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Interview with Kathleen A. Saadat

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1 Portland State University / Black United Front Oral History Project

2 Narrator: Kathleen A. Saadat (KAS)

3 Interviewer: Cameron Chambers (CC)

4 Date: March 2, 2010

5 Transcribed by Cameron Chambers

6 Annotated and edited by Ryan Wisnor, March 2015

7 Audited by Carolee Harrison, August 2015

8

9 0:00.00

10 *CC: Ok, so it is March 2nd, 2010 and this is an interview with Kathleen Saadat. So the first question that*
11 *I had was could you talk about your childhood, where you were born and grew up, and what your*
12 *family life was like or is like?*

13

14 KAS: Mmhhh, I was born in 1940 in St. Louis, Missouri, and it was right before we got into World War
15 II. My dad and mother separated in '45—I think it was, but meanwhile, a little bit before that, my
16 brother and I went to live with my father's parents, a large extended Black family in what I would
17 call “aspiring to middle class.” My grandmother and grandfather had been teachers—my
18 grandfather had been the principal of the colored school in Farmington, Missouri. My
19 grandmother had attended normal school, which was a school where they trained teachers, and
20 had been a teacher. They had seven children: Anna, Gladys, Joseph and Charles [Gunnell]. Four
21 of the seven children, all went to college. And my father had an advanced degree; he had a
22 master's degree. My Aunt Anna and my Aunt Gladys both had post-baccalaureate training; they'd
23 gone to school. My Uncle Charles went to school I think most of his life until he became
24 incapacitated. I lived in a family that was—well, my life was very complicated, so it's not a
25 straight line. I lived with my father and his extended family, a very large, loving family, where I
26 guess the feeling you got was camaraderie. Very strong on manners, very strong on appearance
27 and very strong on being a Gunnell, which is my family name. "You are a Gunnell, you don't
28 behave that way." And some of that bred some resentment in my brothers and I [laughs]. My dad
29 remarried in '47, and that changed my life a lot. My mother had walked off and left my brother
30 and I, so that's why my dad took us to his family.

31

32 Living with that family, what I remember mostly is joy. I had freedom to be a kid, I played in the
33 backyard, I was Tarzan. And I had a quilt that my grandmother had given me and that was my
34 raft, and I would I would float down the river and I would let you on the raft if you were cool, but

35 if you weren't you had to stay off the raft [laughs]. I remember sleeping under the lilac bush, I
36 remember getting in the bed with my grandmother when I was frightened, I remember my Aunt
37 Anna's room which was all pristine and very—everything was very beautiful in that room, I was
38 not allowed to go in there, so I would sneak in there and drink her perfume. I figured if it smelled
39 good it should taste good [laughs] it never did taste good but I kept trying. My dad remarried, and
40 he married a woman who was from Mt. Vernon, Illinois, which is a small town in southern
41 Illinois. She was pregnant. We moved to Nashville, Tennessee—this is like 1947-48. We lived—
42 my dad wanted to go back to school, and he went back to school at Tennessee A&I State College
43 in about 1947, and he'd been in the Navy and he'd come out. We lived in a trailer, and I don't
44 mean a mobile home, I don't mean a double-wide, I mean a *trailer*, a bed at each end of the thing,
45 one for us kids and one for the parents and a little bit of space in between, for cooking and sitting.
46 So there were three children and two adults. That was a hard time, it was, um, [pause] too close, it
47 was, too... there were a lot of things going on between my dad and my stepmother that made it
48 difficult. But it's also there that I got one of the very early lessons in how to stand up for myself.

49
50 In 1947 in Nashville, Tennessee, when you got on the bus the signs read, "This Section for
51 Colored" and that was the back of the bus. I decided I wasn't going to do that. It was only later
52 that I figured out why I got away with it, but at the time it was, I was not going to do it. And, I
53 didn't. Any chance I got, when I was by myself I sat up front behind the bus driver. I came home
54 one day and my dad said that his friend, Ofero Nelson, had told him that I wouldn't ride the back
55 of the bus, my dad said "Why is that?" and I said, "Because it's wrong for them to tell us where to
56 sit because we're colored." And my dad said the most amazing thing to me, he said, "You do what
57 you think is right." I was seven years old. I don't know if he was just blind to possibilities or if he
58 just wanted to instill courage in me, or what, but I will never forget it. When I went on the bus
59 with them, I sat with them in the back of the bus. I got so, that when—I used to have to walk to
60 school when we didn't have much money and that was a lot—the bus driver who came on to the
61 campus, and the bus drivers were white then, came onto campus, and I'd be walking along and
62 he'd stop the bus and he'd say, "Take a token outta there," and I'd take a token out of there and I'd
63 drop it in the box and I'd sit behind him, and I'd get a ride to school. He never made any
64 advances, he never said anything mean or smart, he *just* let me get a ride to school, and I'm still
65 grateful [laughs]. I was going to Fort Green School in Nashville, and it was of course a
66 segregated school, and we were on the Tennessee A&I State [now Tennessee State University]
67 campus and it was a segregated college. And when you went into town to the movies, *if* you did,
68 you went to the front and bought your ticket then you walked around the corner down the alley

69 and climbed to the second story and sat in what they called the "nigger roost" where there was a
70 light over your head, and it was not particularly clean. So we didn't go to the movies very often
71 [laughs], we spent time with other people and at home.

72
73 Living there was different from Missouri. In Missouri you didn't have to sit in the back of the bus;
74 people wanted you to but you didn't have to, there was no law there about that. Missouri
75 segregated its schools, so, by the time we got back to St. Louis I became acquainted with just
76 more segregation, just a different level of it, Tennessee was worse than Missouri. In Tennessee, I
77 became very comfortable with being on a college campus, and I think it made a lot of difference
78 in my life. To be able to walk around and talk to professors and go in and out of the
79 administration building and go behind the stage and see what set building—I mean I remember
80 the first time I went behind um—my dad was in a, he was a Theater Arts major—I'm sorry,
81 minor, and Social Work major, and he was doing, um, *Arsenic and Old Lace*. He was "Teddy," he
82 was the one who played the brother who was kind of nuts. And I remember walking behind the
83 set and being so disappointed, because it was all set, I mean there was nothing back there, there
84 was not a real house that was built, but I *loved* what they *did*, I loved what they did. And I learned
85 about theater. They rehearsed *Macbeth* in our trailer, he and um... god I can't even think of his
86 name anymore. So I got exposed to a lot of really good stuff, being a Black kid in the 40's in St.
87 Louis and Tennessee, and when I look back at it I say my fortune was good. My aunts were
88 teachers; they taught me to read. They told me when my handwriting was lousy and they made
89 me sit down and write better. That's in addition to all the other stuff about "You're a Gunnell, you
90 can't behave this way." When I came back to St. Louis to live, my dad bought a house and by that
91 time I had two more brothers, so there were four of us now, three brothers and I was the oldest
92 one.

