I See My Light Shining: Oral Histories of Our Elders

Oral History Interview with

Ayo Maat

Columbia Center for Oral History Research

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PREFACE

The following oral history is the result of a recorded interview with Ayo Maat conducted by Eve Ewing on March 6, 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.

Transcriptionist: Audio Transcription Center | Session Number: 1

Narrator: Ayo Maat | Location: Chicago, IL

Interviewer: Eve Ewing | Date: March 6, 2023

Q: Okay, and I just got your permission to record so now we are recording. I want to say thank you again so much for agreeing to speak with me, and I'm so excited to talk to you today. At some point I will need a payment form, so that I can pay you, and a release form. But what I can do is I can mail those via snail mail with a self-addressed, stamped envelope and you can send it back or you can do it electronically, as you prefer.

Maat: I'd rather do it electronically. The mail is not that good. I've been waiting six months on my disability placard. The secretary of state said it must've been lost in the mail. The post office has not been doing so well.

Q: No, they've been doing terribly. Okay, well, I'll resend those.

Maat: Which email are the forms in? I can just go to the email.

Q: Yes, we can do it later, I'll—

Maat: Each of my [*unclear*] is it for the W-9?

Q: Yes, there's a W-9, a release form, and an honorarium payment form just to make sure they mail it to the right place. But I'll resend those later. It's not a big deal right now.

Maat: Okay.

Q: So, maybe you could start by telling me your name and when you were born and where you were born.

Maat: I'm Dr. Ayo Maat. I was born in Chicago, March 22, 1948. I lived in Bronzeville when I was born.

Q: And where in Bronzeville did you live?

Maat: Thirty-third and Indiana.

Q: Got it. So you were born in Bronzeville during such a historically important time. Where were your parents born?

Maat: My mother was born in New Orleans and my father was born in Bogue Chitto, Mississippi, nine hundred people [*laughs*], near where Brookhaven where my family knew Emmett Till. My uncle took over the store. He actually bought the store from the prior owner when he retired, the store where Emmett Till was lied on. I'll just put it that way. I won't say where he was murdered, just lied on.

Q: My jaw dropped when you said Brookhaven because my stepfather is also from Brookhaven, Mississippi.

Maat: Okay, all right. That's where the cemetery is. They still have to dig peoples' graves themselves and speaking of the family, that has not changed.

Q: That already gives me so many follow-up questions I want to ask you. What kinds of stories did you hear about Mississippi and Louisiana growing up? What did your parents tell you?

Maat: Well, we're part Native American, my mother's side of the family Cherokee, Creole, African. I don't remember my grandfather. My great grandmother was a hundred percent Cherokee. My grandmother was born on the reservation. And don't know much about my Creole grandfather except he was handsome, you know, because we had pictures. Not much because I was very young when he passed away. In terms of my father's side of the family, all I heard is that they possibly have ancestors from West Africa. And one of the chiefs that I know from Sierra Leone said that the way I sometimes wrap my scarves—no one ever taught me—reminds him of Sierra Leone women. And they had Blackfeet in the family.

My grandmother on my mother's side had—I don't remember if it was sixteen children and three were stillborn, and on my father's side it was thirteen. My father left Mississippi because they were going to kill him because he beat up the boss's son for calling him a nigger. Everyone else called my grandfather, who was his father, Mr. Sam. His name was Samuel McMorris [*phonetic*]

but they all, including the white people, called him Mr. Sam. My family owned the lumberyard, the pine yard there. It was six thousand acres that was given to my grandfather by whoever owned it before in return for whatever. My grandfather, I don't know if he was ever a slave. He certainly didn't act like one. He and my father were never afraid of anyone. They demanded respect.

Here in Chicago, my father moved before my mother and sent for her. She was pregnant with me when she moved to Chicago. He didn't go back for a few years until the killing thing died down. But, yes, it was a little different in Mississippi then. What I was told by my father is that he dropped out of college in his second year in order to fight in the Army and support his family. He supported all of his siblings and his mother on a post office salary in Chicago. That's how great the cost of living was then. And still give his children allowance, take care of us, take care of his wife, et cetera. In those days, the man brought the money home to his wife.

After we left Bronzeville, the area where we lived was Dearborn Homes. Dearborn Homes was a public housing project that was composed of doctors, lawyers, teachers and steel mill workers, postal workers. Just about everybody had a mother and father except for the fathers who had died in the war. It was integrated when there was no integration. Now it's all Black, I believe. But then, no, we had Italians, we had other Caucasians, and we had Mexicans. That was an integrated neighborhood. The part that was discriminatory was that part where Mayor [Richard Joseph] Daley was.

