I See My Light Shining: Oral Histories of Our Elders

Oral History Interview with

Mariah A.Taylor

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PREFACE

The following oral history is the result of a recorded interview with Mariah A. Taylor conducted by Renée Watson on January 10, 2023. This interview is part of the I See My Light Shining: Oral Histories of Our Elders Oral History Project.

The reader is asked to bear in mind that they are reading a verbatim transcript of the spoken word, rather than written prose.

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Narrator: Mariah A. Taylor Location: Portland, OR

Interviewer: Renee Watson Date: January 10, 2023

Q: Thank you for joining me today. I am so excited to be talking with you. I thought we could start with your name, where you were born, and what year you were born.

Taylor: My name is Mariah Anne Taylor. I was born Marianne because that's the way it was pronounced. And it took me decades to get my birth certificate because they couldn't find the Mariah Anne. They put the whole thing together and it ended up being Marianne, so I had time. Anyway, I'm one of twenty-five children, and we came here with ten children in 1947 from Atlanta, Texas to Vanport, Oreogn. I was born October 1, 1939, four pounds and six ounces. So the title of this little speech is, "Big Things Come in Little Packages." [*Laughter*]

Q: And you have done some big things certainly. Can you tell me about your childhood? And when did you move to Portland? Do you have memory of moving to Oregon?

Taylor: I'm going to first back up to tell you how we got our last name of Allen because there are almost eight hundred in a family of Allens, Linolns Nickleberries [*phonetic*], and Warrens [*phonetic*], and they all live within the Portland area. Part of the Warrens [*phonetic*] stayed, while others came from Domino, Queen City and Lindon, Texas. Others stayed in Mississippi and the others came to Portland. We're part of the Allen family. But how did we get our name of Allen? My father had an altercation with a Caucasian gentleman in Jena, Louisiana. He was hit

in the head with an ax after this fight and the KKK let him know they were coming to lynch him..The Blacks—or Negroes, they were called, or coloreds at that time—got him out of town. before midnight and He swam across the bayou. They, the family who took him in, changed his name from Lee, L-E-E was his last name, and they changed it to Allen. That's how we got our last name of Allen. Of those first twelve children, two were stillborn so we—the ten children that arrived in Vanport, Oregon, December 26, 1947. My mother, Geneva Rosemary Allen and my father, Isaac Edward Allen. My mother was from Many, Louisiana, Daddy was from Bastrop, Louisiana.

Q: Do you know how they met?

Taylor: Do I have what?

Q: Do you know how your parents met each other?

Taylor: Yes, ma'am. My mother, Geneva Allen and father, Isaac Edward Allen—Daddy was born December 29, 1898 and my mother was born September 22, 1918, and they married February 19, 1936 by what mother said was a "peg leg preacher". My father was twenty years older than my mother in age. Mother gave birth to her first child at age fourteen after being raped. Millie is my older sister and the one who helped raise us. In the south, if you became pregnant and unmarried; they put you outside of the hose, regardless. Mother was put out and a "white lady saw me standing by the mailbox and took me in". She wanted to keep my baby, but I loved her too much to let that happen so I went to live with my Native American aunt as my

mother had died and all they told me was that my father was a "blind man" and nothing more. They were both wedded. My mother had a lot of memories, almost everything that—the whole sheets of paper I have here is from sitting and just being at her feet and talking. By the way, the ten children, as I say, were brought to Vanport, Oregon in 1947. It was December 26, 1947 we arrived, I was eight years old during the flood. I have vivid memories of that flood, seeing mothers hold their dead babies, people waiting on housetops to be rescued and the sound of the siren that went of at 2:00 pm on Memorial Day, Sunday, May 30th 1948.

Of those ten children, there's a set of twins, Steve and Cleve Allen. Cleve is the DJ that brought Miles Davis here. He was a graduate of the Columbia School Abroad [*unclear*]. Steve is his twin. Both of them were in the theater when the flood hit May 30, 1948. They were delivered by my mother instead of a midwife because the midwife stepped out and my mother delivered her own twins. That shows you the type of strength and knowledge and wisdom that she had. So, ten of us arrived here. I'm not sure of where they—we were in a Model A or Model T car. We had to have been on top of the car, on the running board, and maybe sitting on the headlights or whatever. We were transported to the train station by my mother's doctor friend in his car.

We arrived by train, and it was a culture shock coming from the South to Vanport. That was more than a culture shock, I was eight years old. I have memories of that day like it was yesterday. My older sister Dena [*phonetic*] or Virginia [*phonetic*] was born in 1938, a year ahead of myself. She went back to get Cool-Aid out of the icebox. We did not have a refrigerator. It was a wooden icebox, and there was an iceman who used to come by. His last name was Douglas. His wife was Rosa Lee. I have met her in the past to decade. She was at New Hope

Missionary Baptist Church, she was known as a mean lady there because she thumped the kids on the back of their head when they went to sleep in church or misbehaved. Later, she was over at St. Paul. Missionary Baptist church in their choir and this was when she was in her nineties. And she walked and marched up in that choir stand, and I know she had to have been close to ninety-eight.

But Mr. Douglas had one arm. Those are the memories. And he used to sling the ice over his shoulder. People ordered five pounds, ten pounds, or whatever. And, yes, we used ice picks, and do I have memories of that ice pick and the danger of it; I had a H.S. mate who accidentally stuck herself with an ice pick and went to her grave with the scar. But we had an icebox—we did not have a refrigerator—and it kept everything cold. My sister tried to go back and get the Cool-Aid when the floodwaters hit. My family was notified, as all other Vanport residents of which there were many more accounted for than the history of Vanport, because people moved in and out of that area for employment. And I have the information about Vanport, as I am in that book itself and part of the Oregon Historical Quarterly as well about the role of women. The memories I have of those people on the rooftops, floating on the water, women holding babies in their arms that had drowned. That is a memory that I hold today, and I thank God that our family made it out alive. We lived on Denver Ave. and I remember climbing that little hill to pick orange and yellow California popes.

And I'm going to go back to the twins again because they were in the theater, and my mother prayed, "God, please grant me the favor of my children coming home, and if you do, we will never go to a theater on Sunday again." They had gone to church. Attending church was never a

question. Our faith and being a Christian family is what kept us together during this time and afterwards. The church was what kept us going. Not religion, but our relationship with Jesus Christ. And so the bus behind them went down in the water. They came home safely. And seventy-five years later, we still honor my mother's vow that she made to God. We never attend a theater on Sunday because the twins, their lives were spared. They didn't drown in that, and we honor my mother's vows to this day. Generations later, my children—the great grands are not old enough—and grandchildren, they don't attend the theater on a Sunday because of that.

That was wicked sin city is the way I saw it. There were Caucasians that were beat up in the wash house, or the laundry mat. I think it was ten cents to wash and five to dry, or whatever. Because we had come from the South and there were those who had memories of being suppressed and racism had taken its toll on their lives. So, out of anger they lashed out at anyone who was of another ethnic group. Not the Japanese, just the Caucasians. I remember fights in the wash house. I remember the Red, White, and Blue Store, Piggly Wiggly, lots of memories. And I also remember the thing that kept us together. My father was one of the ministers, Reverend E.C. Wilder [*phonetic*], Reverend Cheek [*phonetic*]. There were beautiful memories.