93

94 *CC: And your stepmother was there?*

95

96 KAS: Yeah, my stepmother, my dad, three brothers and two cousins lived in the house. The house had
97 one, two, three rooms on the first floor and in the basement another three rooms and one
98 bathroom, and we were in good shape [laughs]. Uh, there were people across the street who—I
99 don't think Henry ever had a bed, he um, he slept on two chairs that were pulled up, two
100 overstuffed chairs that were pulled up in the living room, that's where he slept every night. I think
101 there were seven kids over there, and one day the father walked off. We probably were the—one
102 of the two houses on the block that had books all over the house. At that time, you have to

103 0:10.00 remember that neighborhoods were economically integrated, racially segregated but economically
104 integrated, so if you if you were Black and you found a nice house and it bordered on somebody
105 without a nice house, you bought it. And you lived in a neighborhood where there were day
106 workers and janitors and—day workers or domestics—janitors and teacher and nurses, whatever
107 jobs that Black people could get then.

108

109 My Aunt Anna and her sister, my Aunt Gladys, were pretty active in civil rights efforts and in
110 union organizing and they took on the—they protested the fact that in Missouri, if you were a
111 married woman, and a teacher, you were supposed to resign your job, because some man might
112 want that job, or need that job. And they took that on. I don't know how much they played in the
113 final analysis of it I just know that they were a part of sit-ins before sit-ins, before the 60's. They
114 did make sure that we got exposed to lots of good things. We went to—they have a muni opera in
115 St. Louis where they do musicals, not real opera, not European opera. But they do musicals, and
116 we got to go to that, we got to go and have lunches with people, we got to listen to music that was
117 classical music, blah, blah, blah, blah. When I was... how old was I? Twelve and a half I
118 graduated from grade school, and I went to stay with my aunt and uncle in Chicago. Chicago was
119 a whole new world to me, and I thought there was no segregation there; I thought there was no
120 bias there, and I found out differently, but I was so oblivious to it, I was so happy. I was going to
121 Farragut High School on the South—I'm sorry—on the West Side of Chicago and I was in my
122 Junior year and I was out with a bunch of friends and it was an integrated group and we went in
123 this store and I asked for... something, and I'm busy talking to them and their sayin', "Let's go."
124 And I'm sayin', "Why, I haven't got my stuff yet?" And they said, "You're not gonna' get it,
125 they're not gonna' wait on you, *let's go*." I just missed it. But other times, it was clear, when
126 somebody wouldn't wait on me or gave me grief or whatever, that's in Chicago. So segregation
127 was more underground in some ways. Instead of having a sign on the door that said *we don't want*
128 *you here*, people acted it out, which in some ways is really, really painful, more painful than the
129 sign to me. Because it's somebody looking at you and telling you they hate you and they don't
130 know you, the sign just, you know, it's just there, but here's somebody actively saying, "I don't
131 wait on this table." "Well can I move over there?" "No you can't move over there, I don't wait on
132 that table either." And then when you look at class stuff in Chicago—I was going to a working-
133 class school and those kids had a different view of the world—German kids, Czechoslovakian
134 kids, Bohemians, Mexicans, and Black kids, and I wanted to be friends with everybody. When I
135 first got to Chicago I went to Hyde Park High on the South Side, which then was predominantly
136 Jewish. I was amazed at what I didn't know. It was, what I thought Christmas time, and the halls

137 were empty and here were all these candelabras, and I don't know what the hell is goin' on! And
138 somebody told me about Chanukah. I never really had a big foundation—I was raised in a
139 religious household, but I never... it didn't limit me to seeing the joy in what other people did
140 with their lives, because that's how I regarded—this is how people save their lives, this is the
141 stories people tell each other—I didn't have all those words, but I knew, this was important. And
142 so I learned about Chanukah. I didn't know anything about the Holocaust and I remember two
143 friends took me into the library, sat me down, put a book in front of me and said, "Start reading
144 here." And I started to read, and it was the story of a town where they had forced the Jews out of
145 their homes and on to their knees, made them take their clothes off and put them on their knees,
146 and drove them to the slaughterhouse and killed them. *I had no idea, I had no idea.* I knew little
147 about what had actually happened to the people in World War II. In Japan, I knew that we were
148 fighting "Japs." When my father came home—this is before he married my first stepmother—I
149 said, "How many Japs did you kill, daddy?" And he looked at me and he said, "Did you want me
150 to kill anyone?" and I started to cry. He was the first person that had made it real to me that this -
151 that killing was not this game that people were playing, and that there were people on the other
152 end of that killing and he just picked me up and I just said, "No, no, I didn't want you to kill
153 anyone, no, no." It was like another amazing thing—this was not the best father in the world, but
154 he did a few amazing things in life that I always remember—and so people became people to me,
155 as opposed to "those people," they're *people*, you know.

156
157 When I was at Hyde Park, part of what was happening was Puerto Ricans were moving into the
158 neighborhood, many with no English. And so one of my teachers asked me to spend time with
159 them, talking with them, trying to help them learn English. And in the course of that, there were a
160 number of people I'd been introduced to, because when I was living in Hyde Park I was living,
161 you know, two blocks from where Joe Lewis had lived, or *lived*, and six blocks from some other
162 famous person and blah, blah, blah and then there were doctors and lawyers and their children
163 and I was introduced to them as people to be friends with and I didn't like 'em. But when I was
164 sitting in the park across from the high school talking to the Puerto Rican kids, one of the girls
165 came over, a Black girl, and said, "Why are you hanging out with them? You're going to ruin
166 your reputation." And my response was, "Fuck a reputation, leave me alone." I watched them do
167 to other people what had been done to them. And their way of surviving that was not a way I
168 wanted to survive. It seemed to me unreasonable to cut off yourself from people who know things
169 you don't know—number one, just starting there. These are people who speak a language I don't
170 speak, these are people who have been to a part of the world that I don't know anything about—

171 this is *wonderful!* I get to learn from them, I get to know something different. Here are people that
172 have a story I've never heard. *Chanukah, wow.*

173

174 In one class at Hyde Park, there was a young woman who said she had been on Hiroshima when
175 the bomb was dropped, and the teacher, *the teacher*, a white woman with red hair and I don't
176 remember her name anymore, said, "Oh that must have been interesting, tell us about it." And I
177 remember how I felt, I was just learning about all this stuff in depth, and I was so glad that she
178 said, "It was awful, and I'm not going to talk about it." These are things that like stick in your
179 head about what you learn just growing up and going through your life. I hung out with misfits
180 most of the time, the kids who didn't fit somewhere else. The kid who constantly twirled her
181 hands and had sweaty palms, and the Greek kid who was huge as the doorway and you'd look at
182 him and you think he's not too bright, but he was really sharp. I mean I hung out with the kids
183 who didn't seem to fit anywhere else and I liked them. Because they were smart, because they
184 knew things, they had intuition and they had compassion, they were not mean. I graduated from
185 Farragut in 1957. I did pretty well there, I learned a lot about interacting with white people. When
186 I got to Chicago, I didn't know that white people fought among themselves. I just thought, "Well
187 there's white people," okay, "and then there's Black people," or colored people, 'cause that's what
188 I was at the time. And then I found out that Jews and Germans and Bohemians, all could identify
189 themselves, either by name or something, and that they all had conflicts and it kind of blew me
190 away. I mean how do you know how to—if they don't have a badge on, how do you know who to
191 fight, you know. I thought it was all pretty stupid, so I made friends wherever I could, and again,
192 hung out, even in that school, with the misfits, the kids who didn't fit somewhere else but had
193 something else to think about other than being cute, or what to wear.

