing. The housing was limited. It was
opened up within one specific area. If black folks had decided they wanted to live northwest or
southwest, I'm sure they would have been run out of town. But northeast and contiguous to what
had already been designated pretty much as the black community did begin to open up to allow
the people who had been in Vanport into the community. And eventually jobs opened up too, but
limited, limited jobs. Now we’re talking the fifties. It wasn’t until well into the sixties with
Lyndon Johnson's OEO programs and brand-new money that numbers of jobs for black folks
began to open up. Some of the jobs were absorbed into government, but they were paid for with
federal money. So you might have been working for the city or the State or the County but your
job is really being paid for with federal money, in addition to programs, in addition to training
programs. It was the best employment opportunity time in the late sixties of any I've seen in this
state, because there was program money available.

I can remember in ‘68\textsuperscript{17}—yes, ’68, that summer—they had a lot of different money for kids.
Some friends of mine were able to leverage some of that money and opened up what we called
the Black Summerhouse and put on activities for children. Educational activities and art
activities. I think art and music has really just not been given the credit it deserves when it comes
to being a way in to the interest with kids. I don’t know why the school system would jettison art
and music programs first, when for a lot of kids it's the only reason they go to school. It gets
them there and then you can put the academics in with it, but if you can’t get them to come and

\textsuperscript{16} Edwin C. “Bill” Berry (1910-1987) was a Civil Rights activist, associated with the NAACP for

\textsuperscript{17} 1968
stay, it doesn't matter what you're offering. So the summer program that we had was really an opportunity for kids to learn something, be guided by young adults who were trying to do something for the community, and to have some role models that everybody nowadays talks about—above and beyond drug dealers.

Some solutions to some of the problems we have seem so simple that it's amazing to me that we just keep going around in circles. If you don't offer alternatives for kids—alternatives in employment, alternatives in activities, alternatives in interests—what else is there but the streets? It doesn't take a scientist to figure that out. If they have nothing to do well then, they'll do nothing. You know? And it makes it a lot easier for criminal elements to have influence when there's nothing to compete. If you don't have a job and you can stand on a corner and sell drugs… well, OK, stand on a corner and sell drugs. You now have a job. If you don’t have anything else to do with your time why not just hang out? We need, we need a lot more for our kids.

I went from Vanport to the sixties on you there; sorry about that. I’m trying to think is there anything more I can tell you about Vanport. Having never lived in Vanport, probably not. I think that’s about it.

MFF: What can you tell me about how the displacement affected your family specifically?

CF: The Vanport displacement? Well, my dad used to say it buoyed up our numbers. He liked the fact that black folk were now a part of Portland as opposed to their own little city that they created on their own. I think that what I said earlier about black folks moving in to my neighborhood and then beyond to 15th and stuff was a direct response, because those are the people who were moving into the neighborhood, the ones who had been in Vanport. I don’t know what else I can tell you about the displacement.

I mean, I’m glad that the people… we’ve never had enough numbers. So however we can get more black folks into Portland works for me! [chuckles]
MFF: Speaking of black folks. Do you have any siblings?

CF: Yes, I have one brother who is living. I had a second brother who died. He drowned in the Columbia at the age of 32 in 1974. As I said earlier, I’m the youngest. There was five years between each of us. Bill is still here in Portland. I don't know if its age or experiences or what but he and I have kind of had a strained relationship all of our lives.

My mother used to say when I was little girl—mind you, he’s ten years older than I am—he would complain about me and she would say, “Well, Bill, she's just a little girl.” And he would say, “Well, make her act like one then.” So I guess I wasn't deferential enough to his ten years even when I was three. [chuckles] And it didn’t change. But he is a respected artist. He painted that picture of my grandmother. He painted this and there’s more in there that he’s done. He [pause]… he married a white woman in 1961.

MFF: And when was his birthday?

CF: January 3, 1937. And my comment about him marrying a white woman is related to Oregon's history. It was against the law for blacks and whites to marry until 1951\(^{18}\), I believe, and then nationally ’61. I believe was *Loving v. Virginia*\(^ {19}\). My dad used to talk about being called a nigger everyday when he was kid. And he fought to and from school. I think my brother’s marrying a white woman—even though my mom and dad had white friend and certainly white neighbors—was a [pause] turning point, or wedge. It created conflict in the family. And I think that conflict lasted right up to this moment we’re speaking, on some levels. I think for my dad the issues of race were so personal to him that he just had a hard time. And the woman that my brother married [pause] had an attitude that didn't help. She could have been a black woman and I think my dad would have had a problem with her.

---

\(^{18}\) Oregon’s anti-miscegenation laws, which had been on the books since colonial times, were repealed in 1951.

\(^{19}\) *Lovings v. Virginia* (1967) was a landmark Supreme Court case in which the court unanimously upheld the right of couples to marry without regard to race. It reversed *Pace v. Alabama* (1883) and invalidated any remaining anti-miscegenation laws.
CR: It still is. Martha. [laughs] Ah, yeah! OK. So they have two kids and then they’ve had more kids. The two kids are daughters, who married white. And then they’ve had five children between them, who you would never know had black ancestry if you saw them. So that’s Bill.

Earl, who was the one who drowned, and whose widow lives next door to my parents’ house that I now own, Earl married a black woman who actually lived around the corner. She was one of the first black families that moved into the neighborhood. And they have two sons, who…okay. [pause] My brother’s death when they were five and eight years old… they were all out on a Sunday outing with my sister-in-law’s sister and her two year old. And they were at Sauvie’s Island, which is on the Columbia. And my brother was standing in waist-high water one minute and gone the next. And they found his body five days later thirteen miles downstream. And I have a cousin who's a big hunting and fishing guy and he knows the Columbia, and he swore up and down that he thought my brother stepped into a sinkhole and the undertow swept him out. My brother could swim, but if you go down unexpectedly I guess you can swallow water unintentionally.

And his death really changed many lives. I said he lived next door to my folks, okay? So he's the one who never left home. He literally stayed home until he got married when he was 24. He moved 10 blocks away for one year and then they bought the house next door to my folks. He worked at the post office and would come home in the morning—he worked nights. And he would come over to my mom's house in the morning before my dad went to work or just in the morning after he retired and he spent more time with my folks than either my oldest brother who had—I don’t know if it was the first son issue with my dad or the woman (I think they had issues before the woman, to tell you the truth)...So my brother’s two sons didn’t do as much as I think they could have and would have if my brother had lived. They’re both here, Earl and Todd. My brother’s birthday was May 11, 1942, and he died August 4th, 1974.
The boys are Rutherfords, while my [other] brother’s daughters have taken their husbands’ names. They are not Rutherfords. And one son, has a son, Todd Rutherford has a son, Todd Junior. Todd Jr. is, what, sixteen now maybe? Two years ago he was shot in the stomach standing outside the library over here by Jefferson High School in a drive-by that took him a year to recover from, really. And I had hoped that being shot would wise him up, but he seems to have only gotten more stupid with being shot. Although I’m hearing in recent months that he’s turning around, so I’m hoping that will last. I don’t know, it’s depressing actually, because they are all bright young men who could have done more, I think, with their life and time than they did.

I truly do believe that witnessing their father die at such a young age— and they were both really close. I said my brother worked nights, so he was at home in the daytime and he did a lot of caring for his kids while his wife worked in the daytime. So for the time, he was much more family-oriented and kid-oriented than a lot of men. That’s becoming more common nowadays, but my brother was homebody kind of guy. And one child is named after him, Earl, so it was pretty dramatic and traumatic for them and I don’t know that they’ve really recovered yet, to tell you the truth.

Okay so that’s Earl. And I came along last and being the only girl and the baby, I could walk on water. [laughter] Which I think was part of Bill’s problem, but that’s another story, because he was the only child and the only grandchild on both sides of the family for the first five years until Earl came along. And then I knocked both of them out of the park by being the only girl. But I kept leaving town. I left town literally two days after graduation from high school.

MFF: Can we go back a little bit?

CR: We can go wherever you like!

MFF: Can we begin with your grade school?

---

20 Earl’s sons.
21 Billy’s daughters.
CR: Oh, sure! Ooh, grade school experience! I went to Highland Grade School. My dad went to Highland Grade School, living in the same house; we’re in the same school district. Except now it’s called Martin Luther King Elementary School. It was an integrated school. I had black kids in my class and even had a couple of black teachers by then. That was another thing. Teachers would come here fully accredited from other places and the school system wouldn’t hire them. Didn’t start hiring black teachers until the early 1950s. Mid-fifties, for sure.

I don’t know what to tell you about grade school [chuckling]. I don’t remember anything exceptional. I was a fairly good student. I remember that.

MFF: How would you rate the quality of your school, as far as resources, books, equipment, and then the education you got?

CF: Well, what did I know to compare it to? It was adequate. I graduated from Jefferson High School and managed to get several other advanced degrees, so my basic education certainly was adequate.

I remember that when I was a kid we used to have last remnants of the blue-haired ladies. We had a lot of older white women teachers who literally had blue hair. They would dye it with bluing or something. It was white but it would turn blue. They were serious about learning. At the time I grew up, parents supported the teachers more, I believe, than they are doing today. They didn't automatically assume the child was right and the teacher was wrong. You were expected to perform in certain kinds of ways. And when I was growing up not only were you expected because of your family—you didn't want to embarrass your parents—but the race was an issue too. What you did reflected not only on you and your family but the entire race, so you were expected to hold yourself and present yourself in a positive, respectful “credit to the race” kind of way.

And that was not meant in a negative kind of way at all. It was how basically black people survived in very hostile times. So the school, from what I knew was adequate for our needs. It certainly gave me everything I needed to continue my education. Well—I think it gave me what I
MFF: What grade were you in when you first had an African American teacher or staff at your school?

CF: I didn’t have the black teachers that we had. I wasn’t assigned to Miss Hill’s room… or did I… Mr. Brown? There were two black teachers in my grade school, and I think I did have Mr. Brown. I didn't have Miss Hill. I can’t remember: sixth or seventh grade? And just having black teachers in the school was a positive thing. And it’s interesting, black kids tended to respond to black teachers differently. We were all, I think, more malleable or willing to do what we were told generally than kids nowadays seems to be. We were not as argumentative or disrespectful, I think in general, as kids can be these days. But just knowing that there were black teachers in the school, who you would run into in the hallway, who expected a certain kind of decorum, a certain kind of behavior and would speak to you about it, knew you parents—which was another thing. Everybody knew everybody in those days. My mom and dad would know the parents of my friends, either from church or from some social organization because they belonged to everything. And in the early years of numbers were so small you talk to somebody long enough, you’d figure out who you knew in common. Or who your family was.

And church meant a lot. Church meant a lot for me as a social gathering place more so than as a spiritual teacher. The young people's groups, the choir, traveling for conferences or camp or whatever, it allowed me to meet other AME kids from Seattle, Idaho, Tacoma, Yakima. We would go to camp once a year. Those were fun. There would be kids from the Northwest region who would go to camp together. There would be like a hundred or hundred and fifty kids from Oregon and Washington and Idaho. And we would spend four or five days at a religious retreat. I don’t know how much religion was going on. We did a lot of retreating, I can tell you that! [chuckle] But it allowed us to meet kids that you would have never had an opportunity to meet

---

22 African Methodist Episcopal. Charlotte’s family belonged to Bethel AME Church in Portland, which began downtown and spent several decades on N Larabee St, before building of the Memorial Coliseum pushed the church out of that location. The church moved to its current location on NE 8th Avenue in 1959.
otherwise and I still have friends among some of those people that I met back in those days.

Some women out of Seattle and I are still close.

So that's grade school. Shall I go to high school?

MFF: Middle school?

CR: There was no middle school. It was kindergarten through eighth, nine through twelve. So I came out of Highland in the eighth grade. Then went to Jeff in the ninth grade. Jeff had good and bad teachers. I remember there was this terrible science teacher and everybody knew to take him because you didn't have to do any work at all! [chuckle] Everybody knew he was a bad teacher, but that was encouraging because then you didn't have to do any work, so you'd try to take the bad teacher rather than the good ones, right? I think I was in advanced classes; I know I was in advanced classes. I don't think they called it tracking in those days but they did have A, B and C level classes or something like that. It was tracking but I don't know what words they used.

You had classes for kids who were going to college and you had classes for kids who probably weren't going to college. And then you had classes for kids who clearly weren't going to college, of any kind. I tended to be in the classes for kids who were going to college. I don't have any traumatic stories about a teacher telling me as a black kid I couldn't do what I wanted to do. I was fortunate enough to either come along at a time when teachers had learned better or I just didn't run up on those kinds of teachers. Although I have heard stories out of Portland Public School where there have been teachers who have discouraged kids from trying to get higher education trying, to steer them into the industrial arts, as they used to call it I believe, a trade rather than education.

And I actually even got on the honor roll in my junior year, and the National Honor Society. I was always able to keep up, especially if it had to do with reading and writing. Math? Eh.

Probably that was because I really wasn't interested in math. If I had been more interested in math maybe I would have tried harder. But anything that had to do with reading and writing I could hang with fairly well. And talking! I could talk fairly well, too. So Jefferson High School!
It’s a shame to see the kind of reputation it’s got. Although I’ll admit when I was there I
graduated in ‘65, it was considered the thug school then, too, so that hasn’t changed any, even
though it was predominantly white.

It had the majority of black students of any school, even though we were not the majority at the
school, so it had begun to gain a reputation of, you know, not having much in the way of
academics, having a bunch of rowdy kids, fighting after the games and all that stuff. When other
schools would come, if anything happened, the newspapers would always focus on the Jeff kids,
and it was always the Jeff kids’ fault. You know, same old story. Hasn’t changed a bit. We are at
the same place, only we’ve only done it for so long, that kids don’t want to go to Jeff anymore.
Which is really a shame. It was a good school when I went.

It had a range of offerings. It had a mixture of faculty nowhere near like it does now. It’s
incredibly better in terms of people of color in leadership positions. It’s just a shame that the
school isn’t supported more by the community. It’s a great resource. The facility itself is a great
resource and I hear—I’m not involved with it and although they are getting ready to have their
hundredth anniversary so I should be over there doing something—I hear the turnover in teachers
is part of the problem. You get a lot of young teachers in who can’t wait to get out. And like
anywhere else you need seasoned people who know what they’re doing to try to work with the
kids. But the public school system did me fine. I don’t have a complaint about the way the public
school system operated in the ‘60s. ‘50s and ‘60s. Like I said, I came out in ‘65.