Anyway, getting back to Mississippi because that's what you're asking me about—what did they tell us? My uncle dropped out of the third grade, my father's brother—one of his brothers—to caddy at the golf course, so he didn't learn how to write English until he came to Chicago. He was in his fifties when my oldest brother taught him how to write. He always signed with an *x*. He worked at Driscoll [*phonetic*] and he was always cheated out of his money by the currency exchange. In Mississippi, my father walked twenty miles to school; twenty miles there, twenty miles back, winter, summer, whatever. They didn't complain about it. They had outhouses.

When we would come to Mississippi or New Orleans—in New Orleans my grandmother had a farm. We took baths together, male and female children, in a bucket [*laughs*], an oval bucket. We all fit. We didn't have all that stuff in our families with incest and whatever. We didn't know anything about that. We lived in Chicago. And we only knew about racism after integration. We weren't aware. We knew that when we got on buses that if there were white people on the bus—at first the bus would be mostly Black people, and then as you went further north or further south you would see the change in the races and it would be mostly white.

And when they were seated, they would keep their legs open, especially the men, so that you didn't have enough room. When I traveled at—I remember at the age of five, I got separated from my school. We were coming back from wherever. I don't remember where we went but we were on a field trip. When we came back, I was the only child left on the bus, told the bus driver where I needed to go. They let me off and I was able to make it home. We just had that sense of radar. All I know is that the people were not friendly on the bus.

Q: Where did you go to elementary school?

Maat: Daniel Hale Williams [Public School], named after a famous—

Q: Right, next to the Dearborn [Homes].

Maat: Yes. My building was right next to the school. I could look out from my brother's bedroom window and see the school. So could my mother, so she would see us [*laughs*] coming from school. We could not linger unless we had permission to be in an afterschool program. There was no such thing as being late getting home to do your chores or eat with the family. We ate together as a family. When the streetlights came on, of course, we had to be in. If you weren't, you may be put on punishment for the entire summer.

And what that meant, you could not go out to play. You may not be able to have certain desserts. It was cruel [*laughter*]. And you still might get a spanking depending. We called them whoopings though because they were. It wasn't that pat-pat with the hand. It was belts, whatever. That's how parents expressed themselves. But most of the time I didn't get many spankings. Most of my spankings came from whatever my brothers did because until someone confessed everyone in the house got punished. And we didn't believe in snitching even then. One time I got tired of it and I had to tell on my brother. I got tired [*laughs*].

Q: You said, "I'm getting whooped and I didn't do anything."

Maat: Exactly. There was no such thing as hiding money. They'd put money down, it stayed there. Nobody bothered it. You hear about children stealing from their parents. Not in that house. Food, yes. I had a young brother who used to stand on the highchair, climb on the sink, and go in the cookie jar. And they always thought it was one of us but it was him. One time my mother caught him and that was the end.

Q: [*Laughs*] So how many siblings did you have?

Maat: Five. Let's see. Four brothers and one sister, and I have one brother and one sister left.

Q: And where were you in the birth order compared to [*crosstalk*]?

Maat: I was the number two, number two.

Q: Got it. Were you the oldest girl?

Maat: Yes.

Q: So did you have a lot of responsibilities?

Maat: Had responsibilities period. Had to iron, wash clothes, with a disability at that, for everybody. They would prop me up on the chair so I could iron, everything except my mother's uniforms. We stretched curtains. We starched them. We starched the doilies that you put on the

tables. We had to iron underwear, pajamas of my father. We put khakis on stretchers. We put curtains on stretchers. I don't know if you know what I'm speaking of. They had [*unclear*]. Yes, they would have pins in them. You would get hurt, it didn't matter. You boiled diapers for the babies. No such thing as Pampers, breastfed children.

What else? We had to boil all the diapers. My mother only had a service a couple of times and she didn't believe in letting other people do her laundry. We had the old-fashioned hand-wringers and the extractors. We hung our clothes up in the sun. There were special places in the laundry room where there was open light for you to hang up your laundry, especially your whites. We bleached the whites in the sun. When you had whites, they were white white. My mother baked a lot. We had homemade bread, homemade dessert, blah, blah, blah. They made their own medicines. They were the doctors. We only went to the doctor if the school forced us to because when other children would be ill, we wouldn't. In the winter, we didn't stay in. We were allowed to go out to play. We didn't get ill. We had sleds. We may have had to share some things. We didn't have ice skates but we would skate [*laughter*].

Q: Just on your feet?

Maat: Yes. They didn't have to use a hose, you know, natural ice. We played outdoors, marbles, pick-up sticks. We had roller skates. When other children would be in school, they would quarantine—if you didn't have the immunizations you'd be quarantined. Or even if—one time we did have the mumps. They put sardines and potatoes in a towel, wrapped up our head, and still let us go out to play. We did not stay in because the school and the—it was called the Board

of Health and they had no control over the—parents were in charge. Not the school, not the doctors, not the government. Now we have that child welfare system.

