

Speaker 1:

All right, Mrs. Hopkins?

Colette Hopkins:

Yes.

Speaker 1:

Okay. I believe it is recording now. So I'm just going to ask you to state your name before we begin.

Colette Hopkins:

All right. My name is Colette Hopkins.

Speaker 1:

All right. Thank you so much for agreeing to participate in this project. As we've talked about in the past, our intention of it is to benefit the community, both now and in the future. And also, like I said, a few minutes ago, the goal of this questionnaire is really just to get as detailed responses as possible. So don't ever feel like you're saying too much, just, I'll ask you a question, answer it as thoroughly as you see fit. And I'll follow up when we'll go through the guide, right?

Colette Hopkins:

Okay.

Speaker 1:

All right. So this first section is about your early life. So tell me a little bit about your place of birth and about what was going on there, then and as you were growing up.

Colette Hopkins:

Well, I was born in the very segregated South. I was born in Columbia, South Carolina, Richland County. I was born at Waverley Hospital, which was the black hospital, and was born to a two parent family. My father was a community activist and my mother ultimately was an elementary school teacher. They met in high school and they attended this wonderful high school called Booker T. Washington High School. And they both attended Benedict College. My mother ultimately graduated from Benedict. My father did not graduate, but my two brothers also attended Benedict College. So we had kind of a history of attending historically black schools, particularly in South Carolina, because we could not attend, at that time, the University of South Carolina, because it was segregated. When I was going to high school, I should say I attended W.H. Burton Elementary School, which was my neighborhood elementary school.

I attended W.A. Perry Middle School or junior high school as they were called at that time. And both of those schools were all black, all black teachers, all black students. And they were all in my neighborhood. And I knew most of my teachers personally, we lived in the same community. They knew my parents. I was a good student. I was a good girl, a good little girl growing up. I had a great time. I went to preschool at this wonderful place. It was in the community and it was run by the Russell family. And that's where I learned to read. I was reading by three, I was precocious and just loved going to school. When I got to high school, my parents were asked would I participate in the integration of one of the local high schools, A.C. Flora High School.

I wasn't thrilled. I wanted to go to the black high school, C.A. Johnson High School. I knew it would be fun. My friends were going there, but my parents talked to me seriously about integrating A.C. Flora High School and a couple of my other "friends", mostly classmates, while also going to go, there going to be about five of us, I think. And they said that they would drive us there every day and drive us home. That was one of the horrible-est, horrible-est, if that is a word, time of my life, I was terrified the entire 9th grade, 10th grade, 11th grade and 12th grade, terrified. I don't even remember if I participated in graduation. It's kind of like I tried to ex that part out of my life. This coming year will be my 50th anniversary graduating from high school.

Well, I graduated in '69. So it's coming very soon, the anniversary of my having graduated from that particular high school. And when it was the 40th, they called and asked me if I would come back and I was like, "Glenn, I don't ever want to go back there." Such a horrible experience. I can't imagine having four years of that type of an experience, it was just so... The people, the teachers, the administration, the students were so cruel the entire time, I was afraid to go to the bathroom. I was afraid to go to my locker because people would push me and say horrible things to me and my grades were affected. The good thing was that I did extremely well on the SAT, and so schools were interested in my coming there. And as a result, I think, of going to A.C. Flora, I got a scholarship to go to Fisk and I accepted it almost immediately.

And there's a little story behind how that happened as well. But it was during the Vietnam War that I graduated from high school. And so my brothers in South Carolina... At that time we had every type of military installation in the world. We had five different major bases. Fort Jackson was there, The Marine Corps place was there right in South Carolina, Shaw Air Force Base. So a lot of the young men that I knew growing up were being drafted into the army. And the only deferment you had was if you were in school. And so my parents talked to me and told me that they had to have both of my brothers in school because we were stepladders. So if I turned 12, the next one was 13 and the next one was 14. So we were all in the same age group.

So while I was getting ready to go to college, they were also going to college. And so they were going to Benedict because, of course at that time they couldn't go to the University of South Carolina. So they were going to Benedict the same college that my parents attended. And it was a private HBCU and it was extensive. So they didn't have any money. There was no money for me and I wasn't going to be drafted. So if I wanted to go to college, I better get myself a scholarship. And so we went looking at the different colleges and I was getting offers because of my SAT scores. And even though my grades weren't what they should have been, they weren't bad grades. Because my father would always go to the school and fight with the teachers over why I was being graded a certain way.

I remember being in my French class and the lady said that my grammar, my French grammar, that I spoke it with a black accent. And my mama had taught me from growing up. So I spoke French very well, but that particular teacher always graded me low, even though my written exams would always come back very well. She would grade me very low on my accent. And you never forget those little things that happen during that period because that should have been the time when I was making friends, being engaged in clubs, all of that kind of stuff. And none of that happened, that did not happen. That was not my high school experience at all. So my going to college was for me a way to escape. And some of the white colleges at that time were trying to integrate and they were looking for students. And my mother suggested, in fact, she took me up to the University of Michigan. I almost laid on the floor and cried, said, "I am not going to sit for four more years, I'm going to a black school." And she said, "Well you better get a scholarship."

And one day I answered the telephone and this lady was calling me from Fisk University and asked if this was Colette Hopkins. And I said, yes. And she told me where she was calling from and that

she was calling to offer me a scholarship to go to Fisk. And when that happened, I was like, "Yes, I am going to Fisk." I didn't even bat an eye. I was just like, "I'm going to Fisk." And that's what I did. I went to Fisk and I had an amazing four years at Fisk. It was just... I read everything I'd ever wanted to read, I had the best teachers, they just spent a lot of time with me. They didn't understand that I had been in the desert, and that they had the water. That was how I felt. I'd been for four years in a desert where I was treated like a dog. I just want to say that. How people talk about... People would kick me, push me, say nasty things to me, write notes, grade me unfairly. It was horrid. But then when I got to Fisk, I was like, "Oh my gosh."

And I read everything. I had a ball. My first year was just... Of course, I made straight A's. I made straight A's because I wanted to be in everything, do everything. I met so many wonderful people, teachers. Teachers like Lu Outlaw. I didn't meet Lu when I was a first year student, he was not there. And my second year I got accepted to go to Africa, to study at the University of Abidjan and I went there and I was like, "Oh my goodness, this is like heaven." I fell in love. I fell absolutely in love with being in Africa and having friends, girlfriends, just, it was just wonderful. And I made friends with a lot of the other students who had traveled with me from the U.S. from Fisk. And it was like, "Oh my God, this is how it feels."

And then I came back and the second semester I spent an entire semester there, came back and that's when I met Lu Outlaw and here he is talking all of this stuff. And I was like telling him, "Chinua Achebe taught me when I was at the University of Abidjan." Because he was then, out of Nigeria. And my mouth knew everything. He enjoyed my being crazy and having a big mouth and speaking up and reading and he introduced me to a whole other body of literature to read. And we just became very good friends and ultimately colleagues.

So then I graduated from Fisk and I did graduate Summa cum laude, with honors. And I won a Watson fellowship, a Thomas J. Watson Fellowship. And everybody thought that I was going to get a Rhodes scholarship, but I didn't want that. I wanted the one where I could travel and not be kind of in one place. And this other guy, [Laten 00:12:52] Brown also wanted that scholarship. And so we were competing, competing. We were... they came on campus and did interviews and I got the Watson, which gave me an entire year. It actually gave me a year and a half because I went back to Africa, your money goes longer. So I flew into Europe, spent time there. Then I went to Africa and spent an entire year just going from country to country, looking at their education systems, looking at their teaching of young children, because I had done an education degree. Because after having had that terrible experience with teachers, I wanted to be a teacher and I wanted to be a fantastic teacher.

And so I went to Liberia, I went to Senegal. I went to all of these different... Nigeria, different countries and just wandered. Because that's what the Watson is about. It gives you a chance to work on your own independent project. And you just can't come back to the U.S. until you are done with the Watson. So I took an additional six months because my money went longer. And I just had a wonderful experience. When I came back to the U.S., I then went to graduate school at the [A Center 00:14:18] at Atlanta University. I'm still pursuing degrees in education. And when I finished that, I was going to just go straight into teaching, but I met this man. This man met me, I should say, an amazing man who owned this company and had a foundation. And his goal was to provide African-American students with scholarships, fellowships to get their doctorate, if they made the commitment to come back and teach at HBCU.

And I got one of those fellowships, but I had not applied to go on to get my doctorate at that time. And I went to Vanderbilt and met with their education department and they looked at my transcripts. I had always been a great student and they said, "All of our fellowship money is gone for this year." I said, "Oh, I'm not here asking me for money, I have money. And I have money to pay for me to

go all the way to get my doctorate." And so I ended up going to Vanderbilt and doing my doctorate there. And when I finished Vanderbilt, well, what I did was I got an internship on my last year at Vanderbilt with the then, new, very new U.S. Department of Education under Carol Bell.

And I went as a hearing officer, the Public Law for children with disabilities was just being passed. And so I went from city to city doing hearings and presentations on Public Law 94-142, The Education of the Handicapped Act, and came to Atlanta as part of that experience and decided this is where I wanted to be, ended up applying for a teaching job at Atlanta University, in the same department that I had matriculated in and the rest is history. So that's my growing up.

Speaker 1:

Yeah. Well, I definitely have some follow-up questions. I think one of the first ones that came up for me was your mentioning that your father was a community activist. It's interesting because everything you just said to me is a really great story about sort of how you evolved into a community activist, particularly, your investment in education as a result of having these horrible high school experiences. But I want to talk a little bit about your father. What kinds of things did he do as a community activist?

Colette Hopkins:

Well, he had been a student at Benedict College. My mom got pregnant. He was not able to support us and stay in school. So he went to work, and a lot of young men did this, he went to work at a country club. A lot of college guys would go to these country clubs, segregated country clubs, and be waiters, caddies, do all kinds of things and make very good money.

In fact, the tips were really good. My job, I remember, was always counting the tips, rolling the money into the little paper things and being able to tell him how much he made and, he thought it was cute. And I got a little bit of it for doing my little job. So while working there, I mean, the racism must've been amazing. He worked at Forest Lake Country Club and he would have these altercations, people would call him a nigger, "Hey nigger, come do this for me." Just all kinds of things. And he really could not handle that well. And one day my mother had a meeting with us, the kids, and said, "Your daddy cannot work there anymore because he can't take it." It was just destroying him.

And so he went in the opposite way. He started... One of my neighbors. I don't know if you know what his name was, I. DeQuincy Newman. And he was with Dr. King, the NAACP and all of this. And my father and him became really good friends. And my father ended up being the "President" of United Black Fund of Columbia (UBF). I don't know if you know that group, but that worked on voter registration, feed the hungry, housing for poor people. And it was like he found his natural self and that's what he did. And that made him happy... You hear my dogs, don't you?

Speaker 1:

I just heard that. Was that a growl?

Colette Hopkins:

Yeah, they're growling. Anyway, so that's what he did and my brothers joined him in that work and he didn't make a lot of money doing it, but he was so happy doing it. It just made... It was exactly what he needed to do with his life. And I loved that he did that. I mean, I was so proud of him. And even though we didn't have any money, we had a home. I always tell people I grew up as a young black person with an intact family. My mother and father were in the home, both of them were educated. And so what did I really have to complain about? Every day I saw my dad, even though my parents worked very hard,

they were always in the home with that. So I grew up in a stable African-American family. The literature would suggest that, that really didn't exist. But I did. And I grew up in a very stable African-American neighborhood. I knew my neighbors, the kids played out in the street.

We didn't fear that somebody was going to do anything to us inside our neighborhoods. And we would just... We didn't know that that was as abnormal as I've come to learn, as I grew up. But at that time I thought this was how everybody lived. Until one day I looked around in my class and I realized that I was probably the only young person sitting in there that had a daddy that was at home. You know what I'm saying? And that was like, "Wow, that's kind of strange. I didn't know that so many families didn't have daddies." That, that was unusual.

So that's what he was. He was a com... Voter registration, feeding people, housing people, if a black family got burned out, he would be there to try to find them emergency housing, to make sure that they had food, to make sure that they got furniture. That's what he did daily.

Speaker 1:

Wow. Wow. What about your mother? You said that they both worked very hard. Did your mother work outside the home as well?

Colette Hopkins:

Oh yes. She ultimately did graduate from Benedict, and then she and I actually graduated on the same day. Because remember I told you she got pregnant and so she dropped out of school, but she went back, she got her master's degree and she was a school teacher.

Speaker 1:

Excellent. Excellent. Did you know your grandparents?

Colette Hopkins:

Absolutely. Both sets.

Speaker 1:

What were they like?

Colette Hopkins:

My father's mother was an alcoholic and that created a lot of problems. She was not like people, on the street and everything, but it was very disturbing to watch that. She actually died in a car accident with my father, but she wasn't driving. She never drove or anything like that, but that made it difficult to have... She wanted to have a good relationship with her grandkids. But that was the hard part, was that she was an alcoholic. On my mother's side, my mother's mother, I didn't know my mother's father because he died before I was born. He died when my mother was a little girl, because my mother was the baby of 12 children. So I had aunts and cousins who was the age of my... But normally people would think your grandmother, but I knew my mother's mother and she lived next door to my mother's only brother.

And so they kind of took care of her as she aged. But she grew everything. She had gardens, she had fruit trees. And so it was always fun to go to her house and we could walk from our house to her

house. So I knew my grandparents and enjoyed them. And I have pictures of my daughter with my great grandmother, who turned 100 when my daughter was born.

Speaker 1:

Oh, wow, oh, wow. Well, you mentioned your neighborhood and I know that high school was a time when you didn't... That you didn't go to high school with the friends that you had, but did you spend time with them in the neighborhood and if so, what kinds of things did you do together?

Colette Hopkins:

We played, we spent the night at each other's homes. I had a really typical relationship with my girlfriends from even preschool. We are still friends now. We've been friends for 60 years and we'll die as friends. Even the kids that I went to A.C. Flora with are still my friends. And two of them actually ended up going to Fisk with me. We all ended ... Two of them also went to Fisk at the same time with me. So we all escaped A.C. Flora. So I still have relationships with my friends that I grew up with. And when I'm home, my neighbors come over, looking for me. Because I still own my mother's house. My mother lives with me now, she's lived with me for 20 years, so we still have her.