The cohorts that I had, most of them went on to school and eventually finished an undergraduate
degree. And when I came out of school the Upward Bound program came into existence and it
got a bunch of kids into college. A bunch of my friends. Personally, I left town. I moved to Los
Angeles. But a bunch of kids went to the University of Oregon on the Upward Bound program,
and I actually think that was the first class of the Upward Bound program sending significant
numbers to the University of Oregon. You also have to remember that the war was going on and
drafts still occurred. So there were a number of young brothers who got sent to Vietnam.

Couple of them came back and never were right. Never were right. The trauma of what they went
through and access to drugs; they just spent the next thirty years lost. Seriously. I don’t think we can ever really measure the impact on the black community of war and drugs, especially on our men. Actual loss where they lose their lives, or die, or get locked up losing their life, or are walking wounded. They are affected in emotional ways that just reverberate through the community when it comes to the families they are involved with.

MFF: How drastic was the draft, percentage-wise, in the black community?

CR: You mean how many of them went? I have no idea, but most of the young men went because they weren’t going to college. And that was the out: to go to college. And you didn’t have a choice. You went for two years. And if you went in, you went to war, pretty much. The white folks had figured out by then after all those years of keeping us out, either out of the service altogether or off the front lines. During World War II and before World War II, when they would let us in the service it was in service jobs. We were cooking and cleaning and building roads and hauling stuff and whatever. But by the time Vietnam came along, they were like, “You know? We can send those black folk out there first and let them get killed.” As opposed to, you know, killing all the white people.

So things changed drastically and a lot of young and went to war to fight, and I don’t know that we’ll ever really be able to measure how that has taken a toll. With WWII they talk about the brothers coming home from war expecting things to be better and they weren’t. But they had been trained in warfare and they we were ready to stand up for their communities leading directly into a lot of the Civil Rights stuff that eventually began to happen in the ‘50s.

Some of the brothers coming home from the war ended up in the Black Panther Party. Geronimo Pratt, I think, is the first person that comes to mind as a leader of the Black Panther Party who had military experience that he used to try to help organize folks. I don’t know, I just think that that’s an area where we need more study as to its effect, and more importantly how you counter

---

23 Geronimo Pratt (1947-2011) was a high-ranking member of the Black Panther Party. He was convicted for the murder of Caroline Olsen in 1972 and had his vacated in 1997. He went on to work for justice for people he believed to be wrongfully imprisoned.
those effects, because it’s getting ready to happen all over again with the folks who’ve been in Afghanistan and Iraq. The services were never there and they still aren’t, that the men need, although I do believe that the men coming back now—I’d like to believe—would be more willing to accept services than the men coming back 30 years ago. Because mental health was just not something that black folk wanted to talk about or have anything to do with. You prayed on it and that was about it.

I think we are more enlightened now to recognize that mental health professionals are valuable and bring services that black people need and I would like to believe if the services were available, which they’re not, the soldiers coming back will be more likely to use them that those who returned from Vietnam. Next? [chuckle]

MFF: Going back to you. Can you tell us about your further education?

CR: Sure. I can bring you up to date if you like. Would you like me to do that?

MFF: Yes please.

CR: OK. So high school in ‘65. Like I said, two days after graduating from high school I got an opportunity to go to Los Angeles. Somebody offered me a ride [chuckles] which has always been a problem for me. It’s about transportation—how do you get from one place to another and then where you stay when you get there. So! The Akers, who used to be the minister at Bethel AME Church, Parley Akers—and my mom was the secretary for them, too. My mom was a secretary for everybody at one time or another. Anyway, I had gotten to be really close with their daughter, and we were like sisters. Since I didn’t have a sister and she only had one in later years. And they moved. They left and they went to Kansas. And then they settled in L.A. So another Bethel AME member had come to town and was living in Santa Barbara. She asked me if I wanted to ride down and see the Akers, see Deirdre. And I said, “Sure!” I had never been to LA. Couldn't wait. They were living on 35th in Bromley, which was heart of black folk then in Los Angeles. I had never seen that many black people in one place in my life. I was so happy! And what was funny is the Akers were really, really light-skinned people. At a glance you might think they were
white. Once they opened their mouth, you knew they weren’t. But [laughs] if you weren’t looking very closely, you might mistake them.

So I stayed with them for a few weeks and I had aunt [who lived there] and I decided that I liked it. I had actually been awarded a scholarship to George Fox College. And I went and saw the campus. [chuckling, pause] And I was like: “This is worse than being in Portland!” And Portland is killing me. So, when I got to LA and decided I liked it, they had a junior college that was like seven dollars a semester if you were a resident. So somehow or another with my aunt who lived there and I ended up staying with, I became a resident and went to LA City College. And I had big fun. I didn’t learn very much academically.

But I had big fun in Los Angeles because my parents were so prominent, anytime I went anywhere or said my name [in Portland], they’d say “Oh! Are you Otto and Verdell’s daughter?” And I’m like, “Yeah…” So going to Los Angeles and not anybody knowing me or knowing them I thought that was wonderful. I really enjoyed being anonymous because I didn't get to be anonymous in my hometown. I can be now, because years have gone by and I left three or four times but, in my early years, ooh! It was tough.

And so. I stayed in LA for a couple of years. My grades went to hell so I decided that probably was enough of that. And I came back home and I was the second black person to work at First National Bank in the Lloyd Center. And that was an experience because the first black person to work there was an older woman—very nice lady, but older and different from me. And she knew all the little ladies that came in there with their retirement checks and she knew all the operations they had and how many grandchildren and where they were from and whatever. And I didn’t know any of that and didn't really care. I’m what, 20? I’m just working a job. I’d actually worked for Bank of America in Los Angeles. That was one of my first jobs.

MFF: What was your actual first job?

---

24 The Lloyd Center is a shopping mall in Northeast Portland. It is located in the Lloyd District, a primarily commercial area of Northeast and North Portland named after developer Ralph Lloyd. Ralph Lloyd died in 1953, but his descendants carried on his vision of development and opened the district’s anchor, the Lloyd Center shopping mall, in 1960.
CR: [laughing] Well… my actual first job was to be a part time, inexperienced receptionist for these brothers who had started some sort of educational video something or another. I wasn’t there long enough to actually figure out what they were really doing but it was a business. And they hired me. I was going to City College and it was a referral from our placement office. And they hired me with the understanding that I had never worked a job before but I could type. And I could answer the phone and I was going to work part time after I got out of school.

I was supposed to work like Monday, Wednesday and Friday. So I got hired on Monday. I went back on Wednesday for my first full day—which was a half a day—and they had another woman sitting in the chair and told me that I was being fired because they decided they wanted a full-time experienced person rather than a part-time inexperienced person. I was crushed. I was fired off of my first job before I could even do anything wrong. [laughs] And I got fired by black people. Which really just crushed me. So that was my first job. And they referred me to Bank of America.

And actually you know the job I had for Bank of America was typing, because I could type, right? I think it was the beginning of credit cards because this was 1965 and the job I had was to type up all of these mailing labels to customers of the bank that they were sending a Bank of America credit card to, unsolicited. And I sat in this little room and typed names and addresses for days. And then the bank manager’s administrative assistant was pregnant and going to go have a baby. And they decided I should do her job. So I went from typing in the back room to the front office of the bank, not knowing too much of anything about banking.

But I knew enough, evidently, to fake it until she came back from having a baby. By the time I came back to Oregon, I was experienced, honey. I had banking experience. So instead of paying me $300 a month as a teller, they paid me $315 a month as an experienced teller! [laughing]

MFF: Nice upgrade. [lightly sarcastic]
CR: Yeah! Fifteen whole dollars. But the real deal about the bank for me was getting a natural25. It was 1967, ‘cause I came back in ‘67. And the whole time that I was in LA, people were starting, you know—or maybe you don’t know—Cicely Tyson26 was the first black woman to have nappy hair on TV! And it was just mind-boggling! 1965! Eastside-Westside27. I even actually have managed to get some copies of the show. George C. Scott and Cicely Tyson were social workers in New York. And the series was built around incidents with their clients. So there were a lot of Black and Hispanic people in this show. And Cicely Tyson had a little short ‘fro and it was the first time I had seen any black woman with nappy hair. Period. Because if your hair was nappy, it was because you were on your way to get it straightened. It wasn’t because you intended to wear it nappy, let alone cut down to the nub, right? You had to have hair!

And I was just amazed! I loved it! I thought it was great. Because I always hated my hair. I always thought I had too much hair and it was always an ordeal and it was always taking up my time. It just got on my nerves. So I moved to LA and I had a perm. So I move to LA and I’m going and getting my hair permed and I’m saying: “I want a natural.” And the beauticians are telling me, “You can’t wear one.” I’m like: “Well, you putting chemicals in my hair, so how come I can’t wear one?” “Well, your hair’s is too straight.” “Well, it ain’t that straight if you’re putting chemicals in it!” So I could never get anybody who cut my hair to let me wear a ‘fro.

So I come back to Portland. And I got these friends in Seattle. And there’s a barber now in Seattle who is Chinese or whatever, who had now learned to cut ‘fros. So these two sisters that I’m friends with—the same AME Church people that I mentioned earlier—they invited me up. Tommie Smith and John Carlos, the two brothers who did the fist at the Olympics?28 Think it

25 A type of hairstyle, also known as a ‘fro or afro, that became popular in the United States in the late 1960s, particularly among African Americans.
26 Cicely Tyson is an American model and critically-acclaimed actress.
27 Eastside/Westside was an American drama that explored issues of urban life. It was both controversial and critically-acclaimed. The show ran for only one season, 1963-1964.
28 At the 1968 Olympics in Mexico City, American sprinters Tommie Smith (who won gold) and John Carlos (who won bronze) supported a human rights group, called the Olympics Human Rights Project, they had formed the previous year. The group called for desegregation throughout the world and less racism in sports. During the medal ceremony’s playing of the “Star-Spangled Banner,” Smith and Carlos both raised a black-gloved fist and kept it raised until the song’s finish. Many saw this gesture as a salute to the Black Power movement, although Smith wrote in
was Tommie Smith was in town. And they were having a party for him. So they were like,
“Come up to the party and you can go see Johnnie and get your hair cut.” And I’m like:
“Alright, I’m down for that.”

So I go to Seattle. And I get my hair cut off in the daytime. And I go to the party in the night
time. And I come back the next day, and at that time students could fly at half price on a student
ticket. And I flew back from Seattle and my folks picked me up at the airport. And I’m wearing a
green flak jacket and boots and my hair is cut to the nub. And my dad, says: “You look like a Fiji
Islander.” I didn’t even know what a Fiji Islander looked like. He never said another word about
my hair. And my mother didn’t say a word at all. They just drove home. [laughs]

So I go to work at the bank with my new natural and it seemed like within a week—but who
knows how long it was—I had a complaint about my attitude. And my attitude had always been
the same. I said, “Hello.” I said, “Thank you.” And I said, “Good bye.” Unless they had
something else to say. I didn't have a whole lot of conversation for the people. What did I have to
talk about? I’m 20. They’re 75. [scoffs] I don’t know you, you don’t know me. I’m working my
first job for real, you know?

MFF: Were they predominantly white?

CR: All white! All white. Maybe one or two black people a week, if I saw that. And there was a
retirement place nearby, so they were mostly old white. Real old. So one day, somebody called
my manager and said I was rude. And I’m like, “I’m not rude! What do you mean, ‘I’m rude?’ I
always say ‘Hello’ and I always say ‘Goodbye.’ I always say ‘Thank you.’”

And he said, “Well, you didn’t have any conversation.” And I said, “Well, that’s not being rude.
Did they have some conversation?” Next thing I know, I’m saying “So, what do you want me to
do? Shuffle and dance at my window?” Oh man, I was really upset with that man. Of course, he
was like, well, no. And I said, “Well, OK.” So then I left. I quit the job, eventually, not very long

his memoir it was meant as a gesture of support of universal human rights. All three medalists,
including silver medalist, Australian Peter Norman, wore OHRP badges during the ceremony.
Norman did not, however, raise his fist.
after that.

And I started working for a newspaper. Black newspaper. Oregon Advance Times. And I was just writing everything I could think of. Now you gotta remember this is 1968. Martin Luther King has been killed. Malcolm X, whom I haven’t mentioned, Malcolm X; I didn’t get hip to Malcolm X until about that time. Maybe a little earlier. The autobiography came out ‘64-’65\(^{29}\), but I don’t think I read it until 66 or 67, something like that. When Malcolm died, the newspaper here was so poor, and you know, Oregon is at the end of the earth. It’s not like we’re right up there next to Chicago or New York. The image that we had of him was so distorted through the white press that I remember reading the article in the paper when he died, and I was in high school and I remember thinking, well that’s really too bad. I didn’t realize how bad it really was until I started reading his stuff.

And it’s funny because after I moved back here in the ’90s, I had purchased a CD of some of his speeches. And I took it over for my folks to listen to, just to see what they would think. And when I came back and asked them what did they think, they were very impressed and liked everything he had to say, which was kind of a surprise for them. Because the image they had was different than what he really stood for.

So back to my newspaper job. So I’m writing on the Oregon Advance Times, and I’m writing a history column and a news column. And one day I came into work and the advertising man told me I was fired because some of the copy I had been writing was making it difficult for him to sell ads to the white people. Second time I was fired. And those were the only two times I’ve been fired and both times it was black people who fired me.

When I had quit my bank job to go work for the Oregon Advance Times, though, I had made the editor promise me that they wouldn’t fire me without notice. Because that’s what they had just done to the prior woman who had had the job. They came in one day and just fired her. And I’m like, “I’m quitting a job to come work for you, so you can’t just fire me. You’ve got to give me some notice.” So after the ad man fired me, I decided I wanted to be fired and all he had to do

\(^{29}\) The Autobiography of Malcolm X was published in 1965.
was pay me for a couple of weeks so that I had some money actually because I decided to go to
California and get married anyway. So that's what I did. I took my couple of weeks’ pay and
Kenneth and I went to San Francisco—actually, I went to LA first and was in Deirdre’s wedding
and then coming back, Kenneth and I got married in San Francisco. So that was 1968.

So, trying to get an education was kind of hard when first I get married and then I have a child
and then I get divorced. And then I move and then I get married and then I have another child.
But in there, I went to the University of Washington in 1971, for a couple of quarters, and got
pregnant again. And moved back to Portland. And had my son. And got divorced again. No,
before I got divorced I went back to school a third time.

Actually, the same summer my brother drowned was the summer I had started back to school.
And to be truthful, when I went back to school the third time, I had a mission. The first time I
went to schools was because—what do you do? You're out of high school? You go to school. So
I went to school and I didn’t do anything in school. Second time I went to school I’d been home
for two years taking care of my daughter and I was on, I was on welfare.

