

## **A TEI Project**

# **Interview of Bette Cox**

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## **1. Transcript**

### **1.1. Session 1 (December 7, 2006)**

Patterson

Interview with Miss Bette Cox, and it's December 7, 2006. Hi, Bette. One of the first things I wanted to ask you was about your family origins, your grandparents and your parents and where they were born.

Cox

Well, I'll be happy to share that with you. I was born in Twin Falls, Idaho, so Idaho was the state that I probably have more to tell about, because I lived there. But I do know from talking with my father that before he was married, or maybe he might have been married at the time, but he saw them hang a slave, hang a black man, and this was in--he lived in Joplin, Missouri. That was his home. That's where he was born, and as he grew up and he saw this happening he said he would never bring up his children in a place where they hang people, hang black people. And he packed up and moved, he and my grandmother. This is before--I guess they were married then at the time, but he had found that out, had seen it happen, and he said if he got married and had a child, he would never--he just wouldn't do it. He wouldn't live there.

Patterson

What year was that? When did he move from Missouri?

Cox

I don't know the year, but I know it was before he married my mother. He just was old enough to know that that's wrong and that would happen to somebody like him, because he was a black man.

Patterson

Did he marry her in Missouri?

Cox

I think so. I really don't know that part of it. I know that they were married before they moved to Idaho. I think, as I remember, they stopped in someplace in Montana, because he came west from Missouri. I think that they lived in Montana for a short time, but then they came on to Idaho, to Twin Falls, and maybe it was because two of his brothers lived there. I never thought about it, but they were a little older than he was, and it could be that he wanted to be with the rest of his family. His mother was married to Charlie [Charles] Yarbrough. This is my father's name. So that's where I was born. My brother [Herman Norman Yarbrough] was born there, and my mother [Elizabeth Rice Yarbrough] was from Seattle, Washington, but my dad met her at some point when he was living in the area of Portland, Oregon, which wasn't very far really from Seattle, Washington. So that's their background. That's where they had lived.

Cox

My mother had a nice background, because her mother was an artist of beautiful paintings, just beautiful, and one especially was a painting of John the Baptist, and it showed the minister of a church I think that she belonged to, and the minister was pretending to dip someone in the water and let them be baptized. That's what he was supposed to be doing, baptizing one of his--  
[Interruption]

Cox

My dad came from Oregon and happened to meet my mother somewhere. Then he had to go back home. He kept thinking about her, and he thought about her so much, he wanted to go back to Seattle and really get to know her, because he just met her but he didn't really know her. So he came back and he asked her mother, he said, "I want to marry Pauline," and his mother said, "Oh, no, no, no, no, no, no, no. No, no, no. You have to talk to his sister." There were two other girls in the family, and he said, "But Mrs.--," her name was--what was my grandmother's name? I know it very well, but I'll get it later. I don't quite have it in my mind. But when she said that, he said, "Mrs., I don't want to marry your daughters. I want to marry Pauline." And they always told this and everybody laughed, because it was just so quaint.

Cox

But anyway, at some point near there he and his best friend, who was getting married at church, were planning that he would be the best man and they would just trade places and get married, and I think by then my grandmother had agreed that it was all right. So they married at a double wedding, because he best friend, when they announced that they were man and wife, they switched places and there he was with Pauline, and then they put them through whatever they had to do and say for the wedding, and there they were, Mr. and Mrs. Yarbrough. I think they lived there in Seattle for maybe a couple of years, because after the first year their first child was born there. It's a girl, and at that time they didn't have any knowledge about caring for this disease that's where they were--how can I say this? I can't think of the name of it, but it a childhood disease that was very difficult to handle, and they couldn't help. So anyway, she passed away, and all of their friends had their babies and all, and they were so heartbroken.

Cox

That's when they left and went to--I think they went to Twin Falls, Idaho, because his mother lived there, my dad's mother and father. So that's how it happened that when they moved to Twin Falls, Idaho, and then they had a second child who lived, and a third one. I was the third one. But my brother and I lived there and had a wonderful life with them, the only black children in the whole town of Twin Falls.

Patterson

So both of your parents were African American?

Cox

Yes.

Patterson

So you joined your--there were other family members that lived in Idaho.

Cox

Well, two brothers lived there. The other one lived in Seattle where my mother had come from, but there were two brothers. Bert Kelso was one, and the other was Arthur Barker, Art Barker. They were both married and Barker had two stepchildren. His wife had been married before and had these two children, and they were older than my brother and I, so they weren't like we could play together. They were quite a little bit--they were probably late teenagers when we were just little, tiny tots. But anyway, I think that probably my dad moved to Twin Falls because his mother and two of his brothers lived there. Perhaps that was why. But that was where I spent my life up until I finished high school, and I was barely sixteen. I think the week that I graduated, my brother was eighteen or nineteen.

Patterson

What was Twin Falls like?

Cox

Well, to us it was wonderful, because my dad had his own business. There was no prejudice toward us and there was no problem my dad had. He had a shop of his own. He blocked hats and he could do strange things with leather. Like he could change--I don't remember if it was changing suede to a different kind of leather, or changing something to suede. I don't remember, but it was something special he knew how to do, and he took some studies when he was in Portland in how to do that. And as I say, he blocked hats also, and he had a stand where his employees could shine shoes for other people. My dad usually was in the back of the office doing these other things, but there usually were white people, white men, young men who wanted the job, and they would stand and do the shoe-shining thing, and Daddy did the other things that were a little higher level. But he did very well.

Cox

Well, Twin Falls was a happy place for my dad and my mother, and then we had a wonderful family, and we never had any problems at all. My mother wanted us to know history about our people, and I know they subscribed to the "Chicago Defender" and the "Pittsburgh Courier," and my brother and I could read something in the newspaper that was about our people, not just all the white people, but we got acquainted with some things in that way. And then there were people often, black people who would come through Twin Falls en route to maybe a performance, if they were musicians, in California, or just whatever it was. But my mother and dad were always very nice to these people, and some of them they knew, because they had come from Seattle or come from somewhere where my dad knew the people. So we got acquainted now and then. We never had any--they didn't have any children. They were just people who were coming through. Maybe they were going to perform and they were musicians, and otherwise they would just be there.

Patterson

So your father knew musicians from Washington, from Seattle.

Cox

Yes.

Patterson

Was your father involved in music, or your mom?

Cox

No, he wasn't. No. My mother, she loved the readings of Paul Laurence Dunbar, well, just reading in general. She read a lot, and my dad did, too. But my mother saw to it that we learned readings of these famous people of our race, and we got acquainted with that. We had to give readings on programs with some of the white people. They were all nice to us, but some of them were a little extra chummy with my mother. They liked her so much. And my mother went through a college called Gooding College in Idaho, and she learned a lot about stage things. She really wanted to be an actress, and so she studied something about acting. But she insisted that we learn these readings of our people and that we study music.

Cox

And my dad one day, after I began studying piano--I don't know where this little piano came from, but my dad wanted me to have a better one, and he bought a piano, had it brought home, and I was so thrilled about this beautiful new piano, and I studied piano from the time I was five years old until I finished high school, which I was just barely sixteen the week I graduated. They really moved me up a little, because my brother was going to graduate, and my mother wanted him to go to college, so she didn't want me to be there alone. So she talked to the principal and the teachers, and they said that my grades were good and they moved me up, passed me to the senior, or whatever they called what came before college. But I was supposed to graduate the next year, but they said I could make it up in college, because I was a good student. So we both graduated together and came out here to go to college.

Patterson

What was it like growing up? You were born in 1921, and your brother was born when?

Cox

He was born--it must have been 1919.

Patterson

Okay, a couple of years before you. And you started playing the piano at five?

Cox

Yes, and he started--he had violin and drums. He was quite a drummer and learned to play the violin, and some of the people in this town knew that, and they'd ask us to be on programs. Then I was given dance lessons, and I learned how to tap dance, and I learned how to do interpretive dancing and ballet. I remember the lady that had the little dance school downtown, and I'd go. My mother would take me up to have my lesson. I had to learn all of the things dancers learn. Then one day they had a big, fat contest, I guess, and I won the state contest in tap and ballet, or in interpretive dancing.

Patterson

How old were you when that happened?

Cox

I was about maybe thirteen, fourteen. I think that my mother--I don't know if it was her idea or mine to learn an African dance. I have a picture of me. My mother made my costumes for all the things I would dance in, and this one particular one showed me barefoot with like a little something around here, and I was supposed to be being an African. And then at the end of it I had to scream. So I went all the way to the end, and then I jumped up and came down screaming, and I have a picture of it. But I did win the contest for that, and also the piano contest. I won playing Beethoven's "Pathetique" sonata. I won the state contest when I think I was about fifteen or sixteen.

Patterson

Did you have a private teacher--

Cox

Yes.

Patterson

--that would come to the home?

Cox

Well, no. We'd go to the teacher. And I remember my mother, at least one time I know she baked a cake, and I think money was a little short. So I took the cake, and I think there was an understanding that that would pay for my lesson. And I remember a time when the teacher had a husband who drove one of these--oh, it was an old car, it was like a Model A. It was a big car, and I just remember that he came to get me and took me to the lesson, because I wasn't going to be able to get there that day. I think maybe we had trouble with transportation or something. But he came and got me and took me to his wife for my piano lesson. She was a great teacher--Mrs. Regan was her name--and I learned everything I knew from her.

Patterson

So she taught you classical piano mostly?

Cox

Yes. I loved it, but I loved when I would hear jazz. And a couple of times, some people that my dad knew had come from Salt Lake City en route to California somewhere. It was like an orchestra or band, and there was one woman with them. They were all black, the woman was black, and this one woman came over. I think she stayed at our house, and she was like--I always called her Aunt Gaidy . Her name was Gaidy, and she could really play. And, oh, I wished that I could play jazz like that, but I didn't know how to do it. I didn't know about a black church, where there's so much in the church music that is related to that, and I wanted so much, but I had never been to a black church, never heard a black preacher do his usual thing. But when I would hear it, I would want so much to learn to play it. It was many years before I did have a chance to do a little jazz.

Patterson

Was there any radio, African American music, jazz?

Cox

Oh, there was all kinds of music. Jazz was on the radio, along with Jack Benny and all the old ones that we all remember. Yes.

Patterson

Did you know about the African American jazz artists? Did you play the records in your home?

Cox

Well, I don't think we had any records of any of them, but we'd read about them in the paper, that newspaper that my parents subscribed to, and they knew. They would tell me a lot of things that they knew.

Patterson

What was your school like, your elementary school like?

Cox

It was a very, very good school. It was nice, and I think it was only about three blocks from where we lived.



Patterson

So you walked to school in the morning?

Cox

Yes. And then we had a dog named Sport, a collie who was wonderful. He would walk me to school and then he'd come back home, and when it was time for me to come home he'd come and get me. He just knew it was time. You know, dogs have this strange sense, and when I would leave the building and start walking, I saw Sport coming for me, and he'd come and walk back with me, beautiful big brown-and-white collie. It was great.

Patterson

What was the environment like around your neighborhood? The pictures I see of Idaho, everything is so beautiful, lots of trees and lakes and rivers. What was it like in Twin Falls?

Cox

It was nice. We lived in a nice little neighborhood, but it wasn't a wealthy neighborhood or it wasn't anything that was unusual in terms of things that may be evident in some others. It was just a simple little neighborhood, and there were no other blacks in the neighborhood, because as I told you, there were so few in the whole town. Like my uncle and his family and my other uncle and his family. I don't know. There was one little girl that the family would let her play with me. Her name was Dorothy Hayfer [phonetic]. And one day three or four years ago, a woman came to my door, and she was Dorothy's aunt. She remembered me because Dorothy and I would play together, and I asked her about Dorothy. I think she lives up north somewhere, but she said that I would be disappointed, because she was drinking a lot. So I guess she had nobody to really teach her. I think she lived with her aunt a lot, and it wasn't like having her own mother.

Patterson

And she grew up in the same neighborhood that you did?

Cox

Yes, she did. It was about the same.

Patterson

Was that your only playmate, the only playmate you remember when you were a little girl?

Cox

Yes. There was one other girl who in high school was so nice and so friendly. We didn't play together, but she seemed like she was more like a friend than anybody else, because she would always speak to me. I remember in junior high I think it was, I remember sometimes at recess when everybody would go out to play, they'd go out to play games or something, I guess, and I remember this particular day. It was so cold that day, and I had my coat pulled around me, and I was standing outside by the door, just waiting, because all the kids went to play, and I was not invited or anything, and I didn't know that I should just go on and maybe they would play, but maybe they wouldn't, I don't know. But I was just waiting for someone to come and take me by the hand and say, "Come on and join us." But it didn't happen. So I think it was my color of my skin. But anyway, I remember how cold it was, and I was standing out there, and when I look back, I wonder why one of the teachers didn't come to me or go to the students and say, "Will you go get that little girl for us? She can play with us." But nothing like that happened, and so I don't know, I just forgot about it. I knew that when it was time to go, I'd go.

Patterson

So you did feel a little lonely, being the only African American kid?

Cox

Well, I think I did that day in particular, and maybe there were other days like that. I just happen to remember that day. But we had such a loving family, and my dad came home and I remember I'd run across the street. There was a vacant lot and I would just catty-corner right in to meet him, and he'd pick me up and throw me up in the air and catch me, but that's when I was very young. As I got older I would still run across to meet him and all, but I didn't care much about anything or anybody, because our family--my parents were so loving, and they always just tried to give us everything that we could want, and they were just wonderful people.

Patterson

So you didn't feel the effects of any racism when you were growing up?

Cox

No, not really. I remember one time I was trying out to play with the orchestra they had. I guess the pianist was graduating, so they needed another new pianist to perform with the orchestra, and I remember that I raised my hand and the--what was his name? I've got to remember that. Anyway, the professor, teacher had us go over to the side and take turns, and I remember that there were two little white girls and they went ahead of me. Then the teacher called me, and so I got up and went toward the piano, and the little white girls were--they were saying I wouldn't be able to do it, I guess. Anyway, I went on over and sat down, and we had to sight read something that was written. We had to look and play it. And the other two girls really did not do very well, and when I looked at it, I read it right off and played it, and they were so mad that they were trying their best to make me feel bad. But I didn't, because I was chosen and I was so glad, because I'll always remember playing in the orchestra in high school. It was nice and the teacher was really good.

Patterson

So you were the pianist for the high school orchestra?

Cox

Yes, at least during that--I think it might have been the last year or maybe two years, I don't know. But it was really an experience I enjoyed very much.

Patterson

What kind of music did the orchestra play?

Cox

Well, it was orchestral music, and sometimes it was a familiar song, but it had been arranged for orchestra. Sometimes I'd hear one or two of those old pieces and try to think about the title. It's been so long, I just really can't think right now of the name, but they were appropriate numbers for a high school to play if they could do it. They weren't that difficult. They were rearranged. I learned how to do that when I became a teacher, because I was a music

teacher all the years I was teaching. I had a class of beginners that I prepared them for orchestra, and then that was Thursday. Every Thursday morning we would have our instrument classes, and then in the afternoon we'd have orchestra for the more advanced students, and I would show them how to play and perform.

Patterson

So how would you describe your social life when you were in high school?

Cox

Well, we didn't have any social life really. We would go places with our parents. Maybe we'd go out in the country on a drive, and it would be someplace that was pretty and had a lot of trees, and my mother and my grandmother or my aunt, if there were any others with us, they would pack these big lunches. I think about it now, how good it was in the days when people could go away and have lunches together and not have to go to a restaurant or anyplace where you have to go and sit down and whether or not they'd accept you, trying to decide all that. But just we did everything in the car. It was really--I remember those good lunches. Oh, they'd always have some fried chicken, and they'd always have a lot of fruit and maybe a dish that had been prepared, something special, and cold drinks. It was good. We enjoyed it and we learned to enjoy each other.

Patterson

So you would say that your life in Idaho was really based around your family, not so much the other residents of the city or the other neighborhood people. It was basically just your family. [Interruption]

Patterson

So when you were a little girl, your life was based around your family, your loving family, and your activities were mostly your family activities then. So in school, did you feel connected to the other students? Or were you just happy to sort of be on your own and independent?

Cox

Well, there was nothing to be connected. I mean, there was only this one girl, whose parents let her play with me. When I got into junior high or high school,

a strange thing happened. I passed this girl in the hall. I think I was going into a room and I don't remember, but we saw each other and somehow we didn't say anything. We never said a word, and it was like I just didn't know what happened. Did she not speak, or did I not, or what happened? We just kept going. For me it was like trying to just go to my class, do what I'm supposed to do. And I think that she was more outgoing as--I was always--I tend to be a little shy, but she was not, and I don't know. I will never know. I don't know whether she thought that I wouldn't speak, or if she thought that she'd better not, because she'd be criticized. I just don't know.

Patterson

Was this another African American student?

Cox

This is the little girl that used to play with me, Dorothy Hayfer.

Patterson

Oh, so suddenly there was a barrier between you.

Cox

Yes. And I think that this was--see, the junior high and high school were in the same building in that town, so I don't know whether it was my first--I think it was in the junior high period. I just know that we had been playing together through the years as little kids, and all of a sudden we're in junior high and either she thought she shouldn't speak, she wasn't supposed to, or else maybe I just didn't. Maybe I didn't know if she would speak. I don't know. I hadn't thought in advance that this might be something. I [unclear] wouldn't speak, but we never did after that.

Patterson

So in a way, as you grew up, racism maybe was a subtle influence?

Cox

Maybe. But not to my awareness. I really never--

Patterson

Never thought about it. It just sort of was the way things were?

Cox

Yes. And she was my only friend really, because I knew other people. There was this one girl, and I can't think of her name, in actual high school. I remember that she was very friendly. We didn't, like, play together or anything, but I remember that she was overly friendly and was someone who wanted to be nice to me.

Patterson

But in the home you were aware of your African American history, based on your mom's insistence that you learned about it.

Cox

Yes.

Patterson

But not in school. So inside your home, you were aware of your heritage and your black history, and then in school it was sort of a different kind of world then, because you didn't have any students that shared that history with you--

Cox

Right.

Patterson

--and you weren't really learning it in school.

Cox

That's right.

Patterson

So you said that there was a woman that came through that [unclear] you aware of jazz.

Cox

Oh, yes. I think there were maybe two or three times when I heard jazz, because people did come through there. They would be stopping overnight, maybe, and they'd come by to see us or something. But this one Aunt Gaidy,

we called her, Aunt Gaidy, as my mother thought of her as a friend, and she was from Salt Lake City, and she sat down and, oh, did she play that jazz. I've always loved it, see. And you know, there's some things I just didn't know that I could have prepared myself, because if you go to a black church--now, I shouldn't say that, because I should say certain churches. Because I remember there was a boy who had the same piano teacher I did, and his name was Glen Boran [phonetic]. Now, I think that came to me that fast, Glen Boran. I don't think he had maybe not even as much training as I did, but I know that we were at the teacher's home or somebody's home, and he jumped down and played some jazzy stuff, the real jazzy music, and I thought, oh, how did he do that? And to this day, I think they went to a Pentecostal church or some kind of very lively church with that kind of music, and I didn't know why. Until these late years of my life, there are a lot of things by studying music myself that I'm realizing. But I know that he did something I could not do, and I had never been to a church like that.

Cox

In fact, we didn't go to any church for a few years, because I think that nobody made us feel welcome. But finally there was a--not Christian Scientist--Religious Science Church, and evidently they had invited my mother and we started going to that. That was toward the end of my living in Twin Falls, and that's a very calm, hymnal type of church. But when I came to California, now the thing is, if I had gone regularly to a Baptist church, and some of the Methodist churches, too, I would have been inspired by the music, and I would have begun to try, and I just didn't, because the church that I grew up in was Religious Science. I was living in Pasadena in a home of a lady and her husband, and the first time that I went to that church in Pasadena, I was not encouraged.

Cox

Now, I walked there. It was about three or four blocks. I knew where the church was, and I remember the first time I was there, they had tables for different age groups of students. I was a just beginning college student, and I was with the late high school and/or that college age, and that's the table I sat at the first time. Then I just concentrated on Religious Science, whatever we read or what came up. So I went on home. When I came back the next

Sunday, that table wasn't there. I looked around and I said, "I wonder what happened to the table of people that I was with." And I looked around and I didn't see anyone coming that direction. I think it was there, but there was nobody sitting there. I sat down and I waited for about five minutes, ten minutes, and finally I got up. I could just see--I could see just through the whole atmosphere that nobody even came over and said, "We've moved the table," or, "Would you like for me to try to find somebody?" Nobody said anything. But I just got up and after about fifteen minutes maybe, I went to the desk where one lady was and I said, "I think that this is a terrible way of showing love," and then I turned around and walked out. I didn't know what to do or say. But in that church, in any church, you're supposed to be a loving person and express love and receive love and all that, but I never went back.

Cox

Now, I may have visited other churches with friends sometimes, but if I had known what I know now, I would have tried to get a job playing at the church, and it wouldn't be long before I was picking up a little jazz. I know now that, oh, gosh, I know that so much of it does come out of the church, because of the rhythm and the black feeling.

Patterson

But you didn't have any of that when you were in Idaho, right, and you didn't go to a church at all until your teen years, and that was close to the time you left Idaho, right?

Cox

Yes. But I had friends there who played for churches, or at least they sang or played or something, and I did a couple of times just visit Baptist or Methodist with some friends, but it never got that feeling that I know now. It was when I was almost an old woman, long after that that I really realized, because I started studying all of the effects of black music and the origin of it.

Patterson

So you did have some friends that you attended some Baptist and Methodist churches with in Idaho?

Cox



Not in Idaho.

Patterson

Or this was after you left Idaho. So you were really isolated, then, as far as your own black heritage in Idaho, except for your family.

Cox

Right.

Patterson

So in your household, did you and your brother talk about your black identity, or did you ever discuss it with your family?

Cox

No. We knew that--my dad taught us to be proud. And I think it seems to me that in the first grade one time, just once, it seemed like a little white boy called my brother a nigger, and my brother beat him up. And he came home and told my dad. My dad was proud of him for that. And they told us that, "You don't take that from anybody." But I don't know of any other time that anything like that happened. I never had anything happen to me.

Patterson

So you never felt hurt by being different when you were a little girl?

Cox

No. No, because I think I had more than any of them had. I mean, a lot of them didn't take any kind of piano lessons, and they never won the state contest, and some of them didn't take dance lessons and they didn't win that either. I mean, there was nothing that they could be so excited about.

Patterson

So you had a built-in sense of pride, even though you were different than the other kids ethnically. You were proud of who you were, and you had a sense of self-esteem.

Cox

I remember in high school when I was in my last year, and they had invited everybody to write a song for the class song for all the high school kids that were going to graduate. And I wrote a song. Let's see, I wish I could think of the name of it. It wasn't just writing the song, but you make up your own words to maybe a familiar song, just whatever you wanted to do. And I remember that I wrote this song and it maybe had a familiar tune, because anyway, they gave it to somebody else. I think when the time came to judge, they had somebody else's name on it. Uh-huh. And I didn't know what to do or say. I think I told my mother, and I think she told me, "Just don't worry about it. Forget about it."

Patterson

So they stole your idea?

Cox

Yes. I think they even changed the words a little bit, just a little bit. I think there was that old song, [sings] "Come on along, come on along--" ["Alexander's Ragtime Band"], I can't remember. I don't think I chose that, but that was one that somebody did. But I remember that when they finally did give credit, I think they gave it to two names, and I don't even remember if my name was on there now, I don't remember.

Patterson

But you knew that it was kind of shady what they did, and they took your idea. But your mother always smoothed it over for you when these things happened?

Cox

Well, she didn't want a fight. She wouldn't make a big thing of it, because it wouldn't help me any, because they'd just get madder at me. So they got away with whatever.

Patterson

So when did you first have a thought of being a musician as a profession, in a professional direction?

Cox

Well, when I won the state contest in Idaho playing Beethoven's "Pathetique" sonata, and then when I came out to go to college, it was obvious that I wanted to be in music and majored in music education.

Patterson

So up till then, you just enjoyed performing and dancing, growing up and taking your lessons and that.

Cox

Right, right.

Patterson

But you didn't think about, "I know what I'm going to be when I grow up"?

Cox

But I remember the first year, when I came home that summer, my mother found something for me to do. I think I wanted to learn to type on a typewriter. And she found a place and took me there, and it was about the best thing anybody can do if you're going to college, because you're going to have to write term papers and a lot of things, and if you don't know how to type, it slows you down. But anyway, that first summer at home I really learned to type not looking at the keys, but kind of what they called blind, because I know somebody came over here not long ago and just typing away and looking down all the time, and I wondered how they did that, why? You don't have to look down. You just go ahead--but then that's the way they learned it.

Patterson

When you say the first summer, you had already left home and then you went back to Idaho? When you say when you came home after the summer.

Cox

Well, I came home each summer. My mother would always--they would always let me come home.

Patterson

Oh, after you had left to come to L.A. to college?

Cox

When I first came to L.A., I was in Pasadena. We were going to stay with my grandparents, and he passed away. We lived with a family there, and the next year I had a different family, and my brother went on--a ladies' man, you know. He just skipped school. He didn't go to school anymore. But he was a fine man and very handsome, like your father. He was just--but your father wasn't like that, though. I mean, Willie wasn't like a ladies' man, although he could have been, but he wasn't that type. But anyway--

Patterson

Your brother came out here before you, or did you come out here together?

Cox

We came together. My mother got the car out and took us--we had two young white ladies just keeping her company coming and going. But she drove out. Daddy just stayed and kept the work going, and she came out and she knew people there. Her stepmother and her father lived there.

Patterson

In Pasadena?

Cox

Yes. And they all arranged it for me, for us to live with them. And then my grandfather died. He got sick, so when he left, then his wife, who was my mother's stepmother, she was from Oklahoma, I think, and she moved to Oklahoma, and so they weren't there anymore for us. But my mother did find a place for me, because my brother had gone off to spread his wild oats.

Patterson

So let me back up a little bit. Your brother graduated high school, and he stayed in Idaho until you graduated high school and then you both left?

Cox

No. I was just one year behind him, although there's two years in age. I was fifteen until the week of graduation, and my birthday was in May, and I became sixteen, and he was probably seventeen or eighteen. So we graduated

together, because they told my parents that my grades were good, so that I could just make it up in college, which is true, too. I found that out, because I wanted to have just two more years after Pasadena J.C. I had the first two years, and I knew that I'd have two more years at UCLA. They had told me that I'd have to make up some classes in college, and sure enough I did, because I didn't have quite enough credits to graduate that second year there. I had had two years and then there I had had just two before I was supposed to graduate with a few more credits that I hadn't gotten yet.

Patterson

You mean for an associate's degree? Or were you talking about your B.A.?

Cox

No, no. Let's see. I'm trying to say that when I was in high school and they skipped me from the last year and said that I could make up the year later in college--

Patterson

Oh, I see.

Cox

And it's true, because I did the two years at Pasadena J.C. Then I came over to UCLA to do two years, and when I was ready to go, I hadn't yet taken some of the classes that I needed to graduate. So I did have another year there, just like they told me in high school, because I only went two years and not three. And when they said I could make it up, I made it up in college, because they had the college classes that I could take just about anything it could cover.

Patterson

When you were in the high school, what were your favorite subjects? I know you loved music and performing, but other than that, what were your favorite subjects?

Cox

Well, I don't know. I primarily planned to become a teacher, and at UCLA they put me in--after my basic classes, I had to do practice teaching, and the first semester they gave me at--it's a high school in Westwood, and I can't think of

the name of it now, because I've many times seen or hear of it a lot still. It's still there. But I did one year there, and then my last year, which was at University High School, I remember that name. University High School was the last year. That was when I was supposed to teach a class, and I had a class to teach, and I was supposed to be teaching piano. A little white boy was one of my students in the class, and when it was time for him to come over to the piano and take this lesson, he would just sit there and just looked away. He would not look at me and he would not listen to me, and he wouldn't play. He just sat. I told him what he was supposed to do, and I'd show him what he needed to do, and he just looked away. And after class--because this happened every day, and I didn't understand why nobody would say anything. So I went to the teacher and I said, "You know, he never will listen to me. He won't do anything for me." And she said, "Well, just chalk it up to profit and loss." And I looked at her, I don't know why, why she didn't insist that he could not get his grade without taking his lesson from me, but she never did and nothing ever happened of it. I guess they just went on, let him finish and graduate.

Patterson

So this is your practice teaching at UCLA, when you were at UCLA?

Cox

Yes. I did the first one--first year was at--what's the name of that school? I can't think of it right now, but I did do that. I did that period, I got that done. But when it was time to move up to the high school level, this one little boy, he just wouldn't play for me. We didn't have a quarrel or anything. He just wouldn't do it for me.

Patterson

But you had decided that's what you wanted to do is be a teacher?

Cox

Yes, oh, yes.

Patterson

And so that was important to you that you made that connection.

Cox

Right, because my favorite class, even today, when I was teaching was instrumental and orchestra, and I always had a big orchestra that began to really play well. I used to keep them at recess and give them extra help at lunchtime. I'd bring a sandwich, and I would never go down and have lunch. I would always be there so they could come and practice, and then every Thursday morning we'd have our instrument class all together, and then Thursday afternoon the more advanced students could come and that's when we'd have orchestra, and that is always my favorite class, my favorite. I had a great orchestra.

Patterson

So that's when you became a teacher, after you joined this unified system here in L.A.

Cox

Yes.

Patterson

Do you remember when you decided you wanted to be a teacher of music? Was that before you came to L.A., or when you went to Pasadena City College?

Cox

Well, I think just because I had had music all my life, so much music, that I couldn't imagine not having it, and maybe in talking to the people who were guiding us--I don't know, because even when I went back to UCLA when I was working on my doctorate and the teacher asked me--trying to say his name. He's still there. He asked me what was my subject, because I wanted a doctorate, and I said, "Music, music education." And there's no problem in saying it. That's why I did everything I could to prepare for it.

Patterson

So you'd say that your whole life was sort of-- [Interruption]

Patterson

Okay. You were in Idaho and you were only sixteen, and your brother was seventeen or eighteen, and this was when you finished your high school career and you're about to go off to college. What made you choose Los Angeles? It was because your grandparents were there--

Cox

In Pasadena.

Patterson

--in Pasadena, and so that's why your mother chose for you all to come to school here?

Cox

Yes.

Patterson

You had family.

Cox

Yes.

Patterson

So how did it feel to be away from your family? You were very close, a very close-knit family, and your social life mostly revolved around your family, so how did it feel to be in another state, going to college?

Cox

Well, it was really wonderful, because I had never been around--number one, I had never been around my own people. There were no other black people, in general. Another reason is that I was with a lot of the young people my age, who were in college where I was. We were all there together and we just--it was wonderful, because to grow up to the age of sixteen and not have any friends of your own age and race, and then all of a sudden you're part of it. I thought it was wonderful, and my parents were so wonderful. My dad gave me a check which was to be only in emergency or something, because my brother didn't get one, because he was older but he was so kind of fearless as to what could happen. I didn't use it until when I left City College and I was



going to UCLA, and at that time, believe it or not, if you remember, it was only \$29 to apply to go in; \$29.

Cox

However, the fact that I was not a California native, they added to that. I had to pay \$150 extra, and I remember that I couldn't go if I didn't pay that. I had never cashed the check, written any check, because I didn't want to cause them any debt, but when I had to pay that instead of twenty-five, which I was expecting, 150 I believe it was, and I just wrote the check so big, and then I got worried. I wasn't really worried. I knew that my parents were going to have to pay, instead of \$25, which they were expecting, it's 150. I felt badly, but I wrote it, because if not I couldn't go to college, and I just knew they would want me to. You know, we didn't have cell phones or we didn't have e-mail, and there was no way I could just say real quick, "Well, I'll just go write an e-mail right now." But anyway, I think I did call them that evening, and, of course, they understood, and if they felt sick in the stomach as a result, they didn't show it. They're just wonderful, wonderful parents, and they always wanted the best for us.

Cox

So anyway, how did I feel? I felt good. I felt like a woman can write a check. I just felt good, because I was surrounded all the time by people like me.

Patterson

When you say like you, people that were young African American students that were interested in music, and so you begin to socialize now outside of just family, but begun to make friends.

Cox

And at that time, UCLA did not have a black organization like now they have Black Alumni. They didn't have any kind of black anything as far as where you stayed. I couldn't live on campus.

Patterson

Well, how was it that you chose UCLA? You were at Pasadena City College and you chose UCLA. How did that happen? Why did you choose UCLA? How did it come to be UCLA?