194

195 When I graduated I left Chicago, I wanted to, there's some personal stuff, some stuff in my family
196 that made me want to get out from under my mother and stepfather. And I went to a segregated
197 college, Lincoln University in Jefferson City, Missouri. My grandfather had gone there, my
198 father, my mother, uncles and aunts had all gone to that college. On both sides actually, my
199 mother and father's sides, because that's where my mother and father met. I didn't do well, I drank
200 myself silly, I was miserable, I was depressed, nothing challenged me very much. I quit school
201 after a year and a half. I was still, you know, still just sorta sloppin' around in the world. I'm
202 aware of stuff but not doing anything about it. And then we come to the sixties. And my first
203 reaction to knowing about riots was, "What are they being pissed about?" And then I had to help
204 a friend find an apartment, and she had children. And I couldn't believe the places that people

205 were showing her to live in, or how they didn't want children or how they didn't want Black
206 people. And I got it, it's like, *Oh yeah, oh yeah, this makes me wanna pick up a brick, this makes*
207 *me wanna do something really awful.* I still was not as involved as most of my friends. One is I
208 knew that I could never be, at that point in my life, a person who... could do a peaceful
209 demonstration, because I knew if somebody hit me I'd hit 'em back. I knew that if somebody spit
210 on me I'd just... I wouldn't be able to just take it. The other was, I didn't like what I saw in the
211 Black Panther Movement. I didn't like what I saw in terms of how they treated women, and I
212 didn't have the word feminist in my vocabulary at all, but I knew I wasn't gonna' be treated like
213 shit, and I didn't like how they were treating women. I didn't like how they were talking about
214 white people. I was just telling somebody, this was one of my discussions with friends in the
215 sixties was, *What are we gonna do with our white friends?* Because I was then living on an
216 integrated block, but on one side was lily-white with big cars, and the other side was drugs and
217 Black folks and meanness. There's meanness over here but it was well disguised under, you
218 know, having guards on the street, because I remember going for a walk on one of the private
219 streets and being stopped by a guard and wondering why, and it's because I was Black. Black
220 people didn't walk on those private streets, they probably still don't. They were gated
221 communities back in the forties in St. Louis, okay? And there was one that was actually Black,
222 Lewis Place, which was—it never had a patrol person, like a—I mean a hired chain person or
223 whatever you call them, but it was not easy to just walk down Lewis Place, you had to know what
224 you were doing ... Where was I? Wandering around St. Louis.

225

226 *CC: What are we gonna do with our white friends?*

227

228 KAS: Yeah, what are we gonna do with our white friends, because it was scary, it was a scary situation.
229 One of my best friends, who just died, lived across the street from me, actually we shared an
230 apartment later. But she lived across the street from me and she was just a radical; she's the one
231 who went to the March on Washington [1963], she's the one that hung out the Communist flag on
232 May Day, she's the one [laughing] that was makin' all kinda noise! But I was learning from her,
233 and watching, and still knowing that I was not gonna be able to do what they were doing. And
234 part of that was being gay. And knowing that anybody who pulled the cover off of that, it was
235 going to destroy me. I tried to keep a lot of my sexual orientation away from my family. Because
236 they disapproved—I don't think they disapproved of me; they disapproved of being gay. That
237 changed over time. So I didn't, you know, I didn't go home and take my girlfriend and say "Hi!
238 Here's my wife," you know [laughs]. But I still was drinking very heavily, spent a lot of time with

239 just a mixture of people, different economic backgrounds, different ethnic backgrounds, and I was
240 working for Washington University Medical School at the time, and I was working for a Japanese
241 guy and I was working...

242

243 *CC: What were you doing?*

244

245 KAS: I was a lab tech, in a biochemistry research lab. Working every day, drinking every day, I don't
246 know how I got to work some days; some days I didn't get to work. At some point in time feeling
247 miserable—and my girlfriend left me—I checked myself into a mental institution. [I] stayed for
248 about a month, came out and made some decisions about how I was gonna be in the world. And
249 one of the most important decisions I made was to speak up for myself, and to say what I believe
250 in. And to not be... *dissuaded* from speaking because I'm gay, and that's the word we used then,
251 we didn't say lesbian then, we said gay. Everybody was gay. Then we got to be lesbians when I
252 got to Oregon [laughs]. But a lot of what I learned, when I look back at it, what I was learning
253 was, no matter how I saw myself, people saw me as different. So no matter if I thought, "Oh these
254 people were really cool and they're my friends and blah, blah, blah," it wasn't that they weren't
255 my friends it's that they never quite saw me like they saw their other friends, if I was the Black
256 friend. And, that would come out sometimes. The core group, on Westminster, didn't have that
257 problem for me.

258

259 *CC: This was the street?*

260

261 KAS: Yeah, this was the street we lived on. And my friend that just died, Ann Marie, she was just a big
262 factor in my growing up. I was in my twenties but I was still trying to grow up. My friend Oz
263 who lives over in Southeast, we've been friends since third grade, and she's another one, you
264 know, say "Eh, you know, you're being an asshole." You need people in your life to say, you
265 know, *you are being an asshole*, and you need to pay attention to those people if they care about
266 you. So I got that, I got that from my friends.

267

268 When I decided to leave St. Louis, I was depressed about several things, one was a brother who
269 continuously got into trouble, the other was a city that I had loved and watched—just be a—it's a
270 beautiful old city, and I just watched crime and despair take its toll on the city. Racism... when
271 Annie and I did share an apartment—and I was always at my girlfriend's house, she called me out
272 there one night, she said, "Somebody's trying to break in." Now Ann Marie's white, and we were

273 living in a mixed neighborhood. She said, "What really scares me is he can see me and I know he
274 knows I'm in here." I said, "Get out of there." And so she went across the hall to, what do you call
275 'em, uh, a guy who's like a ward person, I can't think of his name.