We had one white family in the building. My mother forced—and I do say forced—me to clean her house. You did not get paid for it. I didn't like doing it. Not because she was white or that her house stank. It was just I wanted to be paid. And you didn't get paid to babysit. If someone needed a babysitter and your parents agreed, I think it usually was supposed to be twenty-five cents an hour. But, no, I never got paid for babysitting. I was supposed to a couple of times. Parents didn't come back on time on the weekend. One time a parent hadn't been back—it was on a Monday. I took care of three children and one of them was a baby. We were taught how to take care of babies so it was nothing. I was still in grammar school then. But we were responsible.

And they had gardens right there in Dearborn Homes. When they needed tomatoes, greens, whatever, went outside, picked them, and brought them back in. Everything was organic. My mother did not buy her certain things from—we had an A&P then. She believed—either my grandmother shipped stuff to us from her farm in New Orleans, or my mother for meat, she would either get it from my grandmother or go to the stockyard to get it. Every Tuesday the entire neighborhood stank.

Q: Because everybody went to the stockyard.

Maat: Oh, yes. I'm so glad they stopped that. A lot of the people got ill, though, from that. And then in terms of my—every summer and certain holidays we would go to visit either grandmother in Mississippi or New Orleans. My grandmother in New Orleans had lots of animals. When she flooded out she had to move into the city. She hated it all of her life because she was used to the farm, fresh air, goats, cows, whatever. So we were raised naturally. No chemicals. My grandmother, she only knew the Indian names for herbs, native Cherokee names or Creole names. She didn't know the English names. She didn't speak English. We were able to speak Creole then. I don't know a bit of Creole now. I know allo [*laughs*], broken French with the English mixed with the Creole. And I do have some friends—well, I had. I think some of them passed—who were Creole.

Most of my relatives disappeared or died during [Hurricane] Katrina. Maybe we lost about two hundred relatives from Katrina. They lost their property because there was no insurance for that. Just like my grandmother didn't have insurance for her farm. The first time my mother went into a hospital was when she fell and cracked her ankle bone on the sidewalk because they had the high sidewalks. She had me walking and she realized because of my disability—I have scoliosis—that I couldn't walk far. So for the first time she took a bus. I forgot what she called it. She did not call it a bus. She called it some unusual name. I don't remember now. She didn't like that. She didn't like the pollution. She's used to fresh air.

So when she was ninety-something years old, they put her in Charity Hospital. She signed herself out. They gave her a tetanus shot and she was not right after that. She had never had a chemical in her body. She used herbs, natural living. She had never been ill in her life. So when I

would go to visit her when I was grown, an adult, and would travel by myself, she would take me in her bedroom. They all said she was crazy. She was not. She showed me every pill they had tried to give her sewed into her pillow. The pillow was full of pills that she was not taking [*laughs*].

She remembered my name but she didn't—she pretended so she didn't remember my aunt and my mother's name because she said she didn't want them bothering her so they would leave her alone. She had very long, beautiful hair. Well, my whole family did. But you know, as we were little city children we messed up our hair putting chemicals in it. I don't use chemicals now, but then. When I got grown that was the first thing I did was get what they called a perm and it took all my hair out because we had the [*crosstalk*].

Q: [*Crosstalk*].

Maat: Well, we had nice hair with the, I guess—what did we call it? It was baby fine hair so it couldn't take the chemicals. Now, my grandmother also—you could not wear what she called short dresses. Do you know what a short dress is?

Q: No.

Maat: Anything above the ankles was considered short. She was very, very, very old-fashioned. You had to cover up. So, remember when they had the high pants?

Q: Yes.

Maat: They'd put the top and the pants. She didn't care. She said you were naked. You could not come in her house like that. She lived with my aunt. Like I said, she wasn't crazy. She would go and cook, in a small cast iron skillet, food for me, Creole food. And she'd take me in the room and she'd tell me all types of things about her children—my aunts and my mother—being so silly and stupid, she said, thinking that there was something wrong with her head when they knew that she couldn't take the medicine. So, what she would really do. They'd try to come in the room—my grandmother had very long hair. We all used to, all the way down past her buttocks. She would take all the hair, braid it, and put it in the front like a unicorn, and they would close the door and leave her alone. And we'd be cracking up, me and my grandmother. To this day, I never told my mother or my aunt—well, they're all gone anyway. But I never told them that my grandmother was tricking them.

Q: Was fooling them. What were your two grandmothers' names?

Maat: My maternal grandmother was Lily Smith [*phonetic*] because you know how people adopt the American or European names. I don't know what her Native American name is. All of those records were lost with Katrina. That was not her original name. Her husband, who was my grandfather, was named Lucas Smith [*phonetic*]. And then for my paternal grandmother, her name was Della McMorris [*phonetic*] and her husband's name was Sam McMorris.

Q: And you said everybody used to call him Mr. Sam.

Maat: Yes. White, Black, whatever, Mr. Sam.

Q: He just commanded that kind of respect?