Cox

Well, I don't know. I guess I really don't know. I knew that I would want to go on. I didn't want to stop just because that's the end of junior college. I knew that I wanted to go on and graduate from college, and I'd probably just been talking to the kids and all, and maybe I was warned about that that's the best place to go. And my parents wrote me or called and asked me, would I like to go to UCLA or to University of Washington, because my mother had friends in Seattle, Washington. My uncle lived there, and I could live there with him and his wife. I didn't want to leave L.A., because I had made--a lot of my friends were here now. This was my first group of friends, Pasadena, and a lot of them did not go on to school, but those that did--well, I'll tell you who knew that was a place to go: Kenny Washington. [Woody] Strode [phonetic], those two and Jackie Robinson. Jackie Robinson was at Pasadena with me and so I knew him very well, and then I also got acquainted with the other two.

Cox

But it was quite interesting. I was very unaware of a lot of things that--most of the kids knew a little bit more about life than I did. They kind of knew how to act or how to do, I don't know. But I was a little bit shy. Well, no. I was mostly nearsighted. I have been nearsighted all my life, and I was told--see, I didn't realize it until I guess I was maybe in junior high, and then when I started reading with glasses and looking out at this world, I saw a whole new world, because I was 20-200 is very bad, and nobody knew, because like they didn't have a teacher at every level to help decide whether or not a student couldn't see well or something. My grades were good, and if I was having poor grades they would probably want to find out why, and then they would be able to tell my parents and me that I had--what do they call it when you're nearsighted? The professional name, I don't know. But 20-200 is bad, but I couldn't see, and I'd have to be almost right in front of somebody to know who it was. But I didn't know it, because I was playing the piano and studying all right and didn't realize it.

Patterson

You didn't have any trouble reading, or reading your music?

Cox

Well, I guess I didn't, because nobody knew, nobody could tell. I guess not. But at any rate, when I went to UCLA I knew who was coming. I knew Jackie Robinson was there now, and Kenny Washington, I didn't get to know him really, or--I can't think of this other one, but there were three that became rather famous, so it was exciting to me. Then I was going to be living with an uncle and aunt who I lived with for that first year, and then the second year I was with a different aunt.

Patterson

So the first family you lived with was your dad's brother and your stepmother, I mean, your--

Cox

In L.A. now, out in Pasadena.

Patterson

But in Pasadena it was your dad's brother and his second wife?

Cox

No, my mother's father and his wife. And then he got ill and passed away that very first semester, before we got there, but that's when my mother did--she knew a few people there and somehow she got to this family that was interested in having us live--very nice, wonderful people.

Patterson

And then you lived with your uncle when you started going to UCLA.

Cox

Yes. Then after that first year I was with my mother's cousin and her husband, that's who it was. But they were always nice to me, and I guess I did all right. They didn't want to get rid of us, or of me, because my brother was already gone off on his own, make his own life.

Patterson

So describe how you viewed Los Angeles when you first got here. What were some of the impressions you had of Los Angeles?

Cox

Oh, it was just so big and so many people, and Central Avenue was to me like a whole new world, with nothing but black people. I remember my piano teacher, who was a friend of my mother's from Seattle, but she had moved to Los Angeles, and she's a marvelous teacher. She traveled all over the world performing. But I remember I stayed with her one summer or a few weeks, whatever it was, or a vacation--

Patterson

What was her name?

Cox

Lorenza Jordan-Cole. She had a home on 56th Street, and I was there during that summer, and I remember one day I walked down to Central Avenue, because it was, like, a block away, and I saw shops and I saw just a lot of people, a lot of black people. And when I came back home she says, "Oh, where did you go?" And I said, "I went downtown." And she said, "You went downtown? How did you get downtown?" I said, "I just walked over there about a block away." "Oh," she said, "that's Central Avenue." And I said, "It's not downtown?" Because I thought it was downtown, because in Twin Falls, Idaho, that's the way Twin Falls looked. It was a small town with shops in a couple of blocks. I mean, to me it just looked--I thought I went to downtown, down to the shopping. But anyway, I remember I saw a place that had ice cream sandwiches, you know, the little chocolate cake like with ice cream? First time I had ever seen that. In Idaho I never had one. I think it was only a nickel in those days, and, oh, I was so excited to have this ice cream sandwich that I went back and told this lady, this piano teacher. I said, "Oh, it was so nice. I did this, that, and the other." And she said, "Honey, you weren't downtown. You were just on the avenue over there." But anyway, I see how it was so easy for me to get excited, because I wasn't used to that.

Patterson

Now, how old were you now? What was your age when you first saw--  
[Interruption]

Cox

Let's see. This was in the summertime, before I went back to L.A., so I was about seventeen. Because I had had two years of college; sixteen or seventeen. I'm not sure, but I think that might have been after my first year of college, because my mother knew her well, and she had offered to have me stay a little while so she could teach me some more about piano. So I think that I would say I was either sixteen--I was probably seventeen.

Patterson

Well, what did you learn from her, musically? [Interruption]

Patterson

So what did you learn from her?

Cox

Well, I learned a lot. It was a short time, but I learned a lot, because she was really a magnificent teacher. But the teacher in Twin Falls was magnificent. She was great.

Patterson

Was that Miss Regan?

Cox

Yes. She was a great teacher.

Patterson

How were they different?

Cox

Well, it's funny how you get something from just knowing the lifestyle of somebody--and this lady now, she's not living now, her daughter's living, though--but I knew that she traveled around the world concertizing. She was a great concert artist, and she had done that most of her whole life. And her daughter was home with her father, and there was a wonderful lady next door who was a great artist. Oh, she was a wonderful artist, and she kind of took her under her wing in a sense, because she loved her, the daughter, who was about my age, maybe a couple of years younger.

Patterson

Now, this is Lorenza's daughter?

Cox

Yes. Her mother wanted her to be a great pianist, too, and so but this girl, as far as I ever knew her, she always wanted that lady next door--she wanted to be like her, because to this day she's an artist of her own.

Patterson

Do you remember who that was, the lady next door?

Cox

Mrs.--maybe later. But I think that she was so kind to the daughter, and the daughter just admired her painting and I think she just--the lady either taught her or she just picked it up and she began to be an artist, and to this day she has taught high school art and college and had exhibitions and all. And I could see right then that she missed her mother so much, because she was always gone on a concert tour or something, and she was very interested in her own work, her music, and that was everything to her. But her daughter was sort of getting the artistry from this other lady, and her father was there. She did have her father and her grandmother. Her grandmother was a little elderly lady who--just a different generation.

Patterson

Do you remember Lorenza's daughter's name?

Cox

Yes. Yvonne Cole-Meo. She some years later met a man from Europe, and they'd married and had a son and still have him.

Patterson

Was Yvonne with her mom when you stayed with her mom? You were both there together?

Cox

Right. Yes. For that summer, yes, she was. But her mother really wanted her to stay with the piano, and it was some years, I think--I think that she had had two years of college before she convinced everybody that she wanted art, not music.

Patterson

Painting, she was really a painter.

Cox

She wanted to be an artist and that's what she devoted her life to. But it's a lot to learn when you're aware that people and the family styles or whatever is happening, because they're fine people and I would never say anything to hurt them at all. But I just think I know that Yvonne really proved that she was a great artist.

Patterson

So getting back to what you learned from her mother, her mother was a pianist--

Cox

Oh, yes, marvelous.

Patterson

So you went from Miss Regan in Idaho to this woman. Would you say that those were two of your primary piano teachers?

Cox

Well, I didn't have that much time with Mrs. Cole, because as I said, she's away a lot, and then I was in school in Pasadena and then UCLA, and maybe some people could do it, but I wanted to keep my grades up and get through school, and then I was meeting all the young people around L.A. that I had never known before, and I didn't really do much practicing. I really didn't. At that time, I think it was just my education. I wanted to go through school and come out with my degree.

Patterson

So the shift was not so much from performance to a new era of performance for you. It was more of a shift from performance to education and learning and getting ready to be a teacher.

Cox

Right, right, music teacher, though. Music education, that's always what I did, and when I retired I was a music advisor downtown for the schools. They had me doing television programs, and I did particularly three particular ones that I still treasure, because one was with Eubie Blake. I interviewed some great artists and then had them perform, and I interviewed some New Orleans musicians and had them perform. I asked them questions that children could relate to and could learn from.

Patterson

Were any of those artists playing on Central Avenue? Did you go to shows on Central Avenue when you first came?

Cox

Oh, no. I was too young. I didn't. I mean, there were very few people, but a few that I knew, because they had sort of told--they were sneaking out at night to do that, but I didn't have the nerve. I was scared. I wouldn't do it. But I know that it was a time when maybe after I graduated, maybe I would have gone if something had come up. "Let's go." One time my sorority had a luncheon there. The AKAs had a tea or something.

Patterson

On Central Avenue?

Cox

In the Club Alabam. I didn't go, though. I wasn't there. I don't know what happened.

Patterson

So you knew of Central Avenue, it was just that you were too young to go--you didn't have that nightlife kind of--

Cox



Yes. I never knew much about it. I just knew that I'd read about it in the paper, and people would talk about maybe somebody famous would be performing there.

Patterson

So what kind of music were you listening to? Did that change when you came to Los Angeles, the kinds of music you liked and that you listened to?

Cox

I still appreciate classical music, but I also learned more about jazz that I never knew much about. I had heard it, and I heard it on the radio, but I never played it. I didn't know how to play it. It's different from classical music, the European kind of music, but I never had any lessons like that until some years later, when I had been teaching for quite a while.

Patterson

Did Aunt Gaidy teach you any--were you playing anything still from--

Cox

The lady that came through there from Salt Lake? She wasn't there but a day or two, no.

Patterson

Okay. You just heard her play and kind of liked it.

Cox

Oh, yes. She sat there and, oh, she got that rhythm going and all that. But I wanted to do it but just didn't know how. My classical music had a whole different sense of rhythm and expression.

Patterson

When you went to parties, did you dance to other kinds of music or listen to it on the radio?

Cox

I have always thought that I was a little bit behind in dancing. I mean ballroom dancing, not the interpretive dancing, [unclear] just dancing. You see, all these

people that I knew, they grew up--they were dancing when they were first or second grade, and they had that feeling, and to this day I feel like I'm looking like a little bit stiff, that I can't quite completely get in there with it, because I didn't grow up with it. I always say that has to be it, because all the kids that I knew in Pasadena and as I knew them here, they'd been dancing all their lives like that. I'd go to dances and I'd gone to parties, but I never felt like I was really--I always thought I was kind of awkward, because it was at this stage in life, if I hadn't learned how now, it's too late. But I would go to dances and all that.

Patterson

Did you enjoy the music? Did you like it?

Cox

Yes, oh, yes. And after I was married, during my early marriage, there was a club of girls. A couple of them lived in the same area where I lived, and we knew each other, got acquainted, and some of them I went to college with, too. But they wanted to start this organization and so I said, "Yeah, I'll be in it." They wanted me to be in it, and it was called the Turnabouts, and for, gosh, maybe ten years I was with the Turnabouts. We would once a year give gifts to needy children during the holiday season, but throughout the year we didn't really--that was our thing or our goal, that by Christmas we were going to give gifts to children in need. So once a year we'd have to give a fundraiser, and it would be at the Elks down on Central, usually there. We'd have a big dance, and everybody that we invited had to bring a toy for children. There was a dancer in the area, Marie Bryant. She was an excellent dancer, and she taught dancing and then she performed. She'd perform in clubs and things. But she was so good at it, and they got her to say she would teach us a little chorus line, so we'd line up and we'd be in the chorus line, and she'd teach us the steps, and we'd have the music. Then when it came time for this big program that we'd put on, that would be our main number. But then we'd try to get a famous person, too.

Cox

Well, I decided one day that I knew I could play jazz, but I just never knew how, I'd never learned. And I thought, maybe I could play jazz. I could play a

number--my favorite record artist is Erroll Garner, and I loved Erroll Garner. I loved all the music he played, and I wanted to learn to do it. His music is much simpler than other people that are doing a whole lot of jazz, but he would just have something cool going, and, oh, it was just so beautiful. And I went to this lady that taught us the chorus version of something, and we were all supposed to be in the chorus line and do all this. So I had started--somebody told me that he would coach me, because I'd had a classical background and it wouldn't be hard for me to learn. So I got in touch with him and I told him that I wanted him to coach me. This was summertime, and he coached me the whole summer, and then when school started I had to go back to school teaching and I didn't do anything.

Cox

But every summer for about three summers, I went, and even the first summer I learned to do my favorite. I could play it just like Erroll Garner. Oh, boy, I was so happy. And so the girls all heard me. They had me play and they said they wanted me to do it on the program. I wanted to do it. They were willing, because I had it down pat. Well, anyway, each year for about three years I would do that, and as soon as school started I had to get ready to go back to work, so I never really stayed with it. But I always wanted to do it in the summer. I wanted to just practice that music and play it, and I did a little piano thing that Count Basie would do, [sings] "Da, da, da, dip, da, da, da, bumpa dump dum, boom," and I'd get it all down. I had that down, and that was to be my finale, because it knocked you out when you hit all that, all those things. I did it and the audience just clapped and clapped, and even my son said, "Mama, I was so proud of you." He told me just the other day. I didn't know he'd remembered it.

Patterson

Can you play it? Is this something you still play?

Cox

Oh, I don't do it anymore. You know, I would try, but I do want to try. I am going to try it, because I know I can do it, but I love jazz. I loved to play it. And to top it off, they had a little band that played on the program, too, and they played, backed me with a bass and the drums and I did the piano part, and it

sounds just like Count Basie. Ask anybody that was there. They'll tell you that's the truth, that I'm not exaggerating.

Patterson

Did you have the recording? Did you make any recordings of these shows?

Cox

I never did, and I wish I had. In that time, people didn't do that as much. It was right after that, I think, that people started doing that, because they did record something I did for my--I had to do a concert for my master's degree. After I graduated, then I went back for my master's, and one of the requirements was a piano concert. So I did that.

Patterson

These three years that you were coached by Erroll Garner, what were those years?

Cox

Let's see. Gosh, I don't know. Oh, wow.

Patterson

That was your first year of teaching school, you say? You were with the Turnabouts?

Cox

Oh, no, no, it was later. It was long later, when I'd heard so much and thought, why can't I do that one? I have had all of my classical background. Why can't I do it? And finally one day when I heard about this man that could just coach, because he told me when I told him what I wanted to do, and I said, "Erroll Garner and George Shearing." I mentioned different ones, and he said, "Well, of all the ones you've named, the easiest one is Erroll Garner." And I said, "Well, that's what I'll do. I'll go for him, but I want to play like Erroll Garner."

Patterson

And he was here in L.A.? Erroll Garner was living here?

Cox

No, no.

Patterson

Oh, you didn't actually get--it was someone else that worked with you. It wasn't Erroll Garner himself?

Cox

It was this man that had been coaching other people on playing instruments.

Patterson

Oh, to play like. I understand.

Cox

He was a musician and he showed me and I would just do it.

Patterson

What was his name? Do you remember?

Cox

He died, but I did remember it, and there's a man now, I think, who has the same name, and I think he might be a musician, too. I just don't know. It'll come to me. But I did that for about three different years, and we would have our big event out on Sunset Strip when it was Sunset Strip. It was really swanky. One place was Ciro's and another was a place where they had booths on the side of the auditorium. Some people would buy tickets to be in a booth, where they could really look out and be seen, too, and I can't think of the name of that place. But I think Jimmy [Bette's current husband] and I had just gotten married, I think, when I quit, because I was beginning to think that I just shouldn't be doing that. I should just stay with my--play at the schools and be part of all of that.

Patterson

When did you get married the first time, the first marriage?

Cox

Well, the first time, right after I went to Oberlin [Conservatory of Music]. I graduated in '42--

Patterson

From UCLA.

Cox

Yes. I got a scholarship to go to the Oberlin Conservatory of Music in Ohio, which I had never heard of before, but it's very famous for pianists. Anyway, I went there and I was there for a year and a half, and then the fellow that I was dating at UCLA was a nice, clean-cut guy. I liked him, but I wasn't in love with him. But he just thought that he had to get married. I just had to be his wife. He was called to go in the service, and when I went to Oberlin, I think that was in '44, and while I was there, he had had to go in the service. He had a little, short--what do they call it when they have a little time off or something, and he went home to Detroit for that little time. And he called me, because I was in Oberlin. He was just not far away from Ohio. I don't know how far it was. But when he got his leave to go home, he called and he wanted to get married, and I really didn't think that I--I knew I wasn't just in love with him, really wasn't. But he was so nice and he's so determined, and he just wouldn't have it any other way. He came to Oberlin and all the girls there that I had met, "Oh," they thought he was so great and all. "Oh, you are crazy. You're a fool if you won't marry him." And they were telling me all that silly stuff.

Cox

Anyway, he kept on, and finally he stuck a ring on my finger. Anyway, we ended up getting married, and that was my first marriage. Then it lasted about six or seven years, and then I saved myself forever. I had to get out of that.

Patterson

But you had your two children during those years?

Cox

I did have two then, and then I met Jimmy about seven years later and we got married.

Patterson

Seven years after your divorce?

Cox

Yes.

Patterson

So you went to Oberlin and you stayed there how long?

Cox

A year and a half, and I studied piano.

Patterson

How was that? What was that experience like at Oberlin? What was Oberlin like?

Cox

Wonderful. Oh, it was so wonderful. I had never been to a conservatory like that. I lived with a family about two blocks, two or three blocks away from it, and I'd have to go up to a big park and walk through the park to get to the first building for the conservatory, and as soon as I walked into the park, immediately I could hear all the pianos going on. I could hear all the music. I'd walk all the way through it and then I'd be right there at the conservatory. It was wonderful, a wonderful experience. I really hadn't been familiar with it before, but it was very famous. I was offered a scholarship, partial scholarship, and that's what I did. I studied piano that whole year.

Patterson

How did it happen that you got a scholarship to go to Oberlin?

Cox

Well, a friend a mine was going. She got one, and her mother was connected with a church that knew about it, and she got a scholarship for her. She applied and she told me about it. She said, "Apply, you'd get it. Apply." And so I applied, and I contacted my parents in Idaho and told them what I was going to do, or wanted to do. And, of course, they never would say no. Anything with education or music, I would have it. See, I think after I graduated I had a little job that was nothing but typing, and it was very dull. It was stuffy. I was just in the end of that year when this happened, so I quit the job and then I got the ticket to go, and I went there and it was fabulous. It was really a fabulous, just marvelous experience, a lot of talented people performing. We

had to play on concerts and things. It was wonderful, wonderful, wonderful. I'll always remember that.

Patterson

Did it change your outlook on music at all? How did it affect your future, Oberlin? How did it affect your future, your feeling about music and what you wanted to do with your life?

Patterson

Well, they taught me a few things I didn't know about. Even though I had had all these piano studies and all of that, there were more things that they could teach me, and the main thing that I learned from them was how to really listen. See, I'd never had anyone tell me, "Listen. Listen." I would play a chord and then another chord, and I would play a particular song, and the man would tell me, "Listen." And I had never had to do that before. It's important, and I learned that.

Cox

But in the meantime while I was there, this fellow who had put a ring on my finger as he got on the train when he was first going into the service, and I told him, "No, no," I wasn't ready for marriage. I went to the train station with him then. I was right there and he was ready to get on the steps. The man was calling, "All aboard," like they used to do with train, and so he grabbed my hand and stuck a ring on, not this ring but a ring, at that time, the one he wanted me to have. And then he said that he wanted me to be his wife and all that, so he was getting on the train and going, and I was saying goodbye. But that was before I went to Oberlin.

Patterson

That was here in L.A., right?

Cox

Yes. And when I went to Oberlin, see, and he started coming over there when he found out where I was, and it wasn't that far from his home in Detroit, and these girls when he came over to visit, all these girls that were from other places--they were mostly from the southern states, I think, but they were there. They were very fine musicians, very great pianists in whatever they



studied. But they kept telling me, "You're a fool, you're a fool. He's the finest man I've ever met." And they'd just do all these things that make you crazy. You think, well, maybe you're wrong. And I said, "Well, gosh." So anyway, I finally accepted the ring as a ring. I had just said it's just a friendship ring, but I finally decided to accept it. Then I left Oberlin and we had a wedding at the Episcopal church, it was his church.

Patterson

Where did you get married?

Cox

Episcopal church.

Patterson

In Detroit?

Cox

No, here.

Patterson

Oh, you came back to Los Angeles. Did you finish at Oberlin? You went as far as you wanted to?

Cox

No, I had nothing to finish. Like I wasn't working on a master's there. I was just studying some more music, and, well, it was just time was up. I'd been there over a year, year and a half, and I had my degree from UCLA. I don't know, I just thought, well, I guess maybe I should just go on and go home and plan for my wedding.

Patterson

How did your parents feel when you decided to marry?

Cox

Well, they wanted me to be happy, so you know, parents are like that.

Patterson

Did you take him home to meet them?

Cox

I think he had come to meet them the summer before. He was with--I think some friends were driving that way, and he got a ride with them, and so that was the year before, I think.

Patterson

Was he involved in music at all?

Cox

No.

Patterson

How did he feel about you being involved in music?

Cox

Well, you know how they do. They make you think that anything you do is okay with them. He became a policeman. But see, at that time, the fellows who graduate, if they're black, most of them couldn't get a decent job unless they went on the police force or the post office, and that's what most of them had to do, because no matter how great their grades were, it's just hard for them. Like Arnette was with the ROTC, but that was very special. But he didn't always feel good about a lot of things that happened to him. But most of them, I guess either they wouldn't try for that, or they couldn't, because it was not easy for them. But anyway, most of them ended up being in the post office or on the police force or something.

Patterson

What was the racial mixture at Oberlin like?

Cox

The racial? Oh, I don't know, but in Oberlin there was also a college for students who wanted to be ministers. It was theological. There was a theological college there, and I don't know, probably it was connected, but it's a whole different setup, a little further away, but still right there. And several of the fellows were there trying to make it to become a minister. So the ones

that I knew--there was only one that I knew while I was there that was not a theological student.

Cox

Oh, wait. I was just going to tell you about this one that lives here now, who did go all the way with that, and he became a great--what do you say, a parson? A great minister at this church over on Jefferson, and I bet you know his name anyway. Oh, how can I not get it? He was the only fellow I went out with, and all it was was go for a walk, because nobody had time to do anything like go out anywhere.

Patterson

African American?

Cox

Elliot Mason, Reverend Mason at Trinity Baptist Church, a big church. Don't you know that name?

Patterson

No, I don't.

Cox

I bet your mother knows that name.

Patterson

And he came back to Los Angeles and became a minister?

Cox

Well, he didn't come from here. He was from somewhere else, but he did end up here as a minister. I think he went to Europe. I don't know where he was first, and then after all of those things he came back here. I mean, I'm saying "back" because I came back here. But by that time I had already married, but he's a good-looking fellow and so nice, very sweet, a good person. But I never had any interest in being a minister's wife. I don't know. I probably could have managed, but I don't know. It seems sort of dull. [laughter]

Patterson

What was UCLA like, to back up a little bit, UCLA for you as an African American musician? Were there many African Americans in the Music Department, performance?

Cox

No. I remember one girl that played violin. But at UCLA at that time, you couldn't belong to a sorority and live at a sorority house, but there weren't even any black sorority houses or blacks on those other sororities. Now, I became an AKA, and there are others who became Delta, and then the fellows, the Kappas and the Alphas, but they did not even have a place for black people to live on campus, and we all did--what do you call it, to get together and ride, whoever has a car? Most of them had a friend with a car, if they didn't have a car, but very few rode on a bus. I'd ride the bus only if I had to, if my driver wasn't coming or something like that, take the bus. But they did not have a place for black students to live on campus. I look back and think maybe I should have tried to get--they had housing for the YWCA, and I don't think there were any there, but they might have been able to accommodate me, because I was away from home, too, see.

Patterson

You were staying with your uncle at the time?

Cox

Yes, or my cousin, who I later went to her place instead. But we had gotten together all--just to get together, that's all, and it was called the Negro Student Body Club or something. There were one hundred that were really members. But any time we had any social life, like it'd be some of them get together and some of them there and here and have a little party or something, but they didn't have what they have now. Now they have the alumni. They kept sending notes to me, and I finally sent one back, and I finally joined the overall, the alumni. That was several years ago. At last they have a place for us to go. And now since then, the alumni of different years have contacted me over and over and over, but they didn't have it for so many years.

Patterson

How did it feel to be at UCLA? Were you aware of racism or being disassociated somehow?

Cox

No, because everybody was nice to us. We didn't have any problem. It's just that we knew that there was no place to live on campus. We're all right to be there, but don't ask to live--they had their own sorority and dormitories and all, and there was none like just for the AKAs and the Alphas or Kappas. But I not used to everything. I was used to what it was like in Twin Falls, and I lived there for sixteen years, and in Pasadena I enjoyed the ones that were there that I got to know them at all. But at that time, I never saw them have black girl on the Rose Parade, on the--you know how they choose? But now since then they have had black girls, maybe two at a time. They've never had the queen, though, but they've had the girls on the floats that were princesses. And I guess there'll be one pretty soon now, too, but I don't know how far they will let anybody go.

Patterson

Where did your uncle live while you were going to school? Where were you living with your uncle, what part of the city?

Cox

In Pasadena?

Patterson

Oh, your uncle lived in Pasadena when you were at UCLA?

Cox

No. When I first went there, my mother thought we were going to be living with my grandfather. Remember, he died. But my uncle--the uncles that I had when I went to UCLA, the first one was somehow related-- [Interruption]

Cox

The first one, that one was an uncle related somehow to my dad's brother's wife. Her name--my dad's brother was Everett Davis, and his wife was Mrs. Davis. She had a relative who stayed there, or whose home it was, and that's who I stayed with that first year. And guess who drove me to school every

day? Tom Bradley. [laughs] He had a little--what kind of car was that, maybe a Model A? I don't know. But he drove, and I don't know how he knew about me, but he came by and picked me up every day.

Patterson

He went to--did he go to Jefferson High?

Cox

I don't know. I think so.

Patterson

Where was he going to school when--he was at UCLA with you?

Cox

Oh, yes, yes. He was there, but he was ahead of me. I think he probably had just that one more year. And there was a girl who had been there the year before me, because I was--this was my first year since Pasadena, and this woman, this girl was kind of heavyset, and she sat in the front with him, and I sat in the back rumble seat. That's the way it was, and it was open air. Every day he'd pick me up. I'm talking about Tom Bradley. Every day he would pick me up and she would be in the front, and then there would sometimes be another person, a girl who became my best friend. She and I would be in the back in the open air, and sometimes there was a fellow, too, but I don't know where he is now. But anyway, one day it rained, and I mean it rained hard, and I don't know why, but he came by for me first, and usually he'd get this other girl. But he came and got me, and I didn't know why or anything. But then he went to pick her up, and honey, she came out of the house and opened the car door and looked at me and said, "Now, honey, you get out. This is my seat. You get out." And she was big and sturdy, and you know I was scared of her. I got up as fast as I could and got in back of this little car in the open-air seat. [laughter] And I always remember that about our mayor.

Cox

And after all the years went by--he was mayor for a long time. But the years went by, and one day he decided to appoint me as Commissioner of Cultural Affairs. I became commissioner, and after a year or two there was an event where we were all there, and there she was, she was the commissioner of

something else. And I said, "Oh, I haven't seen you in a long time." And you know, she remembered that, and I said, "Well, I didn't stay in that front seat when I saw you in there." But anyway, she became a good friend. She was good friends with him, and I was good friends with him, too, and he was nice, always a gentleman. He was always a gentleman. But it was so funny. I wouldn't hesitate to get out of that seat. She scared me.

Patterson

So what would be a typical social event that you would go on while you were at UCLA? Like other weekends with your friends.

Cox

Well, if the AKAs had something, I was initiated and I was one of the--what do they call them? Before I was initiated, I was just whoever [unclear]. But anyway, they would have something-- [Interruption]

Patterson

So the AKAs were the hot thing to do on the weekends?

Cox

Oh, well, they were to most of us. There were some, though, that if there wasn't anything going on, maybe somebody, one person might be having a little get together with a few of us. It was just a matter of whatever was going on.

Patterson

And you were dating John?

Cox

Well, but not that first year or second year. I didn't know him well at all, but he just always seemed like a clean-cut, nice fellow, that's all. I think it was probably just the last year maybe that I--I don't think it was more than a year that just if he'd ask me out I would go, because he was just a nice fellow.

Patterson

When did you start going out to the nightclubs and maybe Central Avenue?

Cox

That wasn't until I got married. I don't think I ever went to one before that.

Patterson

So you would describe yourself as kind of having conservative--

Cox

Yes. Like I didn't have a steady date. I had good friends, and like I said, I was nearsighted and I missed so much all through my young life, I guess, because I was teased at first for wearing glasses. You know how they'd call you "four eyes," and I just was--oh, I wouldn't wear them, and I didn't realize how much I was missing.

Patterson

So you got married soon after you came back from Oberlin.

Cox

Yes. When I came back, yes, because I wrote me parents and told them that I had accepted this ring, and they started making plans to come to L.A. for the wedding.

Patterson

And you started teaching soon after that?

Cox

I did, I think maybe a couple of years later. I don't know. It wasn't too long.

Patterson

Okay. Well, let's stop here. I mean, you take it for granted because you were there.

Cox

Yes, I guess so.

Patterson



Yes, but, for instance, coming from Twin Falls and seeing that as the only city that you knew, and then coming to your friend Lorenza's and walking a block away and seeing Central Avenue and thinking that's downtown, I mean, that's a relative situation. Not having seen the downtown L.A., you thought that was downtown, and I think that that speaks volumes as far as comparing what it was like to live in Idaho and then to move to Los Angeles as a young woman. And then, I mean, these anecdotes are great. I mean, Tom Bradley drove you to school in the morning. I almost missed that one if I hadn't gone back to your UCLA stuff.

Cox

And Jackie Robinson, too, because I knew him in Pasadena--

Patterson

Yes, yes, yes.

Cox

--so that was great, to see him become so famous.

Patterson

Yes. And he went to Pasadena City College with you?

Cox

Yes.

Patterson

Many people may not know that about him and his life.

Cox

Right. I don't remember if I said anything about Jackie.

Patterson

Yes, you did, you mentioned him. I didn't know if you were talking about the Jackie Robinson, the famous Jackie Robinson, so we have to make sure that it's the same one.

Cox

It's the same person.

Patterson

It's the same one, so that's fascinating.

Cox

And his wife, she was in school with us, so we knew her very well, and when they got married, that was just a natural thing, because they had dated quite a while.

Patterson

This is stuff that people may not know about, and when you start talking and saying all these wonderful things and the camera is not running--is the camera running?

Unidentified Female

It's running.

Patterson

Good. So you knew Jackie Robinson's wife--

Cox

Rachel.

Patterson

Rachel, okay. So what was he like then? How was it to be his friend?

Cox

Oh, he was a nice guy. He was just friendly, and I could see that in Pasadena. Then at UCLA I didn't see him much there, because it was a big school and there were just a few of us, and those few, like--well, these athletes--Kenny Washington was famous, Jackie Robinson, who was the other one? Stakes? Oh, gosh, there was another one.

Patterson

Yes, I know you mentioned him before. Maybe you could think about it later. Was Jackie on the team with UCLA?

Cox

Yes. I think he ran, and Tom Bradley ran. What did they call it?

Patterson

Track.

Cox

Yes, ran track.

Patterson

So they let them play on the teams? They let them participate even though they were African American students?

Cox

Yes, because that's how I think everybody knew that they were great, and being black, too. Because like USC, at that time USC didn't have a single black person on anything. I think they were afraid that the others wouldn't like it or something, I don't know, but they never had anything like that. UCLA was the one that was, I think, the first one to bring on three great athletes. That was Jackie and Kenny Washington. Did I say him before? And then this--I can't think of it. I'll try to tell you later, but I can't think what his name was.

Patterson

So Tom Bradley recognized that you were a musician, because he invited you to participate in a cultural affairs department later.

Cox

Oh, yes. Well, see, when I became involved with the commission, naturally they had to do with architecture and with any of the things having to do with what they'd say, culture, and my thing being music--it was time for Black History Month, and I think this was my second year on the commission, I think. I don't think it was the first year. But anyway, I said, "Why don't we have a program for Black History Month and have some great musicians?" And so they said, "Oh, okay," just sort of like that, "Okay." So I had this program with one of the great musicians that lived here now.

Patterson

William Grant Still?

Cox

It was William Grant Still, yes. Is that who you're saying, William Grant Still? He was living, and he lived here, and his daughter, I knew her. I had this program with him and his daughter, and one of my friends that I had gained friendship with from one of these meetings that they would be all over the country, that comes in the year '72, '73?

Patterson

Oh, I have that written down.

Cox

Yes. Well, anyway, I had him come and sing, a beautiful voice.

Patterson

William Grant Still?