PART 1 OF 4 ENDS [00:26:04]

Colette Hopkins:

It's for 20 years, but so we still have her home. So when I go home, I still see the people I grew up with.

Speaker 1:

Wonderful, wonderful.

Colette Hopkins:

They stopped by they said, when you come in, when you're going to be here, don't come and don't tell nobody, we're country. So they'll be real mad at me.

Speaker 1:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Colette Hopkins:

Always thinks it's funny. I go home and in two days, I see all of these people, I drive East Coast by that the Hopkins South Carolina drive all of these different places to see my friends.

Speaker 1:

Mm-hmm (affirmative) Your mother's neighborhood is it still predominantly black, is it-

Colette Hopkins:

Absolutely.

Speaker 1:

Oh, no! That's awesome. And was it in Columbia proper? Was it in the outskirts?

Colette Hopkins:

It's right in the middle of Columbia?

Speaker 1:

Oh, Wow, that's wonderful. Just a couple more questions about your younger years. Did you have sort of favorite songs or television programs or?-

Colette Hopkins:

We were the family that played music all the time and we danced. We would move the furniture in the living room because my parents loved to dance and they loved to party. So music was definitely more important to us than TV. We had a TV, but we knew the Drifters and my father, remember I told you, he was a waiter, when he was in school, in the summer he would go to the beaches Atlantic beach and down in that area and work the parties.

And we always said that was doing the commerce segregation. And so we would stay in these small motels for blacks. And it was always funny that the guys who would be performing for the parties, the black guys, they would stay in the same hotel.

So the Drifters, all of these groups that people would hear on the music, I didn't know that that was a big deal. My mom knew that it was a big deal, but these black groups were staying in the same hotels as the people who were waiting and my father and they would stay up all night talking trash, smoking cigarettes, gambling, and then we'd all go to the beach.

It was fine that, and I have pictures of me with my mom and my dad on the beaches, on Atlantic beach during that period. And it was just, it was good. So that music from that era was the soundtrack of my life. And I still enjoy that music. So yeah, so we were that family, people would come over to the house. My parents were always extremely social. They had all of their friends, have house parties at different people's houses.

And so even though I was at that horrible school, I still had my life outside of the school. And so when I got to be a senior in high school, like all my other friends who weren't at that horrible high school, I was a debutante for the Delta's I went through all that kind of stuff.

So I still had my social life.

Speaker 1:

Wonderful. Wonderful. Do you remember like meeting a specific, well you said that when you... When it was happening you weren't aware that these famous people, but it would be a particular person you met that you really liked their music or you thought they were handsome or whatever the case may be to you.

Colette Hopkins:

This is going to sound funny. And I love this little aspect. My mother used to do makeup for gay men who would come to our house. I don't know how that happened, but different guys who would need to be made up for their shows. And I always found that fascinating because black gay men is, back then they will call sissy, but that's who she would make them up, make up their face and see their hair and everything in the kitchen, in our kitchen.

I was like, wow.

Speaker 1:

Right. That is interesting. Particularly given the time period.

Colette Hopkins:

Absolutely.

Speaker 1:

Wow. Yeah.

Colette Hopkins:

[inaudible 00:30:44] My parents is being extremely progressive and engaged in the community and what it's so funny, I take my mom to South Carolina once a month to play Pitino. I don't know if you know this and some of the people they have been doing this together, for maybe 60 years.

I'm not sure how long, but I've known some of these same people. They've known me since I was a tiny little girl. And so when I take my mom and I take my granddaughter with me, she's the official mascot of the Pitino club. And we're sitting there playing with people who are in their 80s and 70s.

And some of them have daughters just like me, the people who were in there within also chemo club and she was in a bridge club and you know, all of those things, so very social. So I never grew up thinking, you don't talk to this person, you don't do this. You don't, we were always in the mix, doing this, doing that.

Speaker 1:

Oh, wow. How far is Columbia from Atlanta?

Colette Hopkins:

Three and a half hours, one [crosstalk 00:32:03]

Speaker 1:

Oh, yeah. Say it again.

Colette Hopkins:

I said, ask me how I know that three and a half hours.

Speaker 1:

Oh my goodness. Oh, wow. That's awesome. So you have a family who like a long life... Your mother's life sounds very full, not just long, but also full, which is wonderful.

Colette Hopkins:

And very much engaged in community. And I always enjoyed that. Always recognized that this is really how you live your life and I'm married to someone who's not as, quite as outgoing as I am, but he's now used to me after 30 years and a neighbor across the street and he'll say, how do you know this person?

I'm all up in everybody's business, if we go pick up. Now he has to go pick up sometimes when he picks up our granddaughter, a little girl who lives across the street will drive somebody to the grocery

store. They're not going to do and say, so and so and so, can you watch my dog?, or can you do this?. So we're that those people in this, in the neighborhood that we've lived in for 30 years,

Speaker 1:

Mm-hmm (affirmative) That's awesome. Well, actually, I'm going to segue into some questions about communities and activism. So I know that I definitely know about the high school experience, but was that the first time you were consciously aware of issues concerning race or did that happen before?

Colette Hopkins:

Oh, no, I knew about that. I mean, given who my father was, I definitely knew about that before going to high school. I mean, like I said, I was on the beach, staying in a segregated, tiny little hotel and you could see the fancy hotels where white people stayed. So I grew up seeing the disparity between the way blacks lived and were treated and how whites lived and how they treated black people. And then, it was during that airway, if you turned on the TV, there is no way that you did not know what was going on in terms of, the right to vote and from Thurman was there during the time that I was growing up.

So it was, it was always in your face.

Speaker 1:

Mm-hmm (affirmative) So what experiences, certainly from the high school had an impact, but what other experiences shaped your awakening conscience about consciousness, about the need to make a difference and improve African-Americans lives?

Colette Hopkins:

Well, watching my father, I think my father treatment left a mark on me and my mother was one of the first black teachers to teach in an all white school. And so, she had to go through all kinds of, hearing young kids say things to her as a teacher and their parents not wanting her to teach their children.

[inaudible 00:35:37] With that kind of, backdrop. And then I should mention to you, my father's beautiful, more so then [inaudible 00:35:50]

Worked that cotton as long as she could. And when we were there, we, helped she had pigs and all of that around. So, I mean, the disparity was in your face. It wasn't like only if you made the choice not to recognize what was happening.

How people talk to you when you went into the stores and there was a separate street that blacks shopped on assembly street in South Carolina. You did not go on main street to shop, you walk into the wrong place and people would basically tell you to get out.

[inaudible 00:36:51] They made her life hell, just because she tried to not be. And the high school I went to, the governor's daughter, Robin also attended that high school and she was in that clip that was just mean and vicious and the mean girl group. And I would, I would say, wow-

Speaker 1:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Colette Hopkins:

[inaudible 00:37:35] Robin McNair.

Speaker 1:

Wow. The governor's daughter.

Colette Hopkins:

The governor's well, so it was the high school that they asked us that the NAACP asked that we attempt during that period.

Speaker 1:

Goodness, goodness. So, Oh, go ahead.

Colette Hopkins:

I loved it when, for the 40th, somebody that young person called me. So I'm waiting for the 50th, for the person to call me again and say, will you? No, no, no and no. And we're all still alive, the group of us. And we keep in touch, we know each other, the black kids who went there and we keep in touch, but they may go back. But I won't.

Speaker 1:

I understand. Yeah. I think it sounds like an awkward experience. And to go through that for four years, like your entire high school careers sounds overwhelming.

Colette Hopkins:

The first year was the worst. It was the worst. But after that, it kind of just got a pattern. You knew what you did and what you didn't do, where to sit, not to sit, if your grade was screwed up because the teacher was evil, you just said, Oh, whatever, and you just did the best you could, you survived it.

Speaker 1:

So your grades were, I think when you first said it, my first thought was like, Oh, your grades were affected because you were under so much stress. But it, it was actually because you were being like penalized for basically being there, like the French teacher.

Colette Hopkins:

Yeah. Every, every era was magnified. But, after a while, the teachers had to accept that I was really smart, they just had to say, "well, she actually does the work, like in math" what do you, how do you turn math into not the greatest supposed to be.

Speaker 1:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Colette Hopkins:

And so, you might say in an essay, well, this isn't the topic or wasn't well-written and something like that. But with math, with other things, it got to be like, okay, she's smart. So I ended up in the honest society and [crosstalk 00:40:12] yeah. I mean, what do you do when you don't have a life? You feel [inaudible 00:14:20].

Speaker 1:

Mm-hmm (affirmative) Did you read a lot in high school. Like you did-

Colette Hopkins:

I read a lot, period. My mom's a reader and always loved books and that's, that's part of my addiction is reading and I hate it. I think, like so many wonderful books in so little time.

Speaker 1:

Yeah. Yes. I feel that way all the time.

Colette Hopkins:

I don't even want, I get the New York times and I get the book section. I just hope every Sunday that there's not a book in there that I feel like I have to read because I mean, I just, I have, well, you can, if you saw the room I'm sitting in now, you would say, Oh my God. Can you see her books.

Speaker 1:

Oh my God [inaudible 00:41:14].

Colette Hopkins:

And I know you would get books.

Speaker 1:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Colette Hopkins:

So many great children's books out there.

Speaker 1:

Oh, that's true. I think I've always wanted to read Jacqueline Woodson who I think recently won-

Colette Hopkins:

Yes.

Speaker 1:

Yeah.

Colette Hopkins:

I have it on my, in my living room. I actually met her a few times.

Speaker 1:

Oh wow.

Colette Hopkins:

Yeah [inaudible 00:41:38] and I do this children's film festival and we've used some of her books. Some of her books have been converted for children have been converted into film and we've done a [Decklin Woodson 00:00:42:17] film festival for children.

Speaker 1:

Oh. In Atlanta?

Colette Hopkins:

In Atlanta.

Speaker 1:

That's awesome.

Colette Hopkins:

It is awesome. Her books were awesome. Her work is awesome.

Speaker 1:

I guess I've I have, I have not had the time, but she is one of the children's authors that I wanted to read.

Colette Hopkins:

Well, [crosstalk 00:42:12] read her. Her last book is just an amazing piece. So I won't spoil it for you. One book on bullying for children. And it's in it this little girl, and this little girl at the end of it, she is just so disappointed in herself.

Speaker 1:

Because she was a bully.

Colette Hopkins:

She was a bully it never gave the exact term, but that's what it represents that she was a bully to a little child who, never had the right clothes, never had the right supplies who tried to be friend to her. But because she wasn't like her, and I say, "oh my goodness. I love this with children because it opens the door to, because kids can be"

Speaker 1:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Colette Hopkins:

[inaudible 00:43:07] and so it gives you a way to talk about those things. But yeah, her films and her books for kids, you can get them through Scholastic.

Speaker 1:

Oh, okay.

Colette Hopkins:

Yeah.

Speaker 1:

I didn't realize Scholastic was still around.

Colette Hopkins:

Scholastic is still around and they send me their catalog because they know I'm one of their best customers. My husband should fire me.

Speaker 1:

Oh my goodness. Oh yeah. Well, I definitely want to get to, I definitely want to get to your current license. Some of the things you're doing, but, and going to start with just some questions regards about IDW. When and how did you get involved with IDW?

Colette Hopkins:

Okay. I think they're two different stories around this. How would Datsun for example, was working on his dissertation and he had to do some research in South Carolina and he needed a place to stay while there. And so I told him, I said he could stay at my parents house. You can have my room because I'm going to be gone. I think I was going to be an Africa for that year. And he said, "are you serious?" And so he hooked that with my daddy. They loved each other because they could talk crap for hours together. Just talk about this thing in history and this and how it's so smart.

My father just loved him. So he lived at my house for, I think, I don't even know how long, maybe a semester or something. And he went through all my stuff and I told him I was going to kick his tail of that bit.

But anyway, and so I knew Howard and then I was at Atlanta university in graduate school, working on my masters and my EDS at that time. And I lived in the dorm directly across the street from IDW. And my father told me that I had to volunteer. He said, you have to go, go across the street and volunteer. And so I did, I got there, got settled in my dorm room, walked across the street. And for two years, while I was in graduate school, I volunteered there and they didn't make a distinction between my being a volunteer and being a staff.

They were glad to have me, I had some skills and I was consistent. I was one of those good volunteers. I would come every day. I probably would just drop out of school and just stay there if I could have gotten away with it, but I could not. So I could, I would go across the street every day and I was babysitting for [Al Josie 00:21:01]. I think you've already interviewed her.

Speaker 1:

Mm-hmm (affirmative) I have.

Colette Hopkins:

So I was babysitting for [Al Josie 00:00:46:46] because she lived across the street from the dorm in the opposite direction. And her husband was on faculty in the school of social work. And so I would babysit for her and be at IDW.

So my life was an IDW life, between [Al Josie 00:20:58] and volunteering, I was always in that network of people and became really good friends with Vincent Harding and you know, the people who

were actually physically in the building now, because I was a grad student, I was much younger than most of them. But [Molly eco 00:00:47:17] was the baby of the group, [Molly eco 00:00:47:33] [Inaudible 00:47:17]. And that's where I've met [Molly eco 00:00:47:33], even though she was assistant student at Clark, I didn't know her because Clark was across the street. It was undergraduate. And I was on the other side of the street in the graduate program, but I met her there and some of the people who are now in the IDW group, which is what we talk about here in Atlanta, we were like a little group.

I didn't know them as much from IDW as I did know them in the community. So, so I had a personal relationship with Howard through my family. And then I knew some of them from other things that they were doing in the community. And then I got to know them at IDW as well, but [Sue rocks 00:48:36], I didn't know at all, until much later I met Sue because I was her mother's work study student in the school of social work and talked about Sue constantly. So when Sue moved back to Atlanta was when I met her, but I didn't meet her at IDW.

Speaker 1:

So was she away of school or?