The pastor of that church was Thomas at that time, and he went blind after the flood. This is how it impacted him. There was the "Mahalia Jackson" at that time that lived in that area. Alice Hayden, I met her granddaughter at the repass dinner after a funeral, at Self Enhancement, or SEI, that I had attended the services for Pastor [W.G.] Hardy [Jr.], and his repass was at the SEI. And I met the granddaughter of Mahalia Jackson of the '40s. Before, during, and after the flood,

Alice Hayden—I'll never, ever forget her. And she had to build something like—Mahalia Jackson, heavyset. Not obese but heavyset; but a voice.

Our faith is what kept us alive. Our faith is what allowed us to go to school. It was not segregated. School was not segregated. There was an East and West Vanport. And the thing of it is I had friends who were Japanese. To this day I will never, ever forget. One of the best friends was a Japanese classmate of mine. Henry Ford built Vanport in ten months. It was built on a floodplain, number one. Didn't have the foundation, it was built to house World War II veterans that worked in the Kaiser shipyard, the Oregon shipyard. And people came here either to work in the shipyard or the Southern Pacific railroad. Southern Pacific [Railroad] became Union Pacific [Railroad]. That is a history in itself, another chapter in a book about forty-five pages just talking about that. Senator Bob Boyer and others are living historians of this railroad experience, today.

When we came it was not a matter of discrimination, but what was not in Vanport. We got along with particularly, as I say, Japanese and other ethnic groups. But what, to me, is puzzling and painful. As a historian and survivor, one of a family of twelve, is I help with the tour along with some of the others who were tour guides, OB Hill and others. The names of the Japanese are still there. The Expo Center was the Japanese internment camp. I break down in tears every time I do that tour and I see those names on the wall. And I hear the horn blowing; the sirens of the—the dike broke. By the way, let me digress a little bit. Everyone was given a slip of paper, was put under our door, saying, "There's no imminent danger of the dike breaking. I know some of you have heard rumors, but it's all right. We will let you know in time."

That was two o'clock Sunday, May 30, 1948; 2:00 P.M. the dike broke in both places. The Columbia River spilled over Marine Drive, and that's where you get to Vanport. Vancouver, which is a city in Washington, and Portland combined is Vanport. Two o'clock when that siren hit and bodies were rushing to get out, people grabbing whatever they could in terms of thinking of their lives, not material things. It was our faith that gave us the courage to keep pushing forward. And as I said, I was eight but I still have memories to this day. I wear a flotation belt in the pool, by the way, even in shallow because of those memories and my respect for water.

Bess Kaiser, by the way, was the wife of Henry [J.] Kaiser. That's where you get Bess Kaiser Hospital. It was, now it's Kaiser Permanente. I met the grandson of Henry Kaiser at a Martin Luther King [Jr.] breakfast at the convention center here some decades ago because I was honored to be one of those survivors and historians. So, I met his grandson. But that's where Bess Kaiser Hospital came in. Many lives were lost because people moved in and out of that area. And the fact that it was built on a floodplain, it was to discourage people from moving in. But that's where we moved in in Vanport.

Many of the transplants from many Southern states came for a better life; for a happier life, a more prosperous life. We came to keep my father from being lynched, again. And we came as a family. Everyone around us became the extended family. By the way, I remember in the South three generations. There was Big Mama [*phonetic*], who was great grandma. Under one roof, there was grandma and there was your mother; generations under one roof. We had, at that time, the type of family—which it's changed, nuclear family. The extended family now, the in theory

he's gone. Big Mama [*phonetic*] would pass down tradition and history and talk about the winds and the elements in the South.

By the way, we lived in a shotgun house. You opened the front and the back door to keep the wind from blowing the house away. And I have gone back in the '80s, to try to get my birth certificates, to Atlanta, Texas; nothing but an overgrowth of shrubs. But I left here on Monday, and I was in prayer meeting there on a Wednesday. The memories of just meeting those people, I met a ninety-five-year-old lady when I went back to get my birth certificate. Ninety-five years old in a tree. She had already treed a coon and her son had it hanging upside down. I said, "Where's your mother?" He pointed and said, "She's up there in the tree," at ninety-five. I said, "Lord, have mercy." Anyway, we had dinner. I went to a schoolteacher at that time who was where I had dinner with them. And he said, "You're sure enough welcome to have dinner with us." I said, "Thank you, but I have an invitation already." I didn't want to eat that coon is what it was.

Q: [*Laughs*]

Taylor: But anyway, we had opossum. We ate coon. The opossum is so fat when you bake it. You bake it with sweet potatoes. We had the old, old fashioned wood stove where you have soot in the chimney and you have whatever you—you move the eyes with. It has a handle to it. We learned how to apply home treatments and medicine. If we had a cut, an open wound, you'd put soot inside because that's pure carbon and that's what you use to sanitize it. You also put spiderwebs in there, had a healing value. On top of that, you put strips of fatback or bacon, and

on top of that copper pennies. When the copper penny turned green, then that indicated the poisons or toxins had come out of that wound. If you had a swollen ankle, a mudpack was made and the cool from the mud kept the swelling down, this was our form of a cast.

We used watermelon seeds. We pulverized them. And, as you know, watermelon is a diuretic. If you don't, eat a little bit and see what happens to your bladder. We pulverized them and made a type of a drink to get the water out the system. Down South they call—they didn't use the word diabetes. They just said sugar. You know, I've got sugar. We walked for miles. We worked. I remember canning thirty quarts or more of cold pack tomatoes from the garden before walking to school. It was segregated, very segregated. And going back to my mother, she used to remember walking behind the bus. Our counterparts, they had the privilege of a bus. She walked behind that and they had gravel that they used to throw at her as she walked and call her the *n*-word. One time she picked up gravel and threw it at them, of which she paid for it.

But I remember the people, the generosity, the Southern hospitality. People, when you visit them, even when I came back in the '80s to get my birth certificate in Atlanta, they were sitting in rocking chairs on the porch. I had the Oregon tag but they would say, [*imitates accent*] "Y'all come back, ya hear." By the way, in the South they did not pronounce the *r*. There is a choir director here in Portland who reassured us that the *r* still is not considered proper when you're singing gospel. They would, for example, say, [*imitates accent*] "Boy, I ain't gwinna tell you no moe'. Get off that floe and close that doe." The *r* was avoided and not pronounced. And if you listen to Reverend [Alfred Charles] Al Sharpton [Jr.], you'll hear him say it. He's introducing the

mayor, we call him, of New York. He said, “Mare,” like a mare, M-A-R-E. The *r* is not pronounced.

And so we, out of respect, even if a person would say “kiver” instead of cover and say “moe”, you would never correct them. Out of respect, never would you correct them. And, “I ain’t gwinna,” we knew that meant “going to”. If you didn’t, you found out when your britches got—anyway, they’d put some switches on you and then they’d—boy, could they use those switches. When we were disciplined—I’ll call it discipline, but I know another word for it the truth of it is. They would plait the—that means to braid, by the way—green willow switches, and they braided them together. We hid them under the couch trying to avoid getting used. Guess what? We had to go out and get some more.