Cox

No, no, this friend of mine from University of Michigan. Anyway, but I also featured William Grant Still, and it was very successful. The money wasn't forthcoming, but somehow I got a donation or something and so took care of it. But afterwards--the audience loved it. Afterwards, some of the people for the next year, when I said, "Let's do it in time for Black History Month," and then they were giving me a little hard time. "Well, we don't have that in our budget." And I said, "Well, I think we'll get it. We could get it if we worked at it." And I knew I would just go and ask Tom. But anyway, they were kind of against it, and before I could really work on it, they had decided not to have it. I did what I could, but I couldn't quite make it happen, and so the next year I really worked on it, because I had an opera star. I got George Shirley, great opera star from University of Michigan, and I got some other great people like that. I had it all set, and this commission, they weren't interested, because they just weren't. It wasn't their idea.

Cox

So anyway, I saw to it that the money came, and I had a talk with the mayor and somebody else, so there was a certain place or someplace where he knew that that money could come, and it would go for the budget.

Patterson

Well, then, Tom Bradley--[End of interview]

## **1.2. Session 2 ( December 14, 2006 )**

Patterson

This is our second interview. Here we are with our gracious hostess, Mrs. Bette Yarbrough Cox.

Cox

You're all so wonderful and so patient. I'm just happy to do whatever I can. I'm very lucky.

Patterson

The date is December 14 [2006], and so we'll get started. I wanted to this time make sure that I have some things straight with your time in Idaho. One of the things that I wanted to ask you about was, when you would take a trip downtown in Twin Falls, what did Twin Falls' downtown look like to you as a kid?

Cox

Well, let's see. I think it was about two or three blocks from where we lived. The house across the street from us had a vacant lot, and we'd go across the street, through the lot, and we'd walk about a block or two and then there would be a few buildings. We'd walk down--was it Shoshone [phonetic]. I'm not sure now. But the main street that my dad had his shop on was maybe another three blocks or so. It looked like any area where there are little shops and maybe repair shops and workshops and clothing shops, and I think there were two movies in the town, in the whole town. One of them, I think, was named after the mayor. I can't recall offhand right now what the other one was, but I think there were just the two movies, and I think in a matter of five minutes, maybe ten minutes, we'd be at my dad's shop if we were going to go down and see Dad about something. Or we could go a little further and there

would be little shops for another couple of blocks, but all of the main street of Twin Falls, I imagine maybe six or seven blocks long on the main street, and then I don't recall if anything was on the other streets. I just--

Patterson

Just remember the main street?

Cox

Yes.

Patterson

I'm looking at a map. This is a more contemporary map of Twin Falls. Do you remember a Blue Lakes Boulevard?

Cox

I remember the name, Blue Lakes.

Patterson

Or Eastland Drive? Or Washington Street?

Cox

I remember the names. Now, I remember Washington Street.

Patterson

Addison Avenue, do you remember that?

Cox

I don't remember Addison.

Patterson

Falls Avenue? Kimberly?

Cox

Kimberly, I remember that. I think that was the name of a little town, too, but they might have named it after that.

Patterson

When we finish, I'll give you this, and maybe you can point out where you lived on the map?

Cox

Yes, and maybe we can find some pictures in one of those books, I'm sure.

Patterson

Okay. Did you go to the movies much when you were a kid, with your family? Did you go to see movies at that time?

Cox

With my grandmother? I don't remember going with my grandmother. I think my brother and I would go together sometimes. Maybe we did sometimes, because I remember I would want to sit closer. I was very nearsighted and nobody knew it. It wasn't like at school they'd test your eyes in those days, in that town anyway, and nobody ever knew how nearsighted I was, it seems like. I'd want to go down close so I could see better, and my brother and I would sometimes, and my mother and dad would always tell him, "Now, you take care of her." He was my caretaker. He would be supposed to be watching to make sure that nothing happened to me. But I don't think we ever went with grandmother. I think we either went together or maybe with one of our friends.

Patterson

What were your favorite movies? Do you remember any movies you saw that impressed you at that time?

Cox

Musical movies, the dancing and all the stars that could sing and dance.

Patterson

You liked musicals. Do you remember what your favorite movie was? Something you saw that impressed you?

Cox

I remember something like the Broadway something of 19--let's see. I don't remember those years now. But it was the Broadway something, and every

year they'd have another year with another big show, and the girls would all dance and sing.

Patterson

These were movies that would come out?

Cox

Yes. Those are the main ones I liked. I didn't care much about the cowboy movies. My brother did. I'd just sit there and watch it, but I wasn't crazy about it. It was all right.

Patterson

What about books? Did you have a favorite book when you were a kid?

Cox

No. Again, it was probably my being--didn't wear glasses and didn't know I need them, but my brother was a read avid reader. He was terrific. He just could read a book so fast, and I wasn't like that. I was practicing the piano and he'd be reading books. But he was very good at that, and I just didn't have as much of an interest as I should have. I did read some, but I can't think of the names now of any particular ones. He could have told you names of books and things.

Patterson

So you played the piano instead. That was your pastime.

Cox

Practicing the piano.

Patterson

Did you practice every day?

Cox

Yes. My mother knew a lady in Seattle, where she had lived, where she was before, and this lady was a famous pianist, became famous. Even to the day that I lived here, she was coming from Europe and performing.



Patterson

This was Lorenza, right?

Cox

Lorenza Jordan-Cole, and I even studied with her a short time one summer, because my mother wanted to prepare me for whatever in college.

Patterson

Did she talk about Lorenza when you were a little girl?

Cox

We called her Aunt Lorenza. I called her Aunt Lorenza.

Patterson

Oh, did she come and visit you in Twin Falls?

Cox

No. I don't think she ever came, but we talked once on the phone, I think, or at least mother would write letters back and forth. And then she and my dad lived in the same building. There was a duplex, and my mother and dad lived in either the up or the down, and she and her husband in the other level.

Patterson

This was in Seattle when they first married, your dad and mom first married and they were in Seattle still?

Cox

Yes. And she told me all my years, "Lorenza Jordan-Cole practiced eight hours a day, eight hours a day." And I would hear that and I would never intend to practice eight hours a day, and she didn't make me do it either, but she did insist on that one hour. But I would practice and then I would hear about it if she had played that same number. "Oh, Lorenza Jordan-Cole did that one," something like that. But anyway, I became aware that she was really famous, because she was sent to different places around the country, or she would save her money. I think one of their friends worked on the railroad and he had some free tickets, because he had tickets that railroad employees could get,

and he wanted to sell them to somebody, or give them or trade them or something, and he gave them to her husband, and she had a chance to travel to another city, something like maybe Salt Lake City or someplace. She went and gave a big concert, and she got to study with a very famous teacher. She really had a lot of fame in her life. There's one picture I may have somewhere that shows her with a huge group of students, maybe from a university somewhere in Europe or something, and she's the only black face in the whole thing. And she always was an outstanding pianist really, so I heard about her all my life, but I never was forced to practice eight hours a day, and I'm so glad, no, really, I got to know the lady. She eventually lived here and I studied with her just a short time, and I went to meet her personally as a friend and her family and her daughter.

Cox

I knew that her daughter was a very talented artist, and the lady next door was a great artist, and she just loved what that lady did, and she grew up and went to college. She wanted to major in art, and her mother wanted her--

Patterson

To be a musician.

Cox

But that was not what she wanted, and it was very difficult for her to ever-- she had to go through about two years of art before her mother would let her have what she wanted, but she ended up with art.

Patterson

So when you were growing up and you were practicing an hour a day, your mom would talk about Lorenza to you as a role model.

Cox

All the time.

Patterson

But at least she didn't force you to play eight hours a day.

Cox

Oh, no. But she always told us what a great pianist she was, and I knew one day I'd meet her.

Patterson

So what other things did you do around the house to amuse yourself? Did you have other toys when you were little? Because I know you started playing the piano at five years old, right? What else did you do around the house? Did you and your brother play any games?

Cox

We had games, but he was just a big teaser. He liked to tease me till I would cry sometimes, but, oh, we would read the paper, read the funnies and read books. My mother would insist that we do some reading, and, of course, in school we had to read, and he was an avid reader. He would just read and read and read, and he could tell you everything he read. But I don't know, I guess it was because of being nearsighted, but that didn't affect my reading up close, so I don't know. I just was more interested in the music and dance, because I had all kinds of lessons in dance. I had ballet and I had interpretive and tap, and then people would want us to be on programs. My brother, he learned a little tap, too, but he wasn't enthusiastic, but he was good.

Patterson

Well, he liked to play violin and drums, right?

Cox

Violin and drums, especially drums. He was drummer in the orchestra in high school. He was a drummer.

Cox

Did he practice at home? Did he have a drum set at home?

Cox

I think he did, but he mostly practiced the violin.

Patterson

At home?

Cox

My grandfather was a violinist, too.

Patterson

Oh, on your mom's side or your dad's side?

Cox

My mom's side, the one that lived in Pasadena. But he was just doing whatever he was supposed to do, he was asked to do, and he didn't plan to major in college in music like I did. I mean, I knew I wanted to study more music.

Patterson

Now, when you remember being in Twin Falls, I know it was a small town, but do you remember whether or not there was like the elite part of town and then the poor side of town, or where the parks were, or if there was a museum, or anything else you remember about the lay of the city?

Cox

I remember that there were four parks, and I can't recall the museum, although I'm sure there was one. No, I didn't ever think of it as anyplace being elite. There were just bigger homes someplace, and we had just a modest home, and they probably would consider it small, any of those with the bigger homes. But those of us of color weren't all just in one little spot. We lived where we lived, and my Uncle Bert lived over right across the street from the high school, about maybe a mile away or a little more than that. And my other uncle, Uncle Arthur Barker, he lived in that same area. In fact, I think there was a time when my two uncles--one of them moved away, out of town, and the other one either bought his home or just stayed there, so that one was the one that was across the street from the high school, and it was a nice, big house. But I don't know too much. I don't remember much about the houses and the different areas.

Patterson

Did you visit them? I know their children were older than you and your brother. Do you ever go over to their house and visit with them?

Cox

Yes. One of them was my favorite cousin. She was Aunt Lena's daughter.

Patterson

Was that Bert's--

Cox

No, that was Lena's daughter. Maybe I didn't mention Lena. Lena was Arthur Barker's wife.

Patterson

Oh, okay.

Cox

Aunt Lena was, oh, she was always dressed up. I just admired her so much, and I used to look at her. She'd always have on something silk, or pongee they called it. It's very silky, and I'd want to sit on her lap, because I was just a little girl, and she'd say, "Now, don't mess my pleats, honey." And I would want to sit there. But she was very sweet and always wanted to give me something, and it was her daughter that was my favorite cousin, because she was like a teenager. When I was just a little girl, she was like high school age.

Patterson

What was her name?

Cox

Madeline. And Nanny was the short--I always called her Nanny.

Patterson

You called Madeline "Nanny"?

Cox

Yes.

Patterson

So she was someone you kind of looked up to and liked to be with, Madeline?

Cox

Yes.

Patterson

So did your Aunt Lena have any other children that you played with?

Cox

Yes. Her son was--oh, gosh. I have to stop and think. And he lived here for a little while, not too far away from me, but we didn't see much of him. He was kind of very reserved and quiet. I can't recall his name right now.

Patterson

Did Bert and Aunt Gertrude have children that you associated with?

Cox

Yes. They had one daughter, Villya, and she--well, let's see. I think Uncle Bert kind of looked like an Indian himself. He was short and fat. They were kind of fat. But their daughter was V-i-l-l-y-a, like a villa. And when she got older, she and her--I think it was her husband, they went to another city, Boise, and he thought that he was black and she was white, and they held him, and he had to call the mayor to let him know that he was a black man. They thought he was a black man with a white woman, and they had called the mayor, and my dad had to help him, because he knew that that wasn't the way it was, that she was really not white, and so they let him go. They were visiting.

Patterson

They were visiting and they were detained by the authorities, because they thought that--

Cox

Yes, they thought she was white.

Patterson

But did they know they were married? Or did they object to the fact that they were just together and not married?

Cox

I think they just didn't believe him. They just didn't want to believe him.

Patterson

That he was married to this woman and that she was an African American.

Cox

But that was just a little awful thing that happened once. We didn't have much of that. We always had--in fact, the mayor used to think of my dad as the--I don't know why they teased him and told him that he was the colored mayor. It was just something silly. But whenever somebody would be coming into town and they appeared to be transients, and if they didn't seem like they were decent people, they'd have to go by my dad. If he didn't think they were all right, they couldn't come in unless--

Patterson

The mayor would send them to your dad?

Cox

Not the mayor. It's just transient people coming through that didn't seem to want to work or to stay and do right. They looked like they were going to cause trouble, so they would ask my dad to pass on them. If he didn't say to the mayor or the mayor's people that like they were decent people, that he didn't think they were going to cause any trouble--

Patterson

So just to understand, the mayor would sort of consult with your--if you could call it that, I guess, to consult with your dad about people that he wasn't sure about.

Cox

Yes, because maybe they looked a little bit trampy or trashy, like they didn't look like they were--

Patterson

These were African Americans that would come through town?

Cox

Yes. But they would ask him what he thought about them, and he could tell the people were like decent people, that they weren't going to cause any trouble.

Patterson

So he was the black mayor.

Cox

I think I want to take that out. That's not important.

Patterson

Well, it is. It is, because it gives us an idea of the influence that your father had in the community.

Cox

He was so very highly respected. He had many, many friends, and his shop was right next to a big hotel there that a lot of people would come from there to just have something done for their shoes or their hats.

Patterson

What was the hotel, do you remember?

Cox

Yes, it's the Perrine Hotel, P-e-r-r-i-n-e.

Patterson

So the patrons that would go to the hotel would often give your father their business.

Cox

Well, maybe, I don't know.

Patterson

Well, it sounds like it would be convenient for them to do that. It was a good location for him to be in with his business.

Cox



And he worked mostly in the back with the hats. He'd block hats or dye shoes, and he had about, oh, maybe about eight or ten shoe stands that the young white men who wanted to work would be shining shoes for him, and he would be back there handling all the business. And then one day he went to Portland to take a class. I don't know if he was gone a week or two. He wanted to study more about business and learn more about business and become a real businessman and how to make more money. He came back and he had learned a whole lot of things, and I don't know what changes he made. I know one thing, he had a lot of signs. Signs would be across the wall, and the people who came in there for their shoes, then when they were going to sit up in the seat there'd be a whole row of them, and they could look up in the mirror and they could look and see signs that were advertising other businesses in the town, so a lot of the people would buy signs from him and put them up, and they would get business as a result. People would be seeing the signs all the time. And then those who didn't look in the mirror could look down further, and he had all these ideas for business.

Patterson

And so as an African American man in the city, he was respected by other businesspeople--

Cox

Very much.

Patterson

--who also interacted with him and negotiated with him, because he was advertising for them, and so he must have had good business relationships with the community.

Cox

He did, yes, very much.

Patterson

Now, you mentioned that when performers would come through town, or other African Americans would be passing through the city, that they would come and often visit your home. I wondered if maybe it may have been

difficult for them to get hotels. Was there a hotel that they could stay at, or not, or would your family offer them hospitality?

Cox

I don't know. Well, I can remember that once or twice we'd have a single woman or a single man. We never had a whole lot of people, but maybe Daddy knew people or places and he could help to tell them where to go where they wouldn't have any problem. He could recommend them to-- because these would usually be very well-known musicians, like maybe Count Basie, Duke Ellington, or very well-known musicians passing through on their way to California, or maybe they'd stop to play in our town sometimes. But if it was somebody he knew--and sometimes it would be like the lady in Salt Lake that they knew, and I called her Aunt Gaidy, because Aunt Gaidy, oh, could she play that piano. She could play jazz, and I wanted to play jazz like that, but, of course, I couldn't learn overnight. But she could play jazz, and she was the pianist for the orchestra. But, boy, she was so good.

Patterson

Which orchestra? Did she play for an orchestra in Twin Falls when she passed through?

Cox

No, no. She was just with this band and I can't--I don't know, it was a famous band she played with.

Patterson

Did they play at a nightclub or anything in Twin Falls?

Cox

They played someplace. Sometimes they were there to play on their way, or if they just on their way somewhere else, sometimes they would ask them to play. I don't know if they did, if they just asked them about having that contact really, connection, that they would do it and be paid.

Patterson

Was there a place like a nightclub that they would play at if they were booked in town? Do you remember a nightclub in particular?

Cox

I don't know, because we weren't familiar with any nightclubs there at all.

Patterson

Or a concert hall? Where would people--like if a famous musician came to town, where would they play in Twin Falls?

Cox

I don't remember the name of the halls or anyplace, but they did come. When I graduated and I had my concert, I think it was at the--you know, I was going to say high school auditorium, but I don't know for sure. It might have been at another auditorium. It might be in that article in the scrapbook or something that I have over there. I'm not sure.

Patterson

Okay, because you won an award at a recital when you were thirteen or so.

Cox

I won a state contest for the high school contest, and that was the one that Mrs. Regan, my teacher, prepared me for, Beethoven's "Pathetique" sonata. I played that, and all the other girls had their own number that they played, but they didn't make it.

Patterson

Was there a dance one? I know you took interpretive dance-- [Interruption]

Cox

If I say anything that doesn't sound right, you just--

Patterson

All of it sounds great, wonderful, sounds great.

Cox

I don't know about that, about colored Americans. A lot of people wouldn't want to see that in writing.

Patterson

I think that's wonderful.

Cox

That's nothing but talk that I used to hear, but it may not be anybody ever thought they said that. I know they did, but--

Patterson

Even if it's your impression of it and the way you remember it is what's important. It's up to you, though. Anything that you don't want we won't put, but I think it's just a testament to the standing of your father in the community.

Cox

He was very highly regarded.

Patterson

And I think it's great. You said it was sort of a nickname, and it's okay.  
[Interruption]

Patterson

Yes, I'm glad I asked you about your mom and dad's siblings. That makes a lot of things clearer for me.

Cox

Did you tell me you were from here?

Patterson

Yes.

Cox

You've always been?

Patterson

Yes, born and raised. Yes, my mom and dad, they built--well, when they first were married, they lived on Eleventh Avenue, 11th Street? Eleventh Avenue. And then they built their home on 108th and Avalon. They built their first little house, and then when I was a year old, my dad planted a tree out in front to

commemorate my first birthday. I guess that tree is still there, I don't know. Then they moved over here on Corcoran Place. They built a second home. They built all their homes, my mom and dad.

Cox

Isn't that something?

Patterson

Yes. They were industrious that way, and then they could save some money by doing a lot of the work themselves.

Cox

Absolutely.

Patterson

Daddy was handy. He made furniture for our living room, I remember. We still have some of the furniture that he made. Mom took it, because they then eventually built a home out in the high desert, where she lives now.

Cox

What is that area called?

Patterson

Well, the community is called Spring Valley Lake, and it's right adjacent to Victorville, so it's Victorville zip code. It's a separate municipality, but it's right there with Victorville and near Apple Valley and Hesperia.

Cox

Yes. I know somebody else that went to Apple Valley not long ago. He's a pianist, a musician. He was a conductor of the orchestra. It was one of these-- it's close by L.A., but it's a smaller town. I can't think of his name. I'll think of it and then maybe I'll come up with it.

Patterson

Yes, because my mother belongs to an organization for university women. I forget exactly the title, but it's an organization that university women, they

come together, and the women from various universities come together and they meet and have special programs and luncheons.

Cox

Well, she might be familiar with this man. He moved from, I think it was Inglewood before. He's conductor of the symphony orchestra.

Patterson

I just came across his name recently. I can't remember it right now, but the conductor of the Inglewood Orchestra? Gosh. Just recently I think I came across--

Cox

Yes. He lives in Apple Valley.

Patterson

Really?

Cox

Yes. I can't think of his name either, because I could look it up if I did.

Patterson

Oh, that's so funny. I have to go back--I don't know what I was doing. I was online and I think I came across a gentleman's name who was the conductor of the Inglewood Orchestra. Anyway, we'll talk about that later. But getting back to Twin Falls at the time, and your Uncle Bert and your Aunt Gertrude had the one daughter, Villya, who married, and she and her husband went to Boise. Is that the only daughter that they had?

Cox

Yes, yes.

Patterson

The only child?

Cox

That's the only one.

Patterson

Oh, I see. Okay. And then your uncle who stayed in Seattle was Uncle Everett [Davis]. Did he ever visit Twin Falls and come and see you guys?

Cox

No, he didn't. We visited him once or twice, and he was always my favorite uncle. I don't know why. He was just charming. Oh, what was it about Uncle Everett? He was my favorite. I really just loved him. He was so sweet, and he would always have something to give me, just something special. He had one of the first--I think the first post office jobs ever given in Seattle to a black man of the type he had. He was a supervisor, the job. It wasn't throwing mail. He was, well, I guess just you'd call them supervisors, but he was doing more like desk work, and he--well, I don't say--he doesn't look white, but his son does, and maybe they thought he--I don't think that they thought he was. They gave him that job on his talent, his ability. But he did have another son that was another cousin of mine that I didn't mention. His son was--oh, now that's a really interesting story.

Cox

Conley, his name was Conley. Nobody knew about him, what he was. You see, my Uncle Everett had a wife who was very fair skinned, and Conley, when he was born, he's very fair skinned. Well, anyway, he went to a special military-like, kind of military school, private school. He had a uniform. And the first time I ever saw him, he had on this uniform, and I didn't know about uniforms in school. I didn't know what it meant. I just learned that he went to this very private school, and they all wore uniforms. I met him that one time and then I didn't meet him anymore for so many years. I found out that he had--there was a girl that they were in love. I think this is by college time. He and this girl were very much in love, and they wanted to get married, and when she told her parents, they didn't want her to marry him, because he was not white. He's black. He didn't look it, but he was. And the parents said no. They were very wealthy and maybe they had a famous name, I don't know. But they didn't want her to get mixed, and they had already picked out who they wanted her to marry. Can you imagine? They wanted her to marry this fellow that they wanted because he was from a very rich family, like they were, and that was just going to be the way it was.

Cox

And they married them and sent them on a honeymoon on the cruise ship. They got to the first port, and she got to the phone and called Conley--his name is Conley--and told him, she said, "I don't want to be married to this man. I don't want to be with him. Do you still want to marry me?" And he said, "Yes, I do. I still love you." She said, "Well, then, I'm going to get off this ship at the next port," and he met her and they got married.

Patterson

Well, wasn't she already married to this other man?

Cox

I don't know. Maybe she could annul it. I don't know. But anyway, I know that she, what do you call it, jumped ship or whatever, and they met at the next port, and they married. This was college years, or maybe it was just after college, because, see, they knew exactly what they were doing. Anyway, so they went on from there, and they lived their life. Now, I don't know much about what they did, but I just know they were living--I don't want to tell the world where they are living, not in Los Angeles, but not far, in a city not far away from here. Anyway, that's where they have been living, and I hadn't seen him for all the years, until my children were about college age. At least they were up in years, and I don't know if I should be telling all of this or not, because I may have to back up on it. But anyway, I wanted to see him again, my cousin, and I was glad to see him. I think he came in driving a Rolls Royce.

Patterson

He knew you lived here and he came to visit you?

Cox

Yes. Even before this year or last year, it was before that, when I was living--before I married Jimmy, so it's been some years. It's been some years.

Patterson

He came--he found you and he came driving up in a Rolls Royce?

Cox



Yes. Well, my uncle by that time had come here to live. He lived here in L.A., because he and my dad were--Uncle Everett was the last of the uncles with my dad. They were the last two. The others had gone, had passed, and he moved. My mother and dad wanted him to come, because they were all getting older. As we get older, we don't want to be alone, you know. So they were all here in L.A. But he lived in this suburb, I won't say where. But anyway, he drove in to see his dad. That's why--he wasn't looking for me. But then he knew that we were here, so we all got to see him. We're just glad to see him, because he had made his big life. He was a lawyer and they had their life, and they weren't going to have any children, they said, but they did. I never got to meet any of them. My uncle got to meet them, at least I think he did, but I didn't. Anyway, that is a story that didn't need to be told, but it's just so interesting how it happened.

Patterson

It is interesting.

Cox

And only in the last couple of years I read in the "Times" about a fire in this home, in this city that I'm talking about, and they were--I think the parents had died, and they died in this fire in their home, some kind of--

Patterson

Conley died?

Cox

Yes. In the connections of things, something in the middle of the night went wrong, and they were both found dead in there. [unclear] There was a period of time when he would come to L.A. and I would get to see him off and on, but not very often.

Patterson

And did they have children eventually? I know you said they didn't plan to.

Cox

They said they wouldn't. They said that they wouldn't, but they had two [unclear] that I've never seen or met them or anything.

Patterson

But their daughter survived them then, after the fire?

Cox

I'm sure, yes. I saw the article in the paper and it was just the two of them. In the middle of the night, one was in the bathroom and one in the bedroom. I guess they smothered or something, some terrible accident, so that was the end of that story.

Patterson

Well, that's a very romantic story. They opted for love.

Cox

I hope nobody comes after me, because I won't tell you where it was, because it's not in the city.

Patterson

So your Uncle Everett, he stayed in Seattle. He never lived in Twin Falls then?

Cox

No, he'd come here.

Patterson

He came from Seattle down to L.A. Now, didn't you say you lived with an uncle at some point when you were at UCLA? Is this the uncle?

Cox

No, no. We were going to live with my grandparents, and he died, and then my mother stayed long enough to find a nice family that was recommended and that she'd approve of, and they approved of us.

Patterson

And by the way, what was that family? What was their family name? Do you remember?

Cox

It's been so many years. I will try, because they were so nice I'll never forget them.

Patterson

Okay. Well, maybe later we'll get that.

Cox

I'll never forget them.

Patterson

Were they in Pasadena?

Cox

Yes.

Patterson

Okay.

Cox

I lived with them for one year, and then the next year I was with another family, but that's been so many years ago.

Patterson

But when you went to UCLA, wasn't there another relative, your cousin, your mother's cousin?

Cox

Well, these were distant people. Now, the cousin [unclear], I think it was my Uncle Everett in Seattle's wife or something related to her, because her maiden name was the same as his name.

Patterson

And what was his wife's name?

Cox

Maddy? I'm not sure. It's been so long.

Patterson

Okay, because Maddy was H.D.'s wife. Maddy was H.D. Earle's wife.

Cox

Yes, my grandmother. But I can't think of this--

Patterson

Okay. And that would have been Conley's mom.

Cox

Yes, first wife. His first wife. He had another one or two, I don't remember now.

Patterson

Everett did? Okay. So let's see. Did we cover everything out of Twin Falls? Before we get all the way to L.A., I want to make sure we've got Twin Falls covered. Oh, you know what I wanted to ask you about, your trip from Twin Falls to Los Angeles. Did you all drive? Did your mom drive you from Idaho to California?

Cox

When my brother and I came to go to college, she drove, and there were two young white girls--that's all that they had there anyway, but anyway, they were nice girls and she knew who they were, and she wanted to have a little company, so that she didn't want to go alone when she came back. So they went with us, and they came back with her, and she stayed until she could be sure that this was a nice family we were going to be with.

Patterson

So she drove, just she and the two girls brought you and your brother, and you just drove straight through? Or did you stop along the way?

Cox

No, not overnight. I don't think, no.

Patterson

Just drove straight in.

Cox

She's very brave [unclear], and she wasn't afraid.

Patterson

Do you remember that trip? You'd never been out of Twin Falls up to then, had you? Or had you visited Seattle?

Cox

We might have gone on a trip somewhere, maybe. I don't remember when was the first year in Seattle. In those days, you know, there were no planes, no e-mail or any of those other things, and everything was just with a long-distance phone call. But I don't remember exactly.

Patterson

Because you had met your Uncle Everett. When did you meet him? I know you said he was your favorite.

Cox

I think I met him when we went to Seattle. Maybe we went there--maybe we drove there one time. I just don't remember.

Patterson

Okay, okay. And then in--

Cox

I might have gone on a trip on a train, too, because he always invited me. When I left Pasadena J.C., I was going to go to UCLA or Seattle and stay with Uncle Everett. They gave me my choice. But by then I had made a lot of friends in L.A., and I was familiar with more here. I think I didn't want to go there and wouldn't know anybody. I knew Uncle Everett, but I thought I would stay, so I didn't go. But I've been there since, just not as a student.

Patterson

Do you remember the street you lived on in Twin Falls, the name of the street or your address?

Cox

Second Avenue.

Patterson

Do you remember your address?

Cox

337 Second Avenue, East. I think there was an East to it.

Patterson

Okay. And what was your address when you moved to Pasadena, do you remember?

Cox

It was the corner of Westgate and I think it was Forest. It was a corner house, and it was a beautiful home, and the people were nice. They were elderly, very nice people. They had a grown daughter, a pretty daughter.

Patterson

Was it an African American family?

Cox

Yes.

Patterson

And was the neighborhood an African American neighborhood, or was it a mixed neighborhood?

Cox

No, it was African American, I think. I think I remember the street, Westgate and Forest, but I can't right now think of their name. I probably will later. They were so nice.

Patterson

Now, you mentioned you started going to Religious Science Church when you were a teenager, I think you said.

Cox

Well, that's what we did at home. My mother found that was the only church that wanted to accept us, I mean, not that she tried every one, but you know when people don't want you, and if you're not the right color, they let it be known. But, I mean, my mother grew up in church, because she could sing songs and hymns and she had a beautiful voice.

Patterson

Did she sing hymns around the house and teach you hymns to sing hymns?

Cox

Yes, she would. She'd hum and sing and I could tell she had such a beautiful voice. I couldn't sing. I wasn't like that. I was a pianist, but I couldn't sing.

Patterson

What was her church background? What denomination did she belong to?

Cox

I don't know. I think it was Methodist, but I'm not sure.

Patterson

So she didn't find a Methodist church that she felt like she could join, or that she would be allowed to join in Twin Falls.

Cox

No. I think she just felt not--they must have given her an uneasy feeling, not a warm welcome.

Patterson

Do you remember the Religious Science congregation that your mom joined and that you all joined?

Cox

Just an ordinary white congregation.

Patterson

And the music was--

Cox

The music that they had, and my mother sang the hymns with everybody else, and her voice would just stand out, so beautiful, because she had such a beautiful, natural voice. Yes.

Patterson

She wanted to be an actress, didn't she?

Cox

You know, when she was in Idaho, and one thing that she did that I didn't know about--I mean, I didn't know about her desire. But I think that she somehow had a desire to be an actress, or either that or she just--she always wanted--she believed in school, and she believed in education. She took up classes at a college called Gooding College, and you understand if she married at sixteen that she couldn't have been to school. She couldn't have gone beyond high school.

Patterson

She was sixteen when she married your dad?

Cox

Yes. So she had not gone beyond high school. But she believed in education, and she saw an opportunity to go to college at this town called Gooding, Gooding College.

Patterson

Nearby Twin Falls?

Cox

It was somewhere near. I don't know where it was, except somewhere near, and she went and took classes there, and she took drama for one thing and other things also. But she got a degree from high school before we left Idaho. No, no. When she came here, she went and got that high school degree.

Patterson

In L.A.?



Cox

Yes.

Patterson

Oh, wow.

Cox

But she went to college there, and she had a great feeling of acting. And when she came here, at some point she went to someplace where they were asking for actresses, and she was an actress. I have a picture of her. She was in a particular play, and I can't think of the name of it, but she was good, she was very good.

Patterson

Oh, so she got her dream then, in a way. She wanted to be on the stage and she was able to do that.

Cox

Yes, but she was really very good, and they wrote her up, good writing in the paper. I might find one of the write-ups somewhere.

Patterson

That would be great. So she moved to Idaho with your dad, and she hadn't finished high school, but she was able to take some classes at Gooding College. Did your dad support that? He obviously did.

Cox

Oh, yes. Anything she wanted, she had. He wanted her to be happy.

Patterson

Great. So you were a little girl and your mom would go away and have classes sometimes. Did you have anybody else that you stayed with when she was in school?

Cox

Oh, I can't remember any time we were left alone. Maybe my grandmother was there. I don't know. I don't remember.

Patterson

And you had uncles and aunts and all of that in town.

Cox

Yes, but I don't remember anything like babysitting, but I guess there was somebody, because we were always protected.

Patterson

In Pasadena, the people that you stayed with at Westgate and Forest, you were at this home with the family, and they had their own--

Cox

Moore. His name was Moore.

Patterson

Oh, the Moore family. Okay.

Cox

Mr. and Mrs. Moore. I'm sure that was it. They were so nice.

Patterson

Were they musical at all?

Cox

They had a piano, and I practiced, but I didn't practice very much. Once I moved away from home and was in college, I did my college homework, but I didn't go practice. I don't know why. I wish somebody had just told me, "Don't ever stop practicing." Even after I had graduated from UCLA and I went to USC [University of Southern California] to get my master's in music, and I had to do a concert. No, I went to Cal State [California State University, Los Angeles] for that. Anyway, I had to do a concert, and I had to practice, and I hadn't been used to doing that for so long, but I did. I practiced hard and practiced hard, but I didn't in general do that when later I went to USC. I was working, never did finish the doctorate.

Patterson

Well, at least they had a piano that you could play if you ever wanted to play, the Moore family.

Cox

Right.

Patterson

Were they musical at all themselves?