Colette Hopkins:

Yeah she was away at school? She would go to California to school.

Speaker 1:

Oh, okay. All right. Interesting. What was your role? Did you have like a designated title as a volunteer were you-

Colette Hopkins:

Yeah.

Speaker 1:

Okay. What did you do?

Colette Hopkins:

Whatever they told me to do and what they, they liked that I did was I could listen to a lot of times the guys and, that there was an issue about female and male relationships at IDW. Women were the worker bees and the men were the think tank and people I'm sure that [Pat Daly 00:00:49:27] talked to you about that, did she?

Speaker 1:

She didn't.

Colette Hopkins:

[inaudible 00:49:25]Pat was on it cogs on it. See I would think I'm going to be honest. Pat was probably the first feminist that I met in my life because she would, I mean, they would have meetings and when we would be expected to bring the coffee, to make the coffee. And Patty was like, hell no.

And I loved it. I loved it. And she would call them chauvinists. And she added to my vocabulary and my understanding of male/female relationships. You're like, who the hell do you think you are?

And the difference is in pay. And all of that was called to my attention because of the IDW. The women of IDW is how they refer to themselves. The women of IDW who, would raise those kinds of issues around, equity and position titles. And just the whole thing around you will not be talking about freedom and inflates me, you can't be out here talking to shit and then you come home and, IDW was home and then, act like you got carbons. We ain't no servants we're here working. And our work has as much value as yours.

It's different, but it has as much value. And, we, and it was true. We were very smart women and we're all very smart, very intelligent, and our contribution is equal to yours. And so why are we not being paid equitably? How can you have these meetings and exclude us that kind of thing.

That was just really, I was rageful when that whole thing came about in terms of women, I didn't even, I wasn't even aware of it because here I'm coming from a home where my mother was the most educated. She was the primary bread winner because my father was out doing community work. First check was the one that, so I grew up thinking, this is how it was, I didn't, I didn't know that it was so much tension around it until I was put into that setting at IDW and I was like, wow, I'm getting another education. This is good.

So I was.

PART 2 OF 4 ENDS [00:52:04]

Colette Hopkins:

So I was the person. I never got paid by IBW I was getting money through my different fellowships and things like that. So I didn't really need money people say, probably needed it just too dumb not to understand that could have asked for it, but I was volunteering and this was my role was to do whatever I was asked to do. That was reasonable. And people were very reasonable and, a very good group to work with. And then B my consistently assigned duty was to help fade Bellamy with the transcription of the different tapes, because, the people that would be doing the IBW papers and things rarely wrote things out long handed, but they would create tapes and then the tape would be transcribed and then they would edit what had been transcribed, and then we'd make the final pieces.

And then it would go to the official editors who would go through it. And they had some wonderful editors, and I've always admired Molly eco because even back then, cause she was like 16. When she came to IBW, even back then she was the words, Smith, just amazing. And then they would come out and people, and I would look at things that would be published, because we had our own printing press. The Don Edwards was the person working the printing press. He had his own little shop and I didn't understand how any of the equipment worked on that side of the world, but in the things would come out and it would be like, wow look at this

Speaker 1:

What were some of your favorite aspects of working there? I know you mentioned Pat who, were very vocal about things and you appreciated that. What were some of the other favorite things you enjoyed about working

Colette Hopkins:

The conversity it was never, being in a place where, people talked about ideas and not about individuals. It was always so refreshing and people the things that we were publishing everybody in the room read, but they also read other things and would call it to your attention. There was a bookstore at

IBW. So, I'm a busy a file, right? Like you, and I'm reading and I'm reading stuff that I never heard of, and authors and I never seen an international people that, I was in a candy store, almost becoming diabetic. I was eating stuff.

But it was so refreshing. And then the people would come, people would come to Atlanta of course, because, what's the civil rights era and people would come to Atlanta and they would always come to IBW. They would come there because Vincent was there and Bill and Bobby were there, they would come, they would really come in whenever there were conferences, we would set up our books for sale. And, as a volunteer, I would be one of the ones working the book tables.

And, you would have to be able to tell people they would ask, well, what is this book about? And, you had to read everything and talked about it so that you could really sell it to people. And yes, it was, perfect match for me. It felt that I was learning and growing. And I was around people who were not petty. There was very little pettiness going on. And, in many work environments that what goes on night and day. These people were there trying to change the world. It was like pinky and the brain, every day, sat up and tried to change the world and I want it.

Speaker 1:

Wow. Is there a particular book you remember reading from that time? That was,

Colette Hopkins:

Oh, there was so many. For me at that time, working on the Walter Rodney stuff, How Europe Underdeveloped Africa, that book, but even the thought of that book ,It just changed how you look at everything. And remember, by this time that I was at IBW. I had been to Africa, I've been there at all times. And a lot of people that I work with at IBW had never been to Africa. I mean, even though I could talk about Africa being, I could use the Gil Scott Heron thing that we're in Africa right here.

So wherever we are aware of African people, this is after put your flag down, this is where you are. But I mean, they had never physically been in Nigeria, to see where whites lived and where blacks lived. They'd never been in the ivory coast, is the hoteling and it's very francophone is the plateau very Francophone. And then go to where, the people who own this country lived in many instances. The fabulous mansions that people would build and all of this.

So, having seen this and having gone to the university of Abuja, to come back and read and hear people talking about that at that time, I had not yet been to the Caribbean to see that part of it later on, I got to .I traveled, I traveled a lot and I've traveled at one point, my husband and I were counting how many different countries that I've been to, not just to walk in, but to come in time and to have had that experience and then come and have the intellectual experience. Wow. It was amazing. It was an amazing period, a growth theory intellectually, it was like, I got a different, another degree.

Speaker 1:

What were some of your least favorite things about working at IBW?

Colette Hopkins:

The fear, because we, bomb scares that kind of stuff, feeling like you couldn't predict what was going to happen. It was a hard time as well as a great time. Watching wAs, and I think too, once you have a certain level of understanding about oppression, it's hard to watch how African-Americans participate in their own oppression. It's one thing that somebody else is doing it, but when we're doing it to ourselves, so we doing all, making all kinds of crazy decisions and not supporting institutions and just not being

fundamentally good to our own communities. That's the hard part of once you understand, and you see things through a different lens, it's really hard to just keep going, and keep the enthusiasm. It's really, really hard. You once you, it's like that little stir, I was just talking to you about Jacqueline Woodson story.

Watching this little girl, oppressed a little girl who had nothing but wanted to just be her friend and this girl waited too long to get her act together and could not do it. That's how now as an adult, you're seeing it. You see what we're doing to our children, to our community. We see our elected officials, being no better than anyone else, and so certain things you don't want to know, but you can't put your head in the sand, but you see it and you feel it repeatedly. And the crime, the lack of education, the lack of health care, all of these things, this is not a lot has changed. A lot has changed, but the quality of life of many African-Americans and just people in general just hasn't changed.

Speaker 1:

Definitely agree with that. so let's see. Kevin, I'm going to ask you a little bit about the women. I think there in, during the conversation we had in December. You said that May Bellamy Who, with whom You helped to transcribe, How Europe underdeveloped Africa was sort of one of the people you were closest to. And I wanted to let you talk a little bit about that friendship, but also just about the other, like friendships with women that you made while at IBW. What were they like?

Colette Hopkins:

I still have, and that's the thing. The good part is I don't know how to really probably articulate it clearly, but when I am a woman ness. So I probably have, I want to say hundreds of women, friends. Unlike a lot of women who would say, you can't have friends, you can't have women as friends and stuff like that.

But I have always had women as friends from, like I said, my best friend in preschool is still my friend. When I go to South Carolina, if I don't tell her I'm going to be there, she's going to be upset that she didn't, even if we talk on the phone, I email a text at 10 pictures constantly. She wants to see me when I am dead. Now, if there's a emergency active, well, my mom got sick of him. She may understand that. But if there for a weekend, and I don't tell her that I'm in town, she is hurt. And the same thing's true about, so that's preschool, elementary school, middle school. Like I mentioned, the young people that were with me when I was at that horrible high school, my friends from college, my friends that I met when I moved to Atlanta, the IBW friends.

Molly eco comes to town and she expects to see us. We had dinner together. We go out, and we sit there for two or three hours. And we talk as if we saw each other yesterday. If we need something, my daughter came to town and she needed a place to stay. She stayed at [inaudible 01:04:47] , you know what I'm saying? So it's that kind of relationship. So I look at people who said you can't have women as friends. I'm look at them and say, something's wrong with you.

You can't have women as friends, you've got a problem. Because if it wasn't for my women, friends, my husband, doesn't always like to go out with me. He always, I have this one friend Deidre and he says, call Deidre and ask if she wants to go see that movie. I call Deider She says, I'm coming to pick you up. I'm on my way. And he knows four hours later, I'm going to come back home. I'll go see the movies. He's going to go out for a drink. I go out for dinner or do whatever. But, I have friends who are women that are intelligent, that I trust, that I trust my children with them. Sue Ross is my son's other mother. We used to go out and take markets out. And even though he doesn't look like me, he looks more like her than me.

And everybody always says to Sue, that's your son. And so we made an agreement. Marcus belongs to Sue. So when he's going to play or he's singing or doing whatever, they are just going to go and they're going to take their picture and they're going to send me a picture of them together. So we share children, we share all kinds of things. And so I think that one of the things that I learned very early was that you don't, that whole concept of how women treat other women. We have to demonstrate that, that's not true we describe it to our children and our relationships. We are friends and we can be friends forever. One time, my friend Deidre, his car broke down. I said, well we have two cars, come get Trevor's car, not my car.

And he did. I hope that's really risky. I said, if Deidre was, a drunk or whatever, I probably wouldn't have said that, but I did take care of things if she was in a bad way. And so she came and got his car and did what she had to do, brought the car back and she was gone. It wasn't a big deal, it it was just what was supposed to be done. But that's how that relationship with the women of IBW. And we did make Bill Dorsey an official woman. So he can be a part of us every time we all go out there, Dorsey is there.

Speaker 1:

In what way? What kinds of relationships did you have with the women while you were at IBW?

Colette Hopkins:

I did say, I cleaned the houses. I helped them with whatever project they were working on. When one of them route that you didn't get the interview because she was much older than I, when she was in a senior facility, I would go and visit her and just, talk with her. Do whatever, you just, as far as I was concerned, they were my non-biological sisters. And that's how I referred to most of my friends, because I don't have biological sisters.

Speaker 1:

Just the two brothers?

Colette Hopkins:

Yes.

Speaker 1:

Wow that's Wonderful and also inspiring because that's the thing I've been thinking about a lot lately. The communities that we term a part and the women and how we share supporting each other. I think that's so it's like vital. You it's, I don't know how I would live without those networks and those support systems. So, and it's wonderful to hear.

Colette Hopkins:

It's kind of funny to pass it on to the next generation because we don't really trust each other and I'm not talking about we, my friends, I'm talking about we as a community. For people to witness trust and caring and long-term relationship. One of our friends, my husband retired about a few weeks ago. One of our friends, they're now married and they came and somebody says, well, how long have you known Colette? And she turned and looked at me. She says, how long have you been married? I said, 30 years. He says a little over 30 years because they remembered when Trevor and I met. And we remembered

when they met and, and every child that they have, and they know our kids and the long term healthy relationships.

You need something. If you don't call, then you didn't do the friendship justice. Don't be sick and not tell me, don't be broke and not tell me, tell me what you need. And maybe I can help you. So it's that, it's not just the superficial, let's go have a drink or let's go have dinner. Let's truly be friends and support each other. And I think about my different jobs that in many instances, it's my friend who called me on the phone and say, Hey, I got this prize here. I got this going on. I think, I'd like for you to participate in it. I want to help you come to meet you are the one.

Speaker 1:

Wonderful. But I have a follow-up question about IBW. So people describe it as a place where like various philosophies and ideologies emerge, converge, sorry. Things like nationalism, integrationism, other kinds of political philosophies, aside from the sort of these expected gender roles that different between men and women. What other kinds of competing vision did you see among the members? Were there moments when there were sort of disagreements about how to achieve things or like how to go about it?

Colette Hopkins:

Hey, every conversation I like it because people, I mean, there was, I don't think there was a shy person in the building. And so people would state their ideas, their opinions. But I, what I loved was they would quote things from books and I loved it. And people would arm themselves for these discussions. You didn't. And when I say armed, I'm not talking about weapons, but you would go in, you would have stayed up all night reading to make sure that you are articulated and quoted it correctly. Because if you didn't, they know that they're coming for you. But, I think about, the discussions would be seated. They would never be disrespectful. Other people's ideas where to be respected. And, if you defer, it did not mean that that person's idea, would not worthy of consideration. But I mean, in house, it was constant back and forth about everything, which I love too. That was interesting. And then you say, okay, I'm coming to your house tonight for dinner and the conversation might continue over dinner,

But it Was always in the spirit of we can talk about innate things. But the, what was also true is that I don't want to say that everything was politicized, but almost everything was how you lived, how you spent your money. It taught me so many things, how you educated your children

Because there was the learning house school, a block away from IBW. And most of the people who had children in that age group, that's where their kids went to school because they knew the types of things that they would be exposed to. And so it, here I am an educator and I'm taking all of this in. that it's not by chance that they picked that particular school. It was because they wanted their children to be treated a certain way. And at a very young age to be exposed to, Africa, things, Africans, who were the heroes? what holidays did you celebrate? all of that. It was all in one. It wasn't separate. Your polit, your politics were not what you talked about. It was how you lived your life. And that was ingrained.

Where did you buy your food? How did you spend your money? We didn't have much money. Nobody there had much money. Even the people who, were the ones being paid, had very little money because, most of your money went to the struggle. In some way or another, I went to help somebody. So politics weren't separate from what you were doing that. And I think if people observed that they would have problems with the contradiction, it's like nobody smoked, are you spending money on cigarettes are you crazy? No, nobody smoked. Now. They did weed. A lot of weed. That Was a whole different conversation.

Speaker 1:

I think you, you may be the person who ever, who Has said that this far is interesting.