And then—Richard Nixon was the president at the time—and he had this guaranteed annual
income program that he was doing, a study to see if you gave poor people a certain amount of
money if their life would improve, and it was different than welfare because you could move
with it. And I happened to be home one day when a person came to the door. I’m living in
Seattle. And to make a long story short, I ended up getting off of welfare and going on to this
other guaranteed annual income program, which worked out quite nicely because it allowed me,
even though it probably didn't intend to, to move back down here, have my second child, and not
have to work for a couple of years. And then I went back to school and eventually finished
school and became a taxpaying citizen.

30 In 1969, Nixon introduced the Family Assistance Program, which gave direct cash payouts to
those who qualified. The FAP program would have covered more participants than existing
welfare programs. It would have required everyone except mothers of preschool age children to
work or take job training. It was an unpopular program for many interest groups and was never
passed into national law.
I graduated from Portland State in '76 with a BS in Administration of Justice and a certificate or minor in Black Studies. When I enrolled at Portland State, I said, “Okay. This is what I have and this is what I’ve taken. What can I get a degree in and not have to take statistics?” [laughs]

Seriously. Administration of Justice is what it turned out to be. And you had the enforcement and parole sides; enforcement certainly was never a part of my thinking. I thought I could handle parole and probations but I really wasn’t sure. As it turned out I didn’t need to; I ended up as a civil rights investigator and then a compliance officer with the civil rights division for the state of Oregon.

And while I was doing that job, especially as compliance officer, I had to interact with attorney generals for the state of Oregon who allegedly were handling our cases that we couldn't settle—although they really weren’t doing jack, but that's another story. And I would talk to these lawyers, and after dealing with two or three of them, it became clear to me that I could be a lawyer, because I knew more than they knew, and they were supposed to be the lawyer, and I was just the staff person. So, I wanted to leave town, and I decided that with two kids, and two divorces, leaving town—Oh, I’m sorry, there’s a step I forgot. While I was working for the civil rights division EEOC, Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, had some training money and they brought in people from various places to DC to learn whatever, and I got to go to DC, Man! Was I in seventh heaven there! I thought LA was ok, but the east coast was really what I liked. I liked everything about DC, I don’t care how grimy and dirty and ugly it was in the ‘70s and ‘80s. I was immediately taken with the city. I still think DC is my favorite place; I like to do things in New York, [but] living in New York is too hard. I can live in DC, DC’s alright. So I really liked DC, and I made a second trip for some reason that I can’t even remember now, but I've visited the place twice and after the second trip it was like okay, somehow I have to get back here and stay here, and I spent a year trying to figure out how could I afford to get there. I tried to get a job but with an undergraduate degree; I mean come on, they don’t need to bring me all the way from Oregon to DC. So then I started thinking about school, and by this time my AME friend from Seattle has gotten a job in DC. Actually there’d been this evening where a bunch of women were sitting around talking about what would we like to be doing in two years, and I had said I want to move to DC. Kathy didn’t know what she wanted to do, and next thing I know
Kathy’s moving to DC. I’m like, *you’re taking my dream; what are you doing?* Anyway, so Kathy is now in DC, which always makes it easier when you got somebody there. So I started applying to schools and decided, well if nothing else I can live on loans and grants long enough to get me to DC, and then I’ll find a job. If I’m local I can find a job, right? So I apply to law schools and I only applied to law schools either in DC or the University of Maryland in Baltimore. That was as far away as I’d go, fifty miles. I didn’t apply to anything local [in Portland]. And at the same time, I now have two children and my son had decided he wanted to live with his dad, so he was six, I think [pause], five—he was five when he went. And during that year he’s living with his dad, I’m applying to schools and my daughter gets mad at me one evening and decides *I want to go live with dad and Damoni.* And I’m like, “I bet, but if you do, you’re staying for the school year. You’re not coming back just ‘cause you feel like it, so start talking to your dad about next school year.” Now this is like mid-year, Christmas, middle of the year. So, the kids work out this plan where they’re to live with their dad, and I mention to my ex-husband that I was applying to law schools and he just ignored me; I’m like, ok. Then I mention later that I was beginning to get positive responses. I never mentioned what schools I had applied to, I just said I was applying. So by spring, first I thought I was going to [pausing]—the name of the school won’t come to me—it’s a liberal Quaker school in mid-Ohio, and they had a law school in DC that isn’t even there anymore now. Anyway, I didn’t end up going there, I ended up going to Howard, but that’s another story.

Anyway, I told my ex that I was going to go to law school in DC, and he didn’t take very kindly to that, but so what? He and the kids had worked out that they were going to be living together, and so I left and I went to, well first I went to CLEO,31 which if anybody cares I would highly recommend before you go to law school. Although I think they’ve changed the focus of CLEO, CLEO used to be for Black and Hispanic pre-law students, and it would give you six weeks of training before law school after you've already been admitted, to gear you to the rigors of law school so it wasn’t quite so traumatic and it helped me a lot, I mean it helped a whole lot to know what to expect. They give you the basics of how to study and whatever. So I went to LA for the

---

31 The Council on Legal Education Opportunity runs a six-week preparation course for students from racially diverse and economically disadvantaged backgrounds who wish to attend law school.
CLEO then came back and the kids went to Seattle and I went on to DC and I got a JD at Howard University School of Law. And Georgetown had a graduate program where you could work as a fellow for two years in a clinical program. They had four five different clinics and they would pay you like staff. You had second and third year law students who worked in the clinic for a semester for grades and you did, we did workshops so there was some academic stuff but it was mostly straight up legal work. I did civil rights stuff with employment discrimination law. There was a lawsuit that had been going on—everything lasts a hundred years—a lawsuit against the Government printing office that some brothers had filed ten years before I got a hold to it. And they were in the monitoring stages of the consent decree and there was always something that somebody wasn’t doing right and so I did that. We had a citizens’ communication commission—something like that—that was dealing with the Communication Act, and at the time Ronald Reagan had just been sworn in and was rapidly rewriting all the regulations to everything. There used to be set asides in radio and television media for black purchasers trying to diversify the ownership of the media. There used to be restrictions on how many newspapers or magazines, or radio or television stations an owner could have in one market. He did away with all that. There used to be a political time that candidates had to get from television. He did away with that. I mean he did away with so much stuff it was scary and part of what we did was try to fight off his changes. The legislature adopts a statue, the statue is given to an agency to implement and enforce. To implement and enforce the statue they write rules. You can rewrite the rules as many times as you want without ever changing the legislation, but as you rewrite the rules, how the legislation is implemented and enforced gets changed. You take language from the statute and you interpret that language, well you reinterpret that language, and you reinterpret it again and then all of a sudden the language doesn’t mean what it meant for twenty years. And that's what Reagan did and that's what Bush is continuing to do. He’s doing it now with the environmental laws that they complain about he’s trying to change things—he has changed things—he’s made public lands available for private parties to rape and pillage and carry on.

So anyway, Reagan was the master of that, or who ever the people really were running Reagan were master of that. And so we spent a lot of time trying to fight back the changes that occurred; I have to admit that working in DC in one of the most hostile times, I mean the whole time I was in the East—I started law school in 1980, I graduated in ’83. I went to Georgetown’s Institute for
Public Representation was the name of the graduate program, post graduate program. I worked there for two years as a fellow and as a result, got a Masters in Law, the LLM degree from Georgetown in ’85. Then I started working for the Legal Defense Fund; I actually had worked for them during the summers. Partially because Howard gave me a full scholarship and the brother who ran the scholarship program, when he and I talked, and I was coming out of the civil rights division at the time, and I told him about my parents’ stuff. You have to write all that biographical stuff to apply. He hooked me up with the Legal Defense Fund, and I worked for them two or three summers while I was in law school. I also worked for Westinghouse; that didn’t last long, I asked all the wrong questions with them. At the time nuclear stuff was big and they were also cutting food programs and Reagan was just squeezing poor people like crazy. I remember going to some cocktail party and asking some of these Westinghouse executives about what was the justification for asking for a bunch of money they wanted at the same time that food programs were being cut, and the man looked at me like I was completely crazy and said something like he didn’t understand what one had to do with the other and that they had been promised this money and whatever. I had told the guy who got me the job, just don't give me anything that has to do with nuclear power. I don’t want to work on it, and of course that’s what they gave. I understand the private sector was not for me; that’s not where I should be focusing my attention. I couldn’t even last out the summer. [chuckles]

Okay, so back to the Legal Defense Fund. After I finished Georgetown I worked in DC for the Legal Defense Fund, and then they moved me up to their headquarter office in New York and that was the first time in my life that somebody else moved me somewhere. All the other moves that I made, it was my idea to make those moves, and it was one of the hardest moves I’ve ever made. I think it was a combination of my daughter graduated high school and started Brown University in Rhode Island, or left for Brown in July because she went early. She left in July, Damoni left in August, and I left in September. We were living in Maryland, and my daughter went to Brown in July, my son decided he wanted to go back and live with his dad in Seattle, and he left in August; and then I moved to New York by myself in September—and all of a sudden I don’t have kids which I’ve had for seventeen years. My daughter was seventeen when she went to college and now I’m living in a town—I lived in Jersey City, New Jersey. I didn’t live in New York City. I couldn't find anything in New York City that I could afford that I would be scared to
death day and night trying to go home to. So I settled on Jersey City which is right across the
Hudson River from lower Manhattan, and it was a short commute. It was a shorter commute
from Jersey to my job then it would've been if I lived in Brooklyn. Certainly closer than Long
Island or Queens, or any of that.

So I worked for the Legal Defense Fund for almost 7 years and then moved back to Oregon,
primarily because of my folks, in the end of 1992. The Legal Defense Fund experience was
really something. Working at the national level is altogether different than at the state and local.
But at the time I was doing it, it was so depressing. I mean we spent, and I would imagine it's
continued; I haven't stayed in touch that much with the folks from the Legal Defense Fund since
I left, but from what I've read and seen and what they’ve mailed to me, they spend as much time
trying to keep things out of the Supreme Court as they did in the earlier years arguing things in
the Supreme Court. I mean Elaine Jones, who was the woman I worked with in the DC office
and became the executive director, she called it as far as Clarence Thomas was concerned. She
said that she thought he'd be the person that the president would pick to replace Thurgood
Marshall—which is such an insult, such an insult! Thurgood Marshall had all kinds of experience
and Clarence Thomas had little to none. In the experience he had when he ran the EEOC, he lost
a whole bunch of rights for some age claims that he sat on and let get old. I mean his reputation
was horrible, even before Anita Hill talked about his sexual harassment. But Elaine said he'd be
the one she was right, he toast the water for the white folk, no doubt about that.

Okay, so, but it was interesting seeing a lot of our national leaders up close and personal at real
stressful times. Kind of left me not that hopeful about the law. In fact, it left me very unhopeful
about the law. I mean it became real clear that stare decisis, which is you know, settled law, if
you follow settled law, has nothing to do with anything. It’s all in the political will, it’s all in the
who’s in control, who’s in power. And when it comes to the Supreme Court, it’s how you label
something that determines everything else, and if you just change the label on it you've changed
the balance of how you analyze something. It's all gamesmanship. It’s the will of the people that
are in that decide how it's going. It doesn’t have anything to do with just and right and fair and
any of that. And I was really—I didn’t expect a lot, but I expected more than what I got from the
law. I don’t know, with Obama now I don't even know how to view what to expect, I mean this
is truly a new day and if in fact change is what he’s bringing, it’s certain time—past time. I mean
Clinton’s little piece was not all that, he got more credit than he deserves as far as I’m concerned
as far as poor people go, as far as black people go, as far as advancing the cause, is concerned. I
got to my education.

MFF: Actually you’ve told us about your children; do you want to go back?

CR: Yeah! Let me go back

MFF: Their names, date of births.

CR: Sure, I’d be happy to!

CR: I have a daughter who is Al-Yasha Ilhaam Williams; I should say Doctor Al-Yasha Ilhaam
Williams. She was born April 3rd, 1969. She has her undergraduate degree from Brown in
biomedical ethics. She has a Ph.D. from Stanford in Philosophy and she is a tenured professor at
Spelman College in Atlanta. At the moment she is a Fulbright fellow in Cameroon, Africa, where
she is teaching at the University of Buea, Cameroon, and will be back in the states in December.
She left in March with a four-year-old daughter, Zarah Chinosole, and a ten-week-old son,
Asadel Douglas.

MFF: May I have the spelling back?

CR: Which one? [Chuckles]

CR: Both

her last name is Williams-Brewer. And the baby’s name is, Asadel, A-S-A-D-E-L, which is
Arabic. Douglas, which is his father and both grandfather’s middle name. I thought they might
make it D-O-U-G-L-A-S-, after Fred, but they didn’t, [and his last name is] Brewer-Williams.

[pause] No, wait! She didn’t name him that! [laughs] His last name is Ilhaam, I-L-H-A-A-M, which is my daughter’s middle name. And she intends for it to be everybody’s last name at some point in time but right now only the baby has that name. [laughs] I forgot.

[Brewer] is her partner’s name, the dad.

MFF: And she is the daughter of your first husband?

CR: Yes.

MFF: And can we get his information?

CR: Yes. His name is Kenneth Jones. Well, wait, his name was Kenneth Jones. Last I heard his name was Sheik something, but he’s had many names. Kenneth Jones. Actually though, legally, my second husband adopted Yasha. Even though biologically Kenneth is her father, we split up when she was eight months old and she doesn’t really know her father. And Don Williams, who is my second ex-husband, is legally her father, who she considers her father, and is the father of Damoni Williams, my second child. Damoni lives in Seattle with his father, my ex-husband. He’s been an entrepreneur, he had a record shop and studio as a young man. Then he got a job with UPS and did recruitment and hiring for UPS, which really suited him, he’s a very personable guy.

MFF: Sorry… [apologizing for something inaudible, CR pauses]

CR: Huh?

MFF: Excuse me.

CR: (laughs) That’s all right, did you want to say something?

32 Frederick Douglass
CR: Okay. He [Damoni] has many children. He has his real estate license now that real estate is crashing around him. So he’s having a hard time, needless to say. He never was the scholar my daughter was. He always was the kind who would say, “Just tell me about it,” rather than reading it himself. He is a bright young man who, again, I don’t think has done as much with his life as he could. But he has five children. He actually has four biological children and was raising his wife’s youngest sibling. In fact, when they first got married, they had five of her siblings. He had eight children when he was like twenty-three, twenty-four, something like that. Her five siblings and three children of his own. Two with his wife and one with a woman he wasn’t married to. And I gotta give it to him, he’s been very much involved in all of his children’s lives. He now has another son, and this past year he and his wife after thirteen or fourteen years separated. So they’re all up in Seattle. My grandchildren are two fourteen-year-olds, one twelve-year-old, and a seven-year-old. And then there is the sixteen-year-old who was the sister of his wife, who they raised like a daughter. Yeah, so. He has serious potential but he still needs to work on it.