Cox

I don't think so, not any more than that they would appreciate what someone else does.

Patterson

But I guess it's just nice to have a piano in the home, isn't it?

Cox

Well, it was nice for them to have it, and it would have been nicer if I had practiced it. I think I just got the feeling that being in college I had to study for college, and I didn't--I mean, even though I was a music major, I wasn't a piano major. In that time I was not that, so I did not take--I wish that I had, because even now I don't do anything that I would like to. But I think that in due time I had to do it, and I did it.

Patterson

When you came and now you're at a junior college, you're in a big town and you're around other African American young people like you were, what are some of the first things beyond just music that you became interested in? Of course you were interested in music and education, obviously that. Anything else open up to you at that time that was exciting?

Cox

Well, big-city life, big-city life was so new to me. I mean, even having been in Pasadena, it wasn't really like a big city like here, and then especially being at UCLA on the campus, everything--there was so much that I hadn't ever seen

before. It was nice, because there was so much. I mean, there's just so much everywhere.

Patterson

Did it seem a little strange, though? Because you had been around white people all your life, so you were more maybe accustomed to that. Did anything seem shocking about now being part of an African American environment? Was it a little daunting, overwhelming in any way?

Cox

Not shocking, but it was nice to be with more of my own people. It was nice, and it was good to be able to visit with the black churches. I didn't visit much with them, because I went to the Religious Science, and at that time there was never any that I knew of, except the one that was mixed, and, in fact, it was really white. And then even when I came to L.A., I didn't find any Religious Science church that was of color. I mean, there are now, but there weren't at that time. But I visited a lot of the churches of my friends, and so those were-- and it was good to know something about other churches. I needed to know how important the black church is to our people. I needed to know that and all of the things about it that are different and yet important and big and meaningful.

Patterson

So were you exposed then to gospel choirs and gospel music and all that, at that time when you came to Pasadena?

Cox

Right.

Patterson

Did you ever join a church musical activity?

Cox

I didn't really. I never felt that I was a really good singer. I'm not really. I don't think so. I mean, I could do it if they wanted me to play piano, but I just never was a good singer, and I don't try to be one.

Patterson

What about gospel piano? Did you start to hear and play gospel piano?

Cox

If I learned that, I can play some jazz, really. That's what I didn't know, and if I had gotten into that more, because I really wanted to do that, and I do know now that especially Baptist churches, that rhythm and chords, I mean, it's just coming out. Every time you hear it, you can hear a little bit of that, too. You know that's what it is, and if you can do that I would assume you can go home and turn it into jazz. But in those days I didn't know that.

Patterson

So you would go and visit the churches and hear the music at least, even if you weren't participating, but you heard it and liked it.

Cox

And appreciated it for what it means there and what the rhythm and the feeling is overall, so much. [Interruption]

Patterson

Going back to UCLA and that black students were not allowed to be in the dormitories--they wouldn't allow them to live on campus.

Cox

No. There were no dormitories for us. But, see, now I guess I was lucky. I was going to say most of those who did have cars shared, and we could for ten cents, fifteen, whatever, could ride with them, and they'd pick us up. But I don't know, maybe there were some that didn't know anybody and that didn't get a ride, because there were times when I would ride the bus if I would--I remember one time they came by and honked the horn and I was there. It seemed to me that I gave them a signal, but I must have not, because they thought I wasn't coming, and they left. And I came down the steps and came out, and there they were. I said, "Where's my ride?" And I had to go get the bus, but that was just, I guess, something--maybe I didn't make it clear that I was running a little late or something. But you're not supposed to run late, supposed to be on time with them waiting, because the car is full.

Patterson

Well, where were you coming from? Where did you live?

Cox

Well, the first semester, when I lived with my uncle's wife's relatives, I lived on 18th Street between Central and the next street over, and guess who picked me up, and guess who I rode with? Tom Bradley.

Patterson

Yes, you were telling us. What did he used to talk about on the way? What were his interests at that time in his life?

Cox

Well, see, I got the back rumble seat outside, because the big woman got the-- the one that knew him so well, and she was big, bigger than I was, and she would fight. I was afraid of her. And she told me when it rained to get out and get back in the back seat, that is her seat.

Patterson

But did you listen to them talk?

Cox

No. I couldn't hear them talk. And besides, I would talk with my girlfriend in the back that became my best girlfriend, because they were always riding together.

Patterson

What was her name?

Cox

Anita Beverly from Riverside. She lived in Riverside.

Patterson

Well, she was coming all the way to UCLA from Riverside?

Cox

She stayed with a cousin here.

Patterson

And so Tom would pick her up--

Cox

At her cousin's house.

Patterson

--at her cousin's house.

Cox

And then later she went wherever she was and where we both were living, the same things, what she would do is go ahead. But she didn't stay. She had to go back. I think her father couldn't keep her there. I mean, it was [unclear].

Patterson

So she couldn't finish school?

Cox

Well, not then, but later she went to Redlands, you know, out there in Redlands, that very good school.

Patterson

So did you ever get to talk to Tom Bradley about his life and what he was interested in at the time?

Cox

Well, I was kind of shy. I didn't talk much to him, because he was big and tall, and I was kind of scared to try to talk to him.

Patterson

Well, how did it happen that he picked you up then?

Cox

I never will know. I mean, I don't know. It just seemed like--maybe my uncle's wife's friend knew somebody and could make a connection. I didn't ask. I was just glad to go out and get in the car and ride.

Patterson

So this first year at UCLA, now you're coming from Pasadena Junior College, now you're on this even bigger campus with students from all over, and you're living with a new family, people that you hadn't really known before. What was that like? What was your home situation like then? Was there a piano there? Did they support your music?

Cox

I don't recall that there was. There may have been, but if there was I probably didn't practice it. At that stage I was all into this university, but I just don't remember very much about--I know that I didn't stay there the second year. I had another cousin that I didn't know about with my mother's step-aunt, stepmother, a relative of hers in that southern town that I can't think of. Anyway, it was a cousin to the stepmother, and she and her husband lived over a few blocks away on 21st Street, and that's where I was to stay. I think my mother would work it out with somebody. So that's where I was to stay that year.

Patterson

Now, your mother was still in Idaho, right?

Cox

Yes.

Patterson

But she would arrange with her various relatives that you'd have a place to stay.

Cox

Right.

Patterson

Okay. But you don't remember your mom's stepmother's name?



Cox

No, because I really never knew her.

Patterson

She was just a reference. She just referred your mom to people that she knew.

Cox

Yes. I don't think my mother ever really met her. She might have, though, but I can't recall that I knew her name.

Patterson

So the family that you lived with the second year was not that far. They were--

Cox

Just three blocks away on 21st Street.

Patterson

And Central?

Cox

Yes.

Patterson

Oh, so that was in East L.A. So you're sort of getting used to that environment around Central Avenue during that time, and then you'd have that long car ride in the morning. Of course, no traffic in those days like there is now, to UCLA. And so the first year at a big research university, how did you do in school?

Cox

I just remember standing in line and waiting for things that I had to do and taking the classes that I was taking, and then being at the right place at the right time to ride back with one of the drivers.

Patterson

So you wouldn't get left?

Cox

Yes, so I wouldn't have to go on the bus. Sometimes I had to go on the bus, but we would all try to connect with someone we knew that might be driving, and it would save us a little time.

Patterson

What was the classroom situation? Were you many times the only African American student in your classes?

Cox

Not at UCLA. Maybe there would be one or two, but not many.

Patterson

Were they mostly music education, or what kind of classes did you take that first year?

Cox

I think they were basic. I had to take more than music in order to get in and get out of there, but I don't remember. I do know that the basic classes that I needed were music, but also if you remember, in high school when they graduated me early, because they said my grades were good, I could make it up in college, and I had to take some of those, like science courses that I hadn't had. So I was not taking only music. I had to do the basic classes that were just part of getting a degree.

Patterson

And you were a little younger than the other students, probably.

Cox

Yes.

Patterson

Did you feel any stress in those early days of UCLA?

Cox

Just, you know, the main stress I felt was that I was so nearsighted. When we were first--it was in Idaho when they first realized that I was so nearsighted, and I began to wear glasses. And my brother would just tease me. He'd say, "Oh, four eyes, oh, four eyes." He'd tease me and tease me and make me feel like I just was some kind of a freakish person, so that whenever I'd get around anybody else, I'd take them off. And there's one good-looking fellow that came from Salt Lake City, a good-looking black fellow, beautiful brown skin and tall, and he worked for my dad. And every time I'd see him, I'd think he was so cute. I said, "Ooh, he's cute," and I was just kind of in love with him, I thought.

Patterson

This was in Twin Falls?

Cox

Yes. And every time I'd see him coming down the street I'd snatch off my glasses, because my brother told me I looked like a monkey or something. But you know all kids tease, and my brother teased me so much that for many years I hated my glasses and I would try to take them off and try not to wear them. And even in college I would wear them in the classroom, and when I'd come out I'd have them off, because I looked so freakish or funny. My brother was always very loving, but he sure did tease me all the time, and he made me feel that I was like a monkey, and I just didn't want to wear them.

Patterson

This is before contact lenses.

Cox

It was long before contact lenses. And so when you say how did I feel or how did I like everything, I was probably missing everything that I'd go outside to see. A lot of people thought I was a little bit stuck up, because I didn't speak to them. I said, "I didn't see you." "But I was right there." I said, "Well, I didn't know it was you." That was so stupid, but it was a stupid thing I did for years, because I really thought that he was right, that I looked like a monkey or something.

Patterson

Yes, those things are important to us when we're really young, huh, like how we looked to everyone.

Cox

And I don't think my parents realized he was doing that, because they would have stopped him, I know. [Interruption]

Patterson

Did you have any trouble with your studies because of your eyesight?

Cox

No, not that, because the books are close, and that's not something that you have to--

Patterson

Oh, if you're nearsighted, yes, you can read your books okay. It's just the distance.[Interruption]

Patterson

So you were okay then. You must have been a really bright young lady. You were younger than the others.

Cox

Not any more than anybody else.

Patterson

But you got through your first year okay and got into the second year.

Cox

Right.

Patterson

And you were part of the AKAs. When did you join the sorority?

Cox

Oh, the first year, I guess. They wait a year or so, and they take you and initiate you, and then they decide whether they take you in. But do you know

Corrine Taylor, Corrine Jones? Anyway, she and I were initiated together, and neither one of us have really done much, because I know she married and had a child, and then remarried and had another child.[Interruption]

Patterson

So Corrine Jones was in the AKAs with you. She was like your good friend in AKAs?

Cox

Yes.

Patterson

Was she a music person, too?

Cox

No. No. I don't know what her major was.

Patterson

What did most of the African American students major in while you were at UCLA? Did you find that there was any particular subject more than another?

Cox

There was a variety. I know one that became a doctor and one that was a chemist or something. He was always involved with chemistry. And then, let's see, I can't think just where, but I think they all became something. One of them is a very good friend of mine, and he's had trouble with his eyes. And at first when they--like during these past years, most of our young men when they graduate, the best job they could get back then, and this is, what, how many years back, twenty-five, thirty years ago--the best job they could get would be at the post office or on the police force or be a fireman, and that was hard, fireman. That's the way it was, and they just couldn't get any other job. Even if they had a degree in science, they'd have to just take a job like that. Nowadays, of course, they are recognized. If they have a degree in science or whatever it is, they can get those jobs, but in the forties it was very hard.

Cox

And this particular fellow I'm talking about, he went into the post office, and he was working in the post office for some years, and he kept saying to a mutual friend of ours that, he said, "I know I could do better than this. I know I could do better than this. I don't want to be a postman." He made up his mind and he decided to go into real estate, and he is a very wealthy man now. He went in and he sold property, and he made so much money, and he bought a home of his own for his family. He married and has a family, and he has a home out by the Century City where they have all those beautiful homes, by the--what do you call that where they have the shopping? Well, just around there, there are some beautiful homes. His street is called Centurywood, and he bought that years back now, before it was all as great as it is, but he still bought it and he owns it.

Patterson

Do you remember his name?

Cox

Clifford Johnson. He has a family and all, and he has this beautiful home out there, and I'm so proud of him. And a lot of the fellows, of course, have moved up, because they started out like that in the post office, or either that or on the police force or--

Patterson

Or firefighters.

Cox

My ex-husband was a policeman.

Patterson

So now that you're living on--your first two years you were on 18th Street and then 21st Street, but you were around Central Avenue. Did you ever go to--I know when you were at Pasadena you didn't. You said you were a little shy to go out, so some of the young people were sneaking out to go to Central Avenue. Did you ever?

Cox

I never did, and I never would have thought I'd write a book called "Central Avenue." I never thought that I would do that. I had no idea. But the house was on 21st Street, and I think right at the corner or the next corner was the Lincoln Theater, which was a very popular place, and I did get to go to the Lincoln Theater and see the shows. Then they had all the little nightclubs all up and down Central Avenue and then the Club Alabam. They had all of that then, but I didn't go to any of those. Even all through college I remember one of my friends, she and her boyfriend went to the Club Alabam, and she sneaked out, because her mother didn't allow her to go, but she just sneaked out because, you know, a lot of kids do that at that time and didn't get in any trouble. But it was just the way it was. Most of us weren't supposed to go into clubs when we're that young.

Patterson

Were you curious, though? Were you ever curious about those shows, the shows that happened on Central Avenue? Were you ever curious about them?

Cox

Oh, well, yes, I was. I was, but I didn't think that I would even be allowed to-- and I don't think I had the date that would take me there, because they were probably as scared as I was to try to go before twenty-one, and none of us were twenty-one. We were like eighteen and nineteen, twenty. But even after twenty-one, I think maybe we had a chance to do other things.

Patterson

So now you're in your third and fourth year at UCLA. Did anything change for you during the course of your time at UCLA? Or did you stay with your relatives throughout?

Cox

Well, I'd had two years at Pasadena, so it's third and fourth, and then I had that added year because of high school, leaving early. I don't know. Like I said to you, there were no places for us on the campus like the dormitory houses, sorority houses and fraternity houses. We all had a place mostly in town. And the classes--there were no real problems. The only time I had a problem, I think I told you that when I was doing my practice teaching and it was at--

what was the name of that school? I know University High School was where I did the high school practice teaching, but the elementary was--

Patterson

I think my mom did her practice teaching at University High. I'll have to ask her. But where was University High?

Cox

University High is in Westwood, and I think it's west of the campus. I'm pretty sure. But I told you some of that.

Patterson

Yes. But you went to Oberlin.

Cox

After I graduated.

Patterson

But you had a typing job before that, right? Do you remember where?

Cox

Oh, it was just downtown.

Patterson

Downtown L.A.?

Cox

Downtown in the business section, and, oh, it was so dry. I just typed all day, the same thing. It was horrible. I couldn't imagine myself doing that after graduating. I didn't know why I should have to. But I quit that job the first year, and then when I had the opportunity to go to Oberlin, that's what I did.

Patterson

And then when you came back--

Cox

When I came back, I got married.



Patterson

Okay. So then when did you go to Cal State L.A. to do your master's?

Cox

Oh, that was--

Patterson

Much later?

Cox

Oh, yes, some years later. I just knew I needed to go higher, like I needed to go higher and then I worked on my doctorate, but I haven't finished that yet, so I guess I won't. But those were just because I wanted to, but I knew that I should.

Patterson

So when you went to Oberlin--we talked a little bit about Oberlin, and you stayed with a family in Oberlin. Do you remember their names?

Cox

Thomas.

Patterson

The Thomas family?

Cox

They were wonderful, yes. And they had a daughter and a son, and the daughter, I think she took some classes at the conservatory. But I remember how beautiful it was there when I--the minute you leave this ordinary street section and step across to the park, it's a big park, and the minute you get in the park you could just hear music coming from everywhere, piano playing and singing and other instruments, and I was always just so thrilled, every day, that I'd just go in the park and I'd hear all this and then go right into the conservatory.

Patterson

Did you know then that you wanted to teach, be in music education?

Cox

No, I didn't. I just knew I wanted to play the piano, and I wanted to do more--the first thing that I think that I learned was to listen. I had never--nobody told me to listen. So much importance with that, because when you hear or play a chord or no matter what it is, if you don't listen carefully, you just don't ever get acquainted with the importance of chords. I'd never had anyone talk to me about that and tell me to really listen, because everything was--just with your fingers. There were chords we played, but then they really emphasized the importance of being able to listen to sounds.

Patterson

So you were maturing as a musician during this time, and then you came back and got married.

Cox

And had two children. Oh, no, not by then I had not, no.

Patterson

So when you first came back to L.A. you got married, and did you start teaching then, or practice teaching?

Cox

No. I think I didn't start teaching until '46.

Patterson

Now, there was a war, obviously, that was going on. How was your life affected by the war years? In any way? Did you find that life was a little different at that time for you?

Cox

I'm trying to think back. When Japan bombed Pearl Harbor, that was before I graduated. I was still on campus, and some of the fellows had to be drafted and they had to go. Then there was this--oh, now I can't think of the name of it, where a lot of the fellows from college went, because it's where they had--

oh, gosh--it was where they all went to be in the Air Force. They wanted to be--there's a big movie about it, and I know it so well that I can't think.

Patterson

Well, we'll get it later.

Cox

I'll think of it another time. There is a big movie about this black group of black airmen and how they were so great.

Patterson

The Tuskegee Airmen?

Cox

And they didn't want them at first, and they had to have their own separate--

Patterson

The Tuskegee Airmen?

Cox

The Tuskegee, yes. There you go. Thank you, thank you. Yes, the Tuskegee Airmen, and Melanie [Blocker] married one of the Tuskegee Airmen, I think. Now, I'm not sure. I may be mistaken, but I kind of thought that she did, but at any rate, a good friend of ours, anyway. I think maybe he was, but I'm not really sure. But one of the ones at our school, Bill Johnson, I know--I think that he--well, I know his brother. His brother was in the Air Force, and his brother had a bad, a very difficult thing happen. He ran into a mountain or something and they lost him.

Patterson

He was a Tuskegee Airman?

Cox

Yes. It was his brother.

Patterson

Bill Johnson's brother?

Cox

Yes. But Bill is still here.

Patterson

Was Bill in school with you?

Cox

Yes.

Patterson

He was at UCLA with you?

Cox

Yes.

Patterson

Okay. So some of the guys from the UCLA campus went off to join the Tuskegee Airmen?

Cox

Right. Yes, they did.

Patterson

And Bill Johnson's brother was one of them.

Cox

Yes. And another brother of his was never found. He was lost before any of this happened. He was out--he was in the service. But it's just so sad when things happen, even if you don't know them. But when you know them, it's really hard. But there was another one--well, there were several that were with us, and there is a movie that you ought to all see that. Don't ever miss it, because they keep playing it if you're interested, the Tuskegee Airmen, and it's so true, and they tell the story. Yes, because they had a difficult time being accepted. When they finally did, they outdid everybody else. They had fewer accidents or anything that went wrong when they went out to do their job.

Patterson

Very distinguished.

Cox

Yes. And that was during the time that I was on campus, and I remember that--well, it was during the time that they were drafting the men and they had to go. Then I think it was my last semester when things really began to happen.

Patterson

So some of your friends went away to war. Some of the young men you knew or knew of went away to war at the time. Any of your relatives affected by the war?

Cox

I don't think so. I don't think so. But I'm very thankful my brother didn't have to go, or he was too young, maybe. I don't know if he wasn't too young, I guess, but he didn't have to go.

Patterson

I know that was a relief. When was it that your mother and father came to live in Los Angeles?

Cox

Well, we had been gone quite a few years, and my mother--but, see, my father, by having his own business there and people coming and going, he always had someone to talk to. He always could see what was going on in the world. But my mother, there was nothing for her. I mean, she didn't work out. She was a homemaker and it was just she lived for us and doing for us, always, always, and when we were gone, there was nothing for her. We kept begging--once we got out here to stay for a while, we were begging them to come to California. My mother wanted to come, because she didn't want to live in Idaho anymore. There was nothing there for her, not anything. My grandmother lived down at the corner, and she had her to talk to. There was a lady across the street that she was friendly with, but there was just--imagine a young woman. She was still young, in her, say, forties. I don't know, but she was young enough that she still wanted some life and there was nothing. The years went by and then after I got married, then they came for the wedding,

of course, and then they went back. And then she still was telling him she wants to come back here and live.

Cox

And then it was like when I had my first child, she came back to be with me for the first child, and I think that was the time that she stayed. He was going to sell his business and the house, but he had to wait and do it. She came and he didn't come yet. But anyway, it was--well, by the time the baby was ready to be born I think he got here. But anyway, that was--

Patterson

And she lived with you when she came, she lived with you and your husband?

Cox

No. She came early. She wanted to buy--in selling our property there and buy some property here. By that time, my brother had been married, and he brought his wife home to her, and he went in the service for a little while. So his wife was there with my mother and the baby, by then, and then that was all she had. I mean, she still didn't have any real life. She was sixteen when she married, remember. She didn't get to see the world or do anything, but so she still wanted--but by the time that I had a child, then she really began. She came back for a little while for my first child, I think it was. The second one was when she came and stayed.

Patterson

Then she stayed with your brother and his wife?

Cox

No. She bought a house. She stayed in the house they bought. She was to buy the house. She looked and looked, and she bought a house with two on a lot, because she knew that my brother's wife was going to be there, because he was still not--in fact, he wasn't coming home much and all that. So she had to have two houses on a lot. But anyway, she bought what she needed. She bought a lovely home and all these years they've been there since, but this was some years after we had left. See, this was after we had both been married and had a child and so on, and she'd been through a lot, just because she was lonely. In fact, she did a little job just because she didn't want to sit

around doing nothing, and then she gave that up. But they moved here in, I think it was '46, and then my dad, as I say, sold his property and gave up his business, sold his business, and he studied for a real estate license and had opened up his own real estate office here on Adams. So from that time on, he was in real estate and was a super real estate broker, too, on Adams. His office was up there not far from Western or Normandie.

Patterson

Near Western or Normandie and Adams.

Cox

Somewhere in there. And then that's where they both--and my mother worked in the office with him. You'd think she was the head broker. But she had a good life, and she joined a club and became a bigwig.

Patterson

So she liked L.A. then?

Cox

Oh, yes. She is so personable, and she knew everybody. She met more people, and she joined a club, and she had a club called the Business and Professional Women. They were all about business and professional things. And then she was in a play once, because she studied at Gooding College and she had been wanting to do that, and she got in this play in Hollywood somewhere, and they wrote her up in the paper. And then when--what was the man's name that had the theater here on Crenshaw that used to be--remember, he just worked so hard so many years to make this a success. Now, what was his name? He and his wife.

Patterson

The Ebony Showcase Theater?

Cox

Yes. Say that again?

Patterson

The Ebony Showcase Theater, on Washington Boulevard?

Cox

Yes, and it was named--but you remember him, he and his wife?

Patterson

I think I know who you mean.

Cox

That's before that church took it over, that church there now on that corner? The same place. And then they had the play--what is this famous play? It has to do with Africa. Anyway, my mother was in the play. She was one of the actresses. She was an actress, and she was good. My daughter was only seven years old, and they needed a little girl, and she said, "Well, Carole is a big talker, and she's not afraid." Then she said, "My granddaughter can be in it." And so my daughter was in the play. I wish I could think of the name of it. It has beautiful music. It will come to me sometime, I can tell you, but I can't say right now.

Patterson

So Carole was able to be in it as a little girl.

Cox

It'd be in the scrapbooks. I'll find that. I'll look for that for you, because I didn't go through any of them, because I said I'll wait and let you choose what you want, but I can think of things that I should just point to, point them out. But that was really fun. I was dating Jimmy at the time, yes.

Patterson

Where was your first home when you first married? Where did you live?

Cox

On--I should never forget it. It was a little house with a big lot in front of it and lots of grass with just a little house. Oh, dear, I can't--

Patterson

Was it near where your dad set up his business, near Adams?

Cox



It was between Western and Arlington and between Jefferson and Exposition, and it was just a little house. That was the policeman husband.

Patterson

And then when your mom bought her property, where did she buy?

Cox

On Eighth Avenue, between Jefferson and--a few blocks from Jefferson, not far from where we were. So we were all kind of close. We could all be close when we needed to be.

Patterson

Oh, that's great. That's great. And your brother, now you said that he didn't go to the war, but he did join the service?

Cox

He was in the service for a short time, and I don't know, I don't remember how long. It wasn't very long, and he was out.

Patterson

And his wife had a child during that time?

Cox

Yes. It wasn't a very good marriage. Still had the child.

Patterson

He had a boy or a girl?

Cox

Girl.

Patterson

He had a little girl. So they lived--both houses were on the same lot, is that what you meant?

Cox

Where my mother bought the house, yes.

Patterson

So they were close together. So she was the younger grandchild on the same property.

Cox

Yes, that's the way she is. If he wasn't doing right, she was going to make sure everything was right. But he was just not happy, I guess.

Patterson

What were his dreams? What did he want to do? Now, I know you said that he was a little bit of a musician.

Cox

It's hard to say what he really wanted, because he could have been a brilliant speaker and a brilliant almost anything. He's very smart. But he was restless, and I think he didn't marry someone he would have wanted to stay with. I don't know. I think he was just not happy and he just wouldn't do right. But he was very personable. He'd walk in here and just make all of you love him to pieces, just love him, so personable, and then be here for about fifteen minutes and liven up the joint, you know, and everybody feeling so good, and all of a sudden [claps], "Well, I've got to go, got an appointment. See you guys later." And we won't see him for maybe another six months or four months, because he just had that kind of a life, a personality. He's restless, and he could have been anything if he could, but he couldn't. He couldn't but he couldn't; he could have. But he was just restless.

Patterson

Did you remain close, you and your brother John?

Cox

No, he's gone now. One night they called and he was just--he was drinking something. I don't think he drank liquor, but he was eating and drinking. Maybe he choked or something, or swallowed too fast or something and just fell out. They had to take him to the hospital, and he was gone.

Patterson

Did he live in L.A. throughout?

Cox

Yes. Well, when he was in town. He was here, he was there. He always had to go somewhere. But he could win everybody over, personality plus and walk in and just make you feel like a million dollars. On Christmas Day, a special day, "Oh, sure, I'm going to have dinner with you. You know I'll be here." And then he comes walking in like a gust of wind and would make you all feel good and make you laugh and all, and then all of a sudden, "Well, I've got to go. See you. I'll call you. I'll call you. Goodbye."

Patterson

So his daughter, does she still live in Los Angeles?

Cox

His daughter has her own business up on the corner of Crenshaw and Wilshire in, what is it? I can't seem to think what it is.

Patterson

What is her name?

Cox

Belinda Yarbrough, my maiden name. It's a business, printing--let's see. She wants to be a CPA, but she has her own business in business. It's a lot having to do with numbers and money?

Patterson

Accounting?

Cox

Accounting. I tell you, I'm losing it. You should interview people that are younger, if they can remember things. I'm forgetting too many things.

Patterson

Well, we're a partner in this. We're getting it.

Cox

Yes, it is an accounting business, and I hope she'll go on and get her CPA, because she's smart. But she's had a difficult time, because, well, she's young and life just hasn't been good to her for some reason. She hasn't seen enough of her family, that immediate family, the mother. I don't know.

Patterson

So his wife didn't stay close to you all?

Cox

Not [unclear]. I don't know. She's gone now, recently, and Belinda has a couple of children, too. I don't know too much about what's happening there. I try to keep in touch, but sometimes it just doesn't happen. I don't even want to mention it.

Patterson

Yes, but it seems like everybody stayed pretty much in the same area, though, the same kind of neighborhood. So when you started teaching, the first thing you did was you went to University High to do your practice teaching, right? That was in the beginning now.

Cox

No, but first it was the elementary school. Nora Sterry [Elementary]. I knew I would--it just came to me. The elementary school--I had to do practice teaching at Nora Sterry Elementary School, and that went very well. Then after that semester, I had to do high school teaching or practice teaching at University High School, and I told you about that, the little boy who wouldn't do. And they have a black principal there now.

Patterson

Oh, really. Now, when did you start at Nora Sterry for your first practice teaching appointment?

Cox

Oh, gosh, I don't know what year. You want the year?

Patterson

Well, approximately. I mean, you had come back and you got married and you had your child. You had Carol, right?

Cox

It must have been '40, 1940 or '41.

Patterson

But you didn't graduate UCLA until '42, so you started your practice teaching while--

Cox

No, wait. What are you asking me? Maybe I forgot what you're asking me.

Patterson

No, just to clarify, you started your practice teaching while you were still at university?

Cox

Yes.

Patterson

So when you came back to L.A. and you got married and you had your children, when did you actually take a teaching position?

Cox

Oh, the first one was at Hooper Avenue School on the East Side.

Patterson

Okay. And that was an elementary school?

Cox

Yes.

Patterson

And how was that? Did you enjoy that?

Cox

Fine. I was there for ten years. Then I had one short year or semester at another school, but I was really pulled to the West Side, down at Cienega, where I spent about twenty years. That was the school I spent most of my life there, until the last--when they started the integration of schools, they wanted me to go to the first magnet school. They had started the magnet schools for the integration, and I was at the first magnet. I was the music teacher for that school. Then I was only there a semester when they pulled me downtown to be a music advisor for all the schools. So I was music advisor when I left. I had to go to the different schools. I was presenting--it was this integration thing, because I was presenting classes on music that were done by--like Eubie Blake was in town, and I had him to do a program, and one of them was New Orleans music, and I had a New Orleans band to play. I'd first give a lecture, one hour, then I'd have the music. When I had Eubie Blake, I interviewed him one hour and he played a little, and then he played some of his numbers.

Cox

Then I did one on the church, the black church, which was a thing I really wanted to learn more about myself even. I had one semester and I had Maurice McGehee, who is a wonderful musician, wonderful with church music, and he got those chords and the feeling and everything. I interviewed him and then he played some music, and I have all of these videos I'll show you one day.

Patterson

Okay. That's many years, though, after Hooper Avenue.

Cox

Oh, yes.

Patterson

Now, at Hooper Avenue it was an all-black school? Or were there other ethnicities that attended there?

Cox

There may have been a very few Mexicans, Latinos, but basically--I think at that time that's the only place they would have sent me or any of us, because

that was segregation, not integration yet, see. And that's where one of our best or most known teachers was, Albert McNeil. Everybody knows Al. Well, he and I graduated together from UCLA. But he was teaching there, and when he left they called me to teach there, and he went on to junior high school.

Patterson

So you sort of took his position on staff as a music teacher? Like when Albert left, did you sort of fill in, or did you come into that space that he left open, as a music teacher?

Cox

I guess so, because they were going to send me somewhere, and they sent me there, and I was told that he had just been there, and he went to junior high school. No, he went to another school, Latino, I think, because he speaks Spanish pretty well.

Patterson

Oh, really. Was the faculty also African American there?

Cox

I think it was, not completely, though. But I think mostly it was.

Patterson

How was that experience at Hooper Avenue? I know you said it was good. But was it difficult in any way just coming into your first real adult professional position? You had a child.

Cox

It was interesting. It was good and I felt good about it, because I felt prepared, and everybody was nice, everybody was good, and they were all prepared, all professionals. The only thing--I may have told you this, I don't know. See, as a music teacher you're expected to teach the children in classes where they have singing and music of all kinds, and at some point you do something with the instrumental program. So I found that that was the thing I really liked the best. I'm not a singer. I was not necessarily piano, but an instrumentalist, really mainly piano. Anyway, I was trying to start an orchestra, and I found two or three children that were taking lessons from somebody, and so I worked

with it and developed it so that it seemed like we could get a little group together, and it seemed like there were a couple of other teachers in the community that wanted to do the same thing, but they just couldn't get it going. I told them that I was getting mine together. They said, "Well, why don't we combine? We'll come over to you." And so you, me, or me, you go one or the other. Well, I didn't want to go, because I had about enough to get started, and they didn't have but one or two kids.

Cox

So they walked over to my school. They weren't far away, both of them. One came from Ascot and one came from I think it was 49th Street, I'm not sure. But they came and brought one or two children with them, and when we got together we had an orchestra. I mean, we had enough children to do it. So I would just take over and I would give them lessons every week on the instrumental music, and before long we were playing together and we had a little orchestra. So they liked doing that, and so we kept it going that semester, and then after that I knew enough to keep the orchestra without them. I mean, I didn't want to force them. I mean, they're welcome, but I was doing enough without them. But from that point on, I always felt that instruments and instrumental music was my thing, because they would make comments. One time the superintendent or somebody in the district--I don't know who it was, but somebody that wanted to have a big meeting of the teachers, just the teachers, not the students, but they wanted some entertainment or something. They wanted some music, and someone told them about my orchestra, and so they all decided that my orchestra should play for all these teachers that were coming. So we played and it was all very successful, and so from that time on I was just kind of known as the orchestra teacher, because it's the thing that I would have one no matter where I was. I would have my orchestra.

Patterson

So was it mixed students in different grades?