Colette Hopkins:

Oh, they did. But, many of them were vegans and vegetarians. We wore African clothing, not as a fashion statement, but as it was part of our political statements, you didn't just put on any t-shirts, you thought about it, you thought about what was what's on your chest. What, what message are you giving to others about who you are? So it was constant. It wasn't political conversations for the sake of conversations. It was in terms of everybody growing and developing and being able to do your, and to understand what you were doing and the importance of how all of this fit together. So you lived it, you didn't just talk it. And, and when, people thought that was going on, that would then be a reason for a conversation.

Now, I, be politically correct, like when we were talking about Pat and how women were being treated and how, if you worked on something, your name should be included in it, it should not be separate from only one person's name on something. So all of those kinds of things were part of the daily kinds of conversations that we would have. And when people, you know, like when the money got funny, everybody tried to figure out how do we support this family? Who's part of our family. You're not going to suffer because there's no money. We'll figure this out.

Speaker 1:

Wonderful, Actually I wanted to ask you because when I speak to women of IBW, I always hear, here and there, I hear things about the learning house. Tell me a little bit more about.

PART 3 OF 4 ENDS [01:18:04]

Speaker 1:

It was about the Learning House. Tell me a little bit more about that, was it affiliated with IBW? Who established it?

Colette Hopkins:

It was [inaudible 01:18:14] affiliated with IBW. This wonderful sister named [Amuyiwa Steg 00:01:18:20] who attended [SISC 00:01:25], this looks like she did.

She had this sense of how do you teach young people, at this age, when they're very young, such that they end up being conscious beings. We don't fight, we share. We eat healthy. We don't play cops and robbers with freaking guns when we play, we play how do we make unity? We play certain songs. We learn about ourselves as African people in the start from both to... I guess when they would go off to school. I did not have a [problem 01:19:18], but I got to know Amuyiwa and her husband [Eugene 01:19:22] and they had three children. But the world changes you. So I don't want to be too romantic about what they were doing. I wanted to recognize how much hard work went into their caring for other people's children.

Speaker 1:

Good. Thank you. Thank you. So, speaking of education, a lot of people talk about IBW, the ways that it has helped establish black studies as a discipline, how it was a resource for politicians and grassroots organizations at the same time. Do you think IBW achieved its mission?

Colette Hopkins:

Absolutely. I think if you just look at who these individuals were. Howard, ended up as chief of the Schomburg. You understand what I'm saying? That is amazing. And I went up with him, I didn't go up full time, but I would come up in the summer and did his Summer Institute for Educators. And a lot of my friends in New York were people that I met through doing that work, at the Schomburg. And you think about Vincent and the work that he produced. Bobby, the [Gavi 01:20:59] papers. Are you serious?

Oh my God. If you put all of these pieces together, Molly [Ica 01:21:08] and her work as a publisher, as an editor and it's ongoing and I love it. I love it. Sue Ross and her photography. She has an exhibit up here now, 20 years of photography work in Atlanta. And she had everybody, I mean, amazing. She has a book out about the women she's photographed, it's amazing. It's just unbelievable who walked through those doors and who these people are and what they've contributed, not just to IBW, but to the greater society.

Speaker 1:

Wonderful, wonderful. Are there any ways in which IBW did not achieve its mission? In your opinion, are there other things they could have done or should have done?

Colette Hopkins:

Oh, there's always that. You could always talk about that side of it, but I don't think that certain institutions are meant to live forever. I do believe that there were certain things that could have been done better, smarter, wiser. You can always look back and critique but I think it served a purpose, it was an important institution, and I think that people there the ones who... I look at Betty Chaney, as a playwright now, she's not super famous, but her work is meticulous. I look at Jillian and her books and her films. These people are doing important work still, it's different from what they did at IBW, but it is IBW that gave them the vision, so if they just continue to be whoever they are, it's wonderful, it's amazing.

And then we're rearing the next generation, I look at my own children and I'm so proud of them that they're articulate, political, engaged, all of those things. And now, I have grandchildren that we're putting these little stamps on as well. And so I don't think that the brick and mortar part of it is gone, that's gone. But what we learned from that is how we live our lives and the quality of life that we are living. And I don't see any of us sitting on our hands saying, woe is me. Everybody's engaged in whatever it is that they do. And they're passionate and amazing people. I love it.

Speaker 1:

Hmm. Wonderful. Yeah. I think the first time we spoke, you said something I think was just really powerful, "Institutions don't really die or when they do, they only die if we let them die. So it's what you do afterwards that keeps that legacy alive."

Colette Hopkins:

Yeah. You keep walking forward, you can't walk backwards. Why would I want to do that? So what I want to do is touch the next two generations and share. And I do love it when young people ask me, "So how did you figure out who you were going to be? How did you do this and this and this and that. Why did you do that?" And all of that comes from having experiences like being around these individuals and being at that particular institution.

Speaker 1:

Mm-hmm (affirmative) Wonderful. You said you were at IBW for two years. Did you leave once your graduate work was done? What made you leave?

Colette Hopkins:

Well, I went to graduate school, I went to Vanderbilt. I went to work on my doctorate. That's what happened.

Speaker 1:

That's how you left. Okay.

Colette Hopkins:

[crosstalk 01:25:37] back to Atlanta when I finished, I knew that. Yes, but I went to do my graduate work, then I went to Washington and then I came back to Atlanta.

Speaker 1:

Washington D.C. or Washington State?

Colette Hopkins:

Washington, DC. Remember I told you I went to the U.S. Department of ED.

Speaker 1:

Oh, wow. Let me see. You may have answered my follow-up question. In your words, when did the IBW close and why? And I know we've talked about it as an institution and the people who are still moving on and doing work, but when did you hear about it closing? What happened around that time?

Colette Hopkins:

Well, the money, people needed to be paid the bomb threat. It was a lot going on during that era. I wasn't there when it officially closed, but you could predict that people had to get other jobs if they could not be paid and those kinds of things.

Speaker 1:

Hmm. So, Yeah. Thank you. Thank you. I'm going to shift into some questions about your mini travels, which I'm personally interested in because I find myself doing more of that now and travel makes me anxious. So I'm interested in hearing about where you went and some of your experiences there, let's talk about that. So when you went to the University of Abidjan, was the Ivory Coast sort of the first foreign country you visited or had you been other places?

Colette Hopkins:

It was the first foreign country that I visited.

Speaker 1:

What were your impressions? [crosstalk 01:27:40] Oh, I'm sorry, go on.

Colette Hopkins:

Oh, I loved it. I was so excited. I was glad that I went with a group though, because there were about, I think about 10 of us, [Jen, Mae 00:09:51], there were about 10 of us. And I think there were two men, so there were eight women and we shared rooms. My roommate was my classmate at school and it was amazing. I was so glad that I could afford to do it, that my parents made it possible. My mother was so excited and a lot of people questioned, "Why is she going to Africa?" That kind of crazy stuff. But my mother said, "Oh no, she's going to have a bomb. Go learn everything." And that's what I tried to do. I was there during the time when the University of Abidjan was the major francophone university on the continent.

So some of everybody was there. I loved... It was so different from, [SISC 00:10:57], in the way that it was very European in how we were taught. The lecturer would come in and they would stand at the front of the room and lecture and leave, class is over. And if you got it, great, if you didn't, you weren't going to see that person again until the next week. And the interesting thing was, of course I had taken French before I went, but did I understand French to that level? No, so I had to really work on my French. And then there were very subtle differences in how things were spoken in France. My teacher, and the person who traveled with her, was from France. And so the French language as spoken in the Ivory Coast at that time was a little bit different. But what I loved about it was that because of the scholars who were there, so many people came from other countries and I loved that.

So I got to meet friends from other countries and I knew that I was going to come back to Abidjan. I knew it when I left, yes I did, there's no way I'm not coming back to this country. I didn't know I was going to get a Watson, I didn't even know at that time what a Watson was, but I knew that I was going to come back because I just loved it so much. That was a semester, that was my first experience out of the United States and my first experience on the continent. All of these beautiful women, I had no idea what I was going experience. And so I fell in love. I felt like [Langston Hughes 00:01:31:15], I just felt absolutely in love with being in Africa.

Speaker 1:

Mm-hmm (affirmative). So as an African-American woman, how were you treated?

Colette Hopkins:

Well, I don't think that people knew I was African American until I opened my mouth and they would hear my accent because, I'm kind of a little Brown skinned. They would refer to me as [Metis 01:31:43], of course mixed. I was mixed, but from their perspective, I was Metis. I had a little tiny Afro even then, but I would wear my hair wrapped and as soon as I could get to a tailor, I had as many African clothes as most of them. We would go to the Grand Bazaar and buy fabric and then ask our friends that we met to take us to their tailor. You see somebody in some outfit and say, "I want that outfit right there." [crosstalk 01:32:23] to their tailor and for the equivalent of \$30, you'd have this beautiful outfit.

Speaker 1:

Oh, wow. But you did say, you said that money lasted longer in Africa. So that's very reasonable.

Colette Hopkins:

Yeah. Everything was so much cheaper than the U.S. and I was amazed that medicine, food, clothing, transportation, but they all thought that we were rich. And I guess we were compared to them who takes the plane to Africa and spends a semester abroad, if you don't have the financial means to do that.

Speaker 1:

Mm-hmm (affirmative) That's true. Did you feel free or like more beautiful, more desirable as a black woman traveler, and not only to the Ivory Coast, but to some of the other countries you've been to. How do you feel do you have any particular [crosstalk 01:33:28]

Colette Hopkins:

I always grew up thinking I was the cutest thing on earth. Remember I'm the only girl, the baby and I had a father who always doted on me. So I always thought I was cute, so that doesn't have nothing to do with it.

Speaker 1:

Oh Wow. Let's see. You did work at Africa, I think you mentioned working as a lactation specialist. Am I getting that right?

Colette Hopkins:

Well, I had a lot of... So the later part of my Africa experiences, I worked with [Kofi Bouda 01:34:06]. I don't know if you know Dr. Bouda?

Speaker 1:

No.

Colette Hopkins:

Amazing man. He was actually the person who hired me once I had my doctorate to come to Atlanta University. He hired me and my husband, but we were not a couple at that time and he hired me. And then after I'd been at Atlanta University, about six years, he hired me to work directly with him. And he was from Ghana, an amazing scholar, and knew how to raise money at an HBCU. And so I worked with him in his research center and my job was to write grants, particularly focusing on development projects. So I wrote USAID grant. And in many instances, I would be the principal investigator. So we had projects in lots of different African countries.

We had an infant survival project in Egypt for a decade. So I would go to Egypt on that particular project. We just had different projects all over the continent, Madagascar, South Africa, Lesotho, you know, just development projects in education and women in development. Those were the kinds of projects that I would work on. So they would give me entree to going to Africa as a principal investigator, as a project director. And it was good work. I loved it. I did that for, I guess I was at CAU for maybe 20 years or so. I'm not even sure. I'd probably go back and figure all of that out too.

Speaker 1:

I'm sorry, go ahead. Say it again.

Colette Hopkins:

I said, it was about 20 years that I was sitting.

Speaker 1:

So was it like from the 80s to the 2000s? Around what time did you start working at CAU? Was it shortly after finishing up at Vanderbilt or you went to DC first and then?

Colette Hopkins:

I went to DC as an intern, remember, for the US department of ED. So it was an internship, but it was not like traditional internships. It was a graduate internship where I was actually being kind of groomed to be a national leader in this new thing coming out of the US Department of Education. And I did that until... DC and I didn't, it wasn't a good fit. I felt it was too expensive and a lot of different things. And so I really wanted to find my way back to Atlanta. And one of my friends sent me a job description, not for me, but for me to try to share with people because I was traveling in that job as well, it was just domestic travel. And she said, "You may meet somebody who wants to come to AU as an instructor in our graduate education program." I was like, girl, please. I didn't even share that job description with anybody.

Speaker 1:

And you applied for it?

Colette Hopkins:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Speaker 1:

Excellent. And got it. Wow.

Colette Hopkins:

And remember, my PhD was paid for, by somebody who wanted the people who received their PhDs to teach at historically black colleges. So I was fulfilling that part of my having gone to graduate school on his dime. Do you know the Nabrit brothers?

Speaker 1:

That name sounds familiar? Tell me more.

Colette Hopkins:

His brother at the time was the president of Howard University, but Samuel developed this foundation, which was housed right on in Atlanta, where he supplied money to fund people like me to go to graduate school and get their doctorate to come back and teach at historically black colleges. So for every year that he paid for me to be at Vanderbilt, and he paid for everything room, board, tuition, you got a stipend each month, you didn't have to work, and then the expectation was that you'd come back and teach at a HBCU. And I did it.

And I actually met him and I told you that I actually found a picture of me with him. He's now deceased, but he was amazing. And he knew exactly who I was. He said, "Yes, I know you." I said, "Do you know me? My name is Colette Hopkins." He says, "Oh, Dr. Hopkins!" And somebody took a picture of us together that day and I was just like, I love this picture of this man who sent me to get my doctorate.

Speaker 1:

Yeah.

Colette Hopkins:

Mm-hmm (affirmative)

Speaker 1:

So you you started back at Clark Atlanta as an instructor?

Colette Hopkins:

An assistant professor.

Speaker 1:

Yes, yes, yes. Professor. And then you segued into that project with Dr. Bouda how did that?

Colette Hopkins:

He actually just... My husband became Dean of the School of Ed at Clarke AU and therefore, I couldn't work in the School of Ed anymore.

Speaker 1:

Oh, I didn't know that.

Colette Hopkins:

Yeah, because he would have been one of my supervisors.

Speaker 1:

Yes. It's a conflict of interest. Okay.

Colette Hopkins:

So Dr. Bouda asked me, would I be interested in working with him? Little, did I know that this man was going to take over my entire life.

Speaker 1:

And the work you did with him was about two decades. Wow. Wonderful. Wonderful.

Colette Hopkins:

Hold on, hold on one sec.

Speaker 1:

Sure.

Colette Hopkins:

Hi.

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Speaker 1:

Hello.

Colette Hopkins:

Hello. Yes. My mother is having a medical emergency right now.