276

277 *CC: Just like the building manager?*

278

279 KAS: No, no. Somebody who's like a city... not a councilor quite, but something like that. And she went
280 over there and they called the police. They're white, Annie's white. And the policeman's
281 question—this was 1969—the question to her was why was she living down here with all these
282 Black folks. Which... I mean she was outraged. She had another policeman friend who came by
283 the house and told her that all Black people were thieves. He was a Black policeman; I heard him,
284 I was in the other room, I got into it with him, he didn't come back anymore. You're surrounded
285 by it, you live in it, you learn what to do and what not to do. And when the time came, I was
286 ready to march with folks. I was not ready to be—I was not ready to go south; I was not ready to
287 be beaten in the head. And I've been lucky, I've been lucky. After I got to Oregon it feels like I
288 could have my whole self. I could be Black, I could be lesbian, I could be a woman, I could be,
289 you know, whatever. Nobody was telling me to be dumb, to be quiet... and, I didn't have to worry
290 about the impact my behavior would have on my family. My family was precious to me.

291

292 *CC: How did you get from there to here?*

293

294 KAS: I sold all my shit and got on a train [laughs].

295

296 0:30.00

297

298 *CC: Why did you come here?*

299

300 KAS: Because my friend Oz and her husband and my godson were here. And she said "C'mon, c'mon,"
301 she kept sending me these little things about gay rights organizing [laughing] and I kind of go like
302 this [mimes holding the pamphlet away from herself] and read 'em, cause I expected a bullet to
303 come through my window or whatever. And I finally just said—I was with Jenny, and I said to
304 Jenny, "Jenny, I'm going to Oregon, and if you want to come with me, I want you to come." And
305 we came here with five kids [peers], and they did well here. They're all back in St. Louis now, but

306 they did well. They didn't like the *niceness* of Oregon, and they didn't like that you couldn't find a
307 brick if somebody was fuckin' with you [laughs]. But they did well.

308

309 *CC: So you went to Reed [College]?*

310

311 KAS: I went to Reed after I got here. I was at a party, at Oz's house, and a Reed professor was there, and
312 he said something about school and I said, "No, I didn't finish," and he said, "You need to go to
313 Reed." And I said, "That's a rich white kid's school, I can't go there." He said, "I'll write you a
314 letter of recommendation." And then I did the application and I got my old boss, Will Sherman, to
315 write a recommendation, blah, blah, blah. I got accepted, with no money. They had no money for
316 me. I went over trying to find somebody to—including the financial aid office, nah, not a dime.
317 At the time that I went to Reed, they didn't give you grades. After the first grading period, they
318 found money, because I had made, I don't know, "A's" and "B's." And the way I know is that year
319 somebody stole all the grades and copied them and put 'em in everybody's box. It was another
320 adventure in learning. My naiveté had led me to believe that people who had money, at least
321 would be civil, civilized, and probably not racist. And lord have mercy, I was wrong [laughs].
322 Just from the get. No money; I sit down and talk with the dean, who asks me, how I think I will
323 fare in a upper-middle-class white school, as a Black person. And you know, I just said, well,
324 *some of my friends are white, what is that about, you know.* They were trying desperately to
325 discourage me from going there. Nobody inside the school helped me. Outside the school, the
326 wife—or was she the ex-wife then, I don't think so I think they were still married—of the guy
327 who told me I should apply helped me get a loan, and loaned me some money. And it was not
328 quite enough for the whole of the first year, but I figured I was going to get some more money.
329 And I was working two jobs, and I'd get a check and I'd take it over there, five dollars sometimes;
330 *There, here, put that on my tuition, put that on my tuition.* I showed up first day of class, they had
331 no packet for me, they acted like they didn't know I was coming, and I said, you know, "What is
332 going on here, why have you not put this together?" [dramatically sucks in her breath] "I don't
333 know! Blah, blah, blah, blah." They got my stuff together, they got me into the infirmary to get
334 my shots and whatever it is; I don't remember what they put you through. But I was blown away.
335 I had brought them money, and tuition was what, three thousand dollars a year instead of thirty, at
336 that time. I brought them most of that, I hadn't brought them the whole tuition for the whole year
337 but I figured I'd earn that, I'd get it. They had no packet for me, they didn't think I was coming.

338

339 So, I got there. And at first I thought, "Yeah, man, what are you *doing* here, how did you *get*
340 here?" And nobody was mean to me, at that point, they were just indifferent, but they were also
341 indifferent to each other. So it was a great big culture shock. Huge culture shock. And I watched
342 other Black kids come on the campus—and there weren't a whole lot of them—new, and they'd
343 walk up to somebody and start talking and say hello and that person would drop their eyes and
344 say "Bye," and walk off. And it wasn't that... I don't think it was about race, I think it was about
345 culture. The Black kids were used to connecting with people. These other kids were used to being
346 isolated. But what you can feel is racism, that it's racist. But when you look at it you say no these
347 0:35.00 kids don't... they don't relate to each other, you know they're not going to relate to you. And more
348 than once I grabbed somebody and said, "Hey c'mon, sit down, let me talk to you." The kinds of
349 things that happened there had to do with a group of privileged kids who thought they were so hip
350 they could say anything. I'm sitting in the cafeteria, the coffee shop one day and, some guy say's
351 something about—he's sitting across from me—and he says something about "spics." And I said,
352 "You can't talk like that to me. You may not talk that way to me. What makes you think you can
353 talk that way?" [laughs]. The young woman who is sitting over here who is Jewish, and she says,
354 "What's a 'spic'?" I don't know where she was from. I said, "It's like kike or nigger." She said,
355 "What's a kike?" [laughing] I went, "Oh Jesus, where am I, what planet am I on!" I said, "It's all a
356 way of denigrating people and you may not talk to me that way." To his credit, he came back the
357 next day and apologized. But it was like all that little stuff. People who... I got a failing grade,
358 and again they didn't give you your grades they did this kind of—you're sitting with your advisor
359 and he says, "Oh you're doing very well in so and so and very well in blah, blah, blah. But you
360 need to go see your biology teacher, there's something going on there that you may want to take a
361 look at because it's, just not very good." Well, this guy, had marked me down, I don't know why,
362 and I went and talked to him, I said, "You know, before I came here, I spent twelve years working
363 in research laboratories." And I said, "The least you can do is move this 'D' up to a 'A' in the
364 lab," because I was helping to train the other students. He moved it to a "B," and I think I got a
365 "C" in the rest of the course. [He] Couldn't abide... I think looked at me—fat, Black, older, can't
366 *possibly* be smart enough, *can't possibly*. That's not anybody calling you names. And at that point
367 in time, I had enough reinforcement from the world to have some degree of confidence in myself,
368 or else I was incredibly stupid, which is also possible [sniffs]. But I believed I could get through
369 this school, and they were pissing me off because they were telling me I couldn't because I was
370 Black. They didn't tell me I was dumb. They didn't tell me I didn't know how to do anything.
371 They just, you know, "How are you going to fit in here?"
372