We had a smokehouse. In that old shotgun house we had a cellar, so when the storms came we went down in the cellar. And everybody looked out for everybody. Your neighbor, if they killed a hog and—by the way, that’s where that song comes from—[*sings*] “Ham bone, Ham bone where you been? Round the world and back again.” That ham bone traveled through the village that we had and back again. And then the song “Miss Mary Mack, all dressed in black.” There’s one that’s about—[*sings*] “Ashes, ashes, we all fall down.” That’s talking about the bubonic plague. “Little Sally Walker” was another childhood song of memories. They all fell down because they died. All of those songs had meaning, and they historically have a value.

Anyway, getting back to my childhood, I remember my mother telling me that I slept in a shoe box in the daytime and the dresser drawer at night. At four pounds and six ounces, it’s a miracle

even making it eighty-three years ago. But God had his hands on me and a plan and on my mother and father. There's something medicinal about chicken poop, by the way. You can say what you want to. But at eighty-three I've never had a cold, I've never had a flu, and my mother can attest to that. I was in the hospital last year with COVID-21 [coronavirus disease of 2019], what they call a breakthrough. Fully vaccinated, but the breakthrough was in the lungs.

And I won't go into that because I—as a gospel singer, they stopped me from singing until I could get on room air. But getting back to the chicken yard, there's a saying, "A whistling girl and a cackling hen will never come to no good end." Guess who cleaned up the chicken yard? Yes, while I was whistling, crawling through the chicken yard, eating all of that manure. Now you know the medicinal value of chicken poop. Okay, you got it straight from the horse's mouth. Something had to have been medicinal in order for me to be eighty-three and never a cold or a flu [*laughter*].

Q: Can you talk about life after Vanport? Where did your family move once you left and once the flood destroyed that area?

Taylor: After Vanport, they could not find a house large enough to accommodate us and so we lived in Boise[-Eliot] Elementary School on Fremont. And I remember sheets being used to divide areas based on the severity of the person's injury and/or whatever. And I remember leaving that school. I wandered away, came back with a nosebleed accompanied by a police officer to join my family. But we were first taken to—

Q: Wait, what happened? What do you mean you came back with a nose—?

Taylor: I wandered off from that Boise Elementary. That was our home. That's where we lived. And I wandered off. I remember the merry-go-round, round and around. And I was found by a police officer and he brought me back.

Q: Oh, okay. And he brought you home.

Taylor: Yes, he brought me back to Boise Elementary School. My mother was taken to Swan Island right after that, and she fainted because of the memories of Vanport and here looking at all this water of Willamette River. But we lived in different housing projects. We lived at 3827 Northwest Guam and that was in 1950, two years after the flood; St. Johns Woods, 10466 Maple Leaf Drive, 1953. And I attended elementary school, Sitton Elementary School. We walked through Pier Park.

When there was some division of the district, I went to George Elementary School, which was New George at that time. And that school is still there on Columbia Boulevard. And we lived at 3805 North Missouri, March of 1956; 4419 Northeast Cleveland and that's where the Jackson family, the big Harry Jackson and his family, and many other families; Deloneys. We were right across the street from each other, and I have so many precious memories. And then 1961 to 1968 we lived at 5437 Northeast Twelfth and Jarrett; 1969 to my mother's passing, she lived at 1011 Northeast Ainsworth. Lots of memories of every one of those places.

Q: What were some of the things you did as a child? What games did you play or what did you do with your friends in your free time? And then can you talk about what kind of student you were.

Taylor: My mother made dolls from the backs of the flour sacks. We learned how to braid hair as a child using corn silk. We also learned how to avoid becoming ill. The parents figured this out. We lined up all ten of us to get castor oil, black drought, any other thing that you cannot imagine. And castor oil, oh my Lord. And if you got out of line and went in the toilet to get rid of what you just put in, you had to get right back in line again. I guess that combined with the chicken poop is why I've never become ill. We made jewelry, necklaces and bracelets from the seeds of the watermelon. My father grew up to a hundred pounds of watermelons in the South, and I have pictures of that. And he was one that you give him a seed, he could grow anything.

My mother having been an orphan—I didn't know that much about my father's side, and I'm sorry that I did not even the short time that we spent together. My mother was so abused that she would be in the field plowing, twelve years old, on a Sunday because her relatives who were Comanche, her grandmother. Her mother was Comanche, and on my father's side Cherokee and Creek. She was abused all of her life. And at the age of fourteen, she was molested and gave birth to her first child, which my oldest sister, who helped raise the rest of us. She was fourteen years old. And my mother not only was a hard worker, but she taught us the importance of education.

There was a Jewish lawyer that went through the South, Julius Rosenwald, built schools for the Blacks so that they could have an education. And I met a relative of his at the same time I was looking at the movie of Mavis Staples that was at the Hollywood Theater. And I happened to have run into him. He made sure that Black children had an education in the South, and that's a name that she shared with us never to be forgotten. There was a school that had a razor strap. If you came in late—you know what you use to sharpen your razor with—you tasted the razor strap. We had to walk for miles to get there, but we were not permitted to come in late period. It was a time that I cherish of that sense of community, that sense of being one, and the sense of feeling like we're going to get through this together. It was never just me.

I love the time that we made—please don't laugh at this—cow chip tea. This is how you make it. You take cow manure or cow chip. It has to be dry outside, moist inside. You boil it and steep it for a while. And you pour it with a little honey to make it a little bit more palatable. It was still cow poop. But this is what they gave us for pneumonia. They had no idea. By the way, much of the medicine that was practiced—the home remedies, if it didn't kill you, it cured you. That's how we got as far as we did. That cow manure, the sun had decomposed that mold of the cow manure and turned into penicillin. Thank God they invented penicillin and we didn't have to use the cow chip tea any longer. But that's what cured us.

It was wisdom for them to realize that, wisdom to know how to fix a wound with spiderwebs and soot and pure carbon, wisdom to take mud and water and make a cast for your leg from the midcalf down. That was your cast. Now, I'm not going to try to explain because I've put on several in emergency room situations. But how did they get out of that cast made of hardened

dirt? I'm not sure, but we got out of it. That was wisdom. The extremity had the coal [*phonetic*] and the compression. The healing took place, just as it did with the soot and the spiderwebs on the wounds. Many of those home remedies—turpentine with a little sugar, I think, is what they used for worms. They gave it to you on a spoon. There are so many. And I don't want to go on and on because I utilized many of those remedies in my practice when I started my own clinic.

But the memories from yesterday, those old people had something going on that we need to capitalize on today because they had wisdom and they had—oh my goodness, sex education. My mother would say, "Remember to wash your—"

Q: [*Laughs*]

Taylor: "—hands, neck, face, and ears. And don't forget your pocketbook." Well, you don't need to know what the pocketbook was. And then she told us about the three-legged man, Lord have mercy. We knew that they had two. But by the time we figured out the third one, sometimes it may have been too late. But that was the sex education. They ask a question, "Is she on the rag?" That meant you—clean sheets. Obviously, they didn't have any kind of sanitary pads or Kotex or whatever. They tore off a piece of a clean, washed sheet and that's what we used when we were menstruating. And so when people say, "Is she on the rag?" that's what they meant.