Maat: Yes. And that's why he was given—at the turn of the century he was given the lumberyard. You know you never sell that. You lease it, so they made their money by leasing the lumberyard. But my father still took care of them even though—most of my relatives were teachers and preachers, Baptists but mostly teachers and preachers. I'm into metaphysics. I'm a Christian Scientist but I'm into metaphysics. I've studied with Unity. I've studied with Johnnie Colemon. I got my degrees and my ordination from the University of Healing. But for the most part I'm a Christian Scientist so don't believe in certain things. I don't take chemicals, don't do surgery, don't do blood transfusions. And this is all I'm saying about it. You know how I feel about the protocols for COVID. I'm still healthy. I still don't believe in a lot of the stuff they do. I have had surgery and it has not been kind to my body.

Q: Now, you mentioned that as a child even though you had a disability your mother really still expected you to do a lot of chores and had those expectations.

Maat: We didn't get away with any—oh my goodness. Your back hurt, get the mustard plaster, and then would have one of my brothers to walk on my back to relieve the pain. No such thing as not doing chores. If you were on your menstrual cycle, they called it being sick. That's the only time [*laughs*] you could get some sympathy because I would get cramps. I studied. I just needed

B vitamins and stuff like that. But, yes, you could lie down. You didn't have to wash dishes because when you got wet the cramps got worse.

But I had to do everything. Boys were not supposed to do any of the chores, but I protested. When I was in high school my father made sure they did chores. My mother was upset about it because she was raised that women did housework, men brought home the money and whatever. But she eventually started working after all the children were gone. She worked at a hotel. She worked at the Board of Health. But my mother was a natural healer, so was my grandmother. They never went to school like I did. I went to school, but I got most of my stuff not in school What I learned about healing, what I learned about the immune system. And even though I studied social science, mental health, whatever, Christian Science helped me with a lot.

When I had patients and clients I used my intuition. See, nobody in those days was afraid to use their intuition unless they were in the South. The South was so suspicious and superstitious. You did healing work, you worked with herbs, you were called a root lady or you were practicing hoodoo, which there is no such thing. There's a religion called Vodou which is quite legitimate, has nothing to do with evil. But they get it mixed up with a lot of European things. You know that most of the people in New Orleans were originally Christians. But, no, they eventually became whatever. On my mother's side, my maternal grandmother became the first female minister of her church because their minister ran off with the money.

So when I would go to visit her, I'd have to go to their church and I would say, "Oh God, help me," because [*laughs*] they're running up and down the aisles and all of this. I believe that when

you get the Holy Spirit or Holy Ghost, you use it to heal yourself or others, focus on giving some money or some blessings. Not going up and down the aisles knocking over chairs and choking people. That's not the Holy Ghost. That's the opposite because holy means wholeness. How are you going to be whole and you're tearing up, cutting up, you're not getting any better? People take their clothes off. They get naked. Well, we all seek freedom. We really weren't born to have on clothes anyway, but the climate has changed.

Those of us who used to live in warm climates, we didn't need clothes. We didn't have rapers and peeping Toms and whatever. But the diet, the atmosphere, all of that changed and it created a lot of issues with a person's brain, with their body chemistry, et cetera. Most of the people who supposedly are labeled as having mental retardation, mental illness, a lot of that could be healed. But because this society believes in chemicals, drugs, and experimentation, they don't follow those old ways. The older people in every culture are considered the elders. Women were not treated, in the old days, as if they were slaves to men. There were equal partnerships. Women were respected as the healers in the family.

Q: I was going to ask. What was your journey towards being called to be a healer and to Christian Science in particular?

Maat: Well, I've been involved in various religions. I just preferred metaphysics and Christian Science as a natural—I call it a natural way of life. It just happens to—in order to stay legit with the government, it calls itself a religion but it's really a natural way of life. When you realize who you are and you know how to interpret scripture for yourself. Not because someone told you

this is so, but you have meditated, prayed, or received it from your intuition. It's inner knowing of who you are.

How can you be created by a being called whatever name—Allah, God. There's only one, Yahweh, Jehovah. It's one. We're unified as a people but we were born under different races and cultures. Still, if we were created by a creator, regardless as to people talking about the big bang theory and all, how could you not be a part of that? How could you not have those attributes? If I take water from the ocean, doesn't that drop of water or bucket of water have the same composition and chemistry as the entire ocean?

So how could we be created of a being called God or Creator, Great White Spirit, whatever name is used, and not have his attributes? How could you not know that you are the most amazing human being on this planet because you had a creator that instilled that inner knowledge in you? So, I tried Unity. It was fine, too many white people, not enough Black people at that time. Now it's equal. I tried the I AM T [Temple], downtown, Black folks on one side, white people on the other.

Q: Sorry, what's I AM? I don't think I know that one.

Maat: The I AM T. They have a temple downtown on Washington in Chicago. They used to have Black people on one side, white people on the other. How ridiculous?

Q: You couldn't do that.