MFF: When is his birthday?


MFF: And both of my kids were really close with my parents. By virtue of our living here in Portland for most of their early years, they had lots of opportunity to spend time with them and were both very close to my folks. I’m glad they had an opportunity to really know them on their own and develop their own relationships with them. I think it’s had an effect on their social consciousness. Both of them are politically active and interested. Next?

MFF: So back to you. (chuckles) So, you grew up on . . .

CR: Ninth and Shaver, uh huh, sure did.

MFF: Have you always lived in the house you live in now?
When I’m in this town! [laughs] Well let me see, how’d that go? I rented a couple of houses before we bought this house, in Portland. But living in other places was always more interesting to me. The thirteen years that I was gone from here living in the east I rented this house out and actually there were a couple of times I wanted to sell it, but property wasn’t doing much and trying to do anything from 3,000 miles away is next to impossible. And I’m so thankful that I didn’t sell, because I couldn’t afford to buy the house that I’m in now if I were just trying to get it now. We bought this house in 1973. We found it in 1972 but we didn’t sign the papers ‘til 1973, and paid fifteen thousand dollars for it. Yeah. Things have changed a lot! [laughs].

MFF: Pretty good price!

CR: Things have changed a lot. The last time I looked it was valued at over 300,000. I don’t know what’s happening now it’s probably back down to 250 or something but. So, it was a smart thing to hang onto it even though there were periods there when I was in law school when it was really hard to pay rent there and pay the mortgage here. Fortunately the mortgage was like 175 dollars so that helped but, that’s not the case anymore of course. I’ve come back and refinanced a couple of times, but still I’m doing better than the three hundred it’s valued at. Yeah, I’ve lived on Vancouver, I moved like I said in ‘72 and that’s been interesting. My neighbors haven’t changed that much, the people over here are the same people that were there when I left in ‘80. There were people before them, but the family that’s there now has been there for more than twenty years. The people over here [gesturing] were old-timers and the woman died, well I guess it’s been four or five years ago now. She was there when I left and she was there when I came back. And they’ve sold it and a younger couple has moved in with their kids. The neighbor on this side [gesturing] has always been white, and the neighbor on that side [gesturing] first was white and then became, think they’re Cuban. They’re black, but I think they’re Cuban. And I don’t know if you noticed but my neighbors across the street, I’m facing the backs of their houses. I’ve really never known for sure who my neighbors across the street are because the front of their house faces the next block over.

The neighborhood has faced a lot of change, racially as well as physically. The infill, the building that has gone on the last five, six, seven years.
MFF: if their backs are facing you, which block was built first? Or is that the way they aligned it?

CR: It looks like that’s the way they aligned it. I think that street over there is Moore. The name of the street is Moore. And why their backyards face Vancouver and their house faces Moore I couldn’t tell you. I have not a clue. My dad believed that this neighborhood used to be cherry orchards, I guess at the turn of the century. Because my backyard and the two neighbors on either side of my backyard, all of us had cherry trees in our backyards. The neighbor over here’s was cut down before mine; I cut mine down, I don’t know, ten years ago or so, because they had gotten old and every winter a chunk of it fell off and I was afraid that a chunk of it was going to fall on my deck, and so I went ahead and just took them out. Then that neighbor took hers out a year or two later. But the numbers of cherry trees, and the fact there’s an alley that runs through behind my house that runs I don’t know how many blocks through in both directions, my dad believed that at one point this was an orchard. My house was built in, I think it was ‘21, 1921. Or was it ‘27? I think it was ‘21. So this is an old neighborhood, most of the houses were built in and around that same time. The arrangement of the houses though, I couldn’t tell you. I have not a clue.

MFF: It’s kinda random.

CR: Yeah I think so, tell you the truth. Probably who put them up and when they put them up.

[pause]

MFF: I apologize for the pause.

CR: Oh that’s quite all right.

MFF: Is there anything else you’d like to add to the set up of your neighborhood? Or the dynamic of your neighborhood?
CR: Yeah, I could say some more about the neighborhood. I mean the development—it’s not just
my neighborhood, the whole Northeast—the development of additional housing while at the
same time putting in bicycle paths and taking out car lanes has been incredibly annoying. The
north-south transportation routes, the main streets, Interstate [Avenue]—you put a light rail and
take out lanes. Vancouver—you put a bicycle lane, and take out a lane. Williams—they left two
lanes and put in a bicycle lane, and two cars and a bicycle cannot drive at the same time.33
Because the cars want to move over and give the bicycle room and they’ve made the lanes so
tight you have to stagger it practically. They did it on Broadway—what used to be five lanes is
now four lanes and a bicycle lane. The traffic pattern makes no sense to me. You do infill, you
build more housing—more multi-family housing at that—not single-family dwellings but multi-
family dwellings, which one assumes will attract more cars, and then you reduce the number of
lanes available for cars to drive in at the same time. I don’t understand the logic. I guess they’re
just trying to create gridlock. Because eventually I’m sure that’s what they’ll do.

If all of the units that they’ve put into the neighborhood get filled up, and everybody isn’t riding
a bicycle—which I bet they won’t be—you can’t get anywhere! It’s made no sense to me, how
they’ve dealt with either bumps in the road or those turnaround things you have to go around, 7th
[Avenue] with the bumps and the stop signs and you know, it’s just really annoying.

And the bicycles. I’m definitely not a bicycle fan. And every time I see a bicyclist run through a
light, I just want to hit them with my car. Because it’s like if you’re gonna act like a car, act like a
car. Follow the rules! Just ‘cause you’re on a bicycle doesn’t mean you get to go through a red
light, you know? The first two years that they put this bicycle lane out here in front of my house
if I saw three bicycles a day I’d be really surprised. I was really angry the first couple years
because it’s like, where are the bicycles for this lane you’ve put out here? Only in the last year
have numbers gotten to be significant. So significant now of course that I have trouble getting
out of my driveway because I have to wait on the bicycle and then by the time I’ve waited on the

33 City and private development in the opening decade of the twenty-first century created
increased bicycle lanes in inner Portland, including on N Williams and N Vancouver avenues.
The lanes sparked debate over gentrification, as well as what many residents see as the city’s
continued interest in developing the inner city at the expense of outer lying areas.
bicycle then here come some more cars you know? [chuckles] It’s annoying. I have to tell you, it’s really annoying. I don’t understand why bicyclists have to ride on the main streets. Why can’t bicyclists ride on side streets?

MFF: I can’t tell you.

CR: [laughs] I don’t understand, I just don’t understand! And the bicyclists who have their babies, in those pull things—they need to get tickets. They just need to be cited for being negligent parents. I’m waiting for the child to be run over and the parent to keep on driving on down the street. How are you going to supervise your child [emphatic thump, like a hand hitting a table] when you’re riding a bicycle pointing forward and your kid is being driven along drug on the street behind you with all the exhaust blowing into him and carrying on. I think that’s criminal. I’m sorry, I really think that’s criminal. And you’re out there on Martin Luther King [Boulevard]?34 I’ve seen it! You’re on Martin Luther King with a kid in your thing behind you and pedaling up and down the street like you’ve got right of way. Like that means something. So what if you have the right of way if you’re dead you’re still dead, you know, with the right of way. And there’s no way a bicycle and a car are ever going to be equal competitors. I don’t get it, I really don’t get it. This is not a bicycle friendly town, I don’t care what they say. [laughs]

MFF: Case in point downtown—all the people getting hit.

CRR: No doubt, no doubt. Or my favorite story is the bus driver suit. The lawsuit where the bicyclist and the bus driver were having this competitive thing. And the bus couldn’t get around the bicyclist and then finally the bicyclist stopped and he hit the bus with his hand or some craziness. And the bus driver let a passenger get off of the bus who then hit the [laughs] bicycle rider in the mouth and got back on the bus, and they drove off [laughs]. You didn’t hear about that?35

MFF: I did not hear about that.

34 Martin Luther King, Jr. Blvd is a main thoroughfare on Portland’s inner east side.
CR: The bicycle rider sued Trimet and ultimately I think he got some money but not the big money he wanted. But the incident of the lawsuit prompted a whole lot of people to write. Bicycles and dogs, I’m telling you, this town thinks it’s friendly to bicycles and dogs but it’s not! Just like it thinks it progressive in regard to race relations, but it’s not, you know? People were writing in, and I had to laugh, because it really showed how many folks were hostile to bicycle riders. I thought the incident was hysterical. I tell people about it, they’re like, “Oh, you got bicycle riders?” I’m like, “Yeah. Yeah, we got bicycles all right, and it ain’t all that, let me tell ya.”

But the bicycle thing, and dogs in the park. Man, I had a crusade going for a minute, and then they found him. Two years ago I think it was, when they had the dogs being killed in the park with the food that—a couple of years ago somebody planted some poisoned food—and these dogs that were running around free ate some food, and a couple of them died or whatever and of course it was a big outrage. But if you had your dog on a leash you wouldn’t have had to worry about it, right? I went over here to Peninsula Park one day, I was taking a walk, and Peninsula Park—have you ever been to Peninsula Park?

MFF: No, I haven’t been.

CR: Go to Peninsula Park sometime, it’s a really nice park. And it has this beautiful rose garden. It’s over here on Ainsworth and Albina. So in the middle of the rose garden there’s a fountain. And when I got to the park, there was a woman sitting by the fountain with one of those throw things—you put the ball at the end at then it’s like a—I never saw one before this woman—it’s like a hook spoon and you put the ball at the base. . .

MFF: A whiffle ball?

CR: A tennis ball, smaller ball. Why, I have no idea. Instead of throwing the ball in your hand,
you put the ball in this thing and, yeah okay. So she’s sitting on the edge of the fountain, throwing this ball in the water, as her two dogs jump in the water and go get the ball, and then come out and shake water everywhere. And then she takes it and throws it. And so I walked past the fountain and I was standing up high watching them. And there was some kids who came along, who wanted to play in the water. It’s not really meant to be in at all, I don’t believe, by anybody. But the dogs were carrying on so the parents came in and guided on out of the area. And she sat there and did that for ten minutes or longer, I don’t know, all I know is it was long enough to make me mad. And I’m standing there watching her. Finally she gets her dogs and she leaves and a second woman, comes down to the pool with her dog and starts the same thing all over again. Now I’m crazy right?

So I come home, and I’m just like—and there are dogs running, they’re loose dogs. And I grew up with dogs, I don’t dislike dogs. But I also don’t trust dogs and a strange dog running up to me. it’s not “ooh” [mocking admiration, affectionate tone] I’m not petting it! You know? I don’t want it. I want you to keep your dog with you, that’s your dog, you hang on to it. I ain’t ask for your dog, right?

And so usually when dogs run up to me I just stop, and stand there. And then they’ll give me, “Oh he won’t bother you,” and I’m like, “Call your dog, you know. Call your dog.” So I came home, and I got the phone book and I found Multnomah County dog whatever. And I raised all kinds of hell. And I was complaining about dogs off the leash, dogs in the water, and making all kinds of complaints about, what’s the deal with the parks? That very summer, they started this whole six am to nine am dogs off the leash—they got some kind of regs [regulations] that are supposed to guard—or not guard—well yeah, guard, the public—supposed to allow dogs off the leash during certain times, at certain parks, with dog runs and all this. I don’t see where anybody’s following any of that. I mean they’re still off the leash whenever. And I guess they’ve got three people from the county to enforce what little enforcing is going on. But everybody I’ve talked to who is an old member of the community is upset about the dogs, because people don’t keep their dogs on a leash first of all, and even when they do, they still let them run half a block ahead of them, you know, the leashes are so long.

Charlotte is referring to a “Chuck-it,” a popular dog accessory for playing fetch that allows the owner to throw the ball farther than he or she could with the unaided arm.
MFF: Do you think it’s a cultural thing?

CR: I’m sure it’s a cultural thing. Actually, I still believe that the people bring the dogs into the black community as protection from the black community they’re moving into. And the way they allow their dogs freedom, and I guess the “dog is a part of the family” thing. A dog is a dog. I’m sorry. A dog is not a part of the family. I mean it can be a family pet, but it’s not a part of the family. I don’t get it, um, but dogs and bicycles clearly are a cultural thing, maybe a race thing. I’ve only seen, maybe… actually I haven’t seen any black people on a regular basis riding past my house. And I do see certain white people regularly riding past my house. Or when I get out there in my car, I see the same people at the same time. But very few black people riding past. It’s primarily white people that I see riding. On their way to work anyway. The [black] people I see riding don’t seem to be on their way to work. They’re just out there riding. [laughs] You know, probably had their license revoked and can’t drive and so they’re on a bicycle instead. I don’t think it was like they really intended to be on a bicycle. There’s a lot of cultural difference, a lot of cultural difference. And it causes stress. No doubt. Causes stress.

I actually think, everybody and every thing has a place, and you have to work your way up from that place, and I think a lot of black people don’t think that white people who are new to the neighborhood know their place. They want to take over. And some of that is our fault as black people, because we aren’t running the neighborhood associations like we should. We aren’t at the community meetings where decisions are being made as to what will happen. Sometimes we know, sometimes we don’t know, sometimes we know late. So some of it, you could say, is our fault for not protecting ourselves better. Although with regard to the housing thing, every city has gone through the same gentrification, it just took a little longer to get here. I mean I watched it happening in DC. I watched it beginning to happen in New York, in Harlem. And like everything else that works its way west, five years later, it’s happening here. And it shouldn’t have been any surprise it was coming. The infill is a little bit of a surprise, the new construction that went on. The new multi-family dwellings that went on. I can remember when I was a kid, I didn’t even know anybody that lived in an apartment. There were so few apartments in the Black community. Everybody had a house. You might have had a duplex, but apartment buildings? There weren’t
any, until the Lloyd Center area really began to grow, and that was still the early ‘60s. Very, very early ‘60s, late ‘50s. But earlier than that, everybody had a house. It might have been a raggedy house, but it was a house. It wasn’t an apartment [chuckles]. Yeah. Next? [pause] We done?

MFF: We’ve pretty much covered what I had planned to.