Speaker 1:

Oh, no.

Colette Hopkins:

Yes. So can I... How much longer?

Speaker 1:

I had about, I think I'm on page four of five.

Colette Hopkins:

Okay.

Speaker 1:

Do you have a few?

Colette Hopkins:

Okay. Can I call you back. Can I check on her and then call you back?

Speaker 1:

Absolutely. Yes. Please do that. Yeah.

Colette Hopkins:

Okay.

Speaker 1:

I hope everything's okay.

Colette Hopkins:

Me too. Bye-bye.

Speaker 1:

Bye.

PART 4 OF 4 ENDS [01:42:48]

Speaker 1:

All right. I think we're ready.

Speaker 2:

Okay.

Speaker 1:

So, go ahead and get started. So the last question we left off on was actually just a general one. I had been asking you about your work history and, and your travels. And so the last question in that section is basically just, I was going to ask you how your experiences at I-B-W influenced your work life after you left? What kinds of things did you take away and how did they help you through what sounds like a really fascinating career?

Speaker 2:

I think what it did for me was to make me very much aware of the African diaspora and looking at not just from a tourist, I really traveled as a tutor. I tended to travel more as a development specialist. So looking at clean, safe water, sanitation issues, access to education and health care. And so a lot of the projects that I worked on, that related to my travel work projects that focused on particularly Africa and the African diaspora, but specifically development projects. So it ended up almost that, even if I was doing something in education, it was always around advocacy and making sure of equity issues, the women in development projects, clean, safe water. So it wasn't tourism. I do a couple of trips.

I think I did two trips as a tourist. Like one time I went to South Africa with a group of friends, but even then it's still, focusing on being around people and not just going to see monuments or things like that. So I think that was one of the impacts that not only I-B-W, but the other types of experiences that I had had me having that type of focus.

Speaker 1:

Is there a memorable project that you... that like development project that you did in a specific country that you'd like to share?

Speaker 2:

I think the most fascinating for me was the projects that we had in Madagascar. At that time I was at Clark Atlanta University and we were in partnership programs with universities on the African continent and well, Madagascar's is not on the continent, but you understand what I'm talking about. Anyways, we partnered with the University of Toamasina, which is the capital is Antananarivo, but we were in the rural area. And so their faculty would come to like Clark Atlanta University and their students, and we would send faculty and students to their university. And I would serve as the liaison between the two school communities. One of the things we did at the university there was to install a technology center because Madagascar was coming into independence, out of their relationship with the Soviets. And so this students didn't have access to some of the communication things that they would need in order to be successful. But what we also learned was business people wanted access to technology. So we actually put in using a USAID funding, a technology center, we put in women in development projects.

A lot of their young people came to Clark Atlanta University, cause that's where I was at that point. And so one was the person who got her Master's Degree in Library Science, and we felt that she would be a great person to come over because then she learned about all of the technology and things

like that and could take it back to her country. And then the person who was over there, women in development came to Clark Atlanta University to study with Shelby Lewis. And I don't know if he knows Shelby, but she's a major player in the women in development. And we had a business. The School of Business at Clark A-U is amazing. So we had some of their business people to come over and they didn't get a degree, but they did get a certificate. And so it was fascinating to me to be in the rural area of Madagascar.

And when I say rural, I'm talking really rural. And to see the vowel diversity, of course, that was amazing. And to meet people who were just so different from us, I remember once the minister of the environment who was a female came to Atlanta and when I was there, I stayed at her home. And so I invited her to stay at my home, but see, I'm not the minister of anything. And one day we got a knock on the door. We were just in the house busy laughing and it was kind of like her bodyguard saying she can't stay here, she can't stay in a private home, she had to stay in a more secure place. So, we hadn't even thought about those kinds of issues because we just enjoy each other's company and families and things like that. So meeting people, having those types of development experiences and feeling like not only are you doing the right thing, but you could see the differences when somebody has a degree and has new skills and can take it back to their communities, those kinds of experiences.

Speaker 1:

Wow. Thank you. So I'm going to shift a little bit and ask some questions about your family. That's okay.

Speaker 2:

Okay.

Speaker 1:

Where's your spouse from?

Speaker 2:

Jamaica.

Speaker 1:

Oh, wow. I didn't know that. When, how did you meet?

Speaker 2:

Walking down the street in Atlanta. Yeah, it's a long story. So we aren't going to go there. You hit too many long stories.

Speaker 1:

Well, I am okay with that. If you would like to hear it, but you guys just kind of met. Just, what?

Speaker 2:

No, we didn't. I actually moved from Washington to Atlanta. I had gone to...I had a girlfriend whose sister was a senior, like Pat Daly. And she told me to sell everything in my apartment, get rid of the car that I was driving. Cause it wasn't healthy for me. And to pack up all my things into moving to Atlanta and that I would meet my husband to be walking down the street and I would know it immediately. So I

put up signs all over my community. I had an apartment, I'm moving to Atlanta on the train with my little baby daughter and a suitcase. And I took the job that I told you about at Clark AU and one day I was walking to class and this guy walked past me and said, hi. And I said hi to, I looked back in the middle, looking back and I said, smile at. And he said, hi. And the third time that we looked at each other, that was it. A year later we moved married and we've been married for 30 years.

Speaker 1:

Oh wow. Wow.

Speaker 2:

And he was a visiting professor at Atlanta University, but he ended up being a Dean and he just retired.

Speaker 1:

Yes, yes, yes. I knew you'll be talking about that. Wow. God, that's amazing.

Speaker 2:

That gives me hope.

Speaker 1:

I would like to meet someone.

Speaker 2:

Yes. That's exactly what you say. I would like to meet somebody and let your behavior be open to meeting somebody. And you don't meet people in your living room. You'd meet them out in the world. So, I tell women that because they hang around with women or they stay inside, this is how you meet people.

Speaker 1:

That's a good point. So actually in, in about a week I'll be traveling and I'm an anxious traveler, like super anxious. I don't like to be outside my comfort zones very often. And so-

Speaker 2:

Where you going?

Speaker 1:

I'll be going to London for, well, actually Oxford for about seven days for a writing workshop. And then I got a writer's residency at a colony like outside Chicago, but then I'll go like, I'll go straight from London to Chicago. I'll stay there for a couple of days. Then I'll go to the residency, which is about an hour outside the city. So I'll be gone for a few weeks.

Speaker 2:

There are a lot of attractive men in London, from all over the world. Wear something bright and smile.

Speaker 1:

I will take that advice. Oh my goodness. So what was... After about a year you got married. What was the dating like? What was the courtship like? If you want to share that.

Speaker 2:

Fun, he's the type of person who's very even, he's traveled a lot. He ended up being the program officer for the Madagascar project. So I think it is really interesting that I gave birth to his... oh, and the Cameroon project, I gave birth to our son. Like on a Friday and the following week, the son, my daughter and I were in the Cameroon for four months. Cause he had this, there's nobody here as a whole, you can do it. I was like, okay, I'll go. So I was there doing development, work for a project that came out of the school of education for my husband, because he says, I got to send somebody. And you one, I said, okay, I'm gone by. But it was very easy and very nice, very bright. We work a lot together on projects. I call him my secretary because he loves to do the research in the background stuff. And I can ask him if he can find this, and this, and this, and this. And he'll just like, Oh yeah, didn't really talk about it. So very healthy relationship.

Speaker 1:

That's awesome.

Speaker 2:

Yeah, it's fine.

Speaker 1:

And his profession, you said he was a professor, he worked in the department of social work at Clark AU?

Speaker 2:

No. He's in educational leadership. So like I'm in education and I trained educators. He trained principals and school district personnel.

Speaker 1:

Did your parents or family have any opposition to your marrying him?

Speaker 2:

No. Everybody thought he shouldn't marry me, they love him. It's neat, it's problematic. My brothers were like, you don't need to marry her. She doesn't cook. She doesn't clean. We can find you somebody, she can't do anything.

Speaker 1:

And let's see. And you said you have... How many children do you have?

Speaker 2:

We claimed four, he had a daughter and I had a daughter when he married. We adopted a little girl out of Jamaica and we helped. So the son is the connecting all of them. And in fact, in about on the 27th of July, we will all be in New York. My Arlene is coming from Toronto with her daughter. Lorna lives in New

York, my daughter, Amber lives in New York and Marcus lives here with his two daughters and everybody's going to New York to celebrate Trevor's 80th birthday.

Speaker 1:

Oh wow.

Speaker 2:

Yeah, I am excited. We're going to have a weekend. His birthday is on a Thursday. We're going to be there Thursday, Friday, Saturday and then I have to leave on Sunday to go to a conference in D.C.

Speaker 1:

Do you have like events planned? Are you going to...

Speaker 2:

Yeah, I know. We're going out to dinner. We have a restaurant picked out. There'll be 16 of us at dinner. And then we're going on Friday night to see a play. And then on Saturday, we're doing a dinner cruise and we always have brunch Serafina before we leave New York. And so we'll do that on Sunday and we're taking the train because the idea is my husband, one, he loves trains. And so we do a lot of traveling by train. And so he wanted to do the Acela. He's never done it. So it was when I get off the train from Atlanta DC, catch the Acela and then catch the Acela back to DC for my conference. So that is his birthday present from me as their seller train.

Speaker 1:

Oh wonderful. I've never... I don't know a lot about train travel. So is that like a-

Speaker 2:

Like the bullet train. That you get on in D.C. and like a half hour later you in New York.

Speaker 1:

Oh really?

Speaker 2:

You haven't heard about it.

Speaker 1:

I have not.

Speaker 2:

You can catch it and go across the country in the opposite direction. I told him that we're going to do that too. Since now he's retired. We can plan those kinds of... being away for a week, 10 days, that kind of stuff.

Speaker 1:

Yeah. That's amazing. Because, most people tell me it takes a few hours to get from New York to DC by train-

Speaker 2:

If you do the regular train. Yeah. that was exciting.

Speaker 1:

Okay. So you said you had, you have some grandchildren. How many do you have?

Speaker 2:

The daughter in Toronto has one little girl. The young lady we adopted who lives in the Bronx, she has one little boy. And then my son here has two little girls.

Speaker 1:

Oh cool. And what are your grandchildren like?

Speaker 2:

They're perfect. I tried to pull out all of them as much as I can.

Speaker 1:

Well, what about your children? I know you mentioned that your son acts in plays or?

Speaker 2:

He's an opera singer.

Speaker 1:

Oh wow. What about your other children? Do they... are they also in the arts or do they?

Speaker 2:

I have a daughter who was on Broadway, that lives in New York. She also... They all have other things that they do. Cause you know, being an artist, you can starve to death or you can work other things. So she's the director of communications for the school of optometry of the SUNY System. And my other daughter is in HR. The one who lives in Toronto, she is an administrator and HR administrator. And then our little daughter who we adopted from Jamaica when she was seven is a cancer nurse at Carolyn. They're all productive young people.

Speaker 1:

Oh wow. That's wonderful. Wonderful. Did you... When you adopted your daughter, was it like a family thing or did you just make a decision that you wanted to adopt?

Speaker 2:

No, she was one of my husband before teaching that Clark AU, he had taught at the university of the West Indies. One of his students was killed in an automobile accident. And we were here, he has since left to make it. And we received a phone call from one of her neighbors telling us that not only had the

accident happened, but the man that she was married to, the students had left because even though he was married to him, the daughter was not his daughter. And so the family next door, they knew that we were acting as godparents for this little girl. And she called us and said Dr. Turner, you need to come home and check on your god daughter because we think she's in the house by herself. And at that time she was seven. So he flew down and then he called me on the phone and I said, bring her, what differences does one more make? And so we went through all of the necessities of getting her here. I'll look her up.

Speaker 1:

Oh wow.

Speaker 2:

She came home when she was seven.

Speaker 1:

So, with having children, I know you talked a little bit about giving birth and then like being in Cameroon and next week. And apparently you personally had a husband who supported your like travels and all of the wonderful things you did, but did you ever find that it was difficult to like raise a family and do all of the things you did?

Speaker 2:

No. All my kids, we Greg awfully quiet. When I say, Hey, let's go. They don't ask. They don't say like, no mommy, why we leaving? They say, okay, Gwen, when are we leaving? And right now, like we were planning the trip in New York, for example, and one had said, Marcus, the one who's here said,

Speaker 1:

Oh wow.

Speaker 2:

You know, I think I have one conflict. He canceled his stuff so quickly. He said, no, I'm going, they like to go. Even like last week or so my daughter was in Europe and I was like, I'm not too comfortable about this. She says, Hey, she said, things happened in New York. So she says, I don't remember where they went to places. I think they went to Paris and one other place. I was like, no, you don't tell me because I don't want to be worried about you, just have a good time. Let me know when we get back. So the daughter who's now lives in Toronto, the last time we saw her was when she was living in Grenada. It's just what it is.

Speaker 1:

Oh, wow. So, they too are just very open about travel and living in other places?

Speaker 2:

Oh yeah, it is. And I love that because I want them to feel that way.

Speaker 1:

So this is our last... I have one more question and then sort of concluding thoughts, but I'm just going to go back to a quote that Dr. Hiding said in the seventies, which is the vast majority of the black institutions need are yet to be born. And also, and I know I've mentioned this earlier, but during our initial conversation, you said to me, that institutions die only when people let them die. And I just wanted to ask you, in terms of institutions, how much do you think has changed since the 1970s, particularly since you work for organizations that promote community development and like the arts and all of those things. Do you feel like we're further along in building important institutions?

Speaker 2:

You know, it's really, this is an interesting question coming from you. I worked for 20 years for the National Black Arts Festival as the director of education. And that particular institution in terms of its fundamental mission has disappeared. Dylan offices, they do a gala, they do some other programming. But when I worked at the festival, there was the... I could program a concert and there would be maybe 50,000 people who would show up. We would take over the entire Centennial park. I would do programming for children. Let's say one day I brought in Ashley Bunny. Do you know the children's out there Ashley Bunny?

Speaker 1:

That name sounds familiar.