Maat: How are you serving something that is the highest thing in the universe and have discrimination and prejudice? It's silly. It's the silliest thing we've ever had. Racism is nonsense. It's totally unnecessary. It doesn't matter how much melanin you have in your skin. It doesn't matter what country or nation you're from. One earth, one planet in this galaxy—we have many planets. But in terms of the Milky Way and this galaxy and that, we're one. However, I love being Black. I love being called African. I am African-centered, but I'm also a universal person. I don't hate anyone. I dislike what they do, but I don't hate anyone. And I can't be myself without loving people.

When you get to know yourself you find out who you are, and that's what Christian Science taught me to do. I already knew who I was. They just confirmed it. It's a lot of balance involved. Okay, so you get a divorce. You're still friends with that family or that person you're divorced from. There's no such thing as the hate and all that other stuff that people bring into it. And believe me, I've been divorced twice. Had a friendly divorce with the first husband; the second husband, that wasn't such a good divorce. But later on, fourteen years after the divorce, I forgave him. We became friends. He's gone now. That's how it's supposed to be.

We don't know what we were to that other person. If you believe, if you really believe that you've had more than one life, more than one incarnation, came from other planets or whatever, that is your choice. But if you do believe that, you have things to work out [*unclear*] on this planet. People don't know why this person is this way or that. You can find out. You can

meditate. You can pray. You can think. People don't think. They react. We've got to think. We have all this history that people don't learn. They're too busy hating, hating, hating.

And politics, oh my goodness. We live in a state that is so corrupt, a city that's so corrupt. That's what the experts say. So how do you balance your energies with that? By focusing on the real things that are real, your real self. What's your purpose with being here? Did you come here to heal? Did you come here to learn? Life is a learning for all of us. Some of us have a purpose to help others. For me, it was healing. It was writing. I taught college. I was a computer system programmer, system analyst. I was a computer teacher. I've also taught some English language. I've taught math. I've tutored. I've done a lot of things.

Q: You've done it all it sounds like.

Maat: Yes. But my income doesn't reflect it [*laughter*]. We're in a state that taxes the heck out of us. I mean, what can I say? I like the way in which the—I don't call them Founding Fathers but the revolutionaries that helped to found this country. They didn't believe in all that taxation. And these people don't represent us. How are you going to represent someone by taxing the heck out of them? You give to the rich, you take from the poor. That's ridiculous. That's a Robin Hood thing. So when I see a lot of people who are suffering, if I can help them I do. If it's not for me to help them though, I don't. I pray. I may pray for them.

Everybody doesn't come to you for the same purpose or the same reason. So you have to be intelligent enough—wise really, wise enough to know based on your purpose who to help, when

to help, how to help, and still maintain your balance as a spiritual being, not only a human being. And religion was never meant, nor race, to separate us. We're supposed to be united. And all these things that are happening, some of these disasters are being caused by our own ignorance. I don't believe that God creates natural disasters. How are you going to be such a loving being and kill us because we didn't do the right thing by this person or that? We do it to ourselves. There's nobody standing over us taking notes, Oh, Maat smoked today. This one drank alcohol. Let me kill them. Let me give them cancer, this or that.

And to be honest, I am so tired of people asking me, "Have you had this? Did you get your flu shot? Did you get your this? Did you get your that?" And I said, "Did you find out who you are? What's your purpose?" And then they leave me alone. Why are you asking me if I had this and that? I'm an individual. I'm united with you but I'm still an individual. We're all individualized expressions, and I love it. I don't want to be a clone, and I don't want any clones. I don't. I mean, sometimes I think I need them for things I can't do.

Q: [*Laughs*] Right, around the house it wouldn't be so bad.

Maat: Well, not just around the house, in business too. You're trying to build a website and you have to do this design and that. You have to answer the phone, the door. You have to cook or work with your caregivers. Your caregivers come to your house. They try to take over if they don't know who you are. If they know who you are they cooperate with you. Caregivers are not meant to take over what you should be in charge of—your household. I don't care if you're flat on your back. You're still in charge. Now, maybe you can't function physically but you can give

instructions to people. Most of my work is done with people who are disabled, seniors, children, and people who are so depressed that they can't see straight. They can't think straight. And they create all these imbalances in their body that we call disease. It's just an imbalance, and we can balance it. We keep thinking that something is not curable. Not curable by certain methods. Are you familiar with psychic surgeons?

Q: I'm not. Tell me more.

Maat: You don't know anything about psychic surgeons?

Q: No.

Maat: They don't use any chemicals, they don't use any instruments, and they don't go to school to learn how to heal. They use their hands. Check it out in Brazil and places like the Philippines. And it cannot be taught. If it's not natural, if it's not something inherent, you can't do it. And they can't charge for their services.

Q: It has to be something they just have.

Maat: Right. People wait for years to see one. Even though I'm a Christian Scientist and don't believe in this and that, I do go beyond Christian Science and I do question. [*Unclear*], I'm an individual.