A lot of what we know, technology has changed but the principle is still there. After the child was born, every child was given that special love and comfort from the entire family. Oh my gosh, I can remember passing the last—maybe the twelfth child here after Vanport. We would

pass it from one to the other, from one to the other until it pooped its pants. Then we'd give it back to mother and make sure that we would not be involved in that. We lived in some of the most condemned houses in Portland. That 3805 North Missouri, there was—because of being homeless, the house was an army green; deep, deep forest green, or whatever. I don't know what paint was on sale, but that was it.

But we slept like sardines. Someone's head was at your feet, someone's feet were at your head. And we never could find out who wet the bed, but we kept right on going and loving each other. But as we sat on the couch, maggots dropped on our head because there was a hole in the ceiling of that home at 3805 North Missouri, which is still standing today. And the maggots would drop through there. Some of the conditions that we had to live in, that's why my heart today goes out in the ministry to the homeless because we were homeless and subjected to living in places that were deplorable, totally deplorable. The old Kaiser Hospital—we lived across from Overlook Park. There are some beautiful memories and then there are sad memories, but the beautiful ones outweigh the sad ones when you think about it. Whatever we've gone through, what I've gone through has made me what I am today.

Q: Can you talk about what some of your dreams were when you were a young person? Living in those conditions, what were you able to see for yourself as an adult? What were you thinking your life would become?

Taylor: First of all, I was taught to dream big. My mother did not have an opportunity to get an education, so she took her GED [General Education Development] test in Clark College in

Vancouver. She took the culinary arts program from Portland Community College [PCC] Mount Sylvania campus and worked at Portland State University in Smith Memorial [Student Union] as a cook up until her retirement. So she was able to dream big because she finally achieved her goal of getting her education which she had been denied in the South. My dream was to prepare myself academically to be employed as a pediatric nurse practitioner, which I graduated in 1979 from University of Colorado Medical Center.

But even with a master's degree I faced discrimination. I had someone who competed with the position that I desired at Oregon Health & Science University here in Portland. And I congratulated her because I had understood that she was given the honor of being hired for that position because she had more experience. She says, "I'm not sure where you're coming from. I don't have any more experience. I graduated in '79 just like you. I haven't had any experience." I am one that's a problem solver. I don't believe in sitting around having a pity party. If I can't find a job I'll start one. It's exactly why I started the clinic with Juretta [Lillian] Webb.

But I'm going to back up a little bit. In 1972 I graduated from the associate degree program at PCC and was hired as an instructor there shortly after that up until '75. I was told that I was intellectually inferior and could not become a nurse by Georgia English, one of my High School teachers. I was encouraged to become a teacher, anything but a nurse because that was beyond my capability. Well, what I did was take the LPN [licensed practical nurse] license and the associate degree to the person, Georgia English, that challenged me. She was living out in Jennings Lodge toward Oregon City. To prove to her not only was I able to achieve that goal of becoming a registered nurse, that was just the bottom line. I told her I became an LPN, or low-

paid nurse first, and then the associate degree in 1972, and at ’75 Southern Oregon State College in Ashland, Oregon. This is located in Southern Oregon near the California border.

And when I remember living in Ashland, we were one of the only Black families in the area and had the misfortune of having a cross burned on our lawn. When I ask you, which is what my son is saying what it meant, my reply was, “Silver lining to a dark cloud fashion you replied.” It means that they are trying to tell us that Jesus loves them also. That was my son recalling that. But I graduated from Southern Oregon State University. Not only did we have the cross burned in our lawn—my children had the best of education, by the way. Because I truly believe that we’re all connected and that we’re all brothers and sisters. And with them being biracial, the only segregation we faced was when they went to a neighbor’s home to play with their children and the neighbor saw that the mother was African American. They stopped my children from playing with them.

But I wrote the article called “The Fly in the Buttermilk”, one of eighteen Blacks in that little, beautiful town of Ashland, Southern Oregon. Being that fly in the buttermilk meant—that’s a term from the South—the only Black in your class. And that was published by the Oregon Nurses Association, and it actually shared what I went through as the only Black and to graduate and to be successful. But that didn’t stop me. I started a clinic there, a self-care clinic where people can walk in and diagnose themselves whether they had a viral sore throat versus a strep so forth, preparing to implement my own clinic later not knowing that it was going to be because of segregation.

But that experience in Ashland, Oregon with the cross burning and all and what I went through. By the way, I asked them where could I find some greens. They took me to a field of beet greens. I said, "Lord have mercy. I'm talking about turnip greens, mustard greens, collard greens; not no beet greens." And Senator Margaret [Louise] Carter came down, and she came to talk on Women's Day. She inspired me so much as being one of a few. In that college and then university, my mentor was Hazel Adanay Warren [*phonetic*]. She taught me—I was a member of an organization of professionals from Portland. It was the Western Interstate Council of Higher Education or WICHE; She said, "When people stare at you, it's not because of anything more than they admire your beauty." And she taught us it's okay for people to stare at you.

But my problem was trying to fit in to that culture, and I found out it's best to just be yourself. Be yourself. And so I wore my head wraps and I wore my African outfits that I made by hand. And when I graduated in Lithia Park—by the way, if you have not visited there and drank that water like baking soda water at the end of the street and near Lithia Park—there's only two streets, East Main Street and Siskiyou. That's where we had our graduation in that park, Lithia Park. I was invited back to SOSC and honored to be the outstanding alumni of that university. They gave me [bed] and breakfast and I was honored as well as being given the red carpet treatment. My children, we—I still plan on going back to visit someday, because I attended the Mormon church because they are family oriented. I didn't find one close enough to what I was used to in the South. It was Baptist.

The reason I went to the Mormon church because they are family oriented, and I just made do what I had to do. And we stayed together in love. But after that I decided that's not enough,

associate degree, a bachelor of science. I'm going to go ahead and get the master's, which I got in 1979, and then I didn't stop there. I got the PhD in 1992, twenty years after I had received the associate degree. My message to each and every one of you: Don't let what people say stop you. And I encourage young people as I write professional letters of recommendations for them, don't stop until you get to the top. Don't be discouraged or allow yourself to think you're less than. In fact, Hazel Warren [*phonetic*] taught us that we were superior. And we would hold our heads up, stick our chest out, and know that we are somebody. Instead of thinking that people are looking down their nose, turn your nose up. Not with arrogance, but with pride.

Q: Can you talk about—you're living this life and having these big dreams and going to college and having success during a time in our country that was under a lot of turmoil? It was during these years that President [John Fitzgerald] Kennedy is assassinated, Dr. Martin Luther King is assassinated, Malcolm X. That's obviously the backdrop to what you're living. That's happening nationally, and then within Portland there's racial tension. And yet, here you are with these big, bold dreams as a young Black woman finding herself and finding her voice. Did you think much about that at that time, or is it more when you look back you realize all of the bigger picture? Or when you were that age, were you very aware of what was happening racially and socially in the world? And how did that impact you?