373

374 I had an instructor there whose name was John Reed, who I don't think I'll ever forget, I took my
375 first paper to him. I went into my first paper conference, and he had marked it up; I mean it was
376 just terrible. He said, "What am I going to do with you?" I said, "I'm going to tell you what you're
377 gonna do with me, you're gonna teach me how to write, and you're going to let me write about
378 what I want to write about. Because I don't think that you're talking to me when I'm sitting in a
379 lecture and somebody says, 'Write a paper on the moral implications of Achilles' refusing to join
380 the war until after the burning of the Argive ships, as described on page 236-238.'" And except
381 for the page numbers, that's what was said that we were supposed to write on. I said, "That's
382 not—that's for you guys, you're talking to each other, you're not talking to me." He said, "Okay,
383 deal." And it wasn't that I didn't have the thoughts; I didn't know how to organize them. I didn't
384 know how to put them so that they made sense to other people. I could talk it, but I couldn't write
385 it. And, at the end of it, I wrote a poem, at the end of the class I wrote a poem, and I gave it to
386 him, and he wrote me back and said, "It's such a fine time being in your mind, thank you." I don't
387 remember what I got in the class, probably a "B." But I looked at what I had *not* gotten, and this
388 is when you start looking at the systemic level, and I thought, you know, these kids walked in
389 here already having read Marx, which I asked for when I was fifteen and nobody would give me
390 because it was the middle of the McCarthy era and they would lose their jobs, and I'm a Black kid
391 in Chicago. And I finally read it when I get to Reed and I went "Aha! No wonder they didn't want
392 to give this to Black kids in Chicago." [laughs]

393

394 Reed was quite an experience, it was, again, this hip group of folks. They wrote a—the woman
395 wrote a column in the newspaper [*The Reed College Quest*—that said "Wop Food." And I wrote
396 back and said, "Well, when you gonna give us the 'Chink Food' or whatever kind of other... "
397 Well she says, "Well I grew up with Italians and I wrote that." And I said, "And Hitler grew up
398 with Jews." That stopped that one. Then there was the cover of the newspaper that had a big
399 watermelon on it, and under it, the words from a Negro spiritual. [pause] Why? I just wrote and
400 said, "You know, I think whoever did that should take the watermelon, turn it sideways and shove
401 it up their ass." Here I'm learning something about people I thought might be a little more astute,
402 a little more compassionate, a little more knowledgeable; I'm learning, they are not. I learned that
403 they would steal things and I couldn't figure it out. I knew people that stole things in St. Louis,
404 they stole because they didn't have any money, they stole because they were hungry, both
405 physically and spiritually. Here are rich kids, and I finally figured it out, they're hungry
406 spiritually. They go up to the Safeway and steal shit! And I didn't want to go with them. I didn't

407 want to go with them, I didn't want to be involved in that. Anyway, I think I gave them some
408 things, they certainly gave me some, I made friends. And I was selective about them. I didn't want
409 to hear a lot about how they hated their parents or whatever, I was too old, I was thirty years old
410 when I went back there. I didn't want to hear about, you know—I wanted to hear something *up*,
411 something good, of people who had some hopes, who weren't just angry at the world. And I made
412 good friends, I made good friends.

413

414 *CC: When did you graduate?*

415

416 KAS: 1974, when I was thirty-four years old. Getting to Oregon was really a trip because I didn't know
417 about this bias against Indians and Gypsies until I got here. Those two groups had always been
418 romanticized where I grew up. Which is another kind of bias, another kind of stereotyping, but at
419 least it's a little bit pleasant, you can, you know, you can hold some positive thoughts. When I
420 was working for—when I first got here I worked for Stanley Drug, in their laboratory, and I did a
421 lot of their assays of their pills that they were manufacturing. I asked one of the guys about going
422 fishing and he said, "Oh yeah, you can go up to Warm Springs, on the Indian reservation." I said,
423 "Oh yeah?" he said. "And you don't have to worry about those Indians, those are good Indians." I
424 said, *what the f... what does that mean?!* [laughing]. It's like by this time I am just coming out of
425 my shell, I'm not shutting up about anything, especially about bias. And I don't care who it's
426 against, I don't like it. He apologized. Later, the same guy—I came in and I said I was gonna quit.
427 When I was hired I was told they were gonna get a gas spectral photometer machine, which
428 does—I'm sorry, a gas chromatograph, that's what it is; I haven't used that language in a long
429 time, that's what it was, gas chromatograph. It's an assay thing, you put something in it, it goes
430 through a tube of diatomaceous earth, it comes out, and you'll get a graph; and the height of that
431 graph, depending on the speed of the gas and what you've got, what you're using, in the tube, will
432 tell you what the elements are in that particular solution. So, you know, like we did whiskey one
433 time and we got a [laughing] an [assay] for wood alcohol, that was back in St. Louis when I was
434 working there. But, I came here and they said they were going to get that machine, that's why
435 they hired me, they never got it. And the guy who was in charge of the lab kept giving me all the,
436 just the rank, the rank assays. So the ones that were most likely to explode, the ones that really
437 stank, I got. And I came in one day and I said, "Make it easy on yourself, you want me to quit in a
438 week or two?" and he says "What?" I said, "You're giving me all the nasty assays, you're not
439 sharing 'em around, I came here as somebody who had ten years' experience working in labs, and
440 you're not treating me well." And he went away, and he went into his boss's office, who was a

441 Japanese guy. And Ted called me into the office, and I don't even remember my immediate
442 supervisor's name; he said, "What's up?" I said, "I'm not going to be treated this way." I keep
443 wanting to say the guy's name was Sam but I'm not sure—he said, "Well, it's not because you're
444 Black." [laughs] I never said it! I mean, I wasn't even thinking it! I was just thinking, you're just
445 dumping on me 'cause I'm the new kid, you know. And Tomaki looked at him, at then looked at
446 me and said, "Would you excuse us please?" and I could see him in there going like this
447 [gestures]. They decided to change, so that I could have more variety in what I was doing, but by
448 that time I had decided to go back to school.

449

450 *CC: So this was before you started at...?*

451

452 KAS: It was before I started, yeah. Coming out of Reed, or, while I was in Reed actually, getting in touch
453 with the women's movement, going to the Women's Resource Center, getting there and having
454 nobody say hello. Having people drop their eyes. And... I get pissed off and I just make people do
455 shit. I'd say, "HELLO! HOW ARE YOU?" [laughing] "YOU SAID YOU WANTED YOUR
456 SISTERS OF COLOR HERE, HERE I AM! Goddamn it," you know. And again, they're *nice*,
457 they're nice people here, they don't want to say what's in their minds, and it's very hard to do that
458 fighting. If you're in St. Louis, or if you're in New York or if you're in Chicago, and you call
459 somebody out, my experience has been, they're there! "Yeah, what do you mean motherfucker?"
460 you know, but this, niceness and being afraid of me—like I'd say my name and you'd think I was
461 gonna kill somebody, because I wasn't apologetic about the way I said my name. So I got
462 involved with the women's stuff, I got involved with lesbian stuff, I got involved with Black stuff,
463 that came later actually. Although I'd show up for Black stuff, I didn't get a lot of... credibility, I
464 didn't have a lot of credibility. Avel [Gordly] helped a lot with that; working for the Urban
465 League helped a lot with that. And me standing up for some stuff at work, and working pretty
466 hard.