Cox



Well, you know, that area most everything was African American. There may have been a few, very few that were white or Latino, I don't know. But just the area was not--they were not in the thought of integrating at that time.

Patterson

Different grades and ages in the orchestra?

Cox

Yes, starting with fourth grade. Fourth, fifth, and sixth grades, because I required that they be in the fourth grade, old enough to really--and then I was at that school for ten years when I was called to Cienega, I guess, and that's where I spent most of my years, twenty years there.

Patterson

What was your repertoire like, the first repertoire for the orchestra? What kind of music did you have them play?

Cox

We would play whatever, maybe a waltz or a march and just whatever they were able to do. It includes different kinds of music, different types.

Patterson

You played the piano with them?

Cox

No, because I always had a pianist, somebody that could play enough to play the little things.

Patterson

So you conducted then?

Cox

Yes, though I would let them sometimes conduct a little bit. Most of the time I would do it, but I wanted them to learn to conduct, too.

Patterson

Did they learn to read music? Did they read and play, or did some of them play by ear?

Cox

No. They had to read music. I taught them, and I would try to encourage them to take private lessons, because I only had them once a week all together. I mean, I'd do all I could do, but I would recommend some private teachers that could come into the home and teach them. So some of them would do that, and that would help to make them better, because they would get individual-- either that or if it would be two or three of them working together, the teacher would still come, and that would help them, too. So it would improve it for me also, because I didn't have but once a week for a few minutes, although I would take them up to my room. I'd meet them in my room at recess or mostly at lunchtime, because for all of the lunchtimes sometimes we'd practice.

Patterson

So you were really helping them cultivate a musical life, not just at school but at home.

Cox

Yes, and to be able to perform for the Christmas program or for whatever we were called on for.

Patterson

How did you meet some of these--they were really partnering with you to help the children, the private teachers that you would refer them to. How did you meet them?

Cox

Well, maybe if I'd know that it's a child that is already taking lessons and they're doing well, I would then ask the teacher if they wanted any more students, if they wanted to help out one or more--maybe one that's taking the same instrument, if he's playing trumpet and then we have another one that's not doing too well, and maybe he'd like to have another one. And if not, I'd just keep working with them.

Patterson

That's great. You're sort of stimulating business for the other music teachers and creating a musical community.

Cox

But there was a teacher on the East Side who everybody knew. She was known to the whole community as a wonderful teacher with children, Mrs. Hightower. Did you ever hear that name?

Patterson

Yes.

Cox

I bet you did. Alma Hightower. And in her home, in the back she had a little house in the back, and she had those children playing. Oh, they were so good. They played marches out on the street at a certain gas company or gas station on--I can't remember the number of the street. But that was the corner where Mrs. Hightower's kids would play, and, oh, they were so good. So I talked with her and I told her that I had some students that wondered if she would like to help them, because I only got to work with them once a week for an hour. And so she said, "Sure." So I got so I would take them to her. At the end of the day I would let them ride with me. That was before I had sense enough to know that I'd better have some good insurance if anything happened. I never even thought about it, because they wanted to go, because they liked to go, because there were a lot of other kids there that were all musical, all playing. They wanted to go and their mothers wanted them to go, and they were already doing well with me, but if they could go and play with her, they would be really good. So I would take them after school. When I went home, I would put them in my car. It'd just be about two or three, but I'd take them to be sure they got there, because otherwise maybe they would forget to go to their lesson. So anyway, she was just so wonderful, and it helped me to be a better teachers, because whatever I would teach them, she'd be making it even better. But I only had her for a couple of years. I didn't-- [End of recording]

### **1.3. Session 3A (January 12, 2007)**

Patterson

OK. Our date is the 12th. This is December 12, we're continuing --- right, it's a new year, I've got to get used to it. We're January 12th in a New Year with Bette Cox again, for our third interview.

Unidentified Female

Hi, Bette.

Cox

Hi, Marianne and Adrienne -- oh, the whole gang. All of you. Happy New Year, everybody.

Patterson

So we're going to continue and go forward with your professional life in Los Angeles. And I know you started off being a teacher, and you were at Hooper?

Cox

Hooper Avenue School was my first teaching experience -- 10 years.

Patterson

And then you went to a school just for a short time before you went to Cienega.

Cox

I was sent to -- oh, dear. I'm not sure I can recall, because I was only there for one year, and then I was called to Cienega Elementary on the West Side, which was a very nice school with about 1/3 black, 1/3 Caucasian, 1/3 Asian. And it was a very nice mixture, a nice opportunity, and I was there -- I would say at first, I wanted to change from music, and I taught classroom I think 2nd graders, and I only did that for a couple of years, and then it seemed that I was missing music, and somebody else was telling me that I was made for music or something of that sort, and they needed a music teacher, and so I went on back into music where I really belonged, and I really enjoyed that so much, I learned a few things that I didn't know before, having not been in classroom with a whole group of children like that at the time. But I went on to have a music experience for all the grades from 3rd to 6th grade. Usually they didn't

assign me to 1st or 2nd graders, or at least 1st graders, but I would always have the rest of the school, and then I would build an orchestra from instrumental classes that I would have first. Once a week we'd have instrumental classes in the afternoon, and we'd have orchestra, as soon as we were able to develop it. So that was my life from then on at that school as the music teacher?

Patterson

Did you teach any vocal music, or did you have somebody to assist you?

Cox

No, I'm not a singer, but -- I taught songs to all of the grades from 1st through 6th, mostly 3rd through 6th, because I think that primary teachers generally took 1st and 2nd graders, but I did at times. But from 3rd through 6th generally, it was a matter of singing songs and learning something about the music, the famous musicians. Sometimes taking them to the opera when it was in town -- "Hansel and Gretel" was the children's opera.

Patterson

So you did field trips.

Cox

Yes, we had field trips, too.

Patterson

Do you remember any of the trips that you used to take?

Cox

Well, always Hansel and Gretel, always that.

Patterson

And where was that?

Cox

Downtown at the Shrine -- well, at the old Philharmonic downtown sometimes, and later at the Shrine auditorium, when it was developed. I think that that was so large, it accommodated so many schools at once and all.

Patterson

Oh, so there would be a day where it would be for the children.

Cox

For all the schools, right.

Patterson

Hansel and Gretel, right. Any other productions you remember going to for the children?

Cox

I think -- you know, I should know, but I don't think I can recall right now particular ones. But there were some of them.

Patterson

I always loved that story.

Cox

I was so involved with the -- my main interest was the orchestra, and the children who were developing -- they first had to learn how to play their different instruments, and then as they became good enough, I could give them orchestra music, and from September to Christmas, we were always ready, we always had a Christmas program, the little orchestra. And by June, the end of the year, we had quite a nice orchestra program with the chorus also, because I would also have charge of the chorus, and have to see that they learn songs that could be sung for Christmas, or just for general programming in the spring.

Patterson

Did they sing harmony?

Cox

Oh, yes.

Patterson

Two-part harmony, or four-part harmony, or --?

Cox

Well, usually two part. I didn't try to get them into four-part; they were still pretty young and inexperienced in general.

Patterson

Yes, that was plenty for them to do, simple harmony. So did you find -- how did the Cienega administrative staff support you? Did the school really support the music program?

Cox

Oh, yes. They did very much. And some of them more than others; some of them just enjoyed it so much, and thought -- I think one of the visiting teachers, one in particular told me that she came over to visit, and she had -- she was at another school, but she wasn't the music teacher, but there were other music teachers at her school at times, and she had never seen an orchestra like that with little kids, and she said that they sound like a symphony orchestra. Of course, everybody didn't say that, but she did; she was so surprised to compare it to something that -- all that she had ever heard at her school. But her school probably didn't have a music teacher, I guess, I don't know. She said they did, but I don't know.

Patterson

(inaudible)

Cox

It was my favorite; I really enjoyed it, because they were so little, and they loved to do it so well, they tried so hard, and I would keep after them to practice. One thing that was a good thing to do was to stay in touch with the parents, and I would encourage them, if possible, to have them take private lessons, so they could really go further than they were, because there were music teachers around, and I happened to know a couple who liked to come into the neighborhood and teach the kids, so that they'd practice more -- you see, I only had them once a week, and that was only for an hour. But I gave them the basics, and I did teach them things they didn't know. But it couldn't be like having a teacher take just one at a time and work with that one student, so I did encourage the parents to accept a private music teacher to

come to their home for instructions as I could only teach them one hour during the week because I had everything else to do as the music teacher for the whole school. I think I was very lucky, particularly at Hooper Avenue when I was there in the first early days, I learned about Ms. Hightower, and everybody in town seemed to know about Ms. Hightower. I didn't know about her, I hadn't heard of her. But she was one of the wonderful black musicians in Los Angeles who was into music, who knew music. And apparently, she came from, I think, New Orleans, or somewhere in the South. Wherever she came from, at that time where she was, she was dynamite. They just -- she did a lot with music, and when she came to Los Angeles, she opened up a little studio in her backyard; she had a little garage, I guess, that she made into a studio. And if she had a student, she would teach them -- I went to visit her, she's a wonderful person, a wonderful lady, just really wonderful, and she wanted to help the children, she wanted them to learn, and she taught them from the beginning. They were learning scales up and down the piano; -- they wouldn't be able to touch their horn or anything else until they learned those scales -- they just had to learn the basic things. After she had worked with them a short time, it seemed like, maybe for two or three months, she could let them go without having to just work on the scales and let them play some real music, because by then, they had practiced on other things, but she wouldn't let them play by themselves or together. Well, when she did, -- you just wouldn't believe it; they were just so magnificent. And then by the end of the year, they would be going on little tiny trips like going from her house maybe four or five blocks to a gas station that had a little empty space, and they would stand out there and play a march or something. And they were so good, the people would come walking down the street, or driving. They would stop their cars and stop and wonder who were those little kids playing like that?

Patterson

Now, what neighborhood was that in?

Cox

It was on the East Side, say around -- it must have been 42nd or 43rd and Central. I don't know. I knew about this from so many people, and teaching every day, I didn't have the time to really get into that, but I did stop a few times after school, and I'd go and watch how she would train those children.



She would have a big pot of gumbo on the stove in the house. They could go in and have something to eat and come back, and they didn't want to go home. They really had a good time, but they were learning, and they just wanted to practice, made wonderful students out of them. As a music teacher in the school, I could only teach instrumental classes for one day a week on Thursday. Mondays, Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday, I taught music for all of the other students from grades 3 to 6. Also after teaching the instrumental students the basics, I would recommend to a few parents that their child also have private music lessons. We had a great orchestra, I don't take credit for all of that, Mrs. Hightower (an unusually talented private music teacher I recommended) was a big help and even I learned a lot from her. She only charged about \$0.50 per lesson.

Patterson

Did she have a name for the little group that she put together, or --?

Cox

I think she called it the Hightower Group; I think they won the state contest for juniors, for young people, up in -- probably up north in Northern California, they had entered the contest and won. They were that good.

Patterson

Do you remember that was, about?

Cox

I think that must have been way, way back in the -- oh, gosh, maybe the '50s and '60s.

Patterson

And so they were elementary school age.

Cox

They were elementary school children, and they loved to do what they did, because they loved to be with her and have other kids around to be doing the same thing, and then they could go and get some gumbo or whatever she was cooking, and she just was a motherly type. But I've never met a teacher like that, because she didn't care about all these extra things; she wanted them to

learn, and saw to it that they learned the scales and the keys and the important basics.

Patterson

When you were at Cienega, did you stay in touch with Alma Hightower?

Cox

I did at Cienega, but -- no, not for long, because it was too far a distance, and when I would be leaving, I couldn't drop by her house and leave the children who wanted to go for their lesson, their mothers would have to take them if they went. But I really had to kind of let it go and hope I would tell them about this wonderful teacher I knew there was a gentleman (Mr. Russell) who seemed to be the master of the brass instruments, particularly trumpet. And he just wanted to come to the neighborhood and help the children. And he charged for it, he did this for a living, but he was recommended to me by some other teacher. And I did keep him in touch for awhile, so the children -- some of them took lessons from him in addition to what I taught them to just get started.

Patterson

Do you remember his name?

Cox

Mr. Russell, yes. And I ran across his card recently, I didn't know I still had it. But he was an older man, I hope he's still around and still well. But I just think that a teacher has to give it all she has while she's at school, but when you only have one day a week, and only one hour of that day, and of course, I would give extra, because I didn't care about recess and lunchtime, I would take them in my room, they could come up and practice; I would work with them extra at any time, I always did that. So I gave everything I had, as far as any time that there was. And I felt close to the parents and to the children, and I would always recommend that if they wanted to go further, I would recommend somebody that could help them more. But we -- I think I loved doing it so much that whatever I did in what little time I had, somehow, it was successful, because I just -- I tried my very best, and I think I loved doing it, and one of my students just won two Grammys from the -- you know, the

annual Grammys when they have all these festivities, Billy Childs. I was his music teacher in elementary school, and he got his first instrumental lesson with his cello from me, because he wanted to take -- he wanted violin, most of them want violin, or else they want a horn, boys like a horn. But Billy wanted violin, and I didn't have any left; I had given out -- I had a lot of them, because they usually never refuse me, I think they knew that I kept so many coming and going that if I asked for one, they'd let me have -- they would release it. So I always got some, but I had gotten all that I think there were, there weren't any more; I couldn't give Billy a violin, but I could give him a cello. And he had a mother who was very cooperative, and in addition to what I could teach to him in the little time that I had, she took to him USC where they have individual lessons for children, and I recommended that to all of them anyway, and he had some wonderful training. And by the time he finished elementary school, he went on to junior high and high school and college majoring in music, graduated from USC School of Music in composition, and he's winning Grammys today.

Patterson

So you feel proud about that, I'm sure.

Patterson

Oh, I'm so proud of him. And he comes -- he'll be on programs that I asked him for. We had a program with the Young Musicians Foundation at the [Wilshire-Ebell] a couple of years ago, and they proposed -- they performed some of his music that he composed. And he's well-known. People know who Billy Childs is; I think young people know Billy Childs. But -- well, the real younger ones, but a lot of people know, because his name is becoming famous.

Patterson

So he was at Cienega with you?

Cox

Yes. He was my student -- I gave him his first instrumental lessons in cello, and he stayed with that, and I think his mother had him at USC Children's School of Music learning piano, so he gained a good education in music, and when he graduated, he went on to college, and he majored in music composition.

Patterson

Do you have any other students that you can reach back and (inaudible)?

Cox

...I want to say the McDonald boys, Harold and Clarence. They are two brothers, one of them played trumpet and one played clarinet. When I go to the Religious Science Church on, and I don't know the street, used to call it O.C.'s church...

Patterson

O.C. Smith's church?

Cox

Yes, it --

Patterson

It was -- Science and Mind?

Cox

It is, it's a Religious Science church -- at any rate, that's my religion, and when I go, any time I go I see Clarence, and the first time I went, I saw Harold, I couldn't believe that was my little student.

Patterson

Is that one of the two brothers? Clarence was one of the two brothers?

Cox

Yes, yes. And he's playing the piano, I think he's the leader of this little band, because this church is not a church that performs classical music; they perform jazz, and they all love it. Of course, we all love jazz, but I love classical too. But this church performs jazz, and he's there; when I go in there, he's playing the piano and playing jazz, this little band, they have all the different little instruments and all these grown up people -- I mean, I tell you, I can't hardly believe it. And one day, I asked, "Where is Harold?" And he said, he's playing in church, playing the organ at such-and-such a church. Now, those are two boys that went to Ms. Hightower a lot. And she made them what they

were -- I mean, I just gave them a beginning, but it helped them, and she kept them and made them wonderful.

Patterson

Do you remember their last name?

Cox

Yes, and I can't say it right now, but I will. Clarence and Harold McDonald.

Patterson

One played the trumpet --

Cox

Yes, and one played, I think, clarinet, but they played everything, including piano, because they studied with Mrs. Hightower and she insisted they play piano also. Clarence was playing jazzy piano at OC Smith's church any time I went. My church did not play jazz, only classical music, I enjoyed hearing the jazz from a former student of mine. Harold was at another church playing the organ.

Patterson

What church was that?

Cox

It was Religious Science, but it was not O.C.'s church, it was the original one on 4th and -- near Wilshire and Vermont, but it's not -- I'm giving you the wrong street, it's near those two streets, I can't think, because I think when my son married, his mother in law was -- became very good friends with me, she and I both were the same religion, and I was very glad about that. And then she happened to change after that minister passed away, and went to this church that was O.C.'s church. And I started going just because two families, I kind of wanted us good friends go for breakfast afterwards, so we were in the habit of that. We both became interested in the music there.

Patterson

What was that -- so the music at the first one was just different?

Cox

That was classical music.

Patterson

Classical.

Cox

Oh, yes, and the organ and all of the beautiful things that usually go on in that kind of a church.

Patterson

Mm-hmm. And then, was O.C. Smith's church -- the music was a little different.

Cox

It's quite different, and although I love jazz, I hadn't been to a church that was just using jazz for all of the music in the church, whatever it was. So it was interesting, and especially seeing my student there, a grown-up man, very much grown up; he was my age. But it's nice to say hello to him, and I said, "Where is Harold?" And then he told me Harold is at some church he mentioned, he's the organist there. And now the last time -- that was like probably a few years ago, and last time I spoke with him, he said that Harold is living in Las Vegas now and he's in a wheelchair; something has happened to him, and I don't know, but I feel so sad. And if I ever go to Vegas any time soon, I'd want to say hello to him, I'd probably want to go -- but if he's in a wheelchair, I don't know if he's able to be at an organ or anything. But --

Patterson

What else do you remember about the music at O.C. Smith's church?

Cox

Well, the choir is really -- I don't think of it as a real choir; it's just a group of young ladies who come out and sing, but I don't -- all of my life, I've been in a church with classical music, and I feel that that's, to me, the kind of music that belongs in the church, because it's about -- it's not about fun and good times, or expressing that in any way, it's very serious, and it's beautiful music, there's

so much of it that's been composed even by black composers. I mean, a lot of them composed the Gospel and lively music like that, too, but there's a lot of very serious music that is -- has been composed by all kinds of races. I did a program once for the school district, one of my -- I had a four-part series that I developed -- that they wanted me to do on television, and one was on Eubie Blake, because he had been in town, and he was in his 90s well, we wanted him to demonstrate the kind of music that he played. And he told the story about when he was a little boy, that he used to take lessons and play -- he'd show the kind of music he had to play, and he said that when his mother wasn't looking, he would go over and listen to the people that either -- I don't think he mentioned the church, but the music that came out of the church that was like in nightclubs and somewhere, he went and started listening, and he began playing like that, and that's the music he loved. And he created music like that --

Patterson

Gospel music?

Cox

Oh, no, it wasn't Gospel; this was the first evidence of a little jazz, I guess; it was music played with a different rhythm, very lively, and it was -- well, it was quite different.

Patterson

Getting back to O.C.'s church, now he was a singer, he was a recorded commercial singer.

Cox

Yes, but not really classical, it was popular --

Patterson

(inaudible). I remember God Didn't Make Little Green Apples, do you remember that song?

Cox

Oh, yes. Beautiful.

Patterson

He had a great voice.

Cox

He did.

Patterson

Did he sing in the church?

Cox

Well, he did, but that was before I came there, because he had gone -- he was quite young when he passed away.

Patterson

So he didn't really perform much that you saw in the church.

Cox

Not when I was there, but I know he had.

Patterson

So this is a period you're going to O.C.'s church, and what were -- you were teaching, and what else filled out your life at the time?

Cox

Well, when you ask about gospel, you mentioned something I was just going to say. I a four-part series on our music for the school district -- one was with Eubie Blake, and then the music of New Orleans, which was very interesting, of the things that happened and went on. And then the other one was on gospel, because I had Maurice McGehee, who was a wonderful Minister of Music, I'll say, and he was affiliated with a particular church, but he also was -- I think he taught at one of the schools, night school, actually, I believe. But he was so into the other kind of music, the Gospel music and all, that I wanted him to explain and tell the people. So in my little video that I presented, I had him play a hymn and tell us the difference, and he did, he played the hymn, and he said, "Now," (inaudible), and the Gospel. One of the parts of black



religious music, the part of our music sung with soul. A different style of music that i would present throughout my career, because I love it all.

Patterson

These interviews that you conducted, how did it come that you directed that project?

Cox

Well, when I was on sabbatical leave, I was taking classes, I had long graduated from UCLA, but I was doing some graduate work, working on my doctorate, I had finished my Master's, and --

Patterson

At UCLA?

Cox

-- and I was working on my doctorate at UCLA.

Patterson

When was this, Bette?

Cox

'71, '71, '72. Boy, that's a long time ago now. My advisor there asked me, "Well, what do you want to do?" I said, "Well, I want to know more about the music of black people." I said, "There's so much that's different, and I want to know more about it." And so something came up, an opportunity to have a scholarship to a conference at the University of Michigan, and I jumped at the chance, and I wanted to know if I could get one of the scholarships, if I could go, and anyway, I got to go -- I received a scholarship from the University of Michigan and found it to be a wonderful university for music, a lot of different genres of music. All day for a week, I was just carried away, so enthralled. I had my tape recorder and camera. Nobody else was doing that, nobody was taking pictures, nobody was doing the tape recorder; I was just doing it all. I had all of these things I was carrying around, but just went on through the whole week, and at night they had concerts demonstrating what they did in the daytime -- I was just so thrilled, because I think I told you, I grew up in Twin Falls, Idaho, where we (my brother and me) were the only black children,

there was a whole -- I didn't know much about our people, and the things, all of this, when I -- when I went there and learned all this about the music and the people and all, I just about went crazy, I couldn't get enough of it, you know? So anyway, before it was over, one of the teachers there announced that she was having a similar conference at her school, which was Virginia State, the next month. And I thought I'd go crazy if I couldn't go; I had to go. So I came home and said, "Jimmy, I have to go back again." I said, "Next week, there's another one; I have to go, I just love it and I'm learning so much." Anyway, I went to the next one, then came home, and then I had to go back to work, back to school, and I made up my mind somehow, I've got to do that here; I've got to tell everybody, let everybody know what I have discovered. So anyway, I think it must have been '76 before I could really get something pulled together. I think I went back to work in '72, '73, and then '75, '76, all that time I was trying to plan a program like they did. I had this whole thing planned and it was like what I learned, and I didn't know how I was going to do it, but anyway I announced it to everybody and had paperwork so everybody would get copies; I gave so much paperwork -- and Jimmy was coming from work bringing the papers -- he would get all the papers copied for me so that everybody would have what they needed. It turned out that as I did each program I had musicians to demonstrate, just like they did at the university.

Patterson

Now, who were you distributing the paperwork to?

Cox

The teachers, all of the teachers who wanted to come, all over the city. They came from different schools and all of those who came could just come in. But they began to talk about it, because those who came thought that it was a lot -- they liked it.

Patterson

So it was like a seminar that you put on for the teachers in Los Angeles to learn more about black music.

Cox

I think I had presented two or three when I was told that I was going to be transferred to the first magnet school. They were having the first school that would be integrated, that was the beginning of integration, and that was at Rabbi Magnin's School, he had a room there, a big room for the schools, for us to come and teach in these different rooms. And I was the music teacher for the first magnet school, and this was so that if the parents were prejudiced at all, they would see that all of the teachers were hand-picked, and they were all teachers who knew what they were doing. So that was the magnet school. And I wasn't there but a semester when my supervisor called me. He said, "We're pulling you downtown," so I was going to be a music advisor, and I had to do it for the whole city.

Patterson

So you gave the seminars, and then around that time they started the magnet schools, and did you go to teach --?

Cox

Well, the magnet school was at Rabbi Magnin's temple on Wilshire, just off Wilshire.

Patterson

Oh, it was just the one.

Cox

It was one magnet school; it was the first magnet school. But I was there only one semester when I was moved downtown.

Patterson

So you left Cienega.

Cox

I left Cienega to go to the magnet school for one semester, and then I was called to be a music advisor in the downtown District office. I had to present music seminars on black music to the Valley and schools in the Valley district. Then, as Music Advisor, I was asked to prepare and present a four-part series on black music for television.

Patterson

So the first seminars you just did on your own, just to do on your own, and word got around --

Cox

Yes, the word got around.

Patterson

-- and so they wanted you downtown to continue this process of educating, helping educators be more educated in black music. So when you first went downtown, who were the people that you worked with? What was it like going downtown?

Cox

Oh, it was lovely. It was nice down there. But it's crowded; I was in an office with another person, and there were different offices with people in them, and I had my own phone and my own desk, and I just was there working. And then after a few days, or a few weeks, I guess, one of the office photographers came and took my photo, and they had an article in the school paper about who I was and why I was there and what I was doing. Well, and then -- you know, I'd just go wherever -- they had me go to the Valley, and the other places. And then, I was doing that a short time when they decided that I should do it on television. And the thing is that the first one that I did, the teachers mailed in all -- they had to fill out what they thought, was this worthwhile and all, and they gave such terrific ratings, it was just wonderful that they appreciated it. And many of them said it should be on television, and I think that when the supervisor saw that, and maybe people told him that, but anyway, they decided I should do it on television. So I had four-- those four programs that I had done, and that was the last that I did before I retired.

Patterson

So it was Eubie Blake --

Cox

The first program was Dr. Jim Standifer (What is Black Music); Dr. Standifer and Bette Cox discussed the meaning of black music for 30 minutes. Number

two was a discussion of early popular music with Eubie Blake and Bette Cox. Number three was a discussion of early New Orleans music and musicians with Tудie Garland and Bette Cox. The fourth program was a discussion with Maurice McGehee and Bette Cox of African American hymns as opposed to religious "soul" music, which included a performance presentation.

Patterson

Now, this was a local Los Angeles band that you invited to come and play New Orleans music on your show?

Cox

Oh, they were originally from New Orleans but moved here.

Patterson

And what was the band made up of? Do you remember the name of the band, the musicians?

Cox

Oh, I will tell you, but right now, I can't think.

Patterson

ok.

Cox

But I loved it so much, and I was always excited with all of it, because I found it was so worthwhile, and I just wanted to do it, so I would ask him; I said, "Now, you are 90-something," (his age) and I had him there with his bass, he was playing the base. I said, "Tell us about your -- this bass. You told me something about the music you used to play in New Orleans." And he said, "Yes," he said, "we had string and bass band," he'd say it like that, "string and bass band." I said, "A string-based band?" I said, "Really?" He said, "Yes. In those days, we had string bands." I said, "A lot of people didn't know about that. Tell us some more." I'd do this, and I'd get him to talk, and he would tell people just what they would like to know. And then there was somebody else, I would ask each one, and I'd say, "Well, let's have another number," and then they would play again, another good jazz number. I'll show you; I'll play these for you sometime. But anyway, it was -- that was very successful. I had -- I think it was

about -- each one was a half an hour. The first one was a discussion because Dr. James Standifer from the University of Michigan had come here for one of my programs, and he was still in town, and so they wanted us to just sit down and talk about black music. So that's what we were doing. And I was scared to death, really, because he already had his doctorate degree, and he was so smart, and I wondered if I knew enough. But I was trying to do that, and so we did this half-hour program and talked about all the things that came into it, and how and why. So that was one, and then the one with New Orleans, and then this last one that I did was with Maurice McGehee. And Maurice McGehee was a wonderful teacher, and also, he was a wonderful musician; at the piano, he was excellent, he could sit down and play most anything. And then he was a wonderful, nice person; he's gone now. But I asked him questions. I think I've mentioned this already -- about the difference between a hymn and gospel, and he explained that. He said gospel came from the soul. And when I play that for you, you'll see. But this was the third one, and I would have done more, but that was the last one that I did, and I retired after that.

Patterson

Now, Eubie Blake, the one you did with Eubie -- you did James Standifer, and you did the New Orleans, and then you did Maurice McGehee, and then Eubie Blake, where did he fall?

Cox

He was first, because he was 90 -- he was getting near 100, and I wanted to get him while we had him, because he was so -- he had been famous in other years, but people had forgotten about him. And Johnny Carson had brought him back to town on his program, and I saw him. And then Haroldine Brewington, a friend of mine whose father used to be famous -- he's gone now, but he used to be -- oh, he was great in music, he was a singer. And he sang in the early days of musical shows on Broadway or off-Broadway, the first black shows, and he was in those. Eubie Blake and Noble Sissle put those together.

Patterson

So Haroldine Brewington--?

Cox

Haroldine Brewington's father. His name was Ivan Harold Browning.

Patterson

Ivan Harold --

Cox

And he was in those shows on Broadway, and Noble Sissle composed music, and it was just beautiful. And on my seminars, when I had the seminar, I always had them to come -- Noble Sissle was gone, but Mr. Browning would come and talk with Eubie Blake. And they were -- Eubie Blake was just -- they were both entertainers; it was wonderful. It was just fun for me, and I learned all along, everybody else learned, and they seemed to love it. It's too bad that they aren't getting it now, because it's been 30 years ago. And these teachers don't even know about it; they don't have it.

Patterson

The videos, where -- well, who broadcasted them for television?

Cox

The school district.

Patterson

But what stations?

Cox

They had - let's see, K- - KLCS? I think KLCS; it's a school district channel, Los Angeles School. But I have it; It was really just -- for me, the whole thing -- I mean, I learned -- I grew up where there were no black families; I never went to a black church, I never knew a black minister; I didn't know what came out of that church and what the minister gave to it and to the people, it was entirely different from the average church. And the whole thing about black music is always, it was all coming up from the church. So anyway, it was a thrill to me all the way; I was just so happy that people saw worth in it and appreciated it, and I have stacks of letters of the comments I can show you that the teachers wrote as to how much they learned and how much they

enjoyed it. I say that because I think it's a shame that it's not going on now, nobody's doing it.

Patterson

So you were becoming famous among educators, music educators, by giving this information and putting together these shows.

Cox

Well, I think quite a few people began to call me and remember me from that.

Patterson

So when you were doing this, and then you went through the video series, and then you stopped. Did you leave your position downtown?

Cox

Yes, I did.

Patterson

And when did you do that?

Cox

I think a year or so, I just wanted to be retired, and I was not doing much of anything, and then I realized that I couldn't let this go. And I went to a conference up in -- up north, and I met -- Eddie Meadows was standing in line behind me, and he said, "Who are you?" And I told him my name, and he said, "Where are you from?" And I told him, and he said, "You ought to be in the National Black Music Caucus." I said, "What's that?" He said, "Oh," he says, "we meet all over the country, and we talk about the music." I said, "Oh, really?" He says, "Yes, come on and join us." Anyway, he introduced me to the National Black Music Caucus, which is now called NASPAAM, the National Association for the Study and Performance of African-American Music. It's pretty long. But at any rate, at that time it was called the Black Caucus, and I knew nothing about it, and I came home and I told my husband, "You know what? I've got to go to this conference." So I went, told him, and he says, "Well, I guess I can't stop you." So that's when I met Dreddie Meadows at the first music conference; I met a lot of other educators who were brilliant, knew much more than I ever could about music, especially Black music, and they



were -- most of -- some of them had PhDs with titles. Well, I learned what I learned right away from all of them; that was the beginning. They had conferences in different parts of the country, mostly in the East and South. I must have gone to 25 different places and conferences in the matter of maybe ten years. But I was going every year because I wanted to be part of it, and then it was supposed to be a part of the -- Music Educators National Conference, all educators belong to that. But they didn't put the Black Caucus in it. So one year, I think they were in Atlanta, and they were having a conference and it was the same time of the National Music Educators, and they did not include any of this. I mean, we had speakers with Doctorate degrees who were brilliant, who were teaching on university level -- they weren't invited to speak or anything. So anyway, they thought they'd had enough of that, so they got together and had a conference with them, and decided that they should know that a lot of their people couldn't equal what we had already done, and we should be part of this; we're all educated educators. So they had accepted us, and we became -- now we are a part of the Music Educators National Conference, and it is called NASPAAM, the National Association for the Study and Performance of African-American Music, so just NASPAAM. So I haven't been to many this year -- I haven't been to any for a few years because of my husband's illness, but I keep in touch by mail, and now they have in Chicago, Columbia College, Chicago, not the university, but Columbia College, Chicago, and Dr. Warrick Carter, who is one of us who is involved with music too, but he is now the president of the Columbia College, and they have many divisions, and one of the divisions is a Center for Black Music Research, and I am on the President's Circle of that, and I'm in touch, and they know what I do here, and I know what goes on there, and it's a wonderful thing. I just feel grateful for all that I have learned.

Patterson

When you were -- when you finished downtown, and you finished your video series, and you began to be going to the conferences and meeting these national educators, these educators from all over the country, what were you doing here at home in LA during that period? I know you had said you were going to school to pursue your doctoral degree --

Cox

Right.

Patterson

And what else?

Cox

Well, in between times, I had done that. And then when my husband became ill, I had to cut back a little bit on things, but I did -- in 1982, I believe, I decided to form a little part -- my own thing, something like the NASPAAM; we would be the caucus here. And I formed the -- The Black Experience Expressed Through Music (BEEM), that's my organization. The Black Experience Expressed Through Music.