CR: Okay, let me bring my work experience up to date because I didn’t really finish. The [NAACP] Legal Defense Fund—my job with them was primarily employment discrimination, with a focus on working poor black women. The job exposed me to more feminist theory, which was good, and gave me a better appreciation for feminism. And the question of ‘are you Black or are you a woman’ for us is always an issue. And for those of us who are always black and always women, you know, sometimes… there was a period in the ‘70s when Michele Wallace wrote *Myth of the Black Macho*… is that what it was called? I can’t even remember now. There was a period when there was a lot of antagonism between black men and black women. And sometimes black men would blame the white feminist movement [influence] on the attitudes of black women and [say] “Oh, you’re just modeling,” you know, “you’re just imitating white women.” When in fact we had real issues of our own, with black men. Without a doubt.

I mentioned briefly when we talked before that my first husband was a member of the Nation of Islam, and while married to him I also joined the Nation of Islam. Which was difficult because the Nation of Islam called Malcolm X a hypocrite, and I had developed a very strong affinity for Malcolm X even though he was dead. I liked his position, I liked his attitude, I liked what he had to say about Black Nationalism. But I tried to adopt or adapt what was expected of me [clears throat] and the Nation of Islam had problems, as far as I’m concerned, dealing with women. They even taught in their studies—you had these canned lessons that you would get from Chicago that you had to memorize and stuff—and in the lessons they taught that the woman’s brain, the female brain, was smaller than the men’s brain. Never knew exactly what science they used to come up with that, but anyway, that was their belief. And that the woman should follow, physically follow, the man. I mean be-a-step-behind follow the man.

___

37 Michele Wallace’s *Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman* was published in 1978.
I was only married for a year and a half. I was divorced by the time my second anniversary rolled around. We had a lot of differences, needless to say, and in the end it wasn’t worth trying to make sense out of the differences, as far as I could see. I was pregnant and the Nation had a rule that after your third month of pregnancy women weren’t allowed to participate in the mosque. And we had just gotten a mosque started here. My first ex-husband helped to organize Portland’s first Islamic mosque.38

MFF: Where is it located?

CR: [pause] I was about to say it’s the same building they have now on Martin Luther King—I think that’s right. Why am I thinking it was on Mississippi? You know I don’t know! I was able to go there so few times, because literally they didn’t have one at first. Then when they got one I was pregnant and couldn’t go, then after I had the baby I still couldn’t go ‘cause I didn’t have clothes and I didn’t sew. So after I found somebody to make clothes so I could go—because you know you had to have a uniform and you had to have long clothes and whatever—I only managed to get there two or three times before I decided it wasn’t working for me.

And I left my ex and when I left him, the Nation had a process where people were supposed to report on each other if they weren’t behaving appropriately or whatever. Whatever reason they felt they needed to report you. And I, knowing my attitude and personality, decided I would be reported on more often than I felt like hearing about it, so I just kind of faded away. I should ask Lurlene [Johnson Shamsud-Din] that question, Lurlene could probably tell me where that first mosque was located. I want to say it was something on Mississippi before they moved it over to Martin Luther King but I just can’t, I really can’t place it.

But I decided that, even though I thought at the time being a member of the Nation of Islam would—how do I say this. OK, let’s try it again. At the time I joined the Nation, I had other friends who had joined the Black Panther party. The Black Panther Party in Portland was run by Kent Ford. And I like Kent, but I don’t know that I’d want to follow Kent. So the Black

Panther Party in Portland was always kinda questionable for me. In Seattle, Aaron and—what was his brother’s name?—Dixon, ran the Panther Party in Seattle.\(^3\) And I actually had a few friends that were in the party in Seattle. And because of COINTELPRO,\(^4\) it was the federal government’s, or the FBI’s specifically, concerted effort to undermine the Black Panther Party. I mean there have been a few books published that have unearthed documents where, between the infiltrators, the FBI either members or informants who joined the party strictly so they could inform on them, as well as set up incidents. Or, as in Chicago, provide the floor plan so the police knew exactly where to go to kill Fred Hampton.\(^5\) You know, I had a lot of respect for the organization. But I had reservations about our local leadership. And didn’t get involved with the Panthers here. But by that time also I’d joined the Nation of Islam, and at the time you could not be involved in politics with the Nation. It was all about the Nation, whether it was on the religious side or on the entrepreneurial side. They did not want you to participate in political activities. They considered themselves separate from everybody and everything and wanted physically to separate and that was part of the platform, was to get five southern states and become all black. I thought that was unlikely to happen but it was a good idea if it would have happened.

I didn’t have much to do with SNCC,\(^6\) because there wasn’t a SNCC organization that was where I was at various times. Although SNCC’s philosophy probably would have fit better than anything. The Black Panther Party though, to get back to what it was doing and what it was about, it, like the war, and like drugs, left some people scarred, because it had some internal issues also. And again, as far as women went, women, as always, even in Christian churches, women are the workers. Women are the backbone of the organization. But they’re rarely the

---


4 COINTELPRO, an acronym for Counter Intelligence Program, was the name given to the federal government’s efforts to gather information about, infiltrate and at times disrupt or discredit organizations deemed subversive. Although similar programs existed before and after, COINTELPRO refers specifically to programs in operation from 1956-1971. Among other groups, COINTELPRO focused on the Black Panthers, communist and socialist organizations and Civil Rights organizations.

5 Fred Hampton as the leader of the Illinois branch of the Black Panther Party. He was killed (many say assassinated) by the Chicago Police Department and FBI in a joint raid in 1971.

6 Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee.
spokespersons or the leadership. But without women the organizations would crumble because they’re the one’s doing all the work. And that was pretty much the case for the Black Panther Party as well as, to a large extent, the Nation of Islam. So those movements came and went, and I think that people who were involved with both of them have war stories to tell you about how their lives were forever affected. I know mine was affected in the way that I could never go back to Bethel AME Church. I don’t know that I could really articulate the reason. I know that organized religion is a problem for me generally. I do believe there is a God, I do believe I am a spiritual person, but I’m not much on religion. I think that the leadership too often forgets they’re supposed to be an instrument of God rather than The Leadership, and therefore I have difficulty following folks, I guess.

The Black Panther Party is actually getting a little more play these days. I’ve even heard rumors that they’re trying to reinstitute it. The Black Panther Party was truly done in with by the federal government. There was a shootout in Los Angeles. There was the brother in New York who went to jail for several years. You don’t know for sure how much stuff would have happened if it had not been for agent provocateurs, you know. You really don’t. But they were instrumental in so many ways, with food programs and health programs and activities for kids and stuff, that it was really a shame. Some people speculate that the gangs filled the void that the Panthers left when they disintegrated after having amassed a bunch of people that were semi-organized as a group, but then what do you do?

There’ve been a couple documentaries I’ve watched about LA gangs who really do believe the void in the Panther leadership is how communities became misguided, you might say. Or refocused, or unfocused. But it’s a shame because the Black Panther Party was really an inspirational organization. I remember living in Los Angeles watching when the brothers went to Sacramento carrying guns.\(^\text{43}\) I think after ten years of dogs and water hoses and bombings and clandestine murders where people just disappeared, there was an interest in seeing us fight back. There was an interest in western, northern, younger people who didn’t have the southern experience, didn’t have as much belittling and grinding down by whites in the areas where we were compared to the south, that they just always kind of questioned non-violence as a strategy.

\(^\text{43}\) On May 2, 1967, a fully armed group of California Black Panthers marched on the State Capitol in Sacramento. They were protesting the recently introduced Mulford Bill, which would repeal a California state law that allowed citizens to openly carry loaded weapons in public places.
And seeing the Panthers stand up and say, “We ain’t taking it anymore!” was truly inspirational. It was interesting to see the brothers with guns, and I’ve heard Bobby Seale\footnote{Bobby Seale was co-founder of the Black Panthers, along with Huey Newton, in 1966.} talk about how they actually got lost walking around in Sacramento and ended up in the wrong place. But at the time carrying a gun in plain view was not against the law. Unless you were black of course, and then it scared them to death! But it really was inspirational for younger black folks who had gotten tired of seeing nothing but dogs and water hoses and people going to jail. It put out a completely different image and vibe, and that was fine with me.

Although I have to admit I had another friend that used to talk about when the revolution comes. I have never had much experience with violence. I've been fortunate in my lifetime; I didn’t get spanked by my parents and I haven't had men who beat on me. And I didn't get into fights with girls that went in school and whatnot. So we would joke and I said when the revolution came I was going to be the USO. I’d be behind the lines handing out donuts and coffee--being an inspiration to the troops! [laughs] I didn’t know if I could actually pick up a gun and shoot people. I probably could have, but at the time I wasn't sure. But I definitely could be inspirational [laughs], so that was the role I chose for myself. Fortunately, or unfortunately as the case is, the revolution never came--probably fortunately because I'm sure we'd all be dead now if it had, judging by how the urban riots went. I don’t know that anybody ever won one of those. When the time came, the tanks and the National Guard and probably the U.S. Army would have appeared.

MFF: Probably some martial law?

CR: Exactly, exactly. [laughs]

Actually riots are something we haven't talked about. That’s something that needs to be addressed, because Portland actually tried its hand at a couple of those and didn’t get very far. But they did throw a rock or two. It’s interesting how urban, no, race riots, that’s the term, up until the sixties, nearly all those so-called riots were white people pillaging in black communities--just killing folks, burning stuff. From Civil War Draft Riots in New York [of
1863], and some stuff in Louisiana--just again and again and again and again. And then in the sixties it was a turnabout. And suddenly black people were burning up their own communities instead of white people coming into the black community and burning them up. I’ve never quite fully understood--I mean I do understand on some levels--but I don’t understand on other levels. Burn, I guess, what’s closest to you, because to get on a bus and ride across town and burn up you probably might lose your incentive to burn--or not be able to get there. The argument was “you didn’t own it anyway.” I mean the black people who were setting the fires didn’t own the businesses or the buildings that burned, but the result was you had people burned out.

I moved to LA on the day the Watts Riot[s] broke out. And after five or six days it seems like finally we could get out again. It might have been longer than that. You had to be in by dark, something like nine. They had a curfew and National Guard troops parked in parking lots of grocery stores and up and down the street and everything. The helicopters [were] flying over areas that were being looted. You could sit at home and watch television and see people you knew stealing stuff. It was very strange. But when it was over we drove over to Watts--I wasn’t in Watts, I was in West LA. It was scary; it was devastating. I saw LA in 1992 when it burned again and it was still devastating. I mean it’s just blocks and it stayed that way; it stayed burned out for years and so did it this time. It stayed burned out. It wasn’t like, “Oh, get insurance money and build it right back up.” It took a long time for it to build it back up. Just like Katrina has taken a long time. But the spark that starts those things is typically the same always: either an actual or perceived police something--and usually actual--and a few people end up getting a whole lot of people who are frustrated and angry and poor, always poor, to riot and use the riot as an excuse to steal, an opportunity to liberate things.

The riots that occurred in the sixties, they just spread one summer after another, from one place to another. And [the riots] really scared white folks--scared them probably more than anything else black people had done. The marching and singing didn't scare them. Riots did, even though they didn’t spillover into their communities. To know that there were black people willing to burn and loot was enough to scare them. But they also prepared much better as the years wore on--their armaments got better, tactics got better, if you will. More effective--that’s a better way of putting it, because better is questionable. But

45 The Watts Riots lasted from August 11 to August 17, 1965.
46 The LA Riots of 1992, also known as the Rodney King Riots, last from April 29 to May 4, 1992.
more effective in quelling riots.

But the unrest and the... you know, I’d actually rather see black people riot and burn down a town than gang wars where they're shooting each other over craziness. At least they’re trying to make a political statement in a riot. I can’t find anything redeeming about gang wars where kids are shooting each other for nothing. But the political nature of things was so heightened in the sixties. Everything was politics. And everybody viewed their lives from a political framework. And maybe that’s coming back; I hope that's coming back. I hope Obama has re-instilled some political consciousness in masses of people and it's not just all economics. Which it’s been since 1980, it’s been all about the money: making the money, got to get paid.

So back to my jobs, all right. After working for the legal defense fund and struggling to stay even, certainly not getting ahead. I came back to Portland to try to get my folks a hand, and I got a job over the telephone before coming back. And [I] started working as a hearing officer with the Oregon Liquor Control Commission (OLCC), and I never expected to stay on the same job for as long as I have. It’s longest I've worked on any job. It’s 15 years; where has the time gone? Now I work for the Office of Administrative Hearings as an administrative law judge. I actually planned at one point to try to get hired by the Social Security Administration to do administrative law judge work for the feds, who paid more and who I thought, as a benefit program judge, I could be more useful. But it never happened. In between dealing with my folks aging--and aging myself--and coming back to the place where I... I just want to take a vacation. And every time you start a new job of course you start building your vacation time over again. And I have gotten to the place now where I can accumulate a day and a half a month, which makes taking a real vacation easier, and retirement is right around the corner. So where am I going and why am I going there now? I work as an administrative law judge; I had done agency and board cases, primarily the OLCC, but also pharmacy and PERS public employee retirement system, and real estate, and teachers, and nurses--did quite a few nurses cases--and in recent weeks I have been... should I even get into this? I've been first promoted, then reclassified downward. Then they rescinded the reclassification downward and put me back where I was, gave me a raise, and then reclassified me downward again. It’s a big mess all related to money, I believe. And I’m now doing unemployment insurance hearings exclusively. I’m not doing OLCC or any board commissions anymore. And I'm also in the process of using my union to file a grievance, and eventually I'm on my way back to the civil rights division to file a complaint on the basis of age, race and sex against my employer. Yeah, so that's a long story, or a short story of a long version that I know didn't make much sense, but it doesn't make much sense what they done.
But do you know administrative law? Most people don’t. So let me get on my administrative law soapbox for a hot minute. Criminal law and civil law are what most people know about. Civil law is a lawsuit for damages, usually money. You know what criminal law is?

MFF: Yes

CR: Administrative law grew out of the regulatory and benefit aspects of a lot of what FDR [Franklin D. Roosevelt] created. If you create a right for somebody, such as Social Security, and then you tell somebody you’re not eligible. Or the amount they give you is not what you though you were entitled to, there has to be a mechanism for the recipient or the beneficiary to challenge it. You have the Constitution, which sets up courts that are under Article Three of the Constitution, which ensures a trial court, and your Supreme Court, and Court of Appeals. When you pass a law, the legislature gives the executive branch that law to enforce and to regulate. So it’s the executive branch that needed some sort of the judiciary, if you will, when it came to the benefit programs or the regulatory stuff that they were enforcing. And a body of law called administrative law grew up. Whenever there is a license that you have to have for an occupation or business, an agency--a government body--will issue you that license. If they deny the license, or if they say while you were operating with the license you violated rules and regulations that control the industry or that business or that occupation, they can try to take your license, or they can fine you for violating the rules. And therefore you would have a right to contest their agency action. That’s another aspect of administrative law. A third area is regulatory stuff with ratemaking: electric rates, gas rates, water rates--really all that stuff.