467

468 *CC: What did you do for the Urban League?*

469

470 KAS: I ran the youth services arm of the organization for a short while, yeah. I worked for the city in job
471 training programs for almost ten years, and I got to be known there as somebody who was fair,
472 and somebody who would speak up, and even on the issue of gay stuff. I wouldn't necessarily
473 come out, but I'd say *What is that about? Why are you talking to him like that? How do I know*
474 *you're not gay*; you know. It was, it just pissed me off, it's like a stupid way to spend your life,

475 you know, is worrying about what somebody else is or isn't. Is she Black or is she white; why do
476 you care? Does it matter?

477

478 *CC: So, one of the things that we started to talk about last time we spoke was, you were talking about the*
479 *relationship between your feeling marginalized and how that led to leadership.*

480

481 KAS: It's a concept I learned from a guy named Chuck Willie, who is retired from Harvard; he was an
482 instructor there, I think in sociology. And it made sense to me and it still makes sense to me. He
483 said, the view from the margins is a different view than if you're just, if you're with the
484 mainstream. And I just thought, yeah, that's part of why I can see, if I have to integrate everything
485 in me, then I can see how it could work in the rest of the world. And raised as a light-skinned
486 Black in the 40's, which means you had to acknowledge you had some white ancestry, and then
487 you look around at your cousins, you got cousins that range from white to *really* black, and then
488 your Uncle Billy marries a Mexican woman, and they got a bunch of beautiful kids living down
489 in Hobbes, New Mexico. And you say well, there's probably an Asian in there somewhere, what
490 is all this stuff about? What is it all about? So for me it was like, all these people are me, I am all
491 these people. I tried to live a life as a straight woman; that didn't work, but I have some
492 appreciation for what women go through. Living a life as a hard butch, I have some appreciation
493 for what boys go through, for what men go through. I don't think we're very nice to each other.
494 But it's *because* I can see myself in these different places—in this room I'm a minority, in this
495 0:50.00 room I'm a majority—then when I add to that the privilege that I have, and I try to remember that
496 at all times, sitting here with you, we got a computer, we got a recorder, we got lights, we're
497 warm, we're dry, nobody's gonna stone us for, you know, doing something that they think we
498 shouldn't do. We're privileged. I try to remember that every day. And that helps me see the world
499 in a certain kind of way, and it makes me want to change the world, because it's not kind; it's not
500 a kind place. I found out it wasn't kind by having my mother leave, by being raped, by being
501 beaten, but those are the *extremes* of the unkindness, those are the visible unkind. There's an
502 unkindness to children who are cold, who are hungry, who are without. I mean thank god I had a
503 family that took me in, took care of me, loved me, and tried to, you know, make me wear skirts
504 and go to school. They cared about me. But everything that's violent is not *apparent*, and I know
505 that. What I didn't live through I saw. People who emotionally abandon their children, people
506 who—and I have been beaten as a kid, really beaten—and people who rape children, and people
507 who are indifferent to one another, who would choose to be mean rather than kind, as though
508 their meanness would protect them from something, or give them something that they didn't have.

509 I think if you are both a lesbian and a woman, and Black, and smart, and by some measure,
510 people thought I was pretty. I never thought that was important, I was raised that pretty is as
511 pretty does. And what I learned early on was pretty got me raped. That's what was said to me as I
512 was being raped, "You're so pretty, you're so pretty, I can't live without you, I must have you."
513 That's *one* of the times I was raped. You look at all that, and then you go through some parts in
514 your life, and you learn that you can't condemn everything. That, that—tell you a story, one of the
515 guys who raped me when I was a kid lived in the neighborhood. By that time I was so
516 internalized and so—wouldn't talk to anybody, just like this [hunches in], I wouldn't cry, you
517 know, you could beat me I wouldn't cry. I got grown, came to Oregon, went back home to see my
518 family, walked in to see my uncle, who was very ill, and there was this guy, Connie. I said to my
519 brother, "What is Connie doing in our house!" He says, "He comes here every day, he makes sure
520 Uncle Les is clean, he fixes his food, and he walks him back and forth to the bathroom. And he
521 spends time with him." And my response was, *Okay, what am I supposed to learn? I'm supposed*
522 *to learn something here.* And I let it go, I let it go, what he did, I let it go. I don't think he was
523 right, I think he was wrong, I think he should've been punished. But I also have to say
524 everybody's not a monolith. One thing that you did wrong—and I've done wrong shit in my life—
525 don't make me a bad person. And so I have to look at, being pushed to that place where you've
526 been abused, and the licks you take for it, and what, instead of "Oh my god, I'm a victim," what
527 do I get out of this? What can I learn from this? How can I help somebody else? How can I talk to
528 somebody else about it? Because one of the gifts I have is talking, you know, I know that. Well, I
529 can go to Project Network and I can talk to the young women over there about the difference
530 between affection and technique and sex and love. And they loved it. I'm saying, you know, "He
531 kisses really good." That's not love, that's technique [laughs].

532
533 And that's what, I guess what I mean by, if you're on the margin, it's like standing on a wall that's
534 higher. And you look around and you say, aha, Black folks over here, white folks over here,
535 Asians over here, Indians over here, oh, Latinos over here. But what's the real difference between
536 these people? Fundamentally, they want to be warm and dry and loved, they want to be fed, they
537 wanna have something to *laugh* at, and when they're sad they want somebody to comfort them.
538 So, fundamentally, we're about the same. I can see that. What's the difference between all these
539 people and the Lesbian and gay folks? Well, 'bout the same stuff. What about old folks? Well,
540 they need a little help getting around but other than that it's about the same stuff. And some of
541 them are Lesbian and some of them are gay and some Latino and some are Indian and, you know,
542 it's—cultural differences are *real*, but they should not preclude our ability to interact peacefully.