Patterson

Right here in Los Angeles.

Cox

Right here in LA, and I was fortunate in having a lot of the professors from UCLA and other universities around, they're all from different -- and we would meet here, we would meet once a month, and we -- we wanted to help people to learn more about our music, and people who were doing things, and what's going on. And the first thing we did was to develop a movie on Thomas Bethune, a black slave who was blind, but when he was a little boy, his parents were the slaves, but they allowed -- the slave master allowed him to be in the house with them and do little things, and the slave master had a music teacher come to the home and teach music to their daughter. This little blind slave named Thomas. "Tom," they called him, Tom used to sit and listen, and every time the teacher would leave, he would sit down and play everything he heard. He could play anything he heard. He had an autistic kind of learning, and he began to do so well that the slave owner decided that he was going to make money on him. Because people would come to visit him and he would show off, he'd say, "Oh, look at my slave play." And so he finally decided, "Oh, I'm going to make some money," and he started taking him around places, and he was beginning to make really a lot of money, and the slave, of course, none of it, but he was becoming famous. So he became known as Blind Tom, and that was the only name that he was given. There was a whole history on the

story, so we wrote a proposal to The National Endowment for Humanities and received the grant, then we asked KCET, to match the NEH's grant and they did, so we produced the first movie on Blind Tom. It was BEEM's production, Bette Cox, Executive Producer. We won several awards, one being The Best Children's Program of the Year from KCET, and that was the first thing we did. And since then, a lot of the professors that were on my board were too busy, in different schools, and gradually I brought in other educators from school districts that I knew who had retired like me, and who could join and be part and active of the Board. So in the beginning we were all professors except me, I wasn't a professor, but it was my idea. But then now they just gave me this tribute for 25 years as the Founder and President Emeritus. Now I am Emeritus. We finally found another person that accept being President of BEEM. So this is where we are now. BEEM (The Black Experience Expressed through Music) represents music educators in Los Angeles. Dr. Eddie Meadows introduced me to the National Black Music Caucus, now NASPAAM (National Association for the Study and Performance of African American Music) -- everywhere. BEEM is the local California organization.

Patterson

Is it affiliated with NASPAAM?

Cox

Yes, I am a member of their NASPAAM's Board. They meet primarily in the east and south. They want to be apart of us because it is important that we all know each other. One day soon, maybe I'll have to have them come here, because we've been meeting other places, and we only met here once.

Patterson

When you say "here" --

Cox

They came here to Los Angeles once and had a meeting and stayed --

Patterson

NASPAAM?

Cox

Uh-huh. That was before NASPAAM; it was called the Black Caucus at that time. But maybe one time they'll -- I can invite them. I didn't invite them this year, because my husband is ill, and I don't know how good I will be at being the sponsor. But I'm still with it.

Patterson

In the very, very beginning of BEEM, who were some of those educators that stand out in your mind that really helped you hold it together in the beginning?

Cox

All right. Dr. Eddie Meadows; Dr. Richard Yarborough -- these were both UCLA -- and Dr. Gordon Berry, professor at UCLA, he's retired now. And there was a doctor, somebody from one of the universities east of here, and I can't think of the name of it. There was one from Long Beach, Dr. -- oh, dear. I have all the names, but right now I can't just call them up, because they were at different universities. But we got together once a month, and we did Blind Tom, and then we wanted to do more, we wanted to do -- the one that I'm thinking of now is the singer, she is the -- oh, dear, I can't say her name. It leaves me now. But there are a number of people. Of course, we could have done Eubie Blake if we wanted to, and we could -- there's so many, there are just many, many that people recognize the names, and then there's some they don't know at all, like [Marc Chevalier de St. George]. Now, that's the one that is -- nobody hardly knows about Chevalier de St. George. He was born a slave in Guadalupe, and his father was a Frenchman, and when he was big enough, I guess, when -- I don't know the age, but his father came from France and came back over here, and took him to France, and educated him well and had him learn the violin, he became a great violinist and a great composer. Sometimes his music was composed -- was compared with Mozart, and he's black. So, of course, I don't know how black he looked, he might not have looked black, but everybody knew that he was. And now that's a story that we would like to do. And one was this woman singer -- I'll have to think of it, I can't say. But there are so many of them that are -- that have been known. And she was born after the Civil War and was the first black diva, and I know her name so well, "The Black Swan."

Patterson

Now, these were projects that you wanted to do that you didn't --

Unidentified Female

We should switch tapes.

Patterson

Oh, OK. All right.

Cox

I've been talking too much, this is --

Cox

No - [END OF recording]

#### **1.4. Session 3B (January 12, 2007)**

Cox

-- first black diva, and she --

Patterson

Continue talking about some of the environments in Los Angeles while you were doing all of the works that you were doing. And the venues that were important, the musical venues that you remember seemed important to you that were exhibiting musicians and musical works that stood out in your mind -- oh --

Cox

The Hollywood Bowl was the center for classical and/or jazz performances. Excitement was all over the Bowl when I recognized William Grant Still, the Los Angeles artist who was the first black conductor to perform his very own music there. His symphony was beautiful. When Billy Eckstine (one of my favorite vocalists) performed at the Bowl, we had the privilege of going backstage to interview him. It was a thrill to have my picture taken with him. Other musicians whose concerts I have attended were Teddy Wilson, the first black musician to work with Benny Goodman. I attended a performance by Benny Goodman featuring Teddy Wilson as the pianist at the Pasadena Civic Auditorium several years ago. he was so outstanding holding a standing

audience with his performance. My thrill was to meet Teddy Wilson and visit with him. He was leaving the city but promised to come back to join us for dinner. This was truly thrilling to have this commitment from him for the following year. My heart was broken when i learned that he had passed away a few months after meeting him.

Patterson

Speaking of getting out much, Bette, when you were, say, during your teaching years, did you go to concerts in LA?

Cox

Well, there are concerts for children, for schools, that we all were to go to, and we went.

Patterson

But for yourself?

Cox

But for myself, you know, my husband is a jazz fiend, and he likes jazz; he would want to go to something jazz at the Hollywood Bowl, maybe, or we had box tickets for those good seats one year, two year, I guess, and we would see all the best shows. Now, that was a two-year period, and after that, they went up so high he wouldn't have it.

Patterson

What are some of the musicians that would come through town that you remember really liking seeing?

Cox

Let's see. Like Natalie Cole and some of the -- oh, gosh, any time someone like Benny Carter, who became a very dear friend of ours, and I have known him for years, when he was there. Or -- any of the New Orleans musicians. Any of the really -- I guess they can't come to me right now, but I can't recall all of them.

Patterson

Well, when you first came to town, you were just a young girl, you weren't 21, so you couldn't really get into the sophisticated jazz clubs at the time.

Cox

Oh, no.

Patterson

But did you go to any concerts with your family?

Cox

Not at that time, no. My brother and I lived with a nice family, very nice people. But everything was just getting acquainted with people. No, we didn't go to anything when we were young like that, no. And after the first year, I think he began to spread his wings, and he blew away. I don't know whether the ladies got him or he got them, I don't know what happened. But --

Patterson

Well, but do you remember any -- because I remember speaking with Professor Davis, she was like, well, what were some of the favorite groups that may have come through town at that time that you remember maybe reading about in the newspapers, or --

Cox

In those really early years? I really don't -- I don't know how much of that I really did, because I was just in school for those --

Patterson

So you weren't really interested in the concerts.

Cox

No. I was all through the two years at Pasadena Junior College, and then all of the time at UCLA until I graduated. And when I went through to get my Master's, I was always busy with school and other things.

Patterson

When did you get your Master's? You had already started teaching, and then decided to go back to school.

Cox

You know, if we ever get to those big things, and my notes, all I can tell you, because I don't remember now -- I think it was in the '60s.

Patterson

And you decided to go back to USC and California State University, Los Angeles, to get your Master's?

Cox

No, I went to -- I got it at California State University, Los Angeles. I was -- I think I was teaching part-time, and I don't know, I was just doing what I could do on extra time. At USC, I went to USC one year; I think that was when I was on a sabbatical leave, because that year, I was going to work on my doctorate. I did one year of whatever we were to do. I don't think I got far. I made the Pi Lambda Theta Honorary Society at USC. That was an honor.

Patterson

An honor organization at USC? And this is while you were working on your Master's?

Cox

Well, I would think I was working beyond that, but I just didn't do -- I wasn't too serious at getting it then, because when I went to UCLA is when I was really serious about it. And I wish I had taken off enough time to really work with it, but I thought I needed my -- I had two children in college, and they were both traveling a lot, so.

Patterson

During the time you were doing your graduate work getting your Master's degree, how had the music scene changed in LA from the time you first started the --

Cox

I don't know. I don't think I noticed. I don't know. My mind wasn't on things like that, I guess. I don't know.

Patterson



So Central Avenue, and all of the music that was going on on Central Avenue, you weren't interested in it yet.

Cox

You know, that's the funny thing. Some people -- I've had two people recently to call me, and one's writing a book on Central Avenue, and one's interested in it or something, and they want to ask me things about these early days, and I said, "You know, I didn't grow up here," and I said, "I didn't even go to Central Avenue," when I was in college, we weren't supposed to go to nightclubs. I didn't go; I didn't know. And I went to -- I don't know, I may have told you this; I was staying with this pianist, this teacher (Lorenza Jordan Cole), and I went down to Central and I thought I was going downtown. Did I tell you that?

Patterson

Yes, you did.

Cox

Well, see how much I knew. And that was just before I was really into college, I guess. But when I was in the college, we just -- nice, "nice" girls aren't supposed to go to nightclubs on Central Avenue, or anywhere, really. It wasn't like today, nice girls go everywhere. But we just -- I don't know anyone that did, really.

Patterson

Did you have favorite artists that you'd listen to on the radio?

Cox

At that time?

Patterson

During -- yeah, just, say, first of all, thinking about when you were in college initially, were there radio --

Cox

I can remember on the radio in the car, hearing -- let's see, that band -- it was Glen Miller. You remember that? Do you remember that band? Glen Miller

was playing something on the car radio I was in, and I thought, oh, that's sure good music. And that was -- was that the '40s?

Patterson

Mm-hmm. So this is like when you'd been in a car with maybe Tom Bradley, you'd be driving to school, riding to school with him, and the radio would be on, and you'd hear Glen Miller playing.

Cox

I don't remember in his car, because I think the girl that was in there with him was talking a lot, you know. And we were in the rumble seat in the back. Boy, I'm really telling on myself now, because you don't know those days, you were too young. But this girl that was with me, she was from Riverside, and we became best friend all through the time that she was there. But we were talking, mostly, and then up in the front seat, the woman who told me, "That's my seat, you get out," in the rain, I had to get out, I was scared of her in the rumble seat.

Patterson

You mentioned -- you came across her later.

Cox

Velma. Her name was Velma -- what was her maiden name and later?

Patterson

OK, I wanted to know --

Cox

Her son is a lawyer, and his name -- it would be one of her maiden names, she's been married a couple of times or more, I don't know.

Patterson

She was downtown with you when you were working with the commission, right?

Cox

Yes, because he appointed her to a commission too just like he did me, and she was some other kind of commission, and I was on the arts.

Patterson

So you really didn't go to concerts much and go out on the town, so to speak, until you got married then, with Jimmy, because Jimmy liked music?

Cox

Oh, yes. He loves jazz all the way, but I like all of it; I like everything. But he really likes jazz, and I try to get tickets for something that he'd like, but I knew I could always play others if I wanted. But I just, I can't associate -- Glen Miller is the one I remember the most.

Patterson

And then later you would go -- did you go to music concerts more later, say, around the time you were in graduate school?

Cox

I'll have to think about that.

Patterson

OK. So generally speaking --

Cox

See, the ones I remember are the most recent; that was when we got box seats at the Hollywood Bowl, tickets to be there for the best programs that we thought were the best, that were really what Jimmy liked more.

Patterson

What were the audiences like when you would go? Was it ethnically mixed, pretty much?

Cox

Oh, yes. It was nice; they were all nice.

Patterson

Different mixtures of people?

Cox

Oh, yes.

Patterson

You would say there were white people, black people, Asian people, Latino people, really mixed?

Cox

Mm-hmm. And the box seats were most white, but they were all nice. We all -  
- everything was great.

Patterson

So where were you living when you were in graduate school? What was your neighborhood like then?

Cox

In graduate school, I was living on Somerset.

Patterson

Somerset? Where is that?

Cox

That is a few blocks the other side of Crenshaw, and some of it goes across the tracks to the other side, between the tracks and Jefferson. And I lived over on that side.

Patterson

What was that neighborhood like? What was it like over there where you were in graduate school?

Cox

I'm trying to think what it was you were asking me.

Patterson

The -- let's stop. (pause) So you really didn't go out to musical events much until maybe later in your life.

Cox

The most fun I had was with the Turnabout Club, we had my little club, and once a year, we would have a big "to-do," and that was fun.

Patterson

Now, what -- do you remember the building or the street that you all would rehearse in?

Cox

Central Avenue.

Patterson

It was right on Central.

Cox

The Elks -- well, we didn't rehearse there, but that's where the big event was that -- where we would invite people, or we'd sell tickets, and then everybody had to bring a toy or something for a child, that's what it was for, it was in -- we were always -- sometimes we'd have a raffle, clothes raffle, on the Central Avenue. But we didn't do anything with clubs; I didn't know anything about the nightclubs, I didn't know anything at that time.

Patterson

Describe, then, Central Avenue, how it was to you, even though you weren't going to the clubs, you had an impression of that part of town and what it was like.

Cox

Right. Well, it was a very, very nice street, and to me, it was like going downtown; I'm a country girl from a country town. And it was like going downtown; there are shops and all, they weren't real fancy, but they were clean and well-kept, and everybody was -- there was some businesses there, a lot of business people had offices there, doctors, and it was -- it was a nice street, nice place, and we went there -- we never went to the clubs, even daytime to rehearse or anything like that. As I say, the events we had, one every year, was at the Elks Auditorium. And that was on the other -- it was on

the east side of the street, and it was around -- I think it was near 41st or -- I'm not sure exactly, but it was around that area.

Patterson

Was it near the other theatres that were on Central Avenue (inaudible) performed?

Cox

I think it was a little bit south, but not far. They were -- it was kind of in the general area where things were that people went to.

Patterson

So this is mostly an African-American sort of community area. Were there any other mixtures of people that were there?

Cox

Not that I knew about at the time, but there may have been. But I don't recall, not at that time. This was in the early '40s.

Patterson

Was the street mostly large businesses or little small first -- one-story buildings?

Cox

They were, I think, all one-story, as far as I know.

Patterson

And you were driving then.

Cox

Let's see. Yes, I was driving then. I was married and had my car.

Patterson

So you'd go down -- did you pick up some of the other ladies and drive from where you lived down there, or they all were pretty independent women, and --

Cox

I think they were. I don't remember. I might have, because my friend Jean Watkins, we were friends even then, and it could be that I may have picked her up. She might have picked me up sometimes too.

Patterson

So the turnabouts were mostly -- were they mostly single mothers or were they professional women, or --

Cox

No, they weren't single mothers. If they were mothers, they were married.

Patterson

No, I don't mean single mothers. I mean mothers -- family women. They had husbands and families. Were there single women as well?

Cox

I think -- maybe one or two were single, maybe two or three. I don't know. But mostly they were family members.

Patterson

And professional women? Were they working women as well, or were they mostly housewives?

Cox

I think most of them were teachers, and those who weren't had jobs. I can't recall if there was anybody that didn't work at all, there may have been a housewife or two. But I think we were all pretty much married with young children.

Patterson

And working or teaching.

Cox

Yes.

Patterson

So were many of them musical people? People that were professional, or educators, and had a musical background?

Cox

Well, they were educators, some of them were teachers and some of them were -- I think of most of them as being teachers in various schools. There may have been one or two that were in some other area; I think one worked for the telephone company. But they had --

Patterson

And had the mission -- all of you had the mission to raise funds for children who --

Cox

I think so. Our main mission was to do something for children who were in need. So we wanted our main event to be something that people could bring gifts or clothing or something for little children. Mostly toys and things.

Patterson

So that was your Central Avenue activity.

Cox

Yeah, right.

Patterson

But later, when you began to be interested -- when did you begin to be interested in Central Avenue in a larger way? Interested in the clubs and the musical activities?

Cox

I never did, because --

Patterson

Well, I mean, before you wrote the book; how did you become interested in Central Avenue?

Cox



Well, that was because I was interested in the history, and it wasn't that I -- I don't think I ever went to any of the clubs at all. I think by the time I could, when I was like married and had my husband take me there or something, I just never got to do that.

Patterson

So what interested you? What made you want to write about it?

Cox

Well, I had friends who were musicians, and some of them were older, and one in particular that I met when I was doing all of this interviewing of people, happened to be the first black teacher that was hired in the city schools, and he taught music at Jefferson High School. And a number of people had spoken about him, how he was so much admired and loved, and I happened to meet him, and I think it was during this period that he was probably one of the first people I interviewed for my book. But I was so interested in all that he had to say about his experience, because he had an experience that I might have had, although I didn't, being the first black teacher, he graduated cum laude from USC School of Education, music education --

Patterson

Do you remember his name?

Cox

Yes. Very well, if I can say it now. Very well. I will tell you though, I'm trying to say now -- anyway, I'll come back to it. But he graduated cum laude in his field, and had to go on the road with singers to make a living, because they wouldn't hire him, no school would hire him because he was black. Sam. Sam Brown was his name. And he had to go and travel with these singers, and they had a name, some kind of singers, and he's singing and singing and going to make a living, and it was such a shame, and it was such a shame, and it was so terrible, and then when he would come back from the trip, then he would -- sometimes he would probably teaching, but he finally got a job teaching at night, night school. And then said they would give him this job if he would do it at night, and he'd have to get so many -- they told him how many people he'd have to get to be sure they would come. Well, all he had to do was go to

church and get all his choir, all these people, because they all loved him, they all wanted to come, and he filled up the room and more if he could. And of course, the school district personnel, they were just shocked that he could get that many people to come and listen to him and learn from him. And that was the beginning, and I guess it was after they saw the success that he made, that he had with these students, they let him teach at the first high school to have a black teacher, it was Jefferson High School, near Jefferson and Central, near - I guess it's about 40th and Central, somewhere in there. And so he was just a marvelous teacher at Jefferson High School, and they loved him, and he was there for years and years.

Patterson

When did he come there, do you remember when he started?

Cox

I think he came there in about maybe 1938, it was something around that time. And I think this is what interested me; I wanted to write this down. I was taking notes, I was interviewing here, and I began to -- I just had this craving to talk to people and interview them. And my friend Buddy Collette, who is a well-known musician around town, a very fine musician, he and this Sam Brown, and a few other people that I knew, they began to help me by passing the word and telling me who I could call, call him and he'll tell you what it was like. And I interviewed so many people that I began to wonder what was I going to do with all this. And so I finally wondered about a book, and I tried -- I thought I'd try to do that. Well, that's what led me to writing that book, because I did not grow up here, and I did not know the early history, but I had many friends who did. And they told me all this history that they could pass on, and I was writing it down, and, well, eventually it became a book. We sold -- we've had two printings, and, well, it's been very popular, I still have calls for it. I have a few of these soft copies, but I don't have any hard copies to sell. My husband was my manager, I told him to handle all of that. And so he has to tell him how much it is, and he just likes to say, "Well, we'll let you have it now for -- a hard copy for \$40. It was \$60, but now we've come down now. And soft copy, it was \$40, but it's \$25, I'll let you have it." And he likes that, he likes to be able to do that. It's fun for him.

Patterson

So this whole project grew out of your doing these interviews with -Southern California musicians.

Cox

Well, no, no. This was not for the -- the commission had nothing to do with -- this was my own doing; it was my doing as a result of what we did with the Blind Tom, with my BEEM Foundation, the BEEM foundation. Well, the things that we were doing, and the interest and all, one thing just led to another, and when I began to interview people, and see, all of these people were university professors except me, but it was my idea, but they all came. And so it was working out very well, but they suggested that I try to interview people on tape, and I hadn't thought of it, but I did, and I got them all on tape, and so -- and then I checked what I had -- I'm writing it down exactly what they're saying, and it worked out very well. And so that was my first book, and probably my only real book. I wrote another one that was about the -- oh, a lot of the -- I guess they weren't books, but they were -- it was -- I think it was a compilation of a few things. I'll have to tell you about that later.

Patterson

So this was during the period that you were meeting with the BEEM, the other scholars that were with you in BEEM.

Cox

Right.

Patterson

And what else were you doing? Were you teaching as well during this time as well?

Cox

No, I think this was after I retired, it was after I formed the BEEM Foundation, I was retired then. And it's kept me very busy; the BEEM Foundation has really kept me busy, and especially because we do three events a year. The first event is the Black History Month event, and it's a lot of work to prepare, plan, and what we know we're going to do, and the last thing that we did was, we were asked to collaborate with the Young Musicians Foundation, which is a very well-known Beverly Hills organization, and I'm a member of it, just

because I was invited to be a member some years ago, probably 20 years ago now. But I don't get to the meetings hardly at all, because I'm busy with these other things. But they are very fine people, and they seem to -- they don't knock me out because I don't get there. But anyway, they asked me, the leader is Edie Rugolo, the wife of Pete Rugolo, famous musician, and she asked me if I would collaborate with them for Black History Month. They wanted to do a Black History Month program, and of course, they weren't familiar with the black musicians, or the things that black musicians have done. And so I met with them a number of times, went to lunch with them and had them over here to lunch, and so I gave them ideas of the things that they could do, and people they could involve that were black musicians. So at their last event, at the Wilshire-Ebell, they did include music by Billy Childs, who had won two Grammys and was known now. And there were -- some other thing -- their last number was a William Grant Still number, the last movement from his symphony, and it was just beautiful, everybody really loved it. So that was -- as I say, that's one thing we do a year, one something for the Black History Month. And then we do a competition where we search the schools of Southern California, and try to get the very finest school musicians who are interested in applying for a scholarship. And then we have the competition in June, and that prepares them to see who's going to be the winner, and then we give the winner scholarship money to start college.

Patterson

So these are elementary, junior high, and high school students?

Cox

They're mostly high school, high school and college. And then the third thing, the last thing that we have is our big event on -- usually it's in October or November or this year; it was early November, I believe, the early -- early November. But that's the third event. So that keeps me very busy, because the professors began to gradually move out, because they don't have time for all of this, but I have pulled in others who were educators from the schools but who had retired. So they're retired and have time, so we have quite a nice group.

Patterson

So in the beginning of BEEM, you went through the process of becoming a non-profit fundraising organization.

Cox

Yes. That's what we are.

Patterson

So how did that -- did you have to learn about all of the bureaucracy, the paperwork that it takes to become a non-profit organization so that --

Cox

Well, as I said, we were -- they were all professors, university people, and so they knew what should go into that, so we formed the by-laws, which they really -- I think there are one or two people, especially, who wanted to do that, because they had done it before. And so we still use those by-laws, and they are our basis for whatever we do, and we have like -- it's like rules for how we select people; rules for what we can do. It's all about music, and the members have to be either musicologists or educators or community leaders, but they have to have qualifications to be a member.

Patterson

So you were really the heartbeat of this, and they were -- they're university professors and so forth. But you have that first heartfelt passion to get this done.

Cox

I did. They say I did.

Patterson

(laughter) Well, I'm sure you did. So in that time, you were raising your children; did you have them participate in musical activities?

Cox

Yes I did -- my son, violin in junior high. My daughter, piano in high school.

Patterson

Can we pause it --? [END OF recording]

## 1.5. Session 4 (January 26, 2007)

Patterson

You ready? OK. Here we are, January 26 with Bette Cox, and we're going to get started. Today we're going to look at some photographs and hear the stories of those photographs. And so let's start.

Cox

All right.

Patterson

What do we have here?

Cox

Well, this is an old, old photo album that was put into this one, it's a little newer, but these are pictures that I really -- I think perhaps my mother might have put these pictures in at some late time. So this is a picture of my father's mother, who I grew up with, this little grandmother, she was so sweet, I loved her so much, and I knew her better than I knew the other one, because she lived in Seattle. She, and this is her father -- her husband, who was my father's father. So these are my paternal grandparents, and I knew her very well. He, I knew, and loved him, but he -- when I was in the first grade walking home from school, a little boy said to me, "Your grandpa died." It was very cruel, but I guess he didn't know any better. And I didn't believe him; I said, "No, he didn't." And I came home, and he had passed away in his sleep. And so I didn't get to know him for a long time, but to what I did, he was wonderful. It was his son, my dad, was wonderful, and my mother who's wonderful, very wonderful, it was when she was really -- had gained a lot of weight, but she got rid of that. And this is her mother, who was a great artist, Grandmother Earl. And I met her -- I must have been in college age when I was on a vacation, and we went to Seattle. The first time -- she wasn't well, she was in bed, but she got to meet her granddaughter, and I got to meet her. And she was a great, great, well-known artist, both in --

Unidentified Female

I'm going to interrupt for a minute. Bette, once you point to them, just move -- remove your hand.

Cox

OK. Yes. Point and then come back. Oh, sure. Anytime. If I don't do it right, tell me. So she was a very great, well-known artist in Seattle, and also in Colorado Springs. And some of her paintings are on the people's -- in their homes in those cities. And this was my mother's father, my grandfather who -- I don't think I ever really met him, unless I was very young and I don't remember. But these are the grandparents to me. And over here are the baby pictures. Now, I think this is my mother -- now, I did have a sister who passed away, the first child of my parents, and broke their hearts, because she had spinal meningitis -- it could not be cured at the time.

Patterson

Don't we have a picture of her? Is it over there?

Cox

I do. I do, and --

Unidentified Female

Can we bring it over?

Patterson

Yeah.

Cox

I think it's on top of that -- I don't know where I put it; I was going to --

Patterson

I think it's on the [credenza] in the dining room. Do you see a picture, a photograph on top of the stack?

Cox

Unless I put it in here.

Patterson

Yeah -- yes, that's it.

Cox

Oh, good for you. You're good. That was their first baby; her name was Yvonne, spelled like Yvonne but they named her Yvonne-ay. And I have to find a place for it in here. She was beautiful and they just loved her, and they were newlyweds, first year, first year that they had a child. And all of their friends had children, and that broke their hearts. So they just couldn't stand it, and they moved, they left Seattle and moved to Twin Falls, where my grandmother and grandfather lived. And so I never got to meet Yvonne, because she was gone before I was born. But she was a beautiful little girl, and I sure -- I just -- I know how heartbroken that they were, and I have to remember that we saw this, because I want to put it somewhere safely now, I'm afraid to put it in there without a clip or something.

Patterson

OK. Well, I'll put it back for you.

Cox

And these are baby pictures. This is my brother, and that's me trying to ride with him, and there we are again, my brother and me. And here I am on the step with a great big ribbon; my mother had these great big beautiful ribbons, and I think that was the style in those days that they put on little girls. This was my mother and my -- that's with -- I guess that's with me, I don't know. Maybe my brother. This was me over here; that must be my brother. And this, I don't know, probably me, because it's a little girl in a dress. And this again is my mother's father and my brother and I. And I met him at some time to be in this picture, but I don't recall -- maybe I was so young that I knew about him, I knew he had a business, a real estate business in Pasadena. At the time that I was there, he was not there anymore. And here I am and my brother. And I think at this time, I was in high school, and my brother was in high school still. And here I was taking dance lessons; I won the state contest. I think I won it with interpretive dancing; I did all kinds of dancing at that time. Very young. And here is -- this is college years; this is my friend Charlotte and me. Here I am. And this is a lady in Catalina Island, invited us to come over, or invited me



to come over and meet her. She and her husband knew my parents, and I went to Catalina Island for the first time, and I remember it so well, because --

Unidentified Female

Here, let's get some things straight, let's get a couple things straight, so we can adjust some stuff.

Cox

Signal me or something, so you don't have to stop.

Unidentified Female

OK. And Bette, just where your hand is right now, once you've pointed to the picture, that's perfect. You point to it, and once you've started talking about it, you can just put your hand back where it is right now, and it's perfect. OK?

Cox

Sure.

Patterson

Thank you.

Cox

This is Charlotte Hartsfield, whose mother was a dear friend of my mother's, and she was from Seattle, I think. But Charlotte had grown up in -- well, I'm not sure if she lived in Seattle herself, but her family, her mother did.

Patterson

Is she related to Arnette Hartsfield?

Cox

Yes. Arnette's parents were friends of my parents. That's how we met at first. And so of course my mother had hoped that we would all be close friends; you never know one day what would happen. But anyway, this was in Catalina Island, I had never been to Catalina Island. This lady worked over there at a club, and she invited me to come over. And I was so thrilled because it was so different from now. When I got off the plane, they had people out there singing and dancing, songs, and they had a little fellow that was the song

leader, and oh, it was just fun, a good thing. It was like that in a way in Hawaii the first time I went there; they had Hawaiian girls dancing out there, and now -- they don't do it now. It's quite different. In those days, in these days, they did a lot to make you welcome and make you feel like partying and all. So I was just still in college; I think this was during the summer. And I enjoyed, just -- the whole thing was fun to me. Here's my brother and me. And -- trying show off over there. And these were all just sort of family gatherings and friends, nothing important. And again, as I said, my brother and I took dancing lessons in Twin Falls, Idaho. And so I took different -- all kinds of dancing, and he just took tap so that we could have a little thing together -- that's my brother and that's me, and this is me again. I think that --

Unidentified Female

Could you just hold off on those for a second before you turn the pages?

Cox

Mm-hmm. I don't know if I said that to the mic.

Patterson

Talk about that picture. That's --

Unidentified Female

Will you take that paper off it?

Patterson

Oh, sure.

Cox

Maybe you tell me when you're --

Patterson

Yeah, that's a great picture. So you were being very fierce.

Cox

Well, I was taught interpretive dancing, and I was told when I get to the end of this African dance, that I would hold out my arms and my leg up like this and scream, and I did that. (laughter) It was fun, but I didn't know much about it; I

didn't have any background for that, but it was fun. And I think this was my graduation concert when I came back to Twin Falls, after graduating from UCLA, and I was asked to perform, and I really don't know exactly why, because I hadn't been practicing much, because I had majored in music. But I did still know my music from all the years that I had studied, and I performed, and this was a young lady who was asked to sing a few little songs as -- just for a little variety in the program.

Patterson

Do you remember her?

Cox

Her name was Mildred Jennings, and I don't know what ever happened to her, because she was a little girl in Twin Falls, but her mother didn't want her to play with us, so we didn't ever get to really know her. And --

Patterson

Why was that?

Cox

I don't know. I think she had a stepmother, and I don't think she was very nice to her -- I don't think they -- I don't know, whatever it was. But I think that it spoiled her life, I'm sure, because she could have had at least two little friends. But somehow they got her -- they said she knew how to sing, and she sang a song as one of the -- a little variety to the concert that I was doing, with all classical music. And this is my dad, and my mother wanted a picture with the three levels of mother to grandmother. So I was -- I'm the mother figure, and my mother, and my grandmother. And that was why it's like that; she -- I've often thought of doing that for my daughter so that she will have one with the three levels, I haven't done it yet. Better hurry up. This is me at the time that I graduated, and that was my brother.

Patterson

1942.

Cox

Yes, 1942. And that's my brother; we don't have him anymore, he's passed away. But he's very personable; had a million-dollar personality. But he had a way with the ladies, and he was pretty much pretty busy going, on the go. We miss him, anyway.

Patterson

So what were you doing when you took this picture?

Cox

I don't know. Obviously, it looks like I'm leaning on a stool; somebody must have said to pose for a picture, because I don't know why else I put my hands like that. I don't know. And I think it says, "To Mother," I'm not sure, "Mother and Father," I don't know.

Patterson

OK. What else do we have?

Cox

OK. Then over here, here with my son, my first child, and his father, my first husband. And this is Johnny there, and here is my present husband, because the first marriage didn't work out, except for two wonderful children, but that was it. In later years, Jimmy and I met, and as he said, we fell in love. And this is my daughter and son, and he got to know them pretty well. And naturally, he grew to know them better and better. And this is my -- that's my brother up here first, and here he is again, and I think this is still him, and this is myself, I don't remember. I don't recall the occasion for the picture, but that must have been -- it must have been after I graduated at some point. And I don't remember the doggie's name; he was sitting up so well.

Patterson

OK.

Cox

And here is one of my dearest friends who became Carol's godmother, she's godmother to my daughter. She's no longer living; she had -- she used to go Israel, to [Heifa], and she was a real -- all involved with the religion of the Jewish people, although she was one of us; she was not Jewish, but she really

was a wonderful person. I don't know when to turn -- OK. And here again is another family picture, but these are -- this is like a relative, Aunt Julia, she was one of my mother's dearest friends, and she was known to us as Aunt Julia. There's my dad next to her, and there's my mother and I think my aunt, and there's my daughter down here. And these are just little casual shots, all of these are just casual shots. Here's my son and my daughter, much older. Here they are here, much older. And here's a picture of my mother and a friend. Is that me? I don't know, I think that might be me. Can't tell my own self. And this is a family picture.