MFF: Is it all strictly utilities?

CR: Or any kind of ratemaking, any kind of licensing. Any kind of ratemaking is all administrative law. Public Utility Commission (PUC)? Yeah, that’s administrative law; there are administrative judges who work there and people can challenge the ratemaking. People can offer comments when rules are being changed and written, or whatnot. So there’s this huge body of law that affects everybody’s life that nobody knows about, which I find incredible. You know about criminal law, and you know about civil law, but the likelihood of you ever having a trial that is civil or criminal is minimal. First of all, even if you’re involved in the process, I think it’s less than three percent of the cases that get filed actually go to trial. They either get settled in civil law, or they get plea-bargained in criminal law. If everybody got a trial, they would be years and years before they ever got to court. There aren’t enough judges for the amount of time each trial takes. So the system operates off the expectations that the majority, the vast
majority, is never going to get a trial.

At administrative practice, we do more hearings, which are trials. We do more administrative hearings than the state, federal, civil, and criminal courts do combined because pretty much everybody gets a hearing. Not much gets settled. Some but relatively speaking, not much. Nowhere near the amount that goes on in civil and criminal court. But every occupation—it has grown tremendously since the 1940s--so that every occupation pretty much is covered with a licensing body that regulates how that occupation will be operated. And everybody has a right to a hearing. Okay, so across the country, traditionally the hearings officers were in the agency that does the regulatory stuff. And over the last twenty years, there’s been a movement to separate the hearings from the agencies to make the hearings part of separate body, and not have the hearings officer, which is now been changed to administrative law judge, be an employee of the agency that’s being challenged by the citizen. Twenty-some states have adopted some sort of a panel, or an independent body of administrative law judges, who have been taken out of the agencies and work together doing work for the agencies. Oregon did it in 2000. Oregon created the Office of Administrative Hearings in 2000. And I was the Oregon Liquor Control Commission, where I was an employee doing Oregon Liquor Control Commission cases; it was one the agencies that got put into the Office of Administrative Hearings. It was DMV, the motor vehicle part, DHS, all the benefit programs, and the employee department--with the unemployment insurance hearings--as well as the OLCC. Everybody else, all the other boards and commissions didn’t have a fulltime paid staff. They would either contract out, or have one person who they designated but wasn’t a fulltime job. All of the boards and commissions, by law, were required to use a judge from the Office of Administrative Hearings. Some of the boards and commissions, like Workmen’s’ Comp, has their own separate group. BOLI, the Bureau of Labor and Industries, they have their own; they’re not a part of the office. It was all a political deal making, who’s in and who’s out. It makes no sense. Everybody should be in as far as I’m concerned, but they’re not. So since 2000, I didn’t just work for OLCC. I primarily worked for OLCC, but I also started picking up all these other boards and commissions and whatnot. Now since the summer when they started messing around with my classification, I’m only doing the benefit program, which actually is easier work. It’s just you do a lot of them. While the boards and commissions, one case could last for months. You have lawyers on both sides and the AG [Attorney General] representing the agency usually. The orders would take days to write. Now I do five hearings a day, twenty orders a week. And I can’t tell you any of them. I don’t remember who I talk to. You can’t. Give me my notes, I could tell you all about it. But what three cases did I have today? I’m like... uh... you know? Because you’re holding the hearings and writing orders from yesterday’s cases, and twenty in a week? When I would do five in a month with the other stuff? So, anyway, that’s my job. And everybody, I believe, everybody should understand
administrative law, because it will eventually affect you. Just given the nature of it. And if you want to
work somewhere, it will affect you. [laughs] Okay, that’s my latest job. And basically I’m living for the
weekend, trying to figure out how I can afford to retire. That’s where I am now. Yes. Is there anything
left?

MFF: *I’ve covered all my areas for this particular interview.*

CR: Oh, very good! I guess the only thing left to say is Otto and Verdell Rutherford, my parents, were
really exceptional people. I wish I could have done as much with life. I may have gotten more education
than they got, which doesn’t mean a whole hell of a lot. But as far as being useful, and helpful, and
making a change, I don’t think I’ve even come close. I think my greatest accomplishments are probably
my kids. I’ve minimally done stuff that’s worth talking about in my opinion. But my folks really did; they
gave a lot. They gave a lot to this community for no money. They just did it because it needed to be done.
They wanted things to be better for my generation and my children’s generation. And I appreciate them
for it. And they were nice people. My mom was just a jewel. She really was. My dad could be kind of
cantankerous at times.

I remember there was a march. I didn’t tell you about the shooting. That was something else I was going
to mention. I went to Portland State between 1974 and 1976. And in 1975 or 1976, one or the other,
within a six-month period of time, the police had shot, I believe it was, four young brothers under curious
circumstances. And two of the brothers were literally blood brothers of two of the students at Portland
State. Rosemary Allen’s brother and Sandra McFerrin’s brother-in-law, I think it was. Brother? I don’t
know. Anyway, we ended up organizing a march and taking a delegation to go meet with the chief of
police. And as the result of the march, which hundreds of people showed up for, it was well attended. But
what was funny, it was on a Saturday.

MFF: *Do you remember the exact day?*

CR: No, but I could find it, because my mom save newspapers. I’ve got a picture, in fact it might be in
here . . . a picture of the newspaper . . . ooh, I put my hand right on it! Look at me go! Spring of 1975,

---

47 In 1975, a Portland police officer fatally shot 17-year-old Rickie Charles Johnson during an alleged
robbery attempt. He was the fourth Black male shot and killed by Portland police in a five-month period.
The others were Kenny Allen, Charles Menefee, and Joe Hopkins. Charlotte Rutherford was a founding
member of the Black Justice Committee. The group sought a federal investigation into the shootings of all
four men.
[laughs] that’s all I can tell you now. But we can find the newspaper that it was in. But what I was going
to tell you was that when I got to the police station with the delegation that was meeting with the chief.
When we walked in, who did I see standing by the counter but my dad! I was so shocked to see him
standing there. I’m like, “What are you doing here, daddy?” He said, “Well you said you were coming
down here, and I wanted to make sure everything was alright.” I’m like, “Well, okay, thanks a lot!”
[laughs] And he just stood in the . . . that was actually the Black Studies department’s newspaper. That
was my work-study job. Did you see? That was me at the bottom. There ought to be an article about why
we were marching or something. But anyway, my dad was a man’s man. I don’t think they make men like
him anymore.

I also need to talk about my mom’s collection. My mom saved articles in newspapers and magazines and
whatever she could get her hands on that had to do with black folks. She had a collection of local
magazines--local newspapers I should say--going back to the early 19 . . . local black newspapers going
back to the early 1900s. The Advocate was the first black newspaper here in Portland. And I actually have
two or three editions, my first one being 1918. And OPB [Oregon Public Broadcasting] did a
documentary on Beatrice [Morrow] Cannady,48 who was the editor of the Advocate newspaper. And the
producer heard about my collection and called and asked if she could see some of the newspapers,
because she had only been able to find microfiche. She hadn’t found any hardcopies. And [she] came
over, and took pictures, and interviewed me and had, you know, three sentence of mine in her video. But
the newspaper thing was . . . she was really pleased to have actual copies. And I need to find a home for
my mom’s stuff, because it’s just down in the basement. I had sense enough to tell her that I wanted it a
long time ago. I mean, when I was young. And then when I came back here in the nineties, she got a
request for PCC [Portland Community College] for some of her papers to do some kind of exhibit. And
she said, she told the young woman to contact me, because she said the papers were really mine. So when
the woman called me and asked me about the papers, I was like, whoa, yes, but do you plan to
compensate my mom for using the papers? And she was like, we . . . um . . . I think we can give her $300.
Well that’s fine; just give her something. So when she got her first check and the woman came back next
year and did it twice, she was so proud of herself having actually gotten paid for the first time in fifty
years. She had done exhibits for other things at other times. And my dad actually had the nerve to get
angry because nobody ever paid him for anything! [laughs] It set up some competition between them that
I thought was pretty funny.

48 Beatrice Morrow Cannady (1890-1974) was the editor of the state’s largest black newspaper and a co-
founder of the Portland chapter of the NAACP.
There was another incident where somebody had written an article about him. They had three of four articles written about him toward the end. And in the article, they had listed it as Verdell and Otto Rutherford. And my mother gave me the article, and I read it. And she was just laughing, and my dad’s jaws were tight. And I’m looking at both of them, and I didn’t get it. And she said, “My name is first!” [laughs] It was a big deal that it didn’t say Otto and Verdell Rutherford and it said Verdell and Otto Rutherford! There was some stuff going on between my folks that I’ll never understand. After sixty years of being together. They were together for 63 years and then lasted two more years after my dad went into assisted living. No, foster care, they called it.

Yeah, they were funny. My dad used to tell the joke: Don’t take a girl to Sunday school unless you plan to marry here, or something like that. That was how they started out, going to Sunday school together. Yeah. I’ll never know 63 years [laughs] with the same person! But that’s another story too. Okay, well I guess we need to wrap it up! [laughs] Can you think of anything else I should elaborate on or add more to?

MFF: Not at this particular point in time.

CR: I hope I didn’t have too many “ums,” but I’m sure I did. I notice Michelle Obama says “um” too. It’s a way to keep the mind going.

MFF: Maybe it’s a cultural thing.

CR: Could be! [laughs] Could be.

MFF: Anything else you would like to add?

CR: I think what you’re doing is very important. This is totally unrelated. But, I mean, in terms of my life and all that. I think that it’s unfortunate we’ve let a lot of time get by and a lot of people who should’ve recorded what they had to say about their life experiences.

But my generation--I’m 61--it’s amazing what ten years can do. I came into adulthood at a time when “black is beautiful” was the expression and it set a tone for my generation in terms of those of us who were politically active, in terms of how we view ourselves and how we view each other. Using the terms brother and sister is still something that I do; that was real common in those days when you referred to another black person. I think that the difference between my brother, who’s ten years older than I, is so
extreme because of what was going on in our adolescence and early adulthood. I mean, my stuff was at the height of the Black Power movement and I was very much affected by it. He was before the Black Power movement, and if anything was affected by the Beat Generation that went on in the fifties. The sixties were just . . . he was in the Air Force, he was in a whole different sort of place and not still developing. While between my mom and dad’s stuff as a youngster, and then the height of activities as a young adult, my life, I think, was enriched in racial ways that a lot people haven’t had the benefit of. I’ve known folks who were reluctant--black people--who were reluctant to talk about race with white people. I have never been. I mean, my kids will tell you that throughout their entire lives, talking about race is something I’ve done. Talking about color is also something that I’ve done that we as a people have not done sufficiently.

The issue of color within the race is still an issue, in fact is probably more an issue that has been for a while. The video thing and everybody looking Hispanic has just bloomed and young black women I don’t think have an appreciation for their own beauty. I think the hair thing is part of it. We’ve got straighter blonder hair now than we’ve ever had before, and a disinterest in natural hair for the masses. But the masses probably didn’t really wear natural back in the day. If they did it was for style only, it wasn’t about any commitment to natural hair. Which is kind of too bad, I think.

But issues of race have always been important to me, and I’ve made them important for my kids. And being able to talk about race has always been important to me. My daughter, I think, has had a more open or . . . because of going to white schools and living with white people, either in the dorms or renting houses or apartments, I think she’s more comfortable on a personal level around white people than I am. I can get there with some people if I’ve known them for a while. But I think she’s more open and willing get there faster, generally speaking, than I am. I think I still have more resistance and more defenses in general when it comes to white people. And coming out of a Black Nationalist perspective is part of it, I think. I don’t know; I probably could use some clinical time on some of these issues to understand myself. [laughs] Pay for some services. But they would have to be culturally relevant, so that’s another story.

There was something else though that I thought about that--now it’s gone--I meant to mention. Oh shoot, what was it? Well, we do this one more time, right? So if I can’t . . . I can mention, oh this isn’t it…

I can mention my business that I didn’t mention that I think is important. My first husband and I had one of the first—if not the first—black, Afrocentric store in Portland, it was called Black Fashion and we had clothing, jewelry, and books. Actually half the books were off my bookshelf; that’s a whole other story.
On Martin Luther King, which was then Union Avenue, and off of Fremont, of course the building’s been torn down now. We had a store; it was a storefront and an apartment in the back.

Oh! I know what I wanted to mention: African Liberation Day, which I don’t even know if it still exists or not. We talked about the Black Educational Center before, which was an independent private black school that my daughter went and my son also, although he only went for one year, and she went for three. That was located off Northeast Seventeenth off of Alberta and organized by Ron Herndon and Joyce Harris, whose names were Ishola and Makini. Joyce Harris is still around and so is Ron for that matter. Ronnie runs the Alberta Ministerial Alliance Head Start program, and he’s the national Head Start chair, or president, whichever. But the school would also sponsor African Liberation Day parades every year. And I took my kids to the parades, and other demonstrations that we had here in Portland occasionally, as youngsters. And I think they, I know they remember. And I think they value the need to expose children to political activity. And I can remember walking down Williams Avenue or Martin Luther King, one or the other, yelling “Africa for Africans!” with the BEC Black Educational Center children. I don’t know if African Liberation Day still happens. I haven’t seen anything about it.

When I was in DC, Kwame Toure, Stokely Carmichael's All-African Peoples' Revolutionary Party would sponsor African Liberation Day. And they would take over Malcolm X Park. It was pretty interesting. What was fascinating to me was to see eighteen different kinds of Muslims. I mean, Nation of Islam was . . . by that time, Warith Deen Mohammed had disbanded the Nation and, I guess, Farrakhan had taken back over. So you had the bowties with Farrakhan, and you had the t-shirts with Warith Deen Mohammed. And then you had various other Sunni and Hanafi and I don’t know what all. But some wearing veils and some wearing white, and it used to really amaze me that we could splinter off as Muslims as much as Christians did. And have ninety-seven different varieties. [laughs]

But African Liberation Day was always an interesting event. Black folk would turn out. They have speeches, and dances, and entertainment, vendors, and food. It would be a great gathering. I have to ask somebody about that. I was thinking about that the other day. I haven’t heard about African Liberation Day in twenty years? 1988? Yeah, that would be about right. Maybe when Stokely died and Nelson

---

49 Stokely Carmichael (1941-1998), a prominent Civil Rights activist and member of both SNCC and the Black Panther Party, changed his name to Kwame Toure following a trip to Africa in the late sixties.