Taylor: I was aware of what was happening personally because they just plain tell you in the South. "If you're white, you all right; if you brown, hang around; if you Black, get back." It was very outspoken and blatant. In Oregon it was subtle. And the racism, for instance, in not being able to get that position. We were denied our history in the South. You'd be amazed how much

I've learned not only because of sharing on Facebook and sharing that vision that Dr. King had because there are those—I did the fifty year march, downtown Portland, along with others. But Dr. King's vision, Malcolm X, his vision and finding out that we are brothers and sisters of each other and we can live together in unity when he made that trip to Mecca. Everything, all of the people, the shoulders I stand on today, I didn't learn about those when I was a child.

I was in Portland when I learned about them, but not as a child. The racism, by the way, there is a test. You take a brown paper bag and they put it next to your face. If you're darker than that, you're not included. And there's the test, the one drop of blood theory. I'm sure some of you are already aware of that. The thing of it is I was denied all of that coming up. Well, Dr. King wasn't even around when I was born eighty-three years—well, if he was I didn't know about him because I was eight when I came here, as I said. And all of the information I have is that the fight has only begun. This is not a march. This is a movement. I wrote an article and I had it disseminated on Facebook two years ago, "Freedom is Not Free". The freedom that we have today, the price has been paid more than four hundred years ago.

But we're still not free and won't be free until we have overcome, dismantled, and have killed and have done away with racism, the inequities, the disparities of the healthcare system, disparities of the economic system, disparities that we all live with. Which is one reason why I chose pediatric medicine because I have cared for—forty-two years ago I started the clinic at 15 North Morris inside of Dr. Walter [C.] Reynolds—by the way, he lived to be a hundred and I spoke at his funeral a couple years ago. [*Shows emotion*] If you saw how many people are not included. Not only are they marginalized, there are children sleeping in their cars right there on

Seventh and Fremont, Irving Park. I had a Black family. The father brought his child to my clinic. The child describes the crunching of leaves in the fall when they were sleeping and how it disturbed him. I had those that were sleeping in their cars.

What I chose to do was allow them to use my mailing address at the clinic so they could get social services and food stamps. And then I kept the clinic supplied with clothing and food. Women would walk in released from prison with nothing but the clothes on their back. And I had someone, unfortunately, come against me; did not think that was a part of healthcare to have the access to clothing and food. I would buy greens and all kinds of—I hauled about five hundred loaves of bread there <u>every week</u> from Golden Harvesters in North Portland. But I brought sweet potatoes and greens. And I would buy from an older man who has a store on Mississippi. That store is still there.

But he came around in his truck and I would buy 150 of whatever food so that the families could be fed. Because what good is it for someone to pray with you and say, "I notice that you're hungry, be fed," when you've got a means to feed them and access to providing them with something on site. Or, "I can see that your clothes are all torn and soiled. Hopefully you'll find something," and you've got a closet right there. The Bible says, "As much as you've done it to the least of my little ones, you've done it unto me." That's why I'm in prison ministry today. Since COVID I have not been able to go physically into the prison. The last one I was at—there's an Oregon State Correctional Institution in Salem, Oregon State Penitentiary. I've been to [Federal Correctional Institution] Sheridan Federal all the way to Pendleton, Oregon where they have a correctional facility there.

These people are our brothers and sisters. That's why I'm in prison ministry, the homeless ministry. And visiting people who are sick and shut-in that need someone there to support them and let them know they're not forgotten. What I tell the homeless, as I did last night under the Hawthorne Bridge, "You're not an accident and you're not a mistake. You're God's masterpiece. Hold your head up." I tell the women, "Hold your head up, stick your chest out even if it doesn't look like Dolly Parton's," just to get a laugh. It's interesting. I love laughing. I see people that are running across the street in front of my car and I will stop at that crosswalk, roll down the window, and I said, "I'm sorry, but you really didn't need to run because I only hit ugly folks." Laughter is healing. Laughter is medicine.

When you've learned to make lemonade made with NutraSweet instead of the sugar. But anyway, if you've made to make lemonade out of the lemons in your life, you're stronger. Everything I've gone through was a purpose. God had it planned to teach me a lesson and to give me a testimony. And I want to encourage each of you to dream your dream but dream big. Who knew that this little four pound and six ounce, scrawny, little—well, I wasn't ugly. No, you can cross that out. But anyway, who knew that I would get to an age where I was in a position to help others and to be of help. Juretta Webb and I that started this clinic—her husband Mayfield Webb is an attorney with the Albina Corporation, Model City [Model Cities Initiative] years. And he dissolved our corporation because I was seeing families from Vietnam and Laos, Tao [*phonetic*], because that was the influx from that time in 1980. I saw the poor, uninsured, under-insured and marginalized, while Juretta saw those with income and that created the deficit in our budget.

And so I had a choice of going out of business or relocating, and that's when I opted to start a nonprofit corporation. And until 2006 when I was locked out of my own clinic, it was at 5311 North Vancouver Avenue. Everyone that I saw was a treasure. We had people representing twelve nations. I'd have a group in one exam room from Ireland, another one from Mexico, another one from the Middle East. And I learned to respect them and their religion. They've taught me a lot. The ones from Kuwait when you cross your legs, that sole of your foot is a cursing for a man.

And I learned not to—even though I had coffee on site, I did not touch their cup and hand it to them because they wouldn't drink it because I touched it and I was a woman, a female. I invited them to go into my pharmacy where we had the coffee and they in turn were able to—I have taken care of women who all they've had is just a slit for the eyes. I honored them and they honored me. In fact, even after—before the clinic was taken over through micromanagement, I drove to where a family from Kuwait was from. They came back to my clinic and we did a tea ceremony right on the front lawn there. That's what you call respect. Every ethnic group regardless—and the most beautiful Black women from Somalia, they had marks on their face and ashes, and from Ethiopia and from Sudan. The Sudanese have the most beautiful black velvet skin. They were a work of art.

Everyone that was seen there of the twelve nations that I have been blessed to provide medical care for, they're all mine. I was on the front page of the sleazy tabloid. I'm trying to think of the name of it, the one magazine. I can't think of it right now. Anyway, it says, "Nurse works twelve to eighteen grueling hours a day," and inside of that it told the story. I've had the honor of being

on *Oprah* [*Winfrey Show*] and telling my story in 2000 as a Use Your Life Award winner representing Oregon for providing at that time it had been twenty thousand uninsured and underinsured. There are people with insurance, but their deductible is so high it only reserves for catastrophic and emergency room. So, I treated them as if they were uninsured.

My favorites were those who were in gangs, oh my goodness. When they walked in, I greeted them, front room took care of the—when they came back, I'd say "Excuse me sir, I noticed that you need some suspenders or a belt." They got the message. I said, "Would you, out of respect, pull them up please?" "Yes, ma'am." One of them had the nerve to challenge me, I said, "Either you pull them up or pull them down and I've got two number twelve shoes. Which one do you want, the right or the left?" And I'm not joking. And, "Let's talk about your education. Having three women pregnant at the same time, that's not a man that's a sperm donor. Let's talk about you getting an education."