543 And to be able to help one another as opposed to killing each other 'cause we're different. I think
544 you see that better when you see yourself as different. When you know you're different, you're
545 outside of so many groups, and you figure out how to be inside, or how to get to a place where
546 you can work *with*, as opposed to decide to destroy. And I'm not naive enough to think that you
547 can go through life and never have a fight, because there are people who wanna kill ya, I know
548 that, and you get to make a decision about whether you want to just lay down and die or whether
549 you're gonna fight back, and I probably would fight back. And I don't know what I'd do if I had to
550 make a choice between my life and the life of some young kid. I'd probably just say, well shoot
551 me. But that would be a hard choice. So I don't think that those things don't happen to people. I
552 just know that where I am, in a place of privilege, with certain kinds of gifts, I can talk with
553 people about changing the dynamic that we've always had. And I can talk with almost anyone, if
554 they're willing to talk with me. I don't have to draw a line and say I won't talk to so and so. Yes
555 I'll talk to Republicans, yes I will talk to people who don't like gay people, yes I would... I have a
556 great story. My friend Frances Portillo does workshops and trainings for diversity. And she called
557 me one day and she said, "I got this woman up from Southern Oregon who just does not like gay
558 people, will you talk to her?" And I said, "Sure." And I go over to Frances' house and I spend a
559 couple hours talking with this woman. Her religious beliefs are very strong and I said, "You
560 know, I want you to do something with me, I want you to come and go to the gay church with me
561 on Sunday." I said, "I'm not a member, I don't really go to church, but I'd like for you to come and
562 see what that's like." And she said, "Okay." We got there and we're outside the church and I said,
563 "You know they're going to think you're my girlfriend." And she laughed, and she said, "I don't
564 care." I said, "Okay, let's go in." And we went in and—have you ever been to MCC [Metropolitan
565 Community Church]?

566

567 *CC: Is that the one on Broadway?*

568

569 KAS: Yeah.

570

571 *CC: Yeah.*

572

573 KAS: I *love* their communion service, I love the way they do it.

574

575 *CC: I've never been there for a service.*

576

577 KAS: Well, they do a communion where, like if we wanted to go up as a family, we could go up and then
578 we'd be given the communion.

579

580 *CC: Together.*

581

582 KAS: Yeah, together. Or if you wanted to up just with your partner or by yourself or, you know, and I just
583 think it's a lovely way to do it. But I don't take communion. I'm a non-believer in that. Although I
584 find it comforting, I know what is comforting is for me is memory of my childhood. So I don't
585 take communion. Afterwards I asked her what she thought she said, "Wow, it's a great service." I
586 said, "What did you think of the communion?" She said, "I really wanted to go up." I said, "Why
587 didn't you?" She said, "I was waiting for you." And I said, "I'm so sorry, I just don't take
588 communion." I'm not about taking people's religion away from them, I am about hoping they will
589 look at it and see what the symbols say, and what the message is in the symbols. Especially
590 messages about suffering and messages about self-righteousness, you know, don't like it.
591 Anyway.

592

593 *CC: But she... what was her experience?*

594

595 KAS: She said to me, she said, "I don't know if I can ever say it's okay to be homosexual, but I do know
596 that when people say things that aren't true now, when I go back home, south of Salem, I can say
597 that's not true." I said, "Good." That's all you can get right now. That's wonderful! That's a big—if
598 you don't talk to people, you can't get even that little bit of movement. When we were fighting
599 Lon Mabon [founder of Oregon Citizens Alliance, the sponsor organization of Ballot Measure 9
600 which sought to amend the state's Constitution to prohibit it from recognizing sexual orientation
601 in its operations and for public schools to teach homosexuality was abnormal and perverse] in '92
602 I went down to... what's the place with the caveman outside of it? It's either Monmouth or one of
603 those cities down there. We're in a room and it's people of color and we're going to talk about Lon
604 Mabon and fighting him, and I introduced myself, we go around the room, the last guy in the
605 room says, "I think I don't belong here." I said, "Why not?" He said, "Because I support Lon
606 Mabon." I said, "Please stay." He said, "Why?" I said, "Because we get to live on this planet
607 together." And we talked about children and schools and roads and jobs and trees, in *addition*. So
608 when it was over, he said, "Thank you for asking me to stay." I said, "Why?" He said, "Because I
609 know now that you're not just about one thing." That's what you see when you're on the margins,
610 nobody is about one thing. Nobody's about—ultimately, you can't be *just Black*, you gotta be a

611 Black woman or a man, you gotta be a certain age, you gotta have a certain sexual orientation,
612 you gotta have a certain background, level of education; you can't be *just Black*. And *just Black*
613 won't take you anywhere, if you're talking about living in a peaceful world, which is what I'm
614 talking about. It won't take you anywhere until you can connect with other people on the level of
615 your willingness, number one, to have compassion, to extend yourself, to accept from others
616 things that they're willing to give to you. And that's just getting to that multi-faceted analysis of
617 the world, which again, is a part of what I think happens when people who are marginalized—if
618 they're not made sick by it, 'cause I think a lot of people are—then you get to look at the world
619 and say, "Hmm, yeah, okay, looks like this. Hmm, yeah, looks like that. Let's bring this together,
620 let's see what we can do here." And I watched Avel [Gordly] do it with me, bring me in to places
621 I would not have otherwise been, you know. *I'm sitting here*, [looks around] *Whoa, I'm sittin' here*
622 *with some preachers*. I know how I got here, I know how I got here.

623

624 *CC: This was Avel's question when I asked her what she would ask you. She said, "As a woman, when did*
625 *you know and really believe that you were smart?"*

626

627 KAS: Oh, from the time I was a little kid, my dad always told me I was smart, yeah. He um, [laughing] he
628 would tell you [that] you were not allowed to be dumb. [Laughing] You were a Gunnell. But I
629 was told that I was smart and then I was skipped in school. But what I didn't understand, for a
630 long time, was that everybody else wasn't as smart as I was. And I don't even know if they were
631 not as smart, as they didn't have the kind of support that I had. When I got home my grandmother
632 would say, "Where's your homework?" "Don't have any." "I'll give you some." I remember
633 struggling with long division, and just sitting at the desk and having such a hard time, and my
634 uncle saying, "Do you want some help?" And me saying, "No, I want to learn this." "Okay." So I
635 had a lot of support. And then when I was successful and I brought home good grades, "Yeah,
636 yeah, yeah, you can do it, you can do it." I had friends who were very, very smart who didn't have
637 support. One of whom I talked about with somebody else the other night, who I don't even know
638 if she's dead or alive now; she went so far off in to drugs and... but she was smarter than me, she
639 was a lot smarter than me. Oz, my friend who lives over in Southeast Portland, when we were in
640 the third grade together, she was commended for excellence when she was at Reed. She's a Black
641 woman that went there, had a baby, was married, was making bread every other day, had two
642 children, she carried the baby on her back, commended for excellence, smart, smart. But we felt
643 dumb sometimes, I think. I think when you get around people who are committed to making you
644 feel dumb—which is something I have found happens with insecure men; they need for you not