Speaker 2:

He's amazing. He's almost like maybe 90 some years old now, but he's still amazing. And like I brought him in and he had for his birthday and we had 5,000 children's show up for that was to me, the National Black Arts Festival now to see them having a gala and doing a little seminar here and maybe a dance program that 200 people will go to... It's like, are you really serious?

So I think that it would be one thing and I know things have natural lifespans, but it's also important for us to do like an autopsy. Why did this fail? Why did something so fundamental and so critical? Not only to the African-American community, but to the African diaspora, because vendors would come in from all over the diaspora, performances from all over the diaspora would gather in Atlanta every year. And it would be amazing when I moved here I went...just kind of like to enjoy it. And I knew that I had to be somehow connected with it. So I went to the director and I said, you need me, kind of Stephanie Huey. I don't know if you know, Stephanie...

PART 1 OF 4 ENDS [00:24:04]

Paulette:

... kind of Stephanie Hughley, I don't know if you know Stephanie. Stephanie is amazing and I went to her and just say, 'you need me'. She says, I was the craziest person she ever met in her life, but she realized that she really did. And I worked very hard to develop a children's program and a youth program, where interns from colleges could come and work in the summer. And just to say, 'You've got it.' It wasn't people from outside of the organization, it was people internal to the organization, who failed the organization. But there are other institutions here, one of the other places that I've worked for and I still have a very wonderful relationship with this family, [inaudible 00:00:47]. I don't know if you know the [crosstalk 00:24:50] family's first name, but [crosstalk 00:24:52] it's... Basically, it was built 150 years ago on the Spelman's campus.

Speaker 3:

Hmm.

Paulette:

And a lot of people don't know that it was built as a result of children, post the civil war, who could not go back home, had no homes to go to. So this place was established, and it still operates. It still does adoptions, foster care, just all kinds of service agency. And I served as their education advocate as one of my, not part-time jobs, but one of the jobs that I don't have to go to everyday. If they call me and say, there's a child who needs you to go to court or going to the school or do an IEP meeting for them, I'm gone. I'm going to do that. So, that, looking at that institution and seeing how the growth was nurtured. The funding was protected. [crosstalk 00:25:56] The people were well-treated such that they wanted to continue working for the agency, even in retirement or whatever.

Speaker 3:

Oh.

Paulette:

You see institutions where people have nurtured it, cared for it, sustained it. Then you look at a Morris Brown College, which is closed because of theft by people of color. [crosstalk 00:26:24] And what they stole was the education of people who might have benefited from being at that institutions. And you drive by them now... The buildings are falling apart. [crosstalk 00:26:35] No one's using the facilities. [crosstalk 00:26:37] No one has taken the initiative to do the historic preservation fight for some of those buildings that, with hand hewn bricks and things like that. [crosstalk 00:26:48] You look at it and just say, 'no matter where we are, we are not there yet. No matter... If you're tired, rest, because La Luta Continua. [crosstalk 00:03:03] You've got to continue the struggle and the fight.

We have great needs in our community because we have an increased population because the nature of the problems have changed. Old solutions don't always work now. So, the thinkers are needed, the philosophers are needed, the doers are needed, the people who actually get in there and do the hard work. People do ask me, 'why do you still deal with these kids? You could just be retired'.

I say, because they need, they still need people who can provide services. We can do all of these other things, but we have to realize that, almost until the day we die, if you have skills, our community needs you to still be vigilant and to get up every day and say, 'Today is the day that I'm going to change somebody's life. Today is the day that I'm going to make a significant contribution to the quality of life, whether it's one person or it's an entire community'. [crosstalk 00:28:17] But I think a lot of times people don't recognize their own value and don't know how to do that, to give that, that it doesn't always take a lot.

I love it when I see sometimes young children saying all I had to do was be a friend to this child in my classroom, who was struggling, who didn't have a friend. It starts there and how can I change the quality of some one person's life, today or tomorrow? I think we still have to be forward-thinking and recognize that we are not there. Our community is definitely not there, yet. And as long as that's the case, regardless if we are a 100 years old or two years old, not two, but you understand, very young, [crosstalk 00:29:15] that we get up every day and there's something we need to accomplish. And we need to recognize whatever that is and do it. Whatever we can give, we need to do it.

I love, my mom is almost 90 years old and every year she writes this check, and I know that I have to write it for her now, of \$1000 to Benedict College. [crosstalk 00:29:38] That, she can't go and

serve at Benedict, but she can give. And even if she's on social security, her retirement, she can figure out 'what can I do without that I can still donate \$1,000 to Benedict?' Because when she went to college, she didn't have any money to pay to go to college. Because Benedict gave her the opportunity to become a teacher, to do these things, to keep her family intact, she gives back. And I know a lot of people don't think that way, but it is as simple as saying, 'what can I give up in order to be able to give back?'

I don't need 200 pairs of shoes. I don't need the latest designer bag. I don't have to pay \$200 to get my hair done. Can I use that money to support some of these institutions that are going to disappear? If we, as a community, if we don't wake up like Spike Lee said, 'Wake Up...'

Speaker 3:

That's true. You actually touched on the next question I had, which is, you mentioned that there, you said that the issues have changed. Some of the community issues have changed since over time. And I just wanted to ask, in your opinion, how has some of the issues changed? Community issues that affect people of color, what do you [crosstalk 00:31:20] want changed, which ones should stay the same?

Paulette:

Living in Atlanta, I haven't lived in Nashville recently, but I know that living in Atlanta, we have pockets in this community where you would think that you were in an African village [crosstalk 00:31:44] and not the good parts of being in a village. [Crosstalk 00:31:48] Where people are living without water, without safety, without electricity. They're just squatting.

Speaker 3:

Wow.

Paulette:

And, because of the drugs, because of the prostitution that's here in this city and many of them have children, the homeless population, and our city is abysmal. That's the best word. It's not astonishing, I'm not astonished by it, I think [inaudible 00:32:22] it once when it was.

But there's so many homeless children. They're closing, at the end of August, the largest homeless shelter in the city, they're going to close it down. They have no idea where the people, who've been there, are going to live, but they're closing it down because it's located on Peachtree Street in the center of downtown Atlanta. It's gotta go. It's not good for tourism, it's not good for business. That's the attitude, but they don't know what's going to happen to these people. And the relationship between homelessness and a lot of the crime and a lot of the violence is apparent to everyone.

If you don't have food, you're going to figure it out how to get food to eat. [crosstalk 00:33:08] Some people will beg. Some people will go to the soup kitchen and other people will steal. Then you have a real serious gang problem here and that bleeds into the schools. And so it's a lot, it's a lot. And we have one of the lowest performing school districts in the nation, is in Atlanta. I think we're 42nd.

Speaker 3:

Okay. [inaudible 00:33:37] Wow.

Paulette:

It's a really horrid, it's really... I mean on the surface, superficially, unless you really invest in the community and spend time, it looks so pretty. [crosstalk 00:33:56] Yeah, I live in a park. I actually live in an urban park, lots of trees, really older brick homes, [inaudible 00:10:08], bungalows. We have a swimming pool, we have a golf course with tennis courts, all of that. Right outside of that little lane, across the street, it's devastatingly poor [crosstalk 00:34:25] and Atlanta is not a high cost city. The weather here, even though we have some cold days, the weather is pretty pleasant, typically. Everything would make you think this would be a wonderful place to live. Only if you have a job, [crosstalk 00:34:50] only if you're educated, you get what I'm saying. [crosstalk 00:34:56] Other than that, this is hell, [crosstalk 00:34:59] and the gangs and all of that. [crosstalk 00:35:04]

They're thriving because of issues of poverty, lack of education, lack of access to opportunities. [crosstalk 00:35:14] We can't be fooled by exterior appearances. Once we begin to remove that and look at the reality that the majority of kids in the Atlanta metropolitan area are not able to get a quality education through public schools. I have some, what bothers me is when people who are on school boards say, my kids attend Woodward Academy. That's 25,000 per child a year.

Speaker 3:

Wow.

Paulette:

Yeah. So that's how [crosstalk 00:35:54] they can talk about getting a quality education for their kids. My thing is, if you are a principal or you are a school teacher, then the schools that you work in or represent, should be where your kids go to as well. It cannot be for those kids who have no other options. We just have a lot of work to do.

And it's not just in terms of school, its healthcare, transportation, all of those kinds of things. How can you have a workforce who can't get to work, using public transportation? How can it be that still, in this time, that it is two hours using public transportation in a city like Atlanta, because we have a subway system, but it just goes in an X. All of the places interior, you have to then get on a bus and, if there's a bus going there. If you don't have a car, you may not be able to get to work. And if you don't have a job, you can't [inaudible 00:37:03] the car. [crosstalk 00:37:04] It's that kind of systemic problems that we're still having in this community. But knowing that so many, very well educated, wealthy people live in Atlanta, I wonder about the communities where that is not even true. At least the city has to provide a certain level of infrastructure because they have so many middle class blacks and whites who live inside The Beltway.

Speaker 3:

Yeah, that actually leads into the next question. Which is, do you think contemporary activists and community leaders are using effective approaches to solving problems? I know you touched on this a little bit, your conversation about The National Black Arts Festival. But in what ways do you see community leaders addressing some of these issues, which are also true and natural actually, because of gentrification, poor people are getting pushed to the outskirts of town, public transit is not very good. It can take you two hours to get to work, if you don't have a car it's difficult to find work, more people are moving to the city, that makes it difficult to find work. How are leaders addressing these issues in our community? Do you think they're using effective strategies or no?

Paulette:

Wow, we have, I want to give you my latest scenario, which is [crosstalk 00:38:47] speaks to that question. Community leaders, we have and I don't want to lie, I'm going to say 12 people, it's not really 12, running for mayor.

[crosstalk 00:38:57] Kasim Reed, who won his first election by 600, some ridiculous low number of votes, [crosstalk 00:39:05] is ending his two term tenure as mayor. So a new mayor is going to be elected. All of these black elected officials are running for the mayoral seat. One straight white woman and one gay white woman and I think it might be someone else, maybe one white, I'm not sure. So the black vote, which is eight to 12 people who were not running, will apply. Probably another black mayor could be elected, but they can't go into a room and say, 'Okay guys, this is what's going to happen. We're going to split this black vote 12 different ways. That means none of us will be able to be elected. And Mary Norwood would be the next mayor of Atlanta.'

But they can't come together and say, 'This is ridiculous' [crosstalk 00:40:09] because their egos, their disdain for each other, is such that they're going to throw the baby out with the bath water [crosstalk 00:40:21] and you sit and watch it. And you know that the leaders, we have leaders in this community of national note. John Lewis, [crosstalk 00:40:32] and he no longer lives in my neighborhood, per se. He's still in my district, but he used to live right down the street from me. John Lewis, Andy Young, Reverend [inaudible 00:00:40:48]; all of these people live in Atlanta. And I'm saying, if those individuals can't sit these wild people down and say, 'This is ridiculous for all of you to be running for mayor and know what it is going to do to this vote. That none of you will be elected but your egos are so invested in believing and people are telling you, you can do it. You can do it. No you can't. [crosstalk 00:41:20] And you are willing to sacrifice rather than say, you know what? I'm going to step out, in order, and I'm going to back this person.'

They are not there yet. And I'm saying all of these years that we fought, one would have thought that we were thinking this, these kinds of situations through. Mary Norwood is not a bad person. I think she'll be a good mayor.

Speaker 3:

Yeah

Paulette:

But to see how it's going to happen. I have a problem with that [crosstalk 00:18:00]. It's that kind of lack of leadership, lack a role modeling, how we come together to solve problems. We don't, we're not there yet. And I can't imagine that we are not, given that this was the center of the civil rights movement. You watch what goes on with the King family.

Speaker 3:

Yes.

Paulette:

And you say, really? Now, I grew up, there were two boys, I was the one girl. I just could not even, I don't always agree with my brothers. We don't always say yes to the same thing, but we respect each other and we respected our parents. And my father wasn't Martin Luther King, my father was James Hopkins. My mother wasn't Coretta, she was Dorothy Hopkins. But that bad behavior that you see in the King children, somebody needed to stay home and parent those kids. You understand what I'm saying?

Speaker 3:

Mm-hmm.

Paulette:

That, they're in court fighting over the Bible, fighting over the legacy, who's in charge of this, who gets this, who's going to sell that? I'm going, if I were Martin, I would come back from the dead and just say, 'I know you're not acting like fools.' And I'm sure Harry Belafonte has said that to them, which is why they are not speaking to him either.

Speaker 3:

Oh, wow. I didn't know that.

Paulette:

Yes, they took Harry Belafonte to court.

Speaker 3:

Oh, did they?

Paulette:

Yeah. And they lost.

Speaker 3:

Wow. What did they take him to court for?

Paulette:

Some item or something that he had that came from their father. [crosstalk 00:44:04] And they challenged him that it belonged to their estate. And he said, absolutely not. You all need to be ashamed of yourselves, but they weren't.

Speaker 3:

Wow.

Paulette:

You never heard that one?

Speaker 3:

I had not. I heard about, particularly with the filming of Selma, there was so much litigation tied up in the speeches, that they couldn't use the speeches [crosstalk 00:44:29] and the Bible.

Paulette:

I built a miniature version. I don't know, did I tell you this story the last time we talked?

Speaker 3:

No.

Paulette:

I built a miniature version. I told you I was doing children's programs for The National Black Arts Festival. I took the King house as a symbol to teach children about peace, justice, there were 10 words that we selected and we built all of these hands-on activities around, from Dr. King's life. And we gave them copies of speeches and books, but we made it such as a teaching unit for kids coming to The National Black Arts Festival. And the centerpiece was a child-sized replica of the boyhood home.

And I brought in a set designer and we put the swing on the porch, such that it was mounted so the kids could actually sit on the porch and swing. The doors opened and as you come into the child-sized replica, we had a graphic artist to come in and she painted the wallpaper because the wallpaper was no longer available. And we put a miniature couch in it, the fireplace; over the fireplace, we put a DVD screen and we showed films, like in a wraparound of King's life. And we had the house up for five days and it traveled to South Carolina, to the Penn Center because, of course, King spent time organizing for the movement there. And we got Scholastic to give away copies of the book written by his sister called, My brother Martin. And we invited her to come and sit in the house the day that the house opened and to autograph her book and give it to peers.