They were all my own, every person that's sagging. And I've done a presentation at Portland Community College on sagging. It started in prison. The garments that the inmates were given, they were too large but they could not wear a belt because that's considered contraband. So, they were sagging. And then it became a signal for other inmates that they were sexually available. That's where it started, in prison. First because of their attire, and then the other is to signal that they were available. Our young people are sagging. They are our youth. They are our future. We need to invest in them and let them know that's a sagging personality. There's a sagging, lack of a dream. If you knew your history and how you were created for greatness, for success, to be

educated so that you can reach back and pull someone else forward, you would not be showing your drawers.

And, yes, there was one at the Lloyd Center here in Portland. I challenged him, I said, "Excuse me sir, would you mind—" and I made a signal pull them—he pulled them down to his knees. They were below his buns. Because in the gangs when I've worked with them—I've worked with many gang members—they have to be below the drawers. I'm going to just tell you like we say it in the South. I used to clear my throat when they're in front of me, whether they're in church—and I've had it happen in church. I was at a funeral where they—down below their drawers. I learned later that the small group was "packing a gun", after the funeral.

I will clear my throat or I will ask them or send them a note, "Would you, out of respect, please pull them up?" The one I had confronted at the Lloyd Center that pulled his down to his knees, he couldn't run anywhere and I wasn't going to chase him anyway. But two days ago I saw one. He passed me and there were other women. I was an elderly Black woman there. And I said, "Excuse me sir, would you mind—" and made the signal. He pulled them up and he returned to me. He was going the other direction. He said, "Thank you. I honor you for allowing me to respect you and I apologize to you. I was not intending to do that in front of you, so I do thank you."

But some of them are tough. I've had them walk in my clinic and offer—the women are tough. One had the razor blade under the tongue, the other one in her hair that was up in a bun. And she walked into my clinic and she threw a pencil against the window in the reception room. And,

"Where is Mariah Taylor?" I was with a patient. I came out and said, "Excuse me, may I help you?" "Yes, I'm here to kick—" "I don't think so, not today, wrong color, wrong time. And the same door you came in, ma'am, you need to walk out back." "All right, look here. You don't tell me—" she went home and got her gun, and then I had to call for the police at that time.

Right across from my clinic is a duplex, drug dealers by the dozens. Women left their children in the car to go in and buy drugs. There's an empty space there because they were freebasing in that house behind that. But anyway, they sent a note over and told me to watch my back. Because I did work twelve to eighteen hours at the clinic providing care and sweeping up the glass and making sure the place was safe for people. Told me that my name was on a hit list, and I'm saying, "What does that mean to you?" He said, "That means you need to watch your back." And I said, "Okay. If you have my name on that hit list because these women are leaving their babies in the car and going in to buy drugs, so be it. Come and get me. But before you do, you better think about it that you have to go through three people: The Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. Now, come get me." You see I'm still here. I'm not trying to preach, y'all.

Q: I love all of your memories and all the work that you do. Your work is so far reaching. You briefly and so humbly touched on the fact that you were honored by Oprah, and I would love to know more about that. How did that come about? Where were you when you got the news? What was it like to meet her? I see we have this photo here of the two of you together. Can you talk about that moment and what it meant for you?

Taylor: My daughter who was born January 22, 1965, she works for the Centers for Disease Control in Atlanta. She drafted a letter to Oprah that got her attention of the sacrificial giving and the story that I've mentioned about providing medical care for those children, and especially the homeless and gang members. It caught her attention. I was given a two-day notice on Monday that I would be flying to Chicago to be on her show. They came here from the Oprah—anyway, I don't want to go into that. But they came here from the show. They put makeup on me. And without the false eyelashes, they had the little curler. I looked in that mirror and I said, "Wait a minute, who is this?"

Anyway, they filmed that. And then they flew me to Atlanta where I was honored. I did nothing but cry. I didn't know my daughter was there. They kept her in a separate limo. I was at the Omni Hotel in Chicago. When they called my name, I dropped my cane—because I had had my hip replaced at that time. And in the photo it shows my mic on the floor because I had a dress. Most people they wear pants. You can clip your mic to it. Mine fell on the floor. But I was in tears to see my daughter Lisa [*phonetic*], my firstborn, that wrote that letter, got Oprah's attention. And it's called Use Your Life Award where Paul Newman and others have put up money.

And as a result of being on that show, in the past three years I have all kinds of awards, rewards sent to Ellen DeGeneres. She was born in Atlanta, Texas and so was I. And the person, the Royal Rosarian who was trying to get me on her show—unfortunately, she closed down before that could happen. But I was given the honorary knighting ceremony. I have been the Newsmaker of the Year KGW for a couple of years. And also was given the royal knighting ceremony in

2021—where I was fortunate to have been able to stand. It was at Washington Park two years ago, beautiful—by the Royal Rosarians. You're supposed to kneel on the pillow. And I knew I couldn't do it gracefully, i.e. I would fall flat on my face. So, they allowed me to stand and they gave me the knighting ceremony, and what an honor.

And it's all because of being recognized not just from the *Oprah Show* but as a Vanport survivor. Because Juneteenth was the ceremony—it was on Juneteenth on that Sunday two years ago that I received the knighting ceremony. And so I got to give them the history of Juneteenth, which was the day, June 19, 1865, that the slaves in Galveston, Texas found out they had been freed three years before. Eighteen sixty-two is when they were freed. And I'm going to give you just a little bit of history. Eighteen sixty-two on the stroke of midnight, the slaves knew they would be freed. They were gathered in their homes, they were gathered in churches and community centers because they knew on the stroke of midnight that's when they would be freed. So, they prayed all night and that was the very first watch night service.

June 19, 1865 when Texas found out they had been freed, that started the Juneteenth celebration because it was on June 19, 1865 when they found out they were freed. Much of everything that has happened to me, I just thank God for. There have been some hard times, times I've cried. I thought I was literally going to die when I was locked out of my own clinic in 2006. So, I'm not going to go into details about that. Along that journey, I met a lady; a beautiful lady here, Dr. Jill [S.] Ginsberg from Kaiser who started a clinic, North by Northeast. And I was consulting with them to start that because Juretta and I did our research and found out they have providers,

medical doctors, more specialists than primary care providers. And that's why she and I decided to become primary care providers.

But this man lived to be 115, John Hart. The apartment that he lived in was right on Failing, off Albina, 115. He got married at Maranatha Church when he was 104. He outlived most of his wives. His daughter, Pastor Mary Overstreet-Smith, is the one who started the North by Northeast Health Care Clinic with a Jewish Dr. Jill Ginsberg if Kaiser Hospital. His daughter brought people to my clinic that no one else would see them because they were uninsured. They had no funds, no resources. The most profound was to bring a lady from—I won't say the city—with full-blown AIDS [acquired immunodeficiency syndrome] and she was pregnant. I could not treat her because of her being pregnant. She was twenty-one. Long story short, the money from the *Oprah Show*, I put it up at [Legacy] Emanuel [Medical Center]. Only fifty thousand was given to the clinic, the other fifty thousand was in memorabilia and photos that were to be auctioned off. That was before I was locked out. I prayed with her because if I used the money to pay for her medicine; it would have wiped out the account.