Q: Well, that seems like such a big part. You even said that you started protesting in high school about the way gender was working in your household.

Maat: Let me interrupt. How are you going to be free if—we say that we're freethinking beings. I was a freethinker. My father encouraged it though. So I questioned my teachers, I questioned my parents.

Q: Where did you go to high school?

Maat: Wendell Phillips [High School], home of the Wildcats.

Q: Yes, right on Thirty-Ninth.

Maat: They were some Wildcats too. They fought DuSable [High School], they fought Dunbar [Vocational High School] every day, every time we had a game. I was one of the pom-pom people, and I got injured trying out for cheerleading. Who told me that you can't do this, this, and that when you have scoliosis? Nobody tells you that. Your parents are the doctors. You can't walk, they carry you. You get a cut or sore, they fix it up.

Q: So did you end up doing pom-poms regardless?

Maat: I did pom-poms. But, see, my scoliosis got worse and then I had to have surgery for an abscess in the butt. That was painful. I passed every class. The teacher's sent my homework. But

in those days, if you're twenty days absent you could not graduate. I was supposed to graduate early in June of 1961. I had to wait until January of '62. So I didn't graduate and walk down the aisle with the class that I was supposed to be in. I was number thirteen in the June 1961 class. I was number three in the January class. And you know how we used to have the [*Chicago*] *Defender*, they would publish this, so I was published in that. And it was a big deal then. I guess now we don't even pay any attention to who's the valedictorian, who's the salutatorian. And in grammar school I was number two.

We had all these community groups and churches who would invite the children out to speak, do this and that. Now, they close that door on them. They think everybody is a criminal. If the child gets into trouble one time, that's enough to call them a criminal. It doesn't matter if it's a chemical imbalance. It doesn't matter if they're misunderstood. It doesn't matter if they're angry. Our children are angry. That anger builds up. It gets misdirected. There's nothing wrong with directing the anger into other things. But what are they going to do? People closing the doors, they're scared, they call the police, police get scared. What can I say? Whether you're a policeman or you're a regular citizen, it doesn't matter. If you're afraid of each other, you panic and you do things that are not always right.

Q: That's right. That's so true.

Maat: We're such a litigious society. We sue, sue, sue. We don't talk. We talk at each other. Men are still beating their wives if their wives don't obey them. I don't care. And I'm not just talking about people from other cultures. I remember when the Hindu guy burnt his wife up in the car.

That was just horrible, and how they kill the girls. When you come to America, you're in a different culture. You have to learn the culture. If I go anywhere I have to learn that language and that culture. How can I communicate with the people? Except if they're spiritual I can communicate with them intuitively or whatever. Can you imagine? We have survived eons. We have survived speaking different languages, this and that. So don't people think that there's something higher that's controlling some of this stuff? I mean, come on.

Everybody's talking about, Oh, this happened from a bang, this and that. Oh, this is going to happen. We're not going to be alive by the year so-and-so. We're still here. We've been crack addicts, still they had children. The children had children. I mean, come on. There's something—you can say magical, but you know what I mean. There's something amazing about the human being because you're just a spiritual being having a human experience.

Q: Oh, my mother says that all the time [*laughs*].

Maat: Oh, she does?

Q: Yes. Now, you talked a lot about your purpose. And it seems like so much of your purpose is bringing healing to disabled people, like you said seniors. Could you tell me a little bit more about your involvement in some of those movements, disability justice movements in Chicago and how you got into that and what you're doing now?

Maat: How could I not get involved? I am a person who is disabled. I mean, I have never been a drug addict but I have the empathy, the compassion for that. Disabled people come in all sizes, all forms, all races; quite a very misunderstood community. And the court system that we have has not been just. You have to sue just to get the laws obeyed. These corporations know that their places have to be accessible. These landlords know it too. If you don't know your rights, they take advantage. If you want to know what my anger is, it's that. How are you going to keep discriminating because of the color of somebody's skin? How are you going to keep discriminating because they don't meet your standard for what's normal? What's normal for you may not be normal for them.

So many drugs have been given to pregnant women that may have caused autism, so stop giving them the drugs. Start finding out who the person is, what they need naturally in order to survive in this polluted world we live in. We have not just pollution from chemicals but we have pollution from peoples' mouths. I guess there's a word for it, I just can't think of it now. You speak into the universe nasty things about people. You say you don't want this retard, you don't this—what do they call? I didn't like the language. I never considered myself a cripple, never, or a crip. So, of course, I spoke against it. I do not call myself a crip or whatever. Some people do. I never wanted that.

Okay, so I don't mind you saying I'm disabled. Does that mean that I'm not intelligent? Does that mean that I cannot be a positive functioning being of society? There are people that can't use their hands, can't use their legs, so they dictate into a computer. They write books. Some people dance; dance in their wheelchair or they may be able to get out for two seconds, two minutes,

whatever it is. We have to allow people to express—let's see, I better put this phone on the charger. We have to allow people to express who they are and what they need to be. As long as they're not bothering you or harming you, what's the big deal?