50 Warith Deen Muhammad (1933-2008) was the son of Nation of Islam leader Elijah Muhammad. Following his father’s death in 1975, he disbanded the Nation of Islam and formed the more mainstream Islamic organization, World Community of Al-Islam in the West. In 1981, Louis Farrakhan revived the name Nation of Islam for his own organization.
Mandela got freed we don’t need that anymore! [laughs] I don’t know, you can check that one out for me.

Check it out on the Internet.

Yes, but the Black Educational Center was a wonderful school and I’m really sorry it doesn’t still exist. Because now that charter school money is available it might have been able to hang in. They had the kids wearing uniforms: red, black, and green. And they focused heavily on scholarship and also African and African American history, giving children a sense of themselves, their worth, and their responsibility to our people. So it’s really too bad it’s not still in existence. But it was around for twenty years easily, longer than that, which for a private, non-funded school, not religiously affiliated, I guess is a good track record too. Okay, I think that’s it. The African Liberation Day is something that occurred to be that I wanted to mention. I think it was like June 25. It was definitely summertime. And June 25 is the day that keeps sticking in my head. And I actually think it grew out of something Marcus Garvey did. But I might have made that up. [laughs]

MFF: I’ll let you know.

CR: Okay! Well Monica, thank you.

MFF: Yes, I’d like to thank you for your time, Charlotte.

CR: It’s been enjoyable.

MFF: And I look forward to our second interview.

CR: Me too.

MFF: And I guess we’re done.

CR: All right, thank you.

[End of First Interview]
MFF: All right, take number three. This is an oral history interview with Charlotte Rutherford at her home in Portland, Oregon. The interviewer for the Portland Civil Rights Project is Monica Fields-Fears and the date is November 22, 2008. And this is interview number two. Could you give me your full name, date of birth and place of birth?


MFF: I’d like to ask you about some specific details of your business, Blackfashion.

CR: [laughs] Such a business as it was! Yeah, it was located on what is now called Martin Luther King just off of Fremont. It was a storefront. Most of the buildings along that whole block are gone now. They’re entirely different from what they were in the late sixties. And if I remember correctly, we had a furrier next door to us. I don’t recall any other black businesses on that block at the time. The majority of black businesses had been on Williams Avenue and Vancouver Avenue further down around Russell. By the sixties, a lot of the businesses were gone, but there were still a number of businesses remaining. They really didn’t get wiped out completely until the seventies, when Emanuel Hospital expanded. What they had planned to have as a radiation cobalt center or something. They bought up a lot of property and then they didn’t do the building that they had anticipated they were going to do. But in the late sixties, there were still a number of restaurants and small businesses—service industry types—along Williams Avenue and not that much, if I remember correctly, that made it over onto what was then called Union Avenue. Directly across the street there was a McDonalds. And I can remember in high school when they built the McDonalds, it was just really wonderful, because kids now had a place to hang out in the neighborhood. But as far as black businesses go, I really can’t thing of any that were in the block at that time.

1 In the postwar period, several urban renewal projects displaced thousands of mostly black residents living in the Albina District. The most notable projects were the construction of the Memorial Coliseum in the 1950s, the creation of Interstate-5 in the 1960s, and the expansion of Emmanuel Hospital in the
MFF: *What businesses did you frequent that were black-owned during that time?*

CR: Oh, wow.

MFF: *That existed at that time?*

CR: There were restaurants. There were record shops. Barbershops—not that I went to a barbershop. Beauty shops. Not much in the way of retail that I can recall. There were other kinds of businesses that I didn’t frequent, like pool halls. That’s about all I can really think of that were there in the sixties. Earlier than that there were more dance halls and flophouses, where people could rent rooms—not hotels—they were that big. But if I remember correctly that was the mainstay of what was on Williams Avenue in the sixties. But in the fifties and forties there was everything happening on Williams Avenue. But by the sixties, things had started to thin out and spread out.

MFF: *Can you be more specific about these places, such as names?*

CR: No. [laughs] Restaurants? No. Tropicana, it’s still there. It’s the only thing that’s still there on Williams Avenue. Geneva’s, the Cotton Club . . . let’s see here, the Cotton Club was on Williams Avenue. The building is still there, but the business is long gone. Geneva’s was a tavern, bar, club that was on Williams Avenue between Skidmore and Mason, or whatever the street south of there is. Now it’s just a big vacant lot. It was one of the last black-owned neighborhood clubs. Oh, there was also Lou’s Higher Ground. That was a club on Williams Avenue and Killingsworth. It’s now where the used furniture store is on that corner. That was a club, called Lou’s Higher Ground. It’s only thirty years ago you know? [laughs] Nay, forty years ago! That’s the best I can do for now.

MFF: *And when you first began your business, how was it getting financing and getting the space?*

CR: [Laughs] There was no financing. Half of the books that we sold came out of my library. We had a number of things on consignment, where we took stuff in and if we were able to sell it. We split the profit with the person who placed the stuff. The building itself was a storefront and we rented the back to live in. So, getting the building as a whole, that was something, to tell you the truth, my ex-husband did. But I don’t remember there being any big deal about it, other than coming up with the rent for it. The clothes? I early 1970s.
think my ex-husband managed to get an investor initially. At the time there were a number of white people who thought helping out the black community would be a good thing to do. I don’t know if was morally, or financially, or socially, or what. And if I remember correctly, there was somebody, and I don’t even know who it was now, who invested some money that my ex-husband came up with. That may have also helped contribute to the stock that we had. But it wasn’t much on an investment, I can tell you that. It wasn’t much of a store! It was a storefront as they call them. But we had goods and stuffs. Oh, and we also had some friends in San Francisco who he managed to talk out of their goods on consignment, again, to have in our store and pay them later. So it wasn’t going to SBA [Small Business Association] and being a formal business plan and doing it like it should have been done, [as] people are doing it today. It was a place to live and a business in front, and stocked with the best things you could come up with with limited resources. And that’s pretty much what we did.

MFF: Is there anything else you would like to add about that?

CR: That’s about it for Blackfashion. It didn’t last but a year or so, if I remember correctly.

MFF: Did you have a lot of clients?

CR: We had a lot of people coming in there. I don’t know how many people were buying anything. Actually we even ended up sheltering a couple of folks who where running from the FBI out of San Francisco. Didn’t have anything to do with the store. But there were a couple of guys who—I don’t even remember how we got them, but somehow they found our doorstep and needed a place to stay—that we later found out folks were looking for them. We didn’t know at the time that was happening, because of some shootout stuff in the Bay Area. So we had a lot of people hanging around all the time, but they weren’t shopping, really. [laughs]

MFF: Just more of a social scene?

CR: Yeah, or political. Or both. I think that’s about it for Blackfashion.

MFF: Okay, now I’d like to get into the Black Education Center [BEC.]²

---

² Ron Herndon and Joyce Harris founded the Black Education Center (BEC) in 1970. It was originally located at 63 NE Morris Street and later moved to 4919 NE 17th Avenue.
CR: Oh, yes. That was a really worthy institution. I’m sorry it doesn’t still exist. In addition to being a standard K-6, I believe, grade school—maybe it was K-8—they also took responsibility for sponsoring Kwanzaa events and, like I said, the last time the African Liberation Day parade and other events that were race conscious in the community. The BEC, Black Education Center, really instilled in their kids not only the basic academics, which, regardless to your political beliefs, everybody needs to learn to read and write and do math. They also focused the kids more on their individual responsibility to learn and contribute back to the community in ways that public schools didn’t do. They focused on race, which public schools don’t do. They focused on the history of the race and trying to teach children that it was their obligation to forward the race, to do things to further issues of freedom, justice, and equality in a nationalist kind of setting. The kids wore uniforms—green and red. I think they may have changed as the year wore on. My children were in there at the beginning.

MFF: *What years did your children attend?*

CR: 1973, no that’s wrong. Let me think about it here. My daughter was born in 1969. She went to Head Start under one of the BEC teachers, before they opened the school up as a fulltime school. They did Saturday schools for a year of two before they were fully accredited to open up fulltime. Kindergarten, I put her at Ockley Green, but decided to take her out and put her back under the preschool teacher she had, who had done so well with here when she was in Head Start. So 1973 or 1974 would have been when she started and 1978 or 1979 would have been when she came out. And I put her at Ockley Green and basically a year or so later we left town. So she was in there for either three or four years at the beginning. First through fourth grade I believe—no, first through third. Because the fourth grade she did at Ockley Green. The fifth grade she did have a year at Catholic School. I took her out of there and put her back at Ockley Green, they put her in the sixth grade. So, she was there for three years, but she already had two years prior to that when she was in Head Start with one of the teachers that was at the Black Educational Center.

I haven’t kept up with many of the kids, but the few that I have kept up with have tended to do more academically than might be typical of kids from that age group. I know my daughter has talked about wanting to do a reunion of BEC kids, which I think would be great. I would love to see how they’ve turned out and how the years have treated them. I do believe that the emphasis the teachers put on your responsibility for the race to learn had a lasting impact on all of the children that went there. And the academics were solid, also. It’s a resource that this community still needs, and it’s a shame it still doesn’t exist, or can’t be brought back into existence, as the case may be. I know that there was only one of the
teachers left. At least of the early teachers, because as the years went on they changed things. And she’s off doing something else, so it’s not likely the same people would revive the school. But there certainly is a need. And now that there are charter schools and alternative schools and all kinds of other ways to fund schools then there were at the time by strictly tuition from the parents, that the school might now have a better shot at staying alive if the funding source was other than just on the backs of the parents. I think that might have been partially why it went under: just the cost of keeping the school alive was more than the few parents who were willing to put their kids there could afford. BEC was a great institution. And Ron Herndon and Joyce Harris and Ayoka, whose last name I don’t remember, and Makini, whose last name I don’t remember, are deserving of a lot of credit for having tried for twenty years to keep the school alive.

MFF: What was the start date and end date, or years rather?

CR: I’m not sure about the end date. They did Saturday schools for two or three years before they went to fulltime day school. And I believe they went to fulltime day school in 1974. So probably 1972 and 1973, they were on Saturdays only. And actually I think they were on Martin Luther King in a building when they were in Saturday school. They were. And then they bought what was Vernon Library over on [Northeast] Seventeenth off of Alberta as their schoolhouse. And I believe they stayed there right through the early nineties when they closed. I think that’s about it for the BEC.

MFF: Well, is there anything else you want to touch on?

CR: Well, there was another issue you raised, and that was about my own education and how I managed to put myself—or who put me through school—how I funded my own education. And that’s a really interesting question because my education lasted a long time. It took me eleven years to get my undergraduate degree. When I first started to school right out of high school, I was in Los Angeles. And I think I mentioned that going to junior college in Los Angeles was $7.50 a quarter! So, my folks sent me money to live in Los Angeles but going to school wasn’t really costing anything. Everybody who lives in California ought to have at least an AA degree, as cheap as going to school was. Then when I went to the University of Washington, I think I was able to finesse the state of Washington into paying by virtue of being on welfare. And if I remember correctly, they didn’t want me to go and get a four-year degree because I was on welfare. They only wanted me to get something that would allow a two-year degree. And I fortunately had a sensible caseworker, who argued I already had two years of higher education.
Why did I need to go back and get two years of training, when I needed two years of additional education to finish my undergraduate degree? And so I told her I was taking secretarial courses at University of Washington and she didn’t question that. And, therefore, I was able to get the state of Washington to pay for my tuition and childcare so I could go back to school. Then the third time, I went to Portland State. I was a work-study student and I was a resident. And I don’t remember having student loans at Portland State, so I must have been able to afford to pay for it myself at the time. Of course tuition was...

MFF: How much was the tuition?

CR: Yeah, I’m thinking it was something like four hundred dollars or six hundred dollars a quarter. I don’t think it was all that. I mean, it was enough for the time, but it wasn’t just impossible to pay because I didn’t stay on campus. I had my own home; I had kids and a husband, actually. So then when I went to law school, again I had work-study. I borrowed $5,000 a year on whatever kind of grant money was available to borrow to educate yourself. And I got a full scholarship to Howard, so I didn’t have to pay tuition to go to Howard. And the $5,000 dollars I borrowed, I was able to feed my kids and pay rent with.

But I also ended up with $25,000 worth of student loans when I came out of law school—three at Howard and two at Georgetown. And I paid for my own education, but I was able to get a scholarship at Howard and then the fellowship when I was at Georgetown. But you got to remember I had a twelve-year old daughter and a nine-year old son to feed and clothe and educate while I was in law school, which was tough. And the $25000 that I borrowed to get through law school I was only able to pay off by refinancing my house when I moved back to Oregon. I couldn’t get the money together because the year after I graduated for law school my daughter started college. And they didn’t care if I had $25,000 worth of student loans of my own and had been out of the workforce for five years. They still wanted me to pay, like, $1,500 the first year, because I had only worked, like, half a year and then $4,000 or $5,000, $5,000 or $6,000 each year thereafter, which I had no time to save, having had my own debts from law school.

So, fortunately the NAACP Legal Defense Fund had a program where you could borrow against your future salary. And I was an indentured servant to the Legal Defense Fund for the four years my daughter was in college because every year I would borrow the money I needed to pay her tuition or my portion of her tuition, because she was getting grants and scholarships and still taken out student loans herself to go to Brown University in Rhode Island. And now I don’t think they’re charging anybody. I think they’re paying. I think Brown and Harvard and Yale—the Ivies—have decided that if you’re making under $60,000 a year, you don’t have to pay anything for your kids to go there. But my little $15,000 that I was earning, they still wanted me to pay $1,500 the first year. And then it went up from there. So, fortunately I

3 The school closed in 1993.
was able to borrow against my income to pay her tuition, my portion of her tuition. And then work for the year to pay it back and then borrow it again the next year. So all of the funding that I put myself through school with was either a scholarship, like I got from Howard, a fellowship that I worked for with Georgetown, or borrowing money. And fortunately, at the time you could borrow enough money to pay your tuition. I don’t even know if nowadays you can borrow enough money. Georgetown’s tuition, the last I heard, law school tuition... well, first Brown’s tuition was over $30,000 a year. And when my daughter started it was $15,000, and that included room and board. And every year she was there, it went up a thousand. And I guess it kept on going up a thousand every year since to have gotten to $30,000! [laughs]

I can’t imagine any degree being worth $120,000 for an undergraduate degree. I mean, obviously you’re not going to make that kind of money back with an undergraduate degree. So clearly you need to continue your education. I’ve gotten to the place now where what college costs, if you’re not planning on getting at least a master’s or a professional degree or a PhD, I don’t think you should bother to go to college at all. I really do believe you should get some sort of official training to prepare to do a particular occupation because an undergraduate degree for the cost of it, if that’s all you’re planning to get, it isn’t worth it on the market. It may be worth it intellectually, but most people don’t have the money to just spend money to be smart. They tend to spend money to make money. So I’ve gotten to the place now where if a young person didn’t have advanced higher education in mind, I would encourage them to think about them training in some sort of certificate or licensing occupation that will get them a better job probably than an undergraduate degree. Because the undergraduate is going to be competing with a master’s for a job. So that was my funding for school.