But anyway, she was brought there by Pastor Mary [Overstreet] Smith. [*Shows emotions*] If I used the money that had been put up at a local pharmacy at Emanuel Hospital, it would've wiped out the funds because of the cost of AIDS medication. She could not afford it. I prayed about it and I asked God to reveal to me what I could do to help this young lady. Long story short, there was a Black AIDS organization in that same clinic. They could not see her because she didn't have proof of AIDS. Because she was pregnant I couldn't treat her. But I referred her to

Multnomah County [Hospital]. They gave her enough medications for the weekend so she didn't have to suffer. They got her into a clinic, and I thank God for times like this.

And I thank him for those that have been fortunate to have found a reason to dream, and it's about dreaming so that others can dream. It's about reaching back and pulling those forward who would not have a reason. We are historians of our own history, and I just wish—I'm sorry that I did not grow up knowing what I know now and the essence of it. But it's about caring for us and the principles, those seven principles of Kwanzaa. If we just learn to get them, nail them down, live by them, let it become a part of our being, keep our faith, lift the standard, raise the bar for those who feel like they can't be challenged. There are lots of children that I—I volunteered in the SMART program, third-graders who were not as reading ready as compared to some kindergarten kids. Get involved in your community. Be all that you can be. Be that light that somebody is looking for. But don't forget that we only have one Father, just different mothers. We're all brothers and sisters of each other.

Q: I'd love to talk about your relationship to music and your faith. I know that is such a big part of your life. It's a cornerstone for you. You mentioned Maranatha Church. For those who are not familiar with Black Portland and how churches in the neighborhood have kind of been the safe spaces, the heartbeat of Portland, can you talk about any history that you know of Black churches here? And then I'd love to talk about Gospel music before we say goodbye to each other.

Taylor: Historical Black churches, I won the Drum Major Award from Reverend Jackson [*phonetic*]. And that's not all of it, which is—in Northeast Portland right off Broadway across

from Broadway Toyota, that church is right there. Vancouver Avenue Baptist Church, Dr. King spoke behind that pulpit; and I was fortunate to be a part of the choir when his daughter came here to speak. This weekend I will be going to the Jewish temple. It's called Temple Beth [El]. And part of our choir, it's called the Northwest Community Gospel Chorus. We sing there. They sing in Hebrew and we lip sync. But anyway, we hold hands and we sing "I Need You to Survive".

It's always someone who is a historical marcher for justice that comes here to speak. And we've had some of the most—the widow of Medgar [Wiley] Evers was here, on and on. And this Friday it will be there at that temple, and they will come over to Vancouver Avenue for the Drum Major Award for the Martin Luther King celebration. It's interesting. That pastor has—I don't know if I should say it. His head is shiny enough to use it for a mirror. So, how does he keep that yamaka [yarmulke] on, that Jewish little skullcap, and it does not fall off. They probably glue it on there. But anyway, they will be coming over to Vancouver Avenue and he'll wear that, and respect for them, and we will go there on Friday. It's called the Shabbat. It's every Friday in Jewish temples. But this one is designed for reflecting on civil rights workers and those who were activists. That's going to be this Friday, so I'm really looking forward to it.

We recognize the Jewish holidays in our church at Maranatha. It is a nondenominational gathering of people who believe in unity and the community; believe that we are all given a higher calling and that is to serve, to honor, to worship, and obey God. But that we're all connected and that we're kingdom builders. When we go out beyond the four walls, it is to let somebody know that Jesus loves them and cares. And our pastor just turned fifty years old. This

past Sunday the eighth, he was fifty. He's a new pastor. Our former pastor was a historian, Dr. T. Allen Bethel. Anyone who can get up and preach and tell you how to make stone soup and how to use a wire for the hanger—he was inter-generational in his messages; very, very strong and excellent teacher. He taught other pastors and he mentored those other pastors. Many of those I have met when I attended Warner Pacific College because my first goal was to become a medical missionary.

But getting back to the singing, I sing to live and I live to sing. And oh my goodness, I love it. I sing to the inmates. I sing to those that are sick and shut-in, those on the streets [*laughs*] sometimes. Before I will give the homeless a bag of food, I'll say, "I'm sorry, but you need to—can you sing just a little song about Jesus?" "Now lady, I don't really sing but I know—" I said, "Sing 'Mary Had a Little Lamb'." And—[*sings*] "Mary had—" all on one note. I said, "That's okay because Mary the mother of Jesus had the lamb of God, so that'll work." I was doing free physicals for the Salvation Army—by the way, I stopped doing free physicals because I did free sports physicals. And after this young man that had the cardiac arrest on the field, I was challenged because I didn't have the money to pay for an EKG to be performed on all of my patients and it was required. I needed to make sure that they had that before they played sports.

But anyway, before I sign their note to go to camp free I would say, "Can you sing me just a little song about Jesus?" at the Salvation Army. This little boy, he just kept stalling and wasting time. His mother popped him, "Boy, you better get to singing." He said—[*sings*] "Mary had a little lamb." Again, there's another example. And I said, "That's fine because, yes, the mother of

Jesus had the lamb of God." I love singing and I've done twenty years with the Oregon Symphony.

Q: When did you realize that you could sing? When did you fall in love with music, do you remember?

Taylor: I fell in love with music since I started whistling and eating chicken poop on the yard. From there, I started singing. The height of my—I started out at eighteen as a minister at Beech Street Church of God, which was one of our historic churches where many—this was 1984. Many of our people from this community were there, including Pastor [John W.] Garlington [Jr.]. I went to Pastor Garlington in '80.

Q: And is this Reverend Parker [*phonetic*]? Is this Brother Parker [*phonetic*] right here?

Taylor: Yes, Reverend Parker [*phonetic*].

Q: Oh my goodness, this photo has so many Portland legends in it.

Taylor: He got me in prison ministries. He certainly got me in prison ministry, and I honor him for being one of the ministers there. But I started out singing because it's music that makes us come down to reality, that fills that void in our life. Not the void that only Jesus can fill. But I can relate to music being there and my mother singing. My father was a holiness or hell preacher. It was written in his tambourine. He lived to be ninety-three and my mother to ninety-

five. He was born in 1898. And he sang Songs of Zion. Lord have mercy, back in the South—I have to digress a little bit—we had Easter time; ooh, my, my, my. If you only had some coveralls—I mean those striped coveralls—they had to be clean. And we were promised that you would get a new dress based on the color of the butterfly that landed on you. Well, I'm still waiting on that new dress. We wore pinafores. My mother made them by hand.

Everyone had to be clean. What a time of rejoicing we had. They did not have the music, piano. We had leg-slapping, toe-tapping, hand-clapping that we kept up the beat. And you better not get off because somebody's going to look crock-eyed at you and, "Wait a minute, we need to lay hands on that person." One of the churches I sang here in Portland with Bishop Paul Martin who's "Open the Flood Gates of Heaven." And his concert was at Maranatha Church in Northeast Portland. One of the directors said, "I know y'all know the script. You make a joyful noise unto the Lord. But if you make a joyful noise, it had better be on key." And that reiterated the fact it's better to be on key than off. Yes, go ahead and make a joyful noise but it had better be on key.