Why do you want to put people away in institutions? That's why—I didn't want to be in an institution. I wasn't putting my mother and nobody else in one. So I fought. I started a group. I mean, I became part of Access Living. But even before that, I've always spoken out against injustice, always. Even in kindergarten. I was chewing gum. The teacher—do you remember those pointed sticks? Those things hurt. She beat me on the hands with that, and I told her, "Ouch, that hurts. Why did you hit me?" My mother came up to the school about that too. You could not do that without a parent's permission in those days. People don't believe it. I was five years old. I'll never forget it.

And then I didn't like the idea of them saying there was a dummy room for people that were slow, slow learners or had learning disabilities. They didn't call it that. And then they called the people dummies and dunce. And they would make them wear a hat. A teacher put a "dunce" hat on a child. Some of those children are very gifted. I found very gifted children among children who were disabled. Angry youth need love just as much as so-called non-angry people. I'm not going to say nondisabled. And we use that word normal too much. What's normal? It varies.

So, how did I get into it? Well, they messed with my children. When you mess with the children, you get the mother upset. So my son was hyperkinetic this and that. They gave that boy twenty labels. He's forty years old. They didn't expect him to live beyond sixteen. He's still thriving.

He's no longer bitter. But DCFS [Department of Children and Family Services] took the wrong parent's children, and they gave DCFS a run for their money. I'm sure DCFS [*laughs*] was glad to give me my children back. Not just because I fought. My children are something else, especially my daughter. That child, when she was young she ranged in age from six to sixty in terms of how she acted. My God, we say those girls are something else, and they are. They really are. She gets mad with me because I wouldn't tell her certain things. I don't want to set her off. She's into justice too for everything. You name it, she's in it.

I have served my years and my days fighting. Now I want to just help others to learn how to stand up for themselves. That's what we need. We need people to learn, so I would teach. I would tell them they're right. I would set up programs at the [Chicago] Park District. And I used to have seven offices all over Chicago to help people. It was the Black network and children's emotional health because those children's emotions were being attacked. So that's why I didn't say mental health. I said emotional. It included people that didn't have any labels and people whose parents were upset, wanted to give them up, didn't want to be bothered with them. And we taught them how to be productive human beings by getting their emotions in order.

You get your emotions in order. Emotions can cause all kinds of imbalances in the body. It can affect organs. Doctors don't all look at that, not [*unclear*]. What are the emotions doing to affect this whole planet? How many people are thinking negative at the same time? You want to know why there's a storm out there. Check yourself out. Check out how the emotions are, measure peoples' emotions. Before you even examine them physically, what's their mood? You don't have to send everybody to a psychiatrist. Everybody doesn't need medication to control

themselves. So, you teach people how to control themselves. Then you teach them their right, their right to be. Don't we all have a right to be?

And all this stuff about alien. Yes, if you came from another planet you might be an alien. But how many of us aren't aliens? We don't know. Do we really know? And so much information is hidden from us anyway. We find it out. To be honest, there are people who are speaking the truth, but they're being diagnosed as mentally ill so people don't pay any attention to them. There are people who have seen a lot of so-called UFOs. They've talked with so-called aliens. People don't believe them. So in places like Africa and other places, they know how to keep a secret. Believe me, it's not just the Italians as they say that know how to keep a secret. Those Africans know. I'm saying the ones that are invested in the land and themselves and their ancestors.

The ancestors reveal a lot, but most people are afraid to talk about people who have passed on. They don't look at the signs. There are many signs going on in the plant life and animal life. For example, cats. They know when you're ill. They say dogs too. But those cats, they really know. And they know how to comfort you when you're not feeling well. Now when they don't want to be bothered, don't you dare touch them [*laughs*]. But they have that emotional contact with you. Some people, they just let life pass them by.

They think that the government is in control of their entire life. You've got to control your own life. Who is the government anyway? Isn't it supposed to be a government of the people? Aren't we the government? So why don't we act like it? Why do we walk around in a daze all the time

talking about what we hate, what we don't like. Change it. Change your attitude. You can do it. If more people did that, we'd be better off as a society. And stop thinking that because somebody is looking for a better opportunity here, that they shouldn't be here. Too much prejudice going on. You don't want the Mexicans here. You don't want the Muslims here. You don't want the Christians there. You don't want the Jewish people there. You don't want the Black people at all doing anything to progress every time.

I thought that was such a tragedy concerning Byron Allen with Comcast. And, sure, I wanted to cancel my Comcast account. But there's no better internet service out there. Even when they don't do right, they're still the best. So I kept it. I did boycott CBS, though, for about twelve years when Push [*phonetic*] did their thing. I don't know if you know who Dr. Julia Hare is. She's my favorite person. She said that CBS stands for the Caucasian Broadcasting System. She was totally right. And then what was the other one? NBC, I forgot what they called that, Nothing But Something. Anyway, it doesn't matter. But I love her analogy of how racism applied itself in broadcasting.