It appeared in the AJC and, it appeared in the AJC that morning, by nine o'clock, I had a letter from the King family asking me to cease and desist. That I could no longer show the house because I did not have permission from the King family.

Speaker 3:

Wow.

Paulette:

Yeah, they had it delivered to me at my office cause I wasn't out there with the kids, I was in my office. And so they delivered the letter to me. I got on the phone and I called the... It was a nephew who had sent it and I called him on the phone and I said to him, I said, 'you do know that your mother is in the house, autographing her book.'

Speaker 3:

Wow.

Paulette:

And he didn't even know that. He said, 'Oh, really?' Because he was saying I had, 'Paulette, you know better. You should have gotten permission.' I said, 'This house was built on Spelman's campus, where your mother teaches. She was very much aware of the project. We coordinated it with Scholastic Books, so we could have 5,000 copies of her book to give away. Nobody's being charged to go into the house. This is a free educational experience with children. Well, we own the house.'

PART 2 OF 4 ENDS [00:48:04]

Speaker 4:

... experience with children. Well, we own the house. No, you don't. You might own the Boyhood Home, but they don't even own that. That's owned by the National Trust. I said, "No, you don't. This house is not owned by anybody."

But with that kind of ridiculous... but I went on and did what I had to do. That house, toured it, went to South Carolina, kids loved it. I had children inside house serving as youth docents. And each one of the children had different things that they could tell about the life of Dr. King. And I tell them. I say, "What do you want us to cease and desist? The love that these kids are expressing? The education that they're getting about Dr. King? What part of this do you not want us to do? Do you not want us to give away your mother's book to thousands of children, that somebody donated? Just tell me which part you don't want us to do and I'll make sure that The Atlanta Journal-Constitution quotes you exactly." It was so absurd.

Speaker 5:

That sounds absurd, especially given the fact that his mother was a part of the project.

Speaker 4:

From conceptualization, from the beginning. I went to her at Spelman first and she was so excited.

I can tell you my next naughty thing. I'm teaching a class on historic preservation for kids, and we're using bird houses and its called Tweet Auburn. Like Sweet Auburn, but because they are bird houses. We have a replica of the Boyhood Home as a bird house.

Speaker 5:

Oh, wow.

Speaker 4:

So I'm looking to be sued again.

Speaker 5:

Oh, my goodness.

Speaker 4:

It's finished. That was the first one that we finished of the houses. And it took lots of pitches to make sure that the architectural detail was exact, and scales, and all of that. And I know that they are going to be like, "Lord help us, here we have to go again."

Speaker 5:

Wow. What happened to the [inaudible 00:50:38] ? Does it still exist?

Speaker 4:

Well, no. You'd have to pay storage and all of that kind of stuff. We would do projects and have them for one to three years, and then we would recycle the wood, reuse it, dismantle the projects. Because we did all kinds of things, we did. I took a group to Nicaragua, to the Garifuna or Garifuna, depending upon where you're from, how you say it. And we built a Garifuna village with live pigs in it. And the kids loved it. We didn't tell them that the pigs will ended up. When we were in the Garifuna village in Nicaragua,

the pigs would be under the house and there would be a hole in the kitchen. You just drop your garbage down there and the pigs took care of it. So we had the little pigs and we had to be careful because it was so hot that summer. But the kids went from house to house, looking at the different details.

Nobody tried to cease and desist us. Nobody says, "Stop doing this education stuff where you actually have experiences and in everyone about different"... And like I said, I did it for 20 years, so it gave me a lot of latitude on doing different things and trying to be creative. But I always had children teaching other children. And the kids would look, "How did you know all of that?" Because they would have to come to a summer institute and study and compete to be docents.

Speaker 5:

Mm-hmm (affirmative). That's interesting. What made you decide to do that specifically? To train children to teach other children?

Speaker 4:

I've always loved that. When I lived in DC, remember I lived in DC before coming. One of the things I loved was the Smithsonian Museum. I said, "We should do this for children." The Smithsonian is beautiful, but the only museum that the majority of kids go to is the Air and Space Museum, or they'll go to the zoo. And I said, "What is it that is attractive about those?" Because they're made for children.

So I always wanted to have the education component of teaching about Africa and the African diaspora and African-American history and culture from a child's perspective. How would you teach this to children where they never forget it? So every year for 20 years, I would have kids who had to do their service learning to come and do 100 hours in the summer with me.

And they would come in and take the classes. And I had college students who would teach the high school students, who would teach the middle school students, who then would be in the village teaching the kindergartens through fifth graders. And it would just be so, to me, I'm going to use a word that's inappropriate [inaudible 00:00:53:43], it's so cute. Because the little kids would come back and they'd say... They didn't know who I am because I'm an administrator. And I'd be walking in the village and stuff and say, "What's that? What are you saying?" "Oh no, this is [Indo Bali 00:06:01]. They aren't saying [Indo Bali 00:06:03], they're saying [Indo Bali 00:54:05]. It would be like showing off the jute they'd made, or how to wrap this. This artist site that they created and they would go into their bags and they would show me... We'd do a newsletter for the village, "And this is my newsletter." One day, Stephanie Heeley and I were walking through one of the facilities, and this little girl was talking to an onlooker. She said, "Oh girl, I come here every year. I own this, this is my thing."

Speaker 5:

Oh my goodness.

Speaker 4:

Stephanie fell out laughing. She said, "That is too cute." Girl, I come here every year. This is my thing. I said, "Look at you. Yes. Your history and culture is your thing. You're absolutely correct." We also do the Teachers Institute so that teachers could take what we were doing in the summer, back into their classrooms.

Speaker 5:

Was this for the National Black Arts Festival or was this when you were working-

Speaker 4:

Yeah.

Speaker 5:

Oh wow.

Speaker 4:

For 20 years.

Speaker 5:

That's wonderful.

Speaker 4:

Crazy stuff. But it didn't just involve stuff for children. You asked me about Howard. One of the things, and I think you can still find it online, was I invited Howard Dodson in. Then he was at The Schomburg. I brought him in to have a conversation with Dwight Andrews who teaches at Emory, and Portia Maultsby, who is at I think at Indiana, who's a music, ethnocologist. And they had a conversation about the importance of Curtis Mayfield and the music of Curtis Mayfield. And so C-SPAN came in and broadcast it. But we had it at the Carter Center and it was standing room only, the fire marshall fit. Not one more person can come in here. And I love that.

People want to know. We would do things at the Auburn Avenue Library. Like Gillian, every time Gillian had a new book out, I would make sure that we would bring her in town. To sell her books, but also to talk about where she is in the process, the writing process, the publishing process. Not just the book, but how did you get there? And I would bring in other authors, children's authors, illustrators. And so for 20 years, the community, I feel was enriched because it wasn't just, "Go look at this exhibit." My job was to say, "Look at the exhibit. And now let's have a conversation with the artist about the exhibit." Or, "Listen to the music. But now let's bring in an ethnomusicologist to talk about the instrument, the music, the period." Let's learn about these pieces.

Speaker 5:

Wow. Wonderful, wonderful. So we actually started this regular conversation by sort of talking about leadership and the ways in which it could be better. You cited some things like this community is one of the obstacles towards making progress, particularly with the mayoral race. There's a lack of unity of understanding that you're splitting the vote. What-

Speaker 4:

They understand it. It's not a lack of understanding.

Speaker 5:

They just want to win.

Speaker 4:

They understand it, but they're so selfish and so misguided, not willing to have the real conversation of why there's 10 black people running against two white women. Because you know what that's going to

do and how it's going to look. It's like we are no longer [inaudible 00:58:21] for that conversation being held publicly.

And then, like I said, there's the other thing of people feeling as if certain things are no longer important. So priorities have shifted in terms of African-American history and culture.

Speaker 5:

How so? Like what kinds of things are no longer priorities?

Speaker 4:

Well, I think when I see like the Atlanta Housewives and see the movement in that direction. You know how we have these peaks and valleys. I think we are at a valley point in our development, that those kinds of experiences get more attention than other types of experiences in our society.

[inaudible 00:59:25] elected Trump president. He's got a lot of work to do. We're coming right after Obama. Maybe Obama was, it was too good. We got too comfortable with thinking that it's going to be all right. So now we have a different flavor.

Speaker 5:

That's true. Absolutely true. Any other obstacles you see toward making progress?

Speaker 4:

I'm an educator, so it's going to be hard for me not to think about education, not being critical. My husband and I are working on a niche project and we're looking at what we know about colonization, and why so many African American children are not being educated.

So we're going back in the history and time and looking at the work of people like Paulo Freire and trying to understand how colonialism is currently affecting education in our schools, and why as a community we're not in an uproar about our kids not being educated, in a society where we know that if you're not educated, you are going to suffer for the rest of your life.

And I'm not talking about having a PhD or anything. I'm talking about graduating from high school, going to even a two year college to get some type of training. We have such a high dropout rate, poor school attendance, and then we have kids ending up in so much debt trying to get a four year degree. So it's really scary that we are one of the most, notice we said one of and not the most, developed countries in the world and African-Americans are still a third world country within one of the most developed countries in the world.

So that's problematic for me. So right now we're working on a project where we're looking at not just the traditional education of African-American children, but how can we use issues around colonization and theories like that in terms of helping people to understand that without an education, how our communities will look in the next decade. If you're not coding or you don't understand coding, you might not be able to get a job in the technology sect.

The world is changing, it's changing rapidly, and the education of poor children, children of color has not kept up with... You asked me earlier about my granddaughter, and one of my granddaughters, she lives with me. So she was in kindergarten this year and she went to school and they were talking about her writing, learning to write her letters. I said, "First of all, she has an iPad." So very few people are writing their letters because they had sent a practice sheet, like writing the A, over and over. There's no way I'm going to have a five-year-old girl in 2017 writing an A over and over. That's ridiculous, and

why would you ask her to do that? Then they said, "Well, it will help her learn to read." I said, "Have you tested her reading?" I said, "She's been reading since she was three."

At that time they didn't know who I was or who my husband was. I said, "I've tested her, she's reading at a fifth grade level." "Oh, she can't read at a fifth grade level." I said, "Any child could read." That was what Paulo Freire taught us years ago. You can teach farm workers who never read anything if you start with their reading their own name. You can then teach them to read anything. And when you say at fifth grade level, that means that you can read a typical American newspaper. Not the New York Times, but the Atlanta Journal Constitution is at a fifth to eighth grade level.

So you don't even have to go out and buy expensive fancy books. You can just pick up a newspaper and just read with the child, have the child begin to read with you. There are methods that you can use. And so when they find out, oh yeah, she really does read at a fifth grade level. I said, "What would make you that I would have to lie about that?" I said, "Do you know that every child in your kindergarten class can read at a fifth grade level if taught?" "Oh no, we can't teach them that because they don't learn how to read like that until they're in third grade." I said, "Please kill me now." But I wanted her to attend the public school. Everyone else who has kids, their kids are at Woodward Academy. I'm there going, no, no, no, no. You're paying for these kids to go to school. You have to have accountability at the school level. You can't get this just for your child, and then the majority of children suffer.

So we are getting ready to have a revolution at the elementary school. We [inaudible 01:05:33] a principal that would comment, and she's like, "Oh you crazy black people. You know these kids can't thrive." She's the principal.

It's that kind of revolution that we have to have is community. Our consumerism.... I mean, I look at what we consume and why, and I don't understand. I just don't. In Atlanta people live in these huge big homes, swimming pools, three and four stories. And right next to them we have kids who can't eat, don't have food. We have soup kitchens. All of that kind of stuff. So I'm saying, "Why do we have to consume to the extent that you have to have a Mercedes, and your wife has to have a Mercedes, and your 16 year old has to have a Mercedes? Are you really serious?" You know what I'm talking about?

Speaker 5:

Mm-hmm (affirmative) I do. I do. And it's interesting that this is the Atlanta that you're describing, where there are soup kitchens and homeless shelters. It's certainly not the Atlanta you see on television.

Absolutely not.

Speaker 4:

Glossed over, completely glossed over.

Speaker 5:

Okay, I'm going to give you the example. The girl Porsha on Atlanta Housewives. And I'm not trying to pick on her, but she has a relationship with Hosea Feed the Hungry. Hosea, who was part of the Civil Rights Movement, that was her grandfather.

Speaker 4:

Yes. I remember that.

Speaker 5:

She was the one who made the comment about the Underground Railroad that was so ignorant. So somebody failed to educate this child. Anyway, so now Hosea Feed the Hungry has to move into a new building, and that building is going to be \$600,000. And they're trying to get the community to pay for this new building. They're going to do fundraisers and all of that to raise the money for the new Hosea Feed the Hungry facility. Porsha drive a \$100,000 car.

Wow.

Speaker 4:

I drive Tercel that's almost 10 years old. Is it a Tercel? I don't even remember what it is. It's a Toyota product. It's a cute little car. It's a cute little car and I love her to death, but you understand? I'm not driving a \$100,000 car. But you, your family's coming to us, the community, to ask us, and you feel comfortable... She lives in a mansion. I'm going, are you serious? But this is what I feel... I don't know your values, but what I feel we have to combat as a people and as a community. So is the work of someplace like IBW, how Europe underdeveloped Africa [inaudible 01:08:59]?

Are we there yet? The answer is absolutely not. We've taken 10 steps backwards when you can be in such a developed country where children can't read, aren't reading. Graduating from high school and not reading, graduating from high school and not being able to think. Because think is a learned behavior, and so we're not teaching that because then they have to question, then they have to have great expectations. So I think some of it is purposeful and some of it is just neglect.

Speaker 5:

I can certainly agree with that. The next question is related. Just a very general question. And I think you've touched on this particularly it was children and making friends, and getting out into communities and educating children. But in what other ways can each of us nurture a positive teacher.

Speaker 4:

We've kind of gotten lost in this consumerism and materialism. My home is extremely modest. But when I say modest, it doesn't mean that it is not very nice. We bought a house that was in foreclosure and we did it purposely. My husband had bought me a ring. When I looked at the ring, I said, "I really do like this ring. However, we're taking it back. We're getting your money back, and we're going to use that money for a down payment on a house. We're not going to rent."