I have done twenty years with the Oregon Symphony. Twenty eighteen was my last year singing with usually close to a hundred, downtown [Arlene] Schnitzer Auditorium with the Oregon Symphony. Twenty eighteen was my last year because that was my twentieth year because I can't stand up that long for long periods of time and singing. But I sing everywhere, even in the dressing room where I do my water aerobics, in the bathroom, you name it, in the prisons. And, yes, there are times I've had to say, "I'm sorry, I didn't know I was singing that loud," if you could hear me. But I sing to live and I live to sing. And I'm in five different choirs, including I'm

the chaplain of the Gospel Music Workshop of America. I'm in that choir. We meet this weekend, by the way.

And the one that is put on annually by the Seventh-day Adventist Church, Lift Every Voice. That's just two of the choirs. And then I sing in the local community choirs. This past Sunday I was at a concert at the Peace Lutheran Church, which I have performed with them before. I truly believe that music's the language of the soul. I love the old R&Blue. We dance to the music and exercise by the music in the water. Everything from—[*sings*] "Whoa! I feel good," James Brown to—[*sings*] "If you don't know me by now," you name it, Gladys Knight. We do all the moves to—[*sings*] "Stop in the name of love," every move. We do the "Y.M.C.A", SHOUT and man more we even do the WOBBLE in the pool if Dr. Unthank's granddaughter, Marsha teaches. Dr. Denorval Unthank, was the first black M.D. in Portland, Oregon. Some of the students in the pool look as if they are swatting flies, picking grapes or hitting the air while doing the wobble, but free styling and having fun while exercising is what it is all about.

We have fun! I love music. I love everything but bluegrass. Yes, I have to admit. I can't get [*makes sound*]. That is not—I can't relate to it. Everything else—but Mahalia Jackson said that she was invited to sing blues, and she refused because that is a language of a soul in despair. She's not a soul in despair. Her spirit is lifted up. Her faith is lifted up. Her face is lifted toward God, so she refused to sing blues. And I feel that it's one's own choosing. I appreciate all good music. I love jazz and I love a variety of music, even John Denver, yes—[*sings*] "Country road." But I love it all, and—[*sings*] "Thank God I'm a country boy."

I was introduced to that kind of music when I did a preceptorship in New Mexico where I studied with a shaman. I had the fortune of working with a Native American shaman, visiting the different reservations and people that are cliff dwellers. And I have a book of that, the cliff dwellers of New Mexico. They did skinny-dipping. I wasn't about ready to get in no skinny-dipping. Not in my behind—

Q: [*Laughs*]

Taylor: —anyway, they did skinny-dipping and then they would sing "Country Roads" by John Denver. I love music. I love it. There's no way I could live without it. And I have to admit. Your voice changes as you age. And those high, high soprano notes that I hit at the symphony—I was in the loft right up above the orchestra—they have been replaced with semi-high notes. But I sing to live and I love it. I just love it. And I love it when those that I deliver food to sing Songs of Zion. I am music and music is me.

Q: Do you have a favorite hymn?

Taylor: My favorite hymn is the "History", and I'm trying to think of her name. But—[*sings*] "If it had not been for the Lord—" Oleta Adams—[*sings*] "on my side. Tell me where would I be. Where would I be?" And my mother's was—[*sings*] "Amazing grace—" and she had that on her tombstone. Geneva has gone on to be with Jesus. And that was the song that she request at her service. [*Shows emotions*] I thank God for the ability to praise him and to thank him for the good,

the bad, and the ugly because it was all meant for my good. While we're going through it—and this year of 2023 is going to be challenging. There will be challenges, but there are victories also.

And one of the things that I keep reminding people of, the enemy is like a dog on a leash as he was with Job. God said, "Did you consider my servant, Job?" You can do what's necessary, but don't touch him. There's that fence ahead you round about, and that's the way it is with the enemy today. He's like a dog on a leash. He can only go so far. The scripture that talks about he goes about like a roaring lion. It's the roar of the lion that is intimidating. That rascal knows he's under our feet, and that's where he's going to stay. And my determination as I work with the different ones, and God forgive me. The youngest child that I saw was eleven days old that had been sexually abused by her father. And that tore me apart.

There are eighty children at 6601 Northeast Killingsworth here in Portland that are homeless. We give them a party at the Inverness Jail, which is Northeast 122nd, a pizza party and they have a clown and they get their gifts. We line up the hall at the Inverness Jail and we give a high five to the children as they come through. [*Shows emotions*] And there are twice as many Black children in that homeless school that there have been. But the part that's touching is the one little kid that—at Thanksgiving they invite us to come in, the children. We sit down at the table and they share their stories of their fears, of their parents dying or one parent dying and they'd be left homeless. Never getting back to South America, they made it here to America but they'll never see their family again. And I sat at the table with that young child who said he would never see his parents again just to encourage him and to let him know that I believe that we're going to pray about it.

Those children are very special to my heart. And as I mentioned about the child in the park that had thrown a—what he did was threw a chair at the teacher in anger. But I found out why he misbehaved in school. At noon, his sibling was shot. There was a drive-by shooting, and that's why he acted out. But I've also been a part of Local Heroes. That was down by King School where we have little flashcards, like your baseball cards. And so many people, including myself, from the community as leaders, as those that believe in our children. Our children are our future. That's what it's all about. That's what it's all about.

We have to believe in them. We have to encourage them, to let them know there's a better life if they've chosen a wrong path. Not to condemn them, but to lift them up, to praise them, to affirm that they are somebody and they can even be more. And as they are becoming, they should be proud of what they've gone through to get to where they are at. But children are very special to me. And that little boy who said he would never see his parents, I will try to go back there again so that I can encourage him. And to see twice as many homeless—all you have to do is look into the eyes of those children, the homeless.

And to see their tears and their fear of being homeless and feeling like they're no one and that they can't make it. Those children are integrated into the school system and there are successes. That is the truth of it all. [*Shows emotion*] And I'm not sure if I can say this, but the person that's responsible for this recording has done poetry, has written about children, has dedicated her life to giving them sound principles to live by. And I thank her for that. I'm not sure if I can, but

Renee Watson is a woman to be admired. She has invested into the future. Our children are our future.

And I remember singing this song, which was—there was a movie of Cassius Clay, and that was the song behind that, “The Greatest Love—” [*sings*] “And I believe the children are our future. Teach them well and let them lead the way. Show them all the beauty they possess inside.” That is where Renee is coming from. She has invested in them. She’s giving them principles to live by. She believes in them so that they can believe in themselves as they are becoming and reaching that dream. Shooting for the stars, in case they miss they’ll get the moon. That’s what she’s about, and I thank God for her.

Q: Thank you so much.

Taylor: I’m sorry that I’ve become so emotional.

Q: No, that’s okay. I understand. And I thank you for all the work that you’ve done with young people, with women, with the homeless. Portland is indeed a better place because you live here, and so I thank you for sharing your story today. I’m very, very touched by your stories, so thank you again for being a part of this project.

[END OF INTERVIEW]