I was trained in journalism. I was trained in computer science. I was trained in metaphysics. I'm still learning quantum physics. I've been studying quantum physics for years. I'm still a novice. I'm still a baby. There's so much about the human body that they don't teach. I used to also teach as a substitute teacher in high school. I didn't get paid either. I volunteered, and I taught health. Those students—the teachers asked me how did I get those students to sit because they said they had trouble. Well first of all, when you walk into a classroom you don't see trouble.

You see bright, young human beings who are sponges. You give them something they can soak up and that applies to them that they know that they learn. So, yes, they wanted to know.

I also did a program at Probation Challenge where I brought my program in for sixty-something people who were on probation for drugs, mostly marijuana. And I had a no smoking program that the department, both the state—the state funded it and the city. And, yes, I donated my salary so that I could buy awards and food and other things for them. Same thing when I did programs for the Park District. I helped a few politicians, but I'm not one to latch onto politicians. But I did work in William Dock Walls campaigns for mayor and governor. And I love Larry Suffredin, but what can I say? He's a county commissioner who's retiring. I don't think he's returning. He's a good person. Now, he was a tobacco lobbyist and I'm into prevention of tobacco and stuff.

Q: Smoking, yes.

Maat: So we were on opposite sides but he supported my organization. He listened to reason. You do that. You don't just hate somebody because they're not supporting your program. Too much hate goes on. Children say they hate their parents. They don't hate them, they just don't know any better. When you know better, you do better bottom line. It's simple. But we try to make a whole lifetime study out of it. They study this and that and don't even study themselves. And why do we need a study for reparations? They know they owe us.

Q: Right. [*Laughs*]

Maat: [*Unclear*] culture on this planet has been paved, but people of African descent—this one says, "I'm not Black, I'm not African." Well, baby, you better look at the melanin in your skin. What are you then? You're not white.

And then [*unclear*] Africans. I have a friend named Mostafa Hefny. He was discriminated against. He's darker than a cast iron skillet sometimes. Yet, they classified him as white. He was upset. He was a Detroit schoolteacher who was being discriminated against. He filed a complaint and the US government told him that he could not file because he was white, and he didn't know that. Neither did I until then. There's so much that is hidden from us. These children, if they spent time studying and learning, we could be way past all this stuff with poverty. There's no reason for anybody to be in poverty unless they desire to. We can support ourselves. We can form our own rules of knowledge.

And we need to stop all this stuff with Christians versus Muslims, Baptists versus Catholics, this and that. It's silly. It really is. And then all the people thinking that having the Holy Ghost means jumping up and down, running back and forth. That's silly too. But I understand they're serious about it. And these people hating on people who don't wear masks. Okay, you want to wear a mask and cut off your oxygen go right ahead. But don't hate people. Don't tear up their car and their homes because they don't believe the same things you do. And when you teach health classes to children, teach it from a practical standpoint.

Most of them don't know how their body works. They don't know that the brain talks to the gut, the gut talks to the spine, the spine talks to the brain. And that there is so—what is it, about thirty-seven? It's million or billion processes going on every second in the body. And you've got nerve enough to put alcohol in there to upset the process, or some drug. And yet you're afraid to listen to a woman talk about healing, how to heal yourself. They're suspicious about this and, "Oh, I can't use herbs. That's voodoo. Oh, I can't meditate. That's voodoo. Oh, I can't be into metaphysics. That's, whatever, blasphemy." They can't even say the word correctly. I'm just being honest.

Q: No, you've been so honest.

Maat: In this universe, find out who you are. Learn yourself. And then in terms of disabled people, stop hating on disabled people. We do need these rights. We do need—when we go to a doctor's office, they have a table we can get on or to be able to stay in our wheelchair when we need to. Don't make us stand up if we can't. Or if we feel like it, okay, you can hold us up to put us on the scale, fine. But weigh the wheelchair then put us on the scale. I mean, [*unclear*]. You spend all this money and then insurance companies. Oh my goodness, don't get me talking about that.

Q: Well, Dr. Maat, you've been so generous with your time. And I'm just so grateful that I got a chance to meet you and to hear your perspective and your wisdom. Thank you. Thank you for spending some time this morning with me, and thank you also for being so accommodating yesterday when I had to reschedule. I really appreciate you. I'm going to resend you those forms

and we'll get your honorarium out to you as quickly as possible. And I just want to say thank you again.

Maat: Okay, you're welcome. Thank you for doing this.

Q: You have a blessed and wonderful day. I really appreciate you.

Maat: You too.

Q: I shall. Take care.

Maat: Okay, peace.

Q: Bye-bye, peace to you.

[END OF INTERVIEW]