Unidentified Female

Can I ask you to just set it down because --

Cox

I'm not good -- I'm going to have to be better at this. Yes, I'm so sorry.

Patterson

No, you're wonderful.

Cox

OK. Well, that first picture, I'm sure that's me, I think, in -- I think that that -- now, I'm not sure, because I don't know who those two are. It might be Jimmy and me, it looked like the car he had at that time, I'm not sure. And here's a family grouping; this is Daddy, my mother, and me, and my uncle and aunt. This is one of my dad's brothers, my favorite uncle and his wife, Aunt Ruth. And again, here is some little gathering with Aunt Ruth and my mother, and my play-sister Jean.

Adriana

Bette, can I ask you to go through who the people are here?

Cox

Here? This is my dad, my mother; this is me, and this is Aunt Ruth and Uncle Everett from Seattle, Washington. And in very late years, they moved here, because my parents were here, and it was their late years, and I'm so glad we got to really know him better and know her. And he did pass away later, but it was wonderful to have the time -- he was very -- but very wonderful, my

favorite uncle. And I think I had another uncle that was one of her brothers that you had asked about him. And I couldn't think of his name, and it was Roscoe, it came to me; Uncle Roscoe was another brother of my mother's.

Patterson

Rosco was your mother's brother?

Cox

And he, I think, was married to an Indian lady, he was on an Indian reservation in Kansas -- I have to find the name of that --

Patterson

Is that [Villa] was his wife?

Cox

No, no. That's Uncle Burt's daughter, a different one. She lived in Twin Falls; she was much older than we were. This is my mother and my dad in the years that they were feeding themselves pretty well, I think a little chubby. They lost that; they made up their mind and lost some of that weight. They still look beautiful to me.

Patterson

Did you get enough of that one, Adriana? That last picture of her parents?

Adriana

Yeah. Could we have a little bit more of that?

Cox

Sure. I don't know what year that was, but --

Patterson

They're a handsome couple.

Cox

Oh, my dad, my mother, they were both just so wonderful. So wonderful.

Adriana

OK. Can I -- (inaudible), because I think I'm going to want to -- the little tiny pictures, we get the whole page, but they're so small, we can't really focus on that. OK, can I just use the size of the pictures so we know what we're dealing with?

Cox

Sure.

Adriana

And then hold it that way.

Cox

OK.

Patterson

Are you getting it clear from the --

Adriana

Yeah, a little bit of glare sometimes. That's why moving is really not good. So Karen, if you could just (inaudible).

Patterson

OK, this is volume two, the photo albums, this is the second --

Cox

It's numbered as one, because that was so small and came in late, we could just call that 1A, that little one.

Patterson

OK. Then this would be 1B.

Cox

This would be 1B, fine.

Patterson

OK. What do we have here?

Cox

Oh, this is -- I don't think I need these, I'll put them right here. And he is my father's -- my mother's father. And this is Uncle Virgil -- no, this is Uncle Roscoe that lives in the South, and I can't think of the city. I think he lives on an Indian reservation, or near one. And this is his brother, Uncle Virgil, who lived in Twin Falls, Idaho. And this is Aunt Myrtle, my mother's sister. I think she may have been the oldest sister, I'm not sure. My mother had Aunt Bertie and Aunt Myrtle. Maybe that -- was it just the two? I think so. And then I don't know -- I think this is the grandfather, this one. I'm not sure that that -- that may be the grandmother, but I'm not sure. I don't have the close-up of them. And then these are pictures of the same woman, and her name was Bertie, Aunt Bertie. She was one of my mother's -- she was my mother's oldest sister, maybe. And then the one I know as Aunt Myrtle, she's passed away. They've all gone. These are just family shots. These were pictures with my mother and my Aunt Lena, Aunt Lena who lived in Los Angeles, and she was married to my father's, one of his brothers. And here's my grandmother, my father's mother, his dad and his brother Bert, that's uncle Bert. And here is my mother's mother -- sorry, my father's mother; that was Elizabeth Yarbrough. And she lived right down the corner from us, and she was to come down every evening and have her dinner with us, and that was wonderful, because we loved that. And here is her husband, grandpa, and I guess that's her too, but I can't make that one out. But in those days, you don't -- you just really can't really tell. And here, these are some more family shots, I'm not sure who is who; I think that's the grandpa and grandmother, I'm not sure. He's not tall enough; that might have been my uncle. I'm not sure who these people are; they're all family. And this is Harold; Harold was something in the family, I really never was quite sure, he was sort of like a cousin, but he was a step-something; I think his mother was a distant relative of my dad somehow, and I really don't know too much. But that was Harold, and I didn't see him often, and I think he didn't live in Twin Falls all of the time. And here is Aunt Lena and Villa. You've seen Villa before; she's the one that in Boise, they wouldn't let them stay there, because they thought she was white. And this Aunt Gertrude was her mother, and she was the one who looked like a big Indian squaw sometimes. And here, this looks like -- oh, this was the day after I graduated from UCLA, I came back and gave a concert piano recital, and this is Mildred again that sang a few songs. And all of these girls were -- I think they went to school -- no, I don't know if they went to school with my children; they may have. But somehow, they



were willing to come and be ushers, and they ushered all the people -- the paper said there was 800 people there, because they raise money for the soldiers at that time.

Patterson

And where did this take place?

Cox

In Twin Falls, the -- I guess it was on the high school -- in the high school auditorium, and I didn't remember that I knew those girls, because I never really got to know them very well. But they were -- I think they were high school seniors, and at least they ushered the guests who came to hear the concert.

Patterson

OK, let me just spin it back around again.

Cox

At that time, they used to call me Little Bette Yarbrough, because I was little at one time. It seemed as though they kind of knew that I was a pianist and that I had been a dancer, too. Somehow, they -- a lot of people knew, because they knew we were the only black children in town. And these, I believe, are all the AKAs, I was initiated into an Alpha Kappa Alpha sorority.

Patterson

And what year was this?

Cox

It must have been in '41 or '42.

Patterson

So around the time you were finishing college.

Cox

Yes. And I don't remember the occasion or where.

Adriana

Could I ask you to hold onto that and show us what -- yeah, who's --

Cox

One of my dearest friends was Alma -- Alma who was -- Alma Whiteside is her name now. And I see -- I remember this girl, these were UCLA friends. And she passed away -- I'm trying to say her name -- her name doesn't come to me now, but this is one of my dearest friends, Corinne Jones, she's now Corinne Taylor. And there are many people here that I had known now, I didn't know them so well at the time.

Patterson

And where are you? Point yourself out in that picture.

Cox

I don't know where that took place.

Patterson

That's you right there.

Cox

You know, I don't know where that took place.

Patterson

That's you right there.

Cox

Right here. That was me. And this is Alma -- Peake was her maiden name, Alma Peake, P-E-A-K-E. One of my dearest friends, and she was in my wedding, and it's been so many years now, but most of these -- well, around in the front, these were the younger ones who were just initiated, I guess. Some of them had already been initiated, I guess. Some of them had already been initiated.

Adriana

Can we go back to the tall picture, and can you point to where you are?

Cox

This is me.

Adriana

The top one. The other picture.

Cox

Oh, that picture? OK. Now, this is, I'll say, a family gathering, and I really can't - I don't know that it was any real special day like a holiday, but I know that some of them were guests and friends of my parents. This is my Aunt Myrtle, and this is my brother's first wife, Velma. And I don't recall these people. And this is Aunt Julia; she was my mother's dear friend, so we knew her as Aunt Julia. I didn't -- I don't recall the names of everybody. But it was -- I think Mother just invited some ladies over for lunch, and that's what that was about.

Adriana

And who are you?

Cox

I don't think I'm in this. So many -- I don't know what the occasion was. Maybe I was in school and I couldn't come or something; I just don't know. It might have been a meeting of a group of women, it might have been something like that.

Patterson

That's perfect.

Cox

And this is my mother and daddy, again in the good years. My mother and my dad. And --

Patterson

Could we keep that other one longer, get a few more seconds in?

Cox

Oh, OK.

Adriana

OK, we're going to move the green dot to the side. It's such a wonderful photograph.

Cox

It really is. And my dad had his own business in Los Angeles, in Twin Falls. He had a shoe and hat cleaning shop, and the men who worked for him, some of them were white, if there were any -- the few blacks that were around that didn't have jobs would come and he would give them a job, as they would -- he had some seats, a row of seats where people could sit and have their shoes shined, and he'd have these white men or the black men, whoever's available, because he had -- his little office was in the back, and he cleaned and blocked hats, he knew how to do that, and he knew how to dye shoes a different color, and he could change -- it either -- he changed leather to suede or suede to leather, I don't remember which. But he had all kinds of little things like that that he could do. And then people who sat up in his chairs to get their shoes shined, they could look ahead, there was some signs, and then there was a mirror; they could look in there, and they could see signs that couldn't read otherwise, because they would be made for them while they're having their shoes shined, they could read these signs and what the particular ad was for. So he was pretty smart about that. He went to Seattle one time for a class he wanted to take on business, and he came back and had more tricks that he's going to do, and he was great. He was very smart. This looks like my mother's - one of her clubs.

Patterson

Should we take -- do you want to take -- do you need to identify those?

Cox

Do you want to take them out? Oh, let's see. Sure, this is easier. Is that better?

Patterson

It'll just stay still.

Cox

This is a relative of Velma here. Velma is my brother's first wife. And he -- I think that's a relative -- Velma's -- this lady, I think, had -- her husband was from one of the islands, I don't know. But anyway, that's who she is. This was a lady that worked for my father when he was in real estate; she was one of the realtors that sold properties, and my dad was a broker and she was a saleslady. This is my mother, and this is my sister, we call each other sister, we're best friends. She went to UCLA with me, and her name is Jean Watkins. And here's Aunt Julia again, she's my mother's dear friend. I don't know all of these people. This is Aunt Myrtle, and that's Jimmy -- what's he doing there? He is the only man there; I don't know how he got in there. He probably sneaked in and told Mother -- he and mother really --

Patterson

Who was the little girl at the top?

Cox

Let me see who that is. I don't know; I don't know who she belonged to. But Jimmy had a way with people; he probably told my mother, "I'll come in and be your handyman or something," he just has a way, he just probably could -- and got a plate of something good to eat, because my mother is a wonderful cook.

Patterson

And that's you sitting in the center there on the couch?

Cox

Who?

Patterson

Is that you?

Cox

Yes, it's me. This is my mother; that is a relative of Velma. And this is Mrs. [Benit-Berniere], and she was one of the top real estate brokers -- or not brokers, saleslady, in my dad's office when he was in real estate later, when he gave up his business and moved here.

Patterson

About what year was this?

Cox

Well, my mother came here -- the year my daughter was born, she was here for the baby coming, and -- let's see, my daughter was -- my daughter was born in -- let me think, I have to keep thinking now.

Patterson

And the lady on the end, who was that on the far right?

Cox

This? Let's see. I don't think I know her. I knew this one and I knew -- yes, this is my mother here; this is a friend who -- and that's why play sister. Anyway, that was a gathering that she had, I don't know. My mother loved people. And my Aunt Julia used to say, "Your house is like Grand Central Station, you've always got company," because people were coming and going all the time. So Jimmy said, "Well, you know, when you have liquor, people do that." And my mother said, "You know I don't have any liquor; you know we don't do that." He was kidding, and she knew it wasn't that. But if she had something cooking, she was always a wonderful cook, and they sure would like whatever she offered them.

Patterson

I'm just going to get these off of here, move these back.

Cox

Yeah, they kind of messed it up, didn't they? And here -- oh, this is --

Patterson

Yeah, let's talk about this one.

Cox

Oh, this is the cake; this is when Jimmy and I got married. And I have a whole little book of pictures, but it doesn't seem to appear up there, and I am sure nobody would have taken that, because it's got to be there. But I have a lot of

the pictures in here anyway. This is Jimmy and Esme and this is 1959, that's the year that we were married. I know that year, don't I.

Patterson

Got a good view of that, Adriana.

Cox

Do you remember the -- what was it called? -- the -- oh, gosh, it's the club over on -- right off of Adams on like 12th Avenue. It was a man's club. Oh, gosh, what did they call that? Some kind of a club. Anyway.

Patterson

Is that where you were --

Cox

That's where we had our reception; we were married in a church.

Patterson

Which church were you married in?

Cox

Religious science church.

Patterson

Do you remember where it was?

Cox

Dr. Horniday married us, on 6th and Berendo

Patterson

On 6th and Berendo, Dr. Horniday. OK. And tell us about --

Cox

Well, when we got married -- this was the best man, Dr. Bill Sibley. Dr. Sibley is - Jimmy grew up with Bill Sibley, and they knew each other from school days, and he's living here now, and he has his office here. And then Jean is my sister, my play-sister, always she was my best -- my maid-of-honor. This is my dad,

and there I am, and there's Jimmy. He didn't look like him there. And there's my mother. And that was in 1959.

Patterson

OK. Do you need to -- do you want to lift this -- how's that?

Adriana

Yeah, that's better. A little but when they're -- they distort a little.

Patterson

OK. Oh, these are great.

Cox

We're upside down.

Patterson

OK. Let's turn this around and look at this one.

Cox

Yes. This is Jimmy and my children, Carole and Johnny -- Johnny looks like he was going to blink or something. This is at the reception. And here we are riding [grim]. This was Carol and Johnny, and then Jimmy and me.

Patterson

It's nice all your hands are there together in the center. OK. And what do we have here? Oh, we have another wedding shot.

Cox

Mm-hmm, that's a wedding shot.

Patterson

(inaudible) closer.

Cox

What was that club called?

Patterson



Do you want me to take it out?

Adriana

Oh, if you could just tilt it and pull it in like that. There we go.

Cox

Some kind of breakfast club, or whatever --

Patterson

On Adams --

Cox

Off of Adams. Just off of Adams on 12th Avenue, I believe. I think it was more or less like a man's club, then, after awhile. But anyway, they let people rent it for receptions and all that.

Patterson

Was it on the south side of Adams --

Cox

On the west side of the street.

Patterson

South of Adams or north of Adams?

Cox

South. South of Adams.

Patterson

OK.

Cox

Now these are all pictures, just pictures -- I don't even remember what, so it's a waste to try to even remember.

Adriana

We really can't see those.

Patterson

Well, here's a nice big one here.

Cox

That's my brother's third wife. Yes. But -- excuse me. I think I should blow my nose or something.

Patterson

Do you want to get up? Do you want to take a break?

Cox

No, I think I'm all right. If I have to, I will. This is -- when I went to -- I was called to Cienega School, I told you, in '66. I don't know if that was the first year or not, but that's just when that picture was taken. And here I am, here's the principal -- excuse me. And let's see, there were two other -- three -- four.

Patterson

Here, an African-American woman. Do you remember their names?

Cox

I think that's Billie, my dear friend, Billie Croslin. And that looks like my son, but it wasn't, because he didn't teach --

Patterson

What did they teach? What subjects?

Cox

Oh, she was 5th grade, a wonderful teacher. She was just wonderful. And the children, and she gave it her all.

Patterson

Billie Crosslin?

Cox

Mm-hmm. And she would call the parents just to talk to them about the child, and try to help them better. Oh, she was just so wonderful. She retired now, and she's living in Atlanta, near Atlanta.

Patterson

And who is this?

Cox

Let's see. I knew them all, I'm sure. But of course, that may have been the first year, I'm not sure. And they may not have all been there then; I don't know if she was there at that time. I remember her, but I don't remember her name. And that one, I can't see well.

Patterson

And this is an African-American woman here?

Cox

She might be Mabel, but I wouldn't know. Mabel is a dear friend of mine, she's passed away, but she was a wonderful teacher. And I'm not sure that that's Mabel. It looks a little like her. I don't know. This one -- I knew this one, I can't remember her name.

Patterson

And who's that?

Cox

I can't tell who that is. No, I can't -- because that was -- it might have been the first year that I was there, but it didn't have to be. I don't know.

Patterson

So they had quite a few.

Cox

They did then, uh-huh. But as the years went on, and there were more and more -- and when I went there, it seemed to me that there were mostly -- the students, I'll say, were like maybe mostly white and Asian, and then in the later years, they became -- there were more Latinos that came.

Patterson

Oh, let's look at this picture up here. It looks like -- is that Tom Bradley?

Cox

That's my Mayor friend, Tom. And this occasion -- now, we were somewhere, and he showed up and came over to see us and talk to us, and I don't remember the occasion, but he's such -- was such a wonderful man. And as I told you before that I rode to UCLA in his little car, his little rumble seat.

Patterson

And this is -- point yourself out.

Cox

All right. Well, this a friend of Helen Smith, this is Helen Smith, and that's me. I can't think of this lady's name.

Patterson

And this -- what did they do, who were these women?

Cox

Well, they were teachers. Helen was, and I -- I think she was too. They were friends. I don't think these two were with us. This is Jimmy, and that's Helen Smith's husband, Theopolis. Theopolis Smith. And this was this lady's husband. I can't place their name. But we were out somewhere, and Tom came by, he saw us and came over. And that was just really nice; everybody enjoyed meeting him. Some of them didn't know him.

Patterson

Which way are we going?

Adriana

Just to get a little bit more on this picture, just -- and if you could raise it up a little bit, Karen.

Patterson

OK.

Cox

This one or that one?

Patterson

Should we take the dot off, or --?

Adriana

It's not really in the frame, but yeah. It doesn't matter.

Cox

That was a good year. We all looked very good that day. I guess it was a few years ago when we were younger. I never knew this one very well, she's a little bit odd. This was her husband.

Adriana

(inaudible) talk about that one, the big one?

Patterson

Yeah, this one. What's going on here?

Cox

OK. Let's see. Well, my uncle and aunt that were here from Seattle -- I don't think they had moved here yet, but maybe they did by the end. But now --

Patterson

And point yourself out. Here in the top row, is this you here?

Cox

I think so. I don't know who this is. That's my brother, and that's his third wife. And this is my mother and my dad, and that's me, and I don't know this lady's name, but I think I met her. And that's my uncle, dad's brother, Uncle Everett, and his wife Ruth. Oh, she loved to have a good time. And so did Aunt Julia, and they had been having fun, as you can see; we all looked happy. Yeah. Wait, where's Jimmy? Is this Jimmy? Doesn't look like Jimmy. No, Jimmy doesn't look like that; he's too serious. It might be, though. It might be Jimmy. I think it is.

Patterson

OK. And tell us about this one.

Cox

This is a dear friend. Inez and her husband and Jimmy and I went to Europe together, and we went to Paris; that was the year we went to Paris. I don't know what that year was -- let's see, does it say on here? I don't know. But we went, we had a round trip and it took as to London -- first to Paris, I think, and then -- Paris and London. And then we went to Switzerland, a few of the -- well, whatever was -- they allowed on this trip. And we had such a wonderful time; she's so much fun to be with, she keeps you laughing all the time.

Patterson

Do you know about what year it was?

Cox

Gee, does it say on there?

Patterson

No, it doesn't say.

Cox

What year? Gosh, it's probably been 20 years ago, probably. But that's Inez.

Patterson

Maybe in '86, '87? In the '80s?

Cox

I don't really know. I can't recall that. But we sure had a wonderful time, and she always had something funny to say. Some people are like that, and they keep you laughing all the time.

Patterson

Can you get any of these? Are these kind of small?

Adriana

We can get like a general sense of them.

Patterson

This is in 19- --

Cox

Oh, now, this is a very important time for me. You see all the red stickers? Because I had been introduced to the National Black Music Caucus, and I was going to different cities learning more about music and black Americans. And I was just in awe about things I didn't know. And this -- there was a man, I don't know if you remember the name of Fred Warring; he was very famous, had a group of singers, and he was having some kind of a program up north, and I went to that, and I met him. Of course, I wasn't going to come and not meet him, (inaudible) Fred Warring. And this is William Grant Still. Now, William Grant Still was the first black American composer whose works have been performed in the Hollywood Bowl, and they played his music, the Hollywood Orchestra played William Grant Still's music. I had him play one of his symphonies at the Wilshire-Ebell a couple of -- a few months, maybe a year ago now, for my BEEM Foundation, we did that. And it was quite successful. It's a beautiful -- his works are beautiful.

Patterson

I wonder if we do it this way --

Cox

That might help.

Patterson

-- if it might be better for the camera. How's that, Adriana?

Adriana

If you can do that whenever possible?

Patterson

yes, thank you.

Cox

Well, you might want to know this, because William Grant Still lived here in Los Angeles on Victoria, I believe, over -- further north. And I was always -- I had gotten so enthusiastic about this; I was always into it. And I just had to meet him, and I met him, and then I got an appointment with him at his home, and he was beginning to fail; he passed away not too long afterward. And he didn't -- he wasn't able to speak too well but I got what I could just in meeting him and knowing that I had met him. And my dear mother who is so adorable -- when she came here, when they moved here, and Daddy sold his business and went into real estate here and had a lovely, wonderful real estate business, and my mother was in it too, and she was into everything; she just loved life. She was out at Twin Falls, and she knew I was getting involved in all of this, and she wanted to help me. What could she do? So here she is, holding the microphone, so he's talking to me and answering my questions. And here is your first sight of my orchestra, one of my orchestras that I had -- the one I had at Cienega School. And here's some of the children that we are just going a little -- I think that was just something in the classroom, but this was the beginning of my orchestra years with that school. And I had one at Hooper Avenue School, though; a great orchestra there. I had one everywhere. But it was my love of all the things I taught, because I had to teach all of the classes, the whole school, 1,000 students, and I had -- every day I had different classes. But Thursday was my day for orchestra and instrument classes, and that's what I loved more than anything. And here I am helping them, telling them what they should be doing with their violin bows and all -- they weren't in the orchestra yet; they were still in the instrument class, those weren't ready. But if they came in in September, the beginning of the school year, nine, ten years old, they would be playing in orchestra by Christmas and getting big applause. They were wonderful. I enjoyed it so much more than anything I did. And the children loved it, and here's some more of them practicing up there. And these are some friends; this is just a group of friends who came, and sad to say, this girl is now passed away. This one is passed away; I can't believe how many have passed away in the last few years. Here is William Grant Still again with me, and my mother's holding the mic for him. It was --

Patterson

If we can pull this back and get a better shot -- the photograph at the top, what's school is this? Is that Cienega?



Cox

That's Cienega, uh-huh. But not here; I went to his home to interview him, because --

Patterson

And that's your mom holding the microphone.

Cox

Uh-huh. Yeah.

Patterson

OK.

Cox

I should get some scotch tape for that.

Patterson

OK, let's turn this around and see -- here's the Mayor Tom Bradley again.

Patterson

Yes. This -- I think this is after he appointed me Commissioner of Cultural Affairs, and everywhere that I'd see him -- what would he call me? He had a nickname for me.

Patterson

What was that?

Cox

I'm trying to remember what it was. I think it was something that my brother called me, or Jimmy, I don't know. But anyway, there he was, and he saw us as he came into whatever the occasion was. We were having so much fun.

Patterson

And who was this over to the right?

Cox

That's my brother at the far right, and I don't know who that is over there, but -- oh, Jimmy? That doesn't look like Jimmy's head, but I (inaudible), because I'm sure whatever it was, because we were together. But that's -- oh, Boogie, that's what he'd say. "Hello, Boogie!"

Patterson

Oh, Mayor Bradley called you Boogie?

Cox

Yes, because my brother called me that, and he knew that my brother called me that, and he'd say, "Hello there, Boogie!" (laughter) But he was playful; he was a lot of fun. We had a lot of fun. And when he appointed me to Commissioner of Cultural Affairs. I brought to the attention of my commissioners, because there was a little group of us, about six people. I brought to their attention the fact that there were so many people who hadn't become acquainted with our music, and it would be nice for us to have a program for Black History Month. And once I said that, they didn't want to say, "Oh, no." I was the only black on the commission. And they wouldn't back up off that; they'd say, "Oh, well, yes." So they didn't know where we were going to get the money, and I found -- I just said, "Well, we will," and I found a way to get it, but it was kind of hard. I had a friend who just believed in me and loaned it to me, because I hadn't told Jimmy, and then I -- after I told him that we borrowed some money, you know -- no, I didn't! (laughter) But anyway, it was like \$500, and we took care of it, it's OK. And everybody liked it, I had some music of William Grant Still, and I had his daughter, who was still -- he was not living at the time, but his daughter was, and she came and sang, sang or talked or something. Anyway, it was a successful -- every year, for ten years, I had a Black History Month program. And I had something exciting, and they were each one different, and they were different -- it was packed, the house was always packed. So I was really glad that I had that ability to get the right people in and do it. And it was -- you know, it went so well. So that was something that I added to the commissions, and to the city, because Tom agreed with it, and he made sure that the money was available. Here's my husband, Jimmy, and this is my brother.

Patterson

Bail bondsman?

Cox

Now, here we are, Carole -- well, we haven't seen the Sweet 16 party, but I think most people have a Sweet 16 party for their daughters, when they're old enough to date or something. But this was not that -- she had one, and I think it's later in the book, but this is when she was a debutante, and there's an organization here that they recommend certain ones to be one of their debutantes. So she was recommended to be a debutante, and here she is at the debutante ball, this is her escort. I can't think of his name. This is my uncle and my aunt, and my dad and my mother. And this was really -- it was such a beautiful thing, a beautiful event.

Patterson

And these?

Patterson

OK.

Cox

I think there's more of that a little later, but I didn't have all those pictures together.

Patterson

Those aren't really that good. OK, now you have a red dot here, so there must be something important there.

Cox

Yeah. Well, this is probably one of the first, if not the first, opportunity I had to be a member of the National Black Music Caucus, and to go to a conference or a meeting. And this may have been the first one which was University of Indiana. This is Dr. Warwick Carter, who is now the president of Columbia College, Chicago. And these are all people; there I am, and these were all members of the caucus, and here's my dear friend Eddie Meadows, who helped me to form my own BEEM Foundation here. But this was just so wonderful; all of these -- I want you to know that they are all professors at different universities; they are brilliant. And it was just a wonderful thing for

me to be with them and hear them speak, and hear them tell all that they know, and to bring in performers and all. And I just knew one day I was going to do this, but I hadn't done it yet; this was probably 1971 or '72, I think, the first year that I went and met them and all was '72.

Patterson

And who is this playing -- (overlapping dialogue; inaudible).

Cox

I can't think of his name, but that's Leon Rene; I know he was one of the musicians that I invited when I started giving these on my own, doing my own conferences. And I know who that is; I can't recall who that is right now. But I think that was at the first staff development series that I gave for teachers, and teachers came from all over, and they just -- they would write on what their opinion was of it, and some of us said this should be on television, and some would say, this is fantastic, because they, like me, they had never experienced anything like this. These are things that they never taught us, you know.

Patterson

Do you remember the names of any of these people?

Cox

This was my dear friend -- no, that's not Louise; I thought it was. I don't remember her name. This one was from Indiana University, and I did know her name. I can't think of it; it's been like 25 years. I can't remember now, I used to know most of them. And this one, he did something unusual. What is that instrument? He had people that played that -- you know, when you go to the islands, and you hear all this music on these instruments that they have that are different from what we use?

Patterson

Steel drum percussion?

Cox

Steel drum percussion, yeah, but there's one that's for melody, it's not a percussion; I can't

Patterson

Is it steel drums?

Cox

Well, no. I don't know.

Patterson

It sounds like a xylophone?

Cox

Well, yeah. Anyway, he had a whole group of people that he always had them perform. It was so exciting; it was all --

Patterson

Do you remember his name?

Cox

I used to know all the names, but it's been so long now, I don't think I could say it right off. But I might have it in writing in my files. Now, this is Leon Rene, who wrote, "When the Swallows Come Back to Capistrano," you know that song? Everybody sings that. Well, he wrote that song, and I had him come and be on my staff development series, and sing some of his music and explain how and why. And now this is Eddie Meadows, who is so encouraging, when I said I wanted that forum, an organization, he helped to get together some -- two or three professors from UCLA, and some from other parts of Southern California. And he was just a big part of my organization that I started here. Here's Al McNeil, and here is -- now this man taught at UCLA, but he was an African. And I used to know his name right off.

Patterson

That's Nketia.

Cox

Yes, you got it. That's right, that's Nketia. And I can't recall these names right now. Oh, but we had so much fun; it was so wonderful. I wish I had stayed

with the -- working on my doctorate, I wish I had finished. But I had two children in college; that was more important.

Patterson

So this picture was taken at UCLA?

Cox

No, this was -- it looks like I have on one of my home --

Patterson

This was at your home?

Cox

Yes.

Patterson

So you had invited Nketia to your home?

Cox

Something like that.

Patterson

OK.

Cox

I don't think we had him for dinner, but I think --

Patterson

Did we get that last bit, though? Did we get this particular photograph? Because he's probably the most important scholar for African music in the world, so I want to make sure that he --

Cox

And you know Eddie's wife, Jackie. At that time, he used to have a real big hairdo; he doesn't anymore. But I'd say now I hardly know him, but I do. And they were at my BEEM event last month.

Patterson

I know this is tough, you've got glare.

Adriana

(inaudible).

Patterson

Yeah, that's -- it might be too dark. You know what, Adriana? I think it's a matter of angle, because I think what's happening -- Bette's shadowing --

Adriana

(inaudible).

Patterson

It's harsh?

Adriana

It's very hard, the shadows are very hard, that's why I've been standing here. It's just a matter of tilting (inaudible).

Patterson

OK, because I was also thinking of shadow, like Bette's shadowing, certain -- you know what I'm saying?

Adriana

We can't (inaudible).

Cox

I can move any way you want.

Patterson

I was just thinking of a different angle, so that you wouldn't have to worry about that.

Adriana

(inaudible).

Patterson

Not yet.

Adriana

Is it moving at all? (laughter)

Patterson

There you go, there you go.

Adriana

I have to be able to do this.

Patterson

OK. You don't want to get it too dark -- are you trying to pull all the light out?

Adriana

The other way.

Patterson

It's going to be dark. See -- yeah, if I (inaudible) this and pull this back -- how is that? Seems like it's dark.

Adriana

(inaudible). OK. It seems like (inaudible), the harshness of the sun, it's making very hard shadows.

Patterson

Yeah, I've got to really make sure I'm pulling that covering back.

Adriana

It's cloudy.

Patterson

Yeah, it got overcast.

Adriana

So frustrating. Sun comes -- watch me like get to the other side --

Patterson



Oh, it's moving fast now. Somehow, you've got to --

Cox

I'm so sorry; that happened -- of all these years, I've never had that happen. Anyway, they're supposed to have been here by now to have it fixed; they brought those things over, but they haven't put them on yet. I hope by next time you come, they'll be done.

Patterson

So let us know when you're ready. OK. So this is another shot of that occasion that (inaudible) Eddie Meadows, and Dr. Nketia.

Cox

Yes, and Al McNeil

Patterson

Al McNeil.

Cox

And I know her, I can't say her name. I don't think that they were here, maybe he probably was out there, maybe it had to do -- I just don't know. But anyway, I think that it's me, isn't it? This is -- these are part of the service that I was (inaudible), and he -- that looks like that one I said was Leon Renee that wrote this song; I'm not sure right now. We have some better pictures; we don't need to worry about that. And here --

Patterson

(inaudible) here, but those are --

Cox

Oh, that's --

Patterson

But you can tell us what's going on.

Cox

Because it was the first --

Patterson

We can hear the story.

Cox

It was the first time that I had given my own series, that I would go all over to -  
- (inaudible), and this was my -- and I had a lot of people I knew, a lot of the  
musicians who had become a performer, and then I knew some who were  
going to be speakers, like this man; he's not one of us, but --

Patterson

So when you -- I'm sorry, just to understand, when you started your version of  
the Music Caucus here in LA, you set it up to be a -- sort of a forum for  
teachers to learn about black music. Is that --

Cox

Well, for them to come and listen to the speakers and to the performers, and  
know how it all is part of what we should be teaching the children, and how  
much they can learn. It's our own history, for those of us who were of this  
race, because even the other people enjoyed it, and so this was the very first  
one, and I did two that year, and then I think I did -- the next year, I did it  
again, and then they pulled me out to go to the first integrated school, which  
was at Rabbi Magnin's temple, and it was my first opportunity to be -- I was  
the only music teacher selected, because they only had one. And I was  
selected as the music teacher for the school. And I was there one semester,  
and I got a call from the supervisor that we're going to bring you downtown as  
a music advisor. And I hadn't really finished that first semester --

Patterson

Was that the --

Cox

Dr. -- I mean, Mr. --

Patterson

Miramontes? No, that was --

Cox

No, no. This was after I -- Miramontes -- after they sent me from there to Cienega, and I was still at Cienega when they called me to be at the first magnet school at Rabbi Magnin's temple. And then while I was there, they decided that I should do these programs on television. And that -- I did four -- pardon me, I did a series before, I did -- I called on one of the speakers from Indiana University, or from -- anyway, from -- wherever I had gone, I knew he was a fine speakers, he was wonderful. And so I sent for him to come and be one of the speakers, and then there were some other speakers from elsewhere, but I also had speakers from LA. Anyway, when they called me to come downtown, and I was doing some of the in-service classes when they told me that they wanted me to do television, and I did this series was, first was with this same Dr. Standifer, we discussed the meaning of black music; what is black music? What does it mean? We talked about that for about 20 minutes, 20 or so. And then the next week, I did Eubie Blake, which was so much fun, and Eubie had been on Johnny Carson's program, and I wanted to know when he's coming each time, and I found out each time so that I could have him for my in-service class that same week. So I got that going, so then this second program I did was with Eubie Blake. And that was about a half an hour, and then the third one was with the New Orleans music, talked about how did it come about, and how much of it came from Europe and all. And they had a string band once that nobody knew about it, and so all of this -- we had a half an hour with this little 92-year-old --

Adriana

Your hand, if you could just --

Cox

I'm sorry, you should just slap me. (laughter)

Adriana

(laughter) I'm not going to slap you.