And the person who was taking us out to look at houses, she said, "Oh, you're Dr. Hopkins and he's Dr. Turner." And I thought to myself, "Oh-oh, she's fooled." The glitter. I just want her to know that this is just glitter. I said, "No, we're looking for a house that costs no more than \$50,000, preferably a house that is in foreclosure that needs work." And so as the real estate agent, she was disappointed because she really felt that... She had taken us to see these gated communities where other people on our faculty live. They paid \$400,000 for the houses, maybe on the cheap end it was \$200,000. I told her, "We're looking for a \$50,000 in a decent neighborhood." And we found it. We found it. I mean, it's three stories above ground. It's brick exterior, has all kinds of cute features, a full wall fireplace in the living room. Oh yeah. I mean, it's not fancy-

PART 3 OF 4 ENDS [01:12:04]

Speaker 6:

I mean, it's not fancy, but it is nice, two lots of land, and it's in a park, but it was in foreclosure, and we got it for 50,000. We've lived in this house for 30 years.

Speaker 7:

Oh, wow.

Speaker 6:

Yep. The idea being, we still have a very nice home where ultimately, when we do sell it, it will help us as we age, but we are right now able to age in place, we can afford it. We don't have to downsize. We already turned the upstairs into an apartment for our granddaughter and her mom to live there. We have an apartment on the first floor level as well, which can generate additional income if we need it. So it's all of those kinds of things that I think that as a people, we have to begin to think about the quality of our lives, not the quantity of our life. So in this house, there are four generations living, in this one house. My mother lives here, my husband and I live here, Amasia lives here, and her mom lives here.

And because her mom wants to go back to school, we are able to provide support. She doesn't have to pay rent, and we're able to make sure that our, not just the next generation, but the next generation after that, will be able to live a quality life. And I think that thinking beyond today, and myself, changes what people do. I don't know if that's capturing what... It's that thinking beyond my generation, and even thinking beyond the next generation, can we think at least two or three generations out and model those behaviors, such that... Someone has said to me... My mom has lived with me now for 20 years. She said, "Oh, my mom could never live with me." I turned and said, "What?" "Oh no, she's too much trouble."

When we moved in Amasia and her mom, and you know how I say that and her mom, because her mom is not my daughter, but she needed a place to live. She was spending all of her money on renting, not making any progress on her student loan debt, and not having support enough with Amasia, with the child. I was like, "Why don't you come and live with us? We'll change the upstairs so that you have a private entrance. You'll have your own two-bedroom apartment, with a kitchen and full bath, and all of that." And she was like, "You're kidding me. You're not serious." She became so suspicious. I said, "No, I'm really being serious." So my husband went and talked to her. "We're serious. It will give you a chance to pay down your debt, give you a chance to rest and breathe, give you a chance to get your master's degree, and give you a chance to not try to be a single mom. You'll be a single mom, but you'll be a single mom with support."

When I hear people say, "Oh, I bet that's a mess," no, it's not. It really isn't. It really works, but you have to work it. And I just think we can do better as a community, if we began to model new behaviors and different behaviors. I know that there are other families where there are four generations living together. I'm not talking about the ones who fight and cuss, and the police are there at night. I'm talking about a plan, where all of the resources can be pooled to help each other. And I don't have to worry about my mom being by herself, those kinds of things. So that's where I think as a community, we have to talk about it, we have to live it. It's easy to criticize, but if you don't come with a solution, save your breath.

Speaker 7:

That's very true. And a great gift to give to your daughter. I wish I had that gift.

Speaker 6:

It's not my daughter, Tamika is not my daughter, she's my granddaughter's mother.

Speaker 7:

Oh. A wonderful gift.

Speaker 6:

It's a gift to us.

Speaker 7:

What gives you hope? How do you maintain optimism?

Speaker 6:

One child at a time. When I have kids, one of the kids, when I went to Families First was, one of the young people that I met was a ninth grader, and she was living in a group home. And every time I go into meet the kids, I spent about an hour just in conversation. And I said to her, I listened to her talk. I said, "Oh my God, you're a Gates scholar." She'd never heard of Gates. I said, "You are a Gates scholar." She said, "What are you talking about?" I said, "Okay." She had a cell phone. I said, "Go on your cell phone and look it up." And she read about it. And she said, "I don't understand." I said, "I have another little boy that I adopted, who attended Morehouse as a Gates scholar. I'm going to give you his number. I want you to call him right now. And he's going to tell you what you need to do for the next three years."

And the reason that she interested me, she's in foster care and she's telling me she's studying German. She plans to take physics, she's in algebra one now, but she's going to be in algebra two next year. And then the next year she'll be able to do calculus. And this is a little bright girl that I'm just meeting, who's in foster care, who's on my case load for education advocacy, not because she's not doing well in school, but because she's doing great. And then she tells me, "I want to go to Germany because I'm studying German, and I want to go to Germany." I said, "There are study abroad programs, so we can look at those, and do this, and this, and this." And this little girl is in foster care, living in a group home.

She is now at Howard University. She is a Gates scholar. She did spend her summer at the high school in Germany. But when I met her, she didn't know what a Gates scholar was. She knew what she wanted. You get it? That's my inspiration, is that I can meet a little girl when she's in ninth grade, and she can tell me what I consider are just routine things, studying abroad, going to college, that kind of stuff. That's routine. That's what it should be routine for kids, it's not routine for kids in foster care.

And so, hearing her talk to me about what she wanted, she ended up at, when she graduated from college, with all of these scholarships, and they were trying to get her to go to a two year college. I said, "Don't listen to these fools. You're going to a four year school." And then when I told her, "You can go to school in Washington, she says, "Maybe I can volunteer in [inaudible 01:20:55] office, if I get to Washington." I said, "Yeah, maybe you can." And she's there, she's going to be a junior this year. So next year, this time, I'll be gearing up to attend her graduation. You understand what I'm saying?

Speaker 7:

That's wonderful.

Speaker 6:

And one of my other little girls, who I really want to choke right now, today, because she failed two of her classes, but that's a whole nother story, but this summer, she went to Morocco for summer. When I met her, she was a teenage mother. Now she's an unwed mother of two, but she's still in college. She attended Georgia State, and she went to Morocco for the summer, which was her dream trip.

Speaker 7:

Wonderful.

Speaker 6:

So, inspiration, it doesn't come from me, it comes from working with these young people and helping their dreams to come true. Can you imagine what kind of young women these women are going to be? I told them, I said, "Your real estate has gone up in value. You're going to be able to do speeches all over the world about your experiences, so don't mess up your real estate."

Speaker 7:

That's good advice. Next is the last question, which is what specific message do you want to communicate to the younger people of the community?

Speaker 6:

I did it, done. There is an interview, I think on Spelman's website, that they did with me, with one of my young women from foster care. They had brought in a recent exhibit, which was a very interesting exhibit in, it was means and mentors. What's your means, and who was your mentor? And so I brought in this young lady who everybody thought I was going to say I'm mentoring, and what I told them, "No, she's my means, because she inspires me to get up and do what I do every day." And so that's on the Spelman College website, I think it's still up there. So that's that whole thing about inspiration.

Speaker 7:

Wonderful. Is there anything, any other information you'd like to include, we haven't touched on yet? I think we've got a pretty comprehensive interview. I think we're at an hour and a half now. And we did a couple of hours last week. So I feel like there's some great, you said some wonderful things. It was a great conversation and certainly an honor to be a part of. I've learned things just by listening to the life you've led and the kinds of work you've done, it's really important work.

Speaker 6:

It's been fun, that's the other thing, it's been so much fun.

Speaker 7:

I think that's thing that I would like to look back on my career, and say is that I did good work, but I also enjoyed it.

Speaker 6:

Oh yeah. And meeting wonderful, amazing people. I tell people, "When I have an opportunity to go and see a play or go to somebody who's doing," last week, Kay Joy Peters, I don't know if you know who, she's a visual artist. She was doing a little talk and walking through her current exhibit. It was just like, I felt like, Ooh, I felt so important. I was like, "Ooh, this feels so good."

I was in there, licking my lips, listening to her talk about her work, and looking at her work across five decades as a visual artist. This is the food I need, going, listening to great music. Harry Belafonte did this huge concert here, not a concert, he created this festival. And that night, the closing act was Santana. It was an all day, two day, weekend festival, and the closing was Santana. I had never seen Santana live on stage. They had all of these blown up screens where you could see everything. It was like, "Oh, so this is why I got up today."

I needed to go see Santana. I need to go hear this person on the drums, see this dance troop, look at this work of art. That's what feeds your soul, is having these experiences, so feed yourself.

Speaker 7:

Absolutely. Yeah. I found that to be really important because as an artist, as a writer, actually coming into contact with different genres of art, like just being able to see people do what they do and do it really well, is inspiring, really. I've discovered in recent years that that's a really important part of creating my art, even if they're doing like music, or visual arts, even if we're not doing the same thing, it's really important to be able to see that and experience it. It does so much for your soul, for your creative energy.

Speaker 6:

And it just keeps you from being tired. I think your eyes look different, you smile differently, if you are inspired. I think you give off a different kind of vibe around other people, because you bring in energy. It doesn't have to be like you're taking over the room, but it's like you're alive, you feel vibrant. And I just think reading does it, listening to music, going to see movies, reading the newspaper. I love reading the Sunday New York times from cover to cover. And it just makes me feel like, "Oh, okay, now I'm informed, now I can look at the world."

Speaker 7:

Wonderful.

Speaker 6:

Well, I think that does it for us.

Speaker 7:

Yay!

Speaker 6:

Thank you.

Speaker 7:

Thank you, again, for participating and working with me through the technical difficulties on Monday. And this is actually, so this will be uploaded to a website, so once I have permission, I'll share with you a copy of the interview. I'll also email you a little later today and give you my address, so you can send me the consent form. And, yeah, we'll go from there. I really appreciate you sharing your story. I know your time is precious, and just taking time out to be a part of this project really means a lot.

Speaker 6:

So, how many more do you have to do?

Speaker 7:

I will do as many as the women of IBW allow me to do.

Speaker 6:

They haven't all called you yet?

Speaker 7:

No.

Speaker 6:

I know you did Pat.

Speaker 7:

I did. [inaudible 01:28:44] Josie.

Speaker 6:

And you did, what's her name? I just call her name, Yuri.

Speaker 7:

Yeah, that's right. Yeah.

Speaker 6:

So you haven't done Lynn.

Speaker 7:

I have not, no. So what usually happens is, is I have a conversation with Mrs. Harding, and she'll say, "Okay, I've spoken to these people, they're expecting a call from you," so I'll reach out, kind of like what I did with you, I'll reach out, and say, "Hey, I'm interested in interviewing you." We'll usually have a preliminary conversation. I like to be clear on what the project's about and what I go by, what our mission is, and how we interact with our respondents, just so everybody's on the same page in terms of what to expect. And then, whenever they're free, I'll follow up with an interview. And I sent out two, I spoke to Adita Douglas maybe earlier last week, early last week, she wanted to talk to them about Josie, get some questions answered about Josie.

And then she was like, "I'll contact you again and we'll do it later this summer." And I'm also, I'm not pushy. I really try because I feel like it's a gift to the project, for anyone to participate in. So I certainly don't want it to feel pressured or anything. So I'm very open about if you need to have further conversations before we interview, if you need to talk to someone else before we interview, I let all that stuff happen. But whenever someone says they're ready, I'm like, "Okay, when are you free? When can we do it?"

Speaker 6:

So I'm going to send an email out today, because we meet here, you do know that the IBW folks meet here. We just had dinner with Molly Eco. She was in town. And so there was seven of us who sat down and had dinner with Sarah.

So I'm going to send out a little email to them, and just say that you did this, and it was wonderful, it was fun. And kind of encourage those who haven't to step up to the plate. Yeah.

Speaker 7:

That would be great. Yeah. Feel free to pass along my email address, even though I'll be traveling, I'll still be working and I'll still be available via email and phone. So, if anyone wants to give me a call or send me an email, I'm happy to talk to anyone. But I also, again, I really want it to be an experience that the woman feel like, "Okay, this is something I want to do. I decided to do this." I don't want to be-

Speaker 6:

No, I don't think that they would think it's not something that they'd want to do, because they understand the importance of it, it's just that we get distracted [crosstalk 00:19:26].

Speaker 7:

I'm amazed at how busy everyone is, very active. I think when Ms. Roy came to Nashville, she went out the night before, and had an experience like Broadway, and went to listen to the music. And so I totally, I understand that too, that you have lives and families. And so I also try to work around that and be respectful of time.

Speaker 6:

Did she tell you she just had a film to come out to?

Speaker 7:

[inaudible 01:31:58] Am I right?

Speaker 6:

Yes.

Speaker 7:

Yeah, we did. We talked about that during the interview.

Speaker 6:

It's going to be screened at one of the film festivals I work with at [inaudible 01:32:06].

Speaker 7:

Oh, that's wonderful. Yeah. We talked a little bit about writing and the process, and her other... I've asked her how she got into film making, and she talked about seeing the movie Precious. She's also inspiring, particularly as a writer. And we talked about that as well.

Speaker 6:

[inaudible 00:20:34].

Speaker 7:

Yay.

Speaker 6:

All right, my dear.

Speaker 7:

All right, well thank you again. And I will certainly be in touch. And of course, if you have any follow-up questions, I'm also happy, if there are things you forgot, that come to mind later and you're like, "Oh, I forgot to say this. I want to talk about this," we can always have another conversation if you want to. That's totally up to you, but yeah, I'll be in touch, and you be in touch if you need anything from me.

Speaker 6:

Thank you.

Speaker 7:

Thank you. Have a good rest of the day.

Speaker 6:

And you have a wonderful trip, okay.

Speaker 7:

Thank you. Thank you so much.

Speaker 6:

All right. Bye-bye.

Speaker 7:

Bye.

PART 4 OF 4 ENDS [01:33:14]