MFF: Earlier, we not earlier, in our last interview, you talked a little bit about the health center that was located in your neighborhood.

CR: Oh, public health centers, oh man, yeah, which I relied on during those welfare years, no doubt. There was a building right on the corner from me where I live now. Public health centers used to be accessible and they were really great for babies. If you had shots, if you had illnesses, and you needed quick service because there were so many of them, you usually didn’t have much of wait. And they were cheap, if not free. And in fact that was one of the things I think I mentioned about the Black Panther Party that made them one of the benefits to the community: health services that they tried to provide in your neighborhood. Not having to go long distances to get services. That is a benefit that is sorely needed again, where it’s publicly supported if not subsidized. Where people can do walk-ins and afford the services that they get. And it was so much easier for all of the stuff that children need: the immunizations
in particular, but also, babies are constantly getting ear infections and one thing and another, where you
got to go to the doctor. And it’s so much more convenient when they’re accessible. I mean physically
accessible. You don’t have long distances to travel, let alone financially accessible because either they had
a sliding fee scale, where you paid according to your ability to pay, or you didn’t pay at all. I would love
to see public health services back in the community like they used to be in the late sixties again. We need
them more than ever. Now they have what they call urgi-centers, so that you don’t have to go to the
emergency room of a hospital and pay hundreds of dollars. You can go to one of these urgi-centers and
pay $40 or $50 instead, but that’s still more than what we were paying back in the day. And the people
who worked in those clinics tended to have a commitment to the community. They tended to be culturally
more sensitive to their clientele, recognizing that black and Hispanic people were more likely to dominate
their clientele base depending on the neighborhoods that they were located in. And [they] made an effort
to accommodate people, which was nice to feel welcomed in your own neighborhood. And quite often
health services aren’t like that anymore. I mean, you go because you have to go, not because you
necessarily feel welcomed when you get there.

MFF: Okay.

CR: That’s it? No, you have another question.

MFF: Yes.

CR: Okay.

MFF: Actually it’s kind of a two-part question. I know one of the parts you’ve already told me you don’t
have much to say about it, but I was going to ask you about your views on the Burger Barn “opossum
tossing”4 and the “Don’t Choke ‘Em, Smoke ‘Em.”5

---

4 On March 12, 1981, two white police officers placed dead opossums on the doorstep of the Burger Barn,
a black-owned restaurant on Union Avenue. The city fired the officers following protests from Portland’s
black community. However, the police union successfully fought to have the officers reinstated. Leanne
C. Serbulu and Karen J. Gibson, “Black and Blue: Police-Community Relations in Portland’s Albina
5 On April 20, 1985, Portland Police Officer Gary Barbour killed Lloyd “Tony” Stevenson, an African
American off-duty security guard who had committed no crime, after placing him in a “sleeper hold.”
Two other Portland police officers responded to the incident by manufacturing and selling t-shirts
featuring the image of a handgun and the words, “Don’t Choke ‘Em, Smoke ‘Em.” The two officers were
CR: “Don’t Choke ‘Em, Smoke ‘Em?” That was the brother they choked. Is that the one, the chokehold, don’t choke ‘em? I don’t know the “Don’t Choke ‘Em, Smoke ‘Em,” I know they choked a brother and killed him. But… they shot a bunch…

MFF: The police . . .

CR: Excuse me?

MFF: The police . . .

CR: In when?


CR: ’85?

MFF: Yeah.

CR: Okay. All right, first of all I was not living in Portland during all of the eighties. The opossum throwing, they choked and killed and brother, I heard about a chokehold, and then there was the skinheads who killed the… What was he? Ethiopian? Somalian? Whichever. All three of those incidents occurred when I was gone, when I was not living in Portland. But I certainly heard about them. And in all three cases, clearly race was the paramount issue. The possum thing, the way I heard the story was police threw a dead possum in front of a black-owned business. And people in the community who told me about the story certainly believed race was a large part of the factor for doing what they did, and when they did. Clearly race was a factor with the killing by the skinheads. And using excessive force—although in recent years the police used excessive force on a few white folks too—but proportionately we black people have had more incidents where excessive force was used. Historically, and given our proportion of the community, given our size, the numbers of us, we are overrepresented in being killed by the police, without a doubt. That’s not new; it’s historical. For a minute, with community policing and people on the

---

streets and all that, I think some of us thought that the attitude of the police might change, just because of familiarity and some sense of community. But it doesn’t seem to be the case. But it’s not unique to Portland, either. So there’s still an underlying sense of race-hatred, fear, I think fear from police. To tell you the truth, I think that’s why they overreact like they do. I don’t know if it’s projection. I used to think about the fear that slaveholders held. Fear of insurrection, fear of more than two or three black people getting together at one time for fear that they’d plan an insurrection. I really do believe a lot of it is projection. I think it’s what white people think they would do if they were in our circumstances. And out of that fear of what they would do, project onto the black folk what they expect them to do and therefore overreact to it. I truly believe that about the police. It’s quite similar, I think, to slave master’s views of insurrection at every turn. And make sure you keep it under control. I don’t know that there’s much difference between the shooting of a young woman and the shooting of the young folks I talked about in the seventies. I mean, it’s the same: overreaction to a situation and black folks die. But they have overreacted to whites too, so the thing is the proportion is not right. If we’re only ten percent of the population, then ninety percent of the people they kill should be black, as opposed to ten percent being white and ninety percent being black. Those are numbers I made up, but I’m willing to bet they aren’t far off. Race relations in this town, this state, and this country, still have a long way to go. It’s the bottom line.

MFF: *Do you think, have you seen a significant change since you’ve been in Portland?*

CR: Over the 61 years I’ve been here? Yeah, I suppose. But when you go from zero to one, that’s significant, but it ain’t enough. And that’s kind of how I feel about it. There have been changes, sure. I mean, when I was a kid, you couldn’t get a job hardly in this town. And that’s changed significantly. Although I think for some people it hasn’t changed at all. So I guess it depends. I think there’s what they were calling underclass group of black folks who have been so locked out for so long they aren’t even in the mix as far as competing. They are so removed from the ability to compete. Whether it’s academically, socially, emotionally, you know? There is a sizable portion of white people too, but my concern right now is black people who are not equipped if opportunity were made available to take advantage of the opportunities. Any time you can get a high school diploma and not be able to read, there is a problem. And that happens. I don’t how it happens, but it happens. I do believe that somewhere I read that the average reading comprehension level is sixth grade for a high school graduate.

MFF: *For Oregon?*
CR: [laughs] In general, I don’t know if it specifically applies to Oregon. I can’t imagine Oregon is much different, you know? And I don’t know that we know the real numbers of dropouts. If you start at kindergarten and make it up to the twelfth grade in terms of kids who have dropped out along the way, I don’t know that we’ve really had accurate numbers, because they measure at different points. But I do know that the modified diploma that kids can get now, are you familiar with the modified diploma?

MFF: No.

CR: I know it began in the eighties when I was gone, because I have a nephew who got one and my mom told me he was getting, I was like, I don’t understand. A modified diploma basically is a piece of paper that says you went to high school and now we want you to leave. It doesn’t give you enough credits to go to college; it will give you enough credits to go to junior college.

MFF: So is it a step down from GED?

CR: It’s a step up from a GED.

MFF: Step up?

CR: Yeah. It’s a step up because it’s a high school diploma. But the problem is you have not taken enough math, science, or probably history or social studies to qualify for you to get into a college, any college. But it gets you out of high school. They need to push them on. So if you stayed in four years, rather than coming out with nothing because you haven’t taken the academic courses you need to qualify for a full diploma or to qualify for any college, then you get a modified diploma. And they’re giving them out today. You can get a regular diploma or you can get a modified diploma.

MFF: And so with the modified one you can only go to junior college.

CR: Yeah, because you have not taken enough.

MFF: What do they do about people who can’t test... don’t you have to test into junior college?

CR: You do?
MFF: It's a trap.

CR: Yeah, and the belief is probably they don’t plan to go anywhere anyway. They just want to get them out of here. You stayed four years but you didn’t take the academics that you actually needed to get a full diploma, which would have then qualified you to have access to a four-year school, a college of sorts. It’s a diploma, but it’s called a modified diploma. Which basically means you went to high school, period. And as long as we’re giving out a modified diploma and calling it a diploma and you can’t go anywhere with it, what is the educational system doing? That’s a real problem. That is a problem.

And the No Child Left Behind7 is not the answer. The teaching the test is not the answer. And holding schools’ finances hostage because their test numbers aren’t satisfying somebody, is not the answer. And now they got a thing with teachers. What is the proficiency? [A] certain number of teachers have to have majored in the area they’re teaching in or the schools won’t get the money under the No Child Left Behind act. Yeah, they’ve not only focused on the student, but they’ve focused on the teachers now too. And certainly teachers need to know how to teach, and they need to know their subject matter. But I don’t know if the way they’re going about doing it is the right way. But there’s some level of proficiency that teachers have to be able to demonstrate in their core subject to be qualified to meet whatever standards are under the No Child Left Behind act, that’s also biting a bunch of schools in the butt. So between the teachers not being adequately certified.

[phone rings] Well, I just turned it off. I got too many phones to be able to turn them off, I’m sorry about that. Definitely have to cut over that part.

MFF: I thought I put it on hold. Sorry.

CR: Oh, well, it would have to be start and stop anyway. So anyway that was digression into public school systems now days. The No Child Left Behind act, right. Schools as physical structures need money. The remodeling repair needs to be done.

[End of track 2; start of track 3 of 3]

---

7 The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) is a controversial iteration of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA), which authorizes the bulk of federal spending on elementary and secondary education.
CR: All right? I think I was talking about the physical structures, and how schools need a lot of financial help to improve their physical structure. I think there’s also a problem with inexperienced teachers ending up in the schools that are in the worst shape, because nobody wants to be in those schools. And as soon as those teachers actually learn how to teach, then they move on. Our educational system needs a lot of reform. I’m not an educator but I certainly have opinions as to what I see from the press. And what I have observed with friends who are teachers [is] that our kids not academically focused like they should be in the first place. Where this--among black kids, you’re acting white if you’re trying to be academically sound--came from, I have not a clue.

I mean education was the foundation of our existence and coming out of slavery. That’s all anybody wanted to talk about, was getting an education. And I would think since education was the one thing that was withheld from us when we were in slavery, somebody else thought it was a good thing to not be educated to be free, or to be able to keep someone in bondage, required, on some levels, the agreement of the person you’re keeping in bondage. And education tends to open up the mind and open up the will and create conflict when it comes to one person running another person. In fact, I remember reading in Frederick Douglass’ biography about the people who are most likely to run away in slavery times were those who were closer to the city, not in such isolated areas, and had actually experienced some semblance of freedom.

I also remember reading an article about slavery in Mauritania today. And it focused on a woman who had run away from her master after her family had been enslaved for 500 years. They didn’t have a word for freedom in their language. And she ran away because she was afraid she was going to be killed. She didn’t run away to be free and she didn’t know how to be free once she got away. She just lived kind of on the margins of the society that she found herself in. And she didn’t really have a concept of individuality or freedom or independence or any of that. And I can imagine if your family has been enslaved for five hundred years, knowing how to be an independent person ought not to be a part of your language, your view of the world. And if you’re not exposed to something, how can you know?

And it kind of reminds me of our kids. They haven’t been exposed to as much as they need to. And, therefore, have managed to make up stuff, in terms of what should be important and what isn’t. And I don’t exactly understand where the parents were because I certainly stressed with my kids their responsibilities to us as a people and to themselves as citizens of the world, as did my folks with me. And some of what’s going on has to be laid at the feet of the parents. I recognize that making a living and buying all the gadgets that are out here is important, but it can never be important than spending time with
your kids, to [give] your kids a sense of self and place in the world, and a sense of responsibility. You know, what’s expected of them. Something is expected of them, not just hanging and having fun and growing up. But unfortunately, I don’t think enough parents have made that clear to their kids. So that was the long way around about whatever your original question was. [laughs] Anything more?

MFF: I’ve covered everything I have to ask you. Is there anything else you would like to add to the overall interview though?

CR: Well I’d like to thank you for giving me this time to try to remember as best I can and fill in the gaps from some portions of my life. I think your project is incredibly important. I hope that you’re able to get a wide variety of voices from the community to speak on the history of the Civil Rights era in Portland.

I think that these are about the most exciting times we’ve ever had, at least in terms of what’s going on on the national level. That we can hope will trickle down to where it makes a difference on the local level. I think that Obama’s election—I think it will be good and I think it will be very confusing, because a lot of people will try to make it out that we have overcome, when in fact Obama overcame. And a lot of people who supported him, you know, have overcome. But at the same time, the majority of white people didn’t vote for him. The majority of certain populations of white people voted for him. But the majority of white people didn’t vote for him. And that’s something I think we need to keep in mind. The other people who got him in are significant factors in this country, but I think the mere fact that you had poor people voting for McCain—poor white people, and six percent of black people—I don’t know who they are—voting for McCain? Says something very strange to me that I don’t understand, because how people will vote against their own economic interests? I just don’t understand it. I don’t. I don’t care how much you don’t want to have an abortion, or how much you don’t want gay people to get married. How those two issues can trump your own economic well-being is beyond my comprehension. If you don’t want an abortion, don’t have an abortion. That works for me. And if you don’t want to have a gay marriage, don’t marry a gay person. That works for me too. But to vote against your own economic interests to prevent other people from having abortions and getting married with gay people is just beyond my comprehension. And there’s something about the American psyche, at least white people, that I don’t understand, bottom line. I really don’t, I wish somebody would explain that to me.

But anyway, I hope your project succeeds, I look forward to seeing your documentary. And I hope that my comments are helpful and coherent. And I appreciate your time.
MFF: *I appreciate your time too. And I thank you very much for giving me the time to interview you.*

CR: You’re quite welcome.

MFF: *Is that all?*

CR: That’s it. Thank you.