645 to be smart. I didn't have the word sexism in my vocabulary either, but I can remember one of the
646 last times I went out with a guy, his name was Johnny, we were having a nice time sitting
647 somewhere and talking, and two of his friends came in—we were in a bar—and two of his friends
648 came in, they started talking, and when I would try to interject, nothing, you know nobody smiles,
649 and finally somebody handed me some money and said, "Go play the jukebox." And I'm standing
650 at the jukebox thinking, *There's something wrong with this, something's wrong*. I didn't know
651 how to explain it to myself, but I knew it wasn't the right thing, because my dad told me I was
652 smart and that I could talk, you know. Yeah he... well we weren't gonna go anywhere 'cause I
653 wouldn't go to bed with him, number one, but... I think there's being told you're smart and then
654 there's the discovery of what that *means*, and what it *obligates you to do*. I don't believe you just
655 get to be smart, I believe you're supposed to use that for something. Some people use it for
656 themselves, and I'm not going to argue with them about that. But I believe that—and I think it has
657 to do with my family of origin—you owe something back. You owe something back to the people
658 who came before you, and you have to give something to the people who are coming after you.
659 And sometimes you can do it easily and sometimes you can't, but you *owe something*. When you
660 think about Black people in this country, and what people went through, what my folks went
661 through, what *their* folks went through and what *their* folks went through, each step, each
662 generation, has been a reflection of their hopes. I went to Farmington, Missouri—I told you my
663 grandpa had been the principal at the colored school down there—I went to Farmington, Missouri
664 some years ago, and I went to the graveyard there, the Masonic, colored, graveyard. And I found
665 the corner of the graveyard where a lot of my family the Caseys were. And it was probably one of
666 the most uplifting experiences I've ever had. I stood there and I thanked them. I said, "I'm here,
667 I'm your child. *I'm the one that you put effort into*. You didn't know who I was; I'm here. I'm back
668 to thank you." And it was like being lifted up off the ground. I'd never felt anything like that in
669 my life, it was amazing to me. But I thanked them. *I didn't do this myself, I didn't do this*. I did
670 some of it, but the ideas, the feelings, the compassion, the understanding, they come from some...
671 they got handed to me. And the—whatever ambition I have, whatever determination I have,
672 whatever courage I have, these were handed to me; they were taught to me. My father would say,
673 "Go upstairs and get my socks out of the drawer." And I would say, "It's dark up there." And he'd
674 say, "Yes it is." [laughs] And I'd go upstairs, because I wanted him to think I was cool.

675

676 *CC: So what are you most proud of in your... that you've achieved or struggled through or...*

677

678 1:10.00

679 KAS: I'm proud of... hmm. You just got the top of my life, you just got the surface. I'm proud that
680 somehow and some way, I still care about the world; I am not its victim. That---when your mom
681 runs off when you're four years old, you can choose to hang on to that as a comment on you, or
682 you can see yourself as a statistic, or see her as somebody who was irresponsible or whatever it
683 takes. But if that's the beginning of your memory cycle, and then there's beatings and there's rapes
684 and there's abandonment again and again, and there's bad relationships with various people and
685 there's moving from here to there, and there's somebody telling you [that] you can't come to this
686 school because you're not white and rich, and there's somebody else telling you [that] you can't
687 have this job, I mean I climbed stairs for jobs and found out it was for white only back in the 50's
688 and 60's. You get all that, and somewhere there is the risk, always, of becoming bitter, of
689 deciding that the world is not worth your participation. And I'm really proud that I still care.
690 That's taken a lot of therapy [laughing], which means a lot of money, and it's taken a lot of
691 introspection. And it's taken a lot of... forgiving myself for not being god, is what I call it. Not
692 being able to do *all* the things I'd like to do, and not being perfect.

693
694 I'm also proud that I have good relationships with good people. I love that, I love my friends. I'm
695 not a good follow-upper, you know, I'm not real good at checking in. I'm a hermit basically. But I
696 love my friends, and I feel loved by them, so I am proud of having developed those friendships. I
697 was proud to fight against Ballot Measure 9, to be out there, to be, as a Black woman, somebody
698 who was not going to apologize for being a lesbian or a Black woman, that they didn't need
699 apology. I was proud to have worked for Neil Goldschmidt [Oregon governor, 1987-1991], no
700 matter what anybody else thinks of him. He was a good boss, he's a smart guy; he made a really
701 bad mistake and he apologized, and I wish people would leave him alone, but I was proud to
702 work for him. I don't know, I just feel, I feel *lucky*, more than proud I feel *lucky*. I mean, you
703 know, I never planned on doing most of the stuff I've done in my life. I didn't sit down and say,
704 "Gee, I want to be the director of affirmative action when I grow up." There was no affirmative
705 action, you know, I wanted to be a chemist, and I flunked chemistry, first time in college, and I
706 went and worked in biochemistry labs for ten years, I mean, *What was that about?* I mean I never
707 have figured it out. Anyway, I feel lucky more than proud, I guess, I feel blessed; I feel that I've
708 been presented with opportunities that have been hard sometimes but I feel blessed that I had
709 enough courage to try them. Climbing a rock in Colorado, sailing on a hundred and thirty-five
710 foot ship in the South China Sea, going to Reed College, those are big adventures for me. And I
711 think I went because I wanted to learn something about myself, and I feel lucky that I got to do it,
712 and I did learn something about myself, some of it good and some of it bad, you know, not so

713 good. But yeah, I feel lucky more than proud, I mean proud, eh. I'm proud of some of the poetry I
714 write sometimes, then I look at six months later and I go "Ehhh." [laughs]

715

716 *CC: Everybody does that.*

717

718 1:15.00

719

720 KAS: Yeah.

721

722 *CC: Okay.*

723

724 KAS: Is that it?

725

726 *CC: Is there anything else that you would like to say?*

727

728 KAS: Mmhhh, probably.

729

730 *CC: I'm sure! Say it!*

731

732 KAS: First of all, it's an honor to be interviewed. I don't know what anybody will make of anything I
733 have to say. I think one of the most important things in my life is that I have believed in people,
734 and part of that is because people believed in me. When Thelma Dickerson said, "Your
735 handwriting's terrible, sit down!" she had no doubts but that I could learn to write legibly; there
736 was no doubt there. It wasn't, *You are culturally deprived, you have been mistreated and*
737 *therefore you're handicapped.* I feel lucky that I came before that era when everybody decided all
738 the little Black kids were culturally deprived. I believe that young people, people forty years my
739 junior, are going to make the world a different place, if they can get a hold of it fast enough. I
740 think it's spinning out of control right now, and I think they don't know where to grab hold. I want
741 to see people in the streets again. This stuff that we're going through is just *insane*. All the way
742 from the banks, to the healthcare system, to just plain old taking care of people, just being friends
743 with people or respectful of people. You know, people are just—well, I think young people can
744 make a difference, I think they can, they can teach, they can teach *us*. Your world is different
745 from mine; it's not the same, and I can unlearn some things that I may need to unlearn. But I need
746 help in seeing what *this* world is like, and I can give some things to say this is what this has been

747 like, this is what the history has been, let's don't go there again, or let's try to avoid the worst part
748 of it all.

749

750 [Phone starts ringing]

751

752 KAS: Whoo that's terrible, that phone; it'll stop in a minute. One of the things that I learned, and I think it
753 comes out of...learned. *Realized*. I think it comes out of being born right before the war, or right
754 before we got into the war, because the war had already started. I realized at some point in time,
755 there was World War II [phone starts to ring] let me make sure that's not my mom.

756

757 [End of interview]

758 1:18.21