Cox

I will show you, he's in here; he was 92 or 95 by then, I think.

Patterson

Who was that now?

Cox

Eubie Blake. And he talked about his early life, and how he took piano lessons, but he didn't like that; he wanted the music that was out there in the community. And he used to go and listen and come back and play his music. So --

Patterson

Now, this is -- it says Fred Levine right here.

Cox

He lived here, but he was someone who was very involved in music, and I got him to come and speak; he was a good speaker, very interesting. And I think these may have been two of the musicians, I don't know. But --

Patterson

Was that -- oh, New Orleans musicians?

Cox

I'm not -- they may have been.

Patterson

You have that written here.

Cox

Well, then that's what they were. And this again was Fred Levine, and I'm not sure who that gentleman is right now. I think --

Patterson

So these were New Orleans -- these had been musicians, and --

Cox

Yes, they were New Orleans musicians, and they played -- they were part of a group, they were part of a group of musicians --

Patterson

Do you remember (inaudible), the name?

Cox

Well, one of them was the one that was 90-something, named Tudie, Tudie Garland. And he was just so wonderful, and he was kind of feeble, but he was just as happy as he could be, playing that bass. And he had a little girlfriend who took care of him and helped him, see that he was healthy and getting well, and it was so cute. But Tudie was -- he became a dear, good friend of mine.

Patterson

Is that Tudie in the picture?

Cox

No, no. I'll show you; he's in here. He's in one of my sets. Let's see.

Patterson

Is that Eddie Meadows?

Cox

I was going to say, that looks like Eddie. That's the way he used to look with that big hair. Now, let's see. Oh, this is Count Basie. When I -- as a commissioner, I had permission to go backstage at the Hollywood Bowl, because I was from the Mayor's office. And when Count Basie was in town playing at the Bowl, I had to go and interview him. And he was so wonderful, and this was him. And he was so wonderful, and this was him.

Patterson

Count Basie peeled back.

Cox

Oh, yeah. He was so wonderful; he's so jolly and all. And he was a good friend of Aunt Grace; you heard -- my mother's dear friend, Aunt Grace. I had talked to Aunt Grace about it, and she used to live down the street from him. And oh, she's so happy; she'd get to see him too. I don't remember who this lady was, but I know who Aunt Grace was, and he just loved her too. And that was when I first met him. Now, this is my dear friend who was a wonderful couturier,

who would make clothes like you can't believe to fit your body only. And she was making my clothes for when we go out, nighttime, for something.

Patterson

Leslie?

Cox

Leslie. Oh, she was so wonderful.

Patterson

What was her last night?

Cox

Thames, like the Thames River.

Patterson

Oh, Leslie Thames.

Cox

And her mother became ill, and she had to go to New York and be with her, and she stayed and never came back. But we talk to each other on the phone; we talk on the phone every now and then, we stay in touch. She's wonderful.

Patterson

Now, getting back to Count Basie, what was -- tell us more about your time with Count Basie.

Cox

Well, you know, the thing was that I had the privilege of meeting him, but he was not in the spirit of -- he was getting so near retirement, or maybe he was retired, I don't know. But he didn't want to talk much about anything; he just wanted to be friends. And he didn't tell me too much. He was just jovial and pleasant, and his music was good, so I just had this chance to get a picture with him, and I was happy. Sometimes that's the way it is. You have to take what you can get and then go on. Now, this is my dearest, dear friend who was a musician, she was a music teacher also. And everywhere I went, she

would go with me and help me if I needed it. Louise Rhoten. And, bless her, one of my -- she's one of my friends that's no longer with us.

Patterson

Louise Rotan.

Cox

I tell you, I can't believe how many it's been since I -- anyway, this is Louise over here. She was so sweet, and she was like a sister. She was with me most of the time when I would go anywhere. This was something backstage, I guess.

Patterson

Backstage during what? What was the show?

Cox

I don't know. On this time, because I didn't -- I now know to always write down on the back of the picture, because you forget after a few years, you just know he was in that show, and there's one in here that you would know. Let me see.

Patterson

You can take us to the next part; I'm going to --

Cox

OK. And Gregory Hines -- we went backstage to meet him. And this is Jim Standiter, Dr. Jim Standiter teaches -- he was teaching at the University of Michigan, and he went to China several times; I think he got interested in Chinese music. And I think he's retired now, he wanted a copy of the picture. This is my cousin who I told you about who was married and went to Boise with her husband, and they didn't believe that she was black, because she's Uncle Burt's daughter; Uncle Burt's my father's brother, my dad's brother. And her name is Villya, that's my mother. And over here, I can't recall who that name -- I don't know whether he was -- I don't think he was a musician, but these are just people where we were. And friends, and friends, and wherever we were we would --

Patterson

Wait, are we missing something? Here's Gregory Hines. Let's see it.

Cox

Yeah. Well, here we are. Excuse me. Now, Gregory Hines was in a show here in Hollywood, and my friend Leslie, my couturier, she went with me. Sorry. And we went backstage and met Gregory, and this was somebody in the program also. We didn't get -- I didn't write those down; again, I shall never do that again. Always write down whoever is in the picture. I always think that I'll know -- though I would have known Gregory Hines, but I don't know all of them. But it was an experience to go backstage, and many times I could go because I was Tom Bradley's commissioner, and I could just walk in. It was fun; it's nice to do that.

Patterson

Billy Eckstine.

Cox

Oh, my goodness. Who doesn't faint before you get to him? Just listening to him. This was backstage at the Hollywood Bowl another time, and Billy Eckstine was singing, and oh, my goodness, I'm the one who would have fainted. I loved his music, and he's so handsome also. But anyway, it was just a passing thing. But I enjoyed the thrill of seeing him in person. And this is a wonderful musician whose name will come to me. He played for many years with -- ooh, was it -- maybe, was it Benny Goodman? It was one of the white bands, I think. And he had promised to meet with me the next time he came to town, and he didn't live to do that. Oh, gosh, I knew that man. Oh, wait a minute: Teddy Wilson. Teddy Wilson; you remember how -- Teddy Wilson at the piano? The greatest. "With warm wishes," -- yeah, this was from him. Yeah. And he was performing in Pasadena at the -- the Pasadena Civic Auditorium, I think; it was a big auditorium. And everybody knew who Teddy Wilson was. Oh, I was so thrilled to be able to meet him, and he was going to meet with me the next time he came to LA, and he wasn't even -- he just wasn't here. And it was really sad, because oh, how I loved him and his music, he played -- oh, it was so beautiful.

Patterson



That's great.

Cox

Now, who do we have here?

Patterson

Do you have somebody you want to tell us about?

Cox

Well, I don't want to tell you -- these two dear, dear friends of mine are gone. I cannot believe how dear they were, and how these are friends that were with me -- and there's my little friend Louise, and there's another friend up there, she's still with me, Gloria May. And there's my mother and Gran, and there's a dear friend, Lois [Croppard], brilliant girl. Gone. And there's my son and my mother together; that was -- I don't know what year that was, I think he was just out of college. And down here, I think my mother is coughing or something, and here's Johnny and my mother again. I can't think of anything exciting there --

Patterson

Well, now you have a red sticker there. What's going on here?

Cox

Did this have a page I missed? No. Oh, this was -- this is Floyd Levine again; he's a Jewish musician, and he writes -- he's a writer for many of the newspapers and papers that go abroad and all. They're well-known, and he came to every session I gave, and he wrote it up and said something; he's quite a nice guy. And over here -- now, this is Maurice McGehee. And Maurice McGehee is the man -- he was the one that took me to that church where they were shuffling their feet on the floor, and we took movies of it. Do you remember? I told you, and you said we'll go sometime. I think you did. No, maybe it wasn't you that said that. But this was a church; I told him I wanted to go to another black church, a different kind, and he said I'm going to take you to one, and he took me to this church where for a little while, the people sat in their seats, and everything was going all right. And pretty soon, one by one, different ones would get up and get out in the middle of the floor and shuffle their feet. See, in Africa, if you shuffle your feet, you're OK, but if you

pick your feet up off -- if you're like in church, you don't -- it's sacrilegious, it's not religious, you have to keep your feet flat on the floor, and that's the way you dance or move. Don't lift your feet up. Well, he took me to this church, and this is what was going on. And after awhile, one by one, they would get up and go out in the middle, and they'd be shuffling their feet to the music. And I kept wondering what was going on, and after awhile, the minister, who was up on the podium, he came down a few steps and got down on the floor, and shuffled and shuffled and shuffled, and went over to the door and shuffled himself right outside and got in his big Cadillac and went home. (laughter) It was really -- it's not really funny, but it was just to see, because I didn't know; I wasn't expecting that. And evidently, maybe we got there a little late or something, or maybe church was over, and this was the end of it, because when different ones shuffled, and when he got down and shuffled, they were just honoring him and they kept right on, and he just shuffled right on out there and opened that Cadillac door and got in, and boom, he was gone. So I said, "What is this?" And so anyway, this was a very unusual church. And I was fortunate enough to get the tape and keep the tape, and I also had -- my husband Jimmy was with me, he helped me on these things a lot, and he got pictures. So we had it on pictures, and not too long ago, I was -- I've had all my materials carefully written up, and I know what's there and where it is and all. And not long ago, I was looking for that, and it wasn't there, and I have no idea where it is, because somebody -- I mean, I looked so carefully, and I had an organizer, this is a woman who comes and does the organizing.

Patterson

Is Maurice -- was Maurice there with you? And what was his last name, how do you say --

Cox

G-E-H-E-E. McGehee.

Patterson

McGehee. OK.

Cox

It's M-C, and then capital G.

Patterson

OK. So he was -- he's the one that took you to this church. Do you remember the name of the church?

Cox

Mm-hmm. He didn't go, he told us where it was. And I still have -- I know where it is. And I still have the sound, but somebody has moved or taken that other -- I've looked everywhere, and it's gone. But I want to go again if it's still going on.

Patterson

What was the church name?

Cox

Universal Tabernacle.

Patterson

Universal Tabernacle. And do you know where it was located?

Cox

No, I don't. I know approximately.

Patterson

Where was it approximately?

Cox

I know it was on the East Side, and I'm not going to have anyone take that away from me, if anybody else wants to go and do that, but I want to go again and get the whole thing on tape, on video. I know that it is -- I know approximately where it is on the East Side.

Patterson

Do you remember the street, like a street it was near?

Cox

I don't; I was so sure -- I had the whole thing, I had the sound on tape. But now you can get things done at the same time, and I want to have it done again if I can get in there.

Patterson

Now, do these fall out of here? This is -- you have this page marked Eubie Blake.

Cox

Yeah. Let's see, Eubie Blake, he --

Patterson

Is that Eubie Blake?

Cox

That's Eubie. Oh, did we have a good time. He was so cute. And I had him on television, that was one of the four of the series I did for the school, I had him on one. And Eubie was sitting at the piano, and he had the longest fingers that you could ever imagine if you -- the camera went right on his fingers, and they were so long, and he was playing what he used to play when he took piano lessons. He said, I didn't like that; I liked it like this, and then he'd play it ragtime. And everyone just enjoyed it, when he did this at my class, when I gave the class; in fact, I had announced that I was going to have two performers who were in their 90s, and the teachers couldn't believe it. They were talking about that they just didn't believe it. And when they came and saw Eubie Blake was one, and the other was -- Ivan Harold Browning, because he was the bass player, he was 90-something. But Eubie Blake just stole the show every time; he was just fantastic, and he was so sweet. This is in my den, I had a birthday party for him; his birthday came when he was here, and I had a birthday party in my backyard, and I was afraid because I didn't know if it was going to rain or what, but I was determined that it's going to be -- that I was going to do this, and do it for him, and it didn't rain, and people -- he was signing autographs to a book he wrote, that's what he's doing there, signing autographs. But he was wonderful, and --

Patterson

Do you remember the book that he was --

Cox

Well, I have one of his books, but I don't know if it was that one. I don't know; I'm not sure.

Patterson

And who was this down here?

Cox

That's a Jewish friend of ours, Harry Weinberg, who could play anything; he was a businessman, but he loved his piano, and all his life he'd been playing the piano, and he could just sit down, and you name it, he'd play it right off. And I'd say, "How did you do that? I'm not that good; how could you --" and he would just go -- he and his wife are very dear friends of ours, we just love them and they love us, and they divorced. And now she remarried somebody, and, you know, life is funny. And then he didn't -- he remarried somebody, I didn't know -- but anyway, she's still living, and he's still is, but they're not together. But they're wonderful people to know. And, you know, he's very good; he's terrific with the piano. Now, he's -- where were we? We were out for dinner or something, these were all my friends, and he -- well, most of those are still here.

Patterson

Now, who are these?

Cox

These are politicians, and I went -- this was at the music center, there was something going on while I was there, and it was during the daytime, and I went in just like other people, we were all trying -- something about some kind of politics. And I met them because they were people to know.

Patterson

Are they Los Angeles politicians, or --?

Cox

Yeah, but they weren't real big ones, but they just were very nice, and I was glad to meet him.

Patterson

Here's Eubie Blake over here again here. What's -- let's see, what do we got going on?

Cox

This is -- these are two of my friends, both of them are gone. There's Johnny and next-door neighbor; he's gone now. And these -- he's a musician. Who is that? I can't place them. I don't know; we must have been a group of musicians together. Again, I don't know this one.

Patterson

Now, this is Eubie Blake again here.

Cox

Yes. She's gone, that's a dear friend. This was at my house; this was -- see on the wall, some of the awards I have all over the wall in the den.

Patterson

Did you say Gwen?

Cox

Gwen Duseau. And she's gone. She wanted to get his book, and then autographed. And that's my mother and my cousin, and this is Dr. Jim Standiter again, and he wanted to do the program with me to be the co-speaker, we talked to each other about what is black music, the meaning? And -- oh, dear, it's so much -- it's so wonderful to be with all these people that love music like I do, and we're all learning -- well, most of them already have their Doctorates and all, and here -- is that Jimmy getting out of the car, I guess? Somebody must have dropped us or something. I can't place her. This is my mother. But all of these, I can't tell you how thrilling and wonderful it is when you know that people who are doing things that you want to know more about, and they're so good at it, and they're so willing to share. Here is -- this is my dear husband when he was well, and me. And -- I can't --

Patterson

What was this occasion?

Cox

Oh, I think we were on this ship; I think we -- the captain, every time we've gone on a cruise, the captain invites us to be at the captain's table, or we get to go and sit at his table and eat with him.

Patterson

Where were you going?

Cox

This must have been one of the cruises, I think. We might have been going somewhere out in the ocean there, I don't know.

Patterson

Just for fun?

Cox

Well, yeah. We went different places, and I can't recall exactly -- this time it had nothing to do with music.

Patterson

OK. Well, moving right along.

Cox

Let's see, did I have any musicians over here? No, that's more family.

Patterson

It's probably all the musicians. You've got --

Cox

Maurice McGehee now, he's passed away, the one that told me about the church. And it's my uncle and my dad, and that's Leon Renee, "When the Swallows Come Back to Capistrano," he wrote that. And he was one of my guest speakers and performers at the meeting. Betsy Green, my daughter's godmother, she's gone. And Billy Eckstine, I tell you, what a thrill. I just loved his music so much. And it was just nice to be able to say hello and meet him backstage.

Patterson

OK. That's probably --

Cox

I must have talked your ear off.

Patterson

Oh, that's great. That was great to be able to see the photographs and hear the stories and look at the photographs, that's wonderful. OK.

Adriana

(inaudible) sitting there?

Cox

(inaudible)

Patterson

When Maurice McGehee -- was he just a friend to you, or was he a musician, or --

Cox

He was a musician; he was a choir director mainly, I think. He loved to be with his choir.

Patterson

Was that from -- did he have a church in any city that he was --

Cox

He was with -- I don't remember the church he was with, but I know that whenever he was with the church, he was the choir director. And Reverend Branham had a church that I think he was the choir director for at one time when he was living. And -- but he also just knew all about Gospel music, and I enjoyed talking to him, and having him give me information that I didn't know about how it goes about, because the time I had him on television, I asked him to tell us the difference between a hymn and Gospel music. And he went on to explain how Gospel music, you really -- it gives you soul, it has soul, and he



goes on into that. And he explains how it has so much more feeling in certain ways, and you know right away that you have soul, and you hear it. And he's great at explaining anything to do with music, but particularly Gospel music, and he loves to play.

Patterson

How did he --

Adriana

Put one of the books in front of you?

Patterson

Oh, sure. You don't have -- don't start, because we're going to get interested, and --

Adriana

(inaudible).

Patterson

Yeah. So this Universal Tabernacle, they -- what denomination was that church?

Cox

I have no idea. I really don't. And I don't know of any other name than that name.

Patterson

Is it still there? Do you know?

Cox

I don't know. I don't know. But I know that it was something like I had never seen before, and I had no previous knowledge of anything that goes on in there. And the whole time that I was there, at first there was a little music, and I guess when the minister first came out, he had a few words to say, but it seemed to me that just in no time that somebody, some man came out, I think they were mostly men at first, came out and started shuffling their feet. And then pretty soon, more and more people were out on the floor shuffling their

feet, and never raising their foot. And I knew that that was African when I saw that, because I knew that was a religious thing about them, that they don't raise their feet off the ground, it's not -- it's against the religion, especially when you're involving yourself in the religion.

Patterson

Were they singing at the time?

Cox

You know, I guess I was so shocked and excited, I don't know if I paid attention. I couldn't -- I want to go back someday and find out; I'm going to go back someday, I just don't know -- I need somebody with permission that will get them to give me permission to do what I want to do while I'm there.

Patterson

Like shoot some video.

Cox

It was no problem before, but I think that Maurice had something to do with that, he probably told them what I was doing, and that I might need to do pictures or tape or something. So I just didn't worry about it because I knew he was taking care of it, and he would do what he said, he'd find out that I could come and visit.

Patterson

Do you remember any instruments?

Cox

I only remember -- it seems to me there was an organ. And the music was good, and they moved right to the music. And the minister felt good too, he got down the steps this way, and then kept going, and it was just a shock to me when he kept going and went out the door. (laughter) I didn't know until afterwards; I said, "Well, he went out the door and he didn't come back;" I said, "Uh-oh," -- I think I must have heard -- somebody must have told me that he went out and just got -- shuffled right into his big Cadillac and went home, or went somewhere. He just left; he was through. And I guess the rest of them just shuffled as long as they wanted to and then went on home. I just don't

know. I just thought it was probably just a completely African, I guess. Now, when I was there, I did not get to go to a church like that.

Patterson

How were they dressed?

Cox

They were --

Patterson

Did they have on robes, or just their street clothes?

Cox

No. I didn't see them with robes, no. And I think the minister had on something like robes, but I just thought he had a great talent, because he had to get -- he had to shuffle down the steps, and that's not too easy. Oh, dear.

Patterson

OK, wow.

Cox

Now, we've finished this one?

Patterson

No, we haven't finished this one; we finished the first two, so if you --

Cox

We left where the red stars are --

Patterson

Yeah, this will be next when we come back.

Cox

And that's number 3?

Patterson

Yes, or number 2A, or number 2.

Cox

Number 2, because we did it the orange and number 1.

Patterson

Yes, that's what we did.

Cox

We only -- we did those two. The orange one was very small; the orange was not a big one. We just got part of that one done. I thought for sure we would have cut out so much, and -- but I thought I put the red stars just for something that was important, but I guess it's more important that I thought; I didn't know, really. I thought you might not care about this or that.

Patterson

Well, maybe we can move through it a little faster next time, but we're going to have to definitely --

Cox

We might be two more times getting through all of them. (laughter)

Patterson

Yeah, we might be. But we're going to need to do that, I think. Maybe we should (inaudible) and these first two, (inaudible).

Cox

So we did the orange, and then the 1A. And we were in the middle of which one? The 1A or the 2?

Patterson

We finished 1A and B, and now we're going to start number 2 next time.

Cox

OK. All right.

Patterson

And here's your dear sister, you want to find a place for her?

Cox

Oh, I'm so glad you saved that for me; I thought I put that -- it really should go in that very first, that orange one. But I couldn't make room in the proper place, but I'll have to work it out.

Patterson

Figure it out, yeah, because she should be with everyone else.

Cox

I think so. I love your shoes, they are so cute. Oh, they look comfy.

Patterson

And they are; they're soft and --

Cox

Where did you find those?

Patterson

You know, I don't remember.

## **1.6. Session 5 (February 2, 2007)**

Patterson

OK? This is the Eagle newspaper. What does it say? "This is Bette Yarbrough Alston," -- that was your first married name, "president of Turnabout Charity Club, is a music teacher at Hooper Avenue School, and has served as training teacher for USC. Mrs. Alston also services as vice-president of Hooper PTA, and is an active member of the Child Guidance and Welfare League." You don't remember that. (laughter) So the PTA would be a school function that you were involved in with the parents and the students.

Cox

I guess. I don't remember myself; I didn't have time to do anything nice (inaudible).

Patterson

So this was what year? It doesn't say here.

Cox

I don't --

Patterson

Let's see if we can look at the back of it. Oh, it was January 7th, 1954.

Cox

Half a century ago.

Patterson

OK. What else do I have here? Here's a nice large photo.

Cox

There is Jean Watkins, my (inaudible). And Haroldine Brewington, and I'm sure your mother knew Lucy Bosman, everybody knew Lucy, she was very plump and very --

Patterson

She has a happy face.

Cox

Haroldine is in my BEEM Foundation, she has been for years. And she was my play-sister, you know.

Patterson

OK. Let's get this back in. Yeah, what year was this, Bette?

Cox

You know, I don't know.

Patterson

Yeah, it's not. Well, let's see, is it written on the back? No, it's not going to be 1970 from '65, it was earlier than that. And -- let's see, Virginia Road School.

Cox

Johnny, that was his class, my son had a teacher, he would come and say, "She swears."

Patterson

She swears.

Cox

Yeah. She would swear and she'd get mad. He went back to school and told her he's swearing, something like that, I don't remember much. But it seemed like she just -- when she got mad, she didn't care. I don't know. I still remember that; I think she was an Asian teacher. This is my uncle, his home in Seattle. We were visiting, I guess. And my brother, father's brother.

Patterson

Let's see what's going on here.

Cox

Oh, Fred. When I was divorced -- I had forgotten all about it, he got a little bit too frisky, and I didn't like the way -- he started to get a little too feisty, and I didn't care for anything serious, and it's -- this is my uncle, my dad's brother, and that's my dad, my uncle's, that's my dad, my uncle's wife, his mother and aunt.

Patterson

Oh, here's a picture of --

Cox

Oh, I love this. I wish I had made a big huge one of that, that I could somehow keep that forever. She was taking piano lessons and he was taking violin.

Patterson

Let me pull that out.

Cox

Oh, yeah, I mean -- this is Johnny and Carol.

Patterson

You know what, you might want to check and make sure these are acid-free pages, because it'll eat up your photographs eventually. See, they're already starting to melt into the paper. Maybe we'll just have to do this. I want to take it out. Now, you can help me here, Bette, and hold this open. How's that? So Johnny was a violinist, your son. Did he really learn to play?

Cox

Yes, he did. When he got to junior high school, he just didn't seem to want to go to junior high school with a violin. He asked me the other day, "Why did I stop playing the violin?" I said, "You didn't want it." But I should not have given in to that.

Patterson

And Carol, did she go forward with it?

Cox

Carol was studying with Andre Previn's father, who was a judge but also a musician. And I was recommended to him when I was working on my Master's concert, and he just suddenly, all of the sudden, called her to the piano and played some tunes and little things, and he figured out that she was naturally gifted, because she could recognize the sounds so well, and she could just go from one to the other and tell him what it was. And she studied with him for two or three years, it was away in Beverly Hills, I didn't have much time to drive over there.

Patterson

Did she go forward with her studies?

Cox

Mm-hmm, for awhile.

Patterson

OK. Now what was this?

Cox

My mother, as you know, in Twin Falls, everything was -- there wasn't anything really to give her life or anything, and she went to college, she went



to Gooding College, and studied drama. And when she got out here, she found out that Lost in the Stars needed actors, do you remember that, all about the applicants, and she tried it out or something, and they picked her and chose her, and then she would be over there practicing in the evening, and they needed a little girl, and she says, "Well, my granddaughter could play that, she could do it," and sure enough, they took her and kept her, and she was only seven, but she did so well in school that we decided to let her continue and she didn't miss anything --

Patterson

Would you hold onto that for me, Bette? So this is the Ebony Showcase production, and it looks like it happened at North La Cienega, so was that Pacific Playhouse was the location, and Ebony Showcase was the producing company?

Cox

Well, you know, when they were up on Crenshaw, I remember that that's where it was, so maybe they did it in both places, I don't know. But I remember John Herod used to be a member of BEEM Foundation, and -- let's see --

Patterson

And so the Civic Playhouse was 755 North La Cienega.

Cox

-- and I -- maybe they played there and then went on and played at (inaudible).

Patterson

So this is March 1957, and Lost in the Stars, it says, "A musical tragedy based on Alan Peyton's novel, Cry the Beloved Country," which is a very well-known work.

Cox

Oh, yes. And Carol played that part, my mother did too, and there's more on the other side, I think, of that.

Patterson

Now, it says, "Special arrangement with Maxine Anderson and Mrs. Curt Wyle." OK, this is Carol -- this is a beautiful photograph. Wow.

Cox

And she loved being in a play.

Patterson

This was her at the stage?

Cox

Yes.

Patterson

Still --

Adriana

(inaudible) so it's not facing the window?

Patterson

OK. Sure. And we'll -- how's that? So this is her at the foot of the stage, Lost in the Stars. Wow. OK. So your mom got a chance to act after all.

Cox

Oh, yes. She enjoyed it so much.

Patterson

Theodore Tickton. OK.

Adriana

I'm going to (inaudible) for a second.

Patterson

OK.

Cox

Now this -- there was another little boy that played --

Patterson

Wait until we get this on, because I don't want to miss the story, and then it'll be gone. (laughter) I don't want to miss the story.

Cox

It mentions my mother and it mentions --

Patterson

Oh, here's the play -- oh, this is great. We're going to have to go through this, Carole Alston. She was seven and a half. Next to it -- oh, I recognize him. OK.

Cox

I wonder if she'd -- I think he is, but he's not getting any credit for anything for that play.

Patterson

OK, so here is the souvenir program put out by the Ebony Showcase Theater of Lost in the Stars, it has very '50s architecture here that the theater had at that time. And the Stewarts were the producers now, I remember his face. He was one of the Amos and Andy cast, on the cast -- wasn't he the taxi driver?

Cox

Maybe so, but I don't remember; I remember him -- they did it -- they must have done the program on La Cienega, because it's all there. But I can remember my mother coming and helping them to get down on her hands and knees and help to hammer nails into these chairs over at that place on Crenshaw; that's where they ended up doing it again. But my mother was just so willing to help, they needed help so much, and she'd just do anything to help them.

Patterson

Maybe I was mistaken; it seems to me -- his face looks familiar, maybe it wasn't Amos and Andy. It says he was in Carmen Jones, he was in the Milton Berle show, Fireside Theatre. He was the African guide in [Lamar] of the Jungle; he appeared in Irvine Burland's Louisiana Purchase; he played Carmen Jones at the Greek Theater, at the Las Palmas theatre, Chris Columbus Brown,

a musical comedy for which he wrote the book and music. He is co-founder of the Ebony Showcase. Edna Stewart, she was also in Chris Columbus Brown.

Cox

She worked so hard (inaudible), and that, I think, was (inaudible) politician, he gets all the credit now, he's taken that place over; they moved from Crenshaw, from that theatre to a place on Washington, and (inaudible) really worked like a slave, just did everything to make it go well.

Patterson

And his wife, Edna. And then Alan Peyton, author; Maxwell Henderson, the playwright; [Curton Wild], the composer -- Backstage with Ebony. Now, did you go to the theatre with her ever?

Cox

Yes, I did. We went to see it, but I didn't stay, because my mother was watching, she was right there backstage.

Patterson

OK. This is priceless, this --

Cox

John Herod, he passed away about a year or two ago; he was a member of BEEM.

Patterson

Jester Hairston was the musical director, huh?

Cox

He was just so marvelous. You knew him, didn't you?

Patterson

I didn't know him. I know of him.

Cox

He was a wonderful (inaudible), a singer and -- there wasn't anything he couldn't sing, any song, and he would go to China and he'd tell the -- I think he

went over to USC, and he was like almost 90, and he would say, "I'm going to China, and I want you to show me how to say a few things," and they'd start him off on a whole lot, and he said, "Now, I don't want all that. I just want to be able to say hello, how are you." But when he started to sing, oh, he could sing and have a choir going -- oh, he was wonderful.

Patterson

So I see here, the Ebony Showcase Theatre was located at 3020 Crenshaw Boulevard at this time.

Cox

And now they have -- I don't think they even give it that name anymore, but this politician -- and I can't think of his name, up on Washington; he seems to have taken it over, and they don't mention Nick's name, it's very sad. He spent his whole life, all those years, making it a wonderful success.

Patterson

And members of the chorus, Bette Arlet and Julia Bush, Loreen Howard, Annetta C. Logan, Faye Miller, Ella Sellers, Jean Trevor, Winona Perryman, and the men, Sylvester Bell, Alvin Bowen, Stan Williams, Robert Clarkson, David Mason, Bob Moore, Don Powell, Thomas Robinson. And then they had two dancers, Irish Peterson and Charles Carter. So this was -- and where -- wait a minute; where is Carrole?

Cox

On the next page, I think.

Patterson

On the next page.

Cox

I guess that's the next one.

Patterson

OK. Here's Jester Hairston, Archie Savage, the choreographer.

Cox

Yeah, he was a great dancer.

Patterson

He traveled with Katherine Dunham and appeared with the company Cabin in the Sky. Wow.

Cox

Now there's my mother and Carol. Of course, you know I had to highlight it.  
(laughter)

Patterson

Your mom and her granddaughter got to be in a show like this together. That's wonderful.

Cox

Oh, she enjoyed it so much.

Patterson

"She received her dramatic training at Gooding College, currently with the Circle of Life Players, under the direction of Doris Burden. Miss Yarbrough was previously heard over radio in the Phyllis Wheatley Story. Interesting. Now making her professional debut.

Cox

Yeah, I think that was [in Idaho] at one time, (inaudible).

Patterson

This is priceless.

Adriana

(inaudible)?

Patterson

Mm-hmm. Sure. John Cumalo, South African name. And -- small cast, and there's the chorus. About the Showcase -- wow, this is -- can we stop for just a second? Just pause it --

Adriana

Do you want me to pause audio?

Cox

Yeah, would you, for just a second? Sorry.

Cox

(inaudible) his mother -- I guess my mother --

Patterson

That was great. OK.

Cox

His mother and my mother were friends, very good friends, and as he grew up older and he became -- I think he got into something in the field, like --

Patterson

Now, was this from the show?

Cox

Yes.

Patterson

From Lost in the Stars.

Cox

But he was -- I think he died of something, but he was involved with the theater a lot with the motion pictures, I think.

Patterson

Do you remember -- his name is in the program.

Cox

I don't know whatever happened -- I think (inaudible).

Patterson

He was in -- I remember seeing him here. Yeah. Johnny Doolittle, was that him here?

Cox

I guess so, yeah. I was thinking about --

Patterson

Johnny Doolittle.

Cox

Mm-hmm. He was only nine.

Patterson

So he continued on into (inaudible).

Cox

I think he died after he was grown, I don't know what happened.

Patterson

He died young, huh. OK. That's Virginia Rhodes, who --

Cox

My daughter with her little red ribbons on. (laughter)

Patterson

Oh, here's a nice big picture. Let's see.

Cox

This is Jimmy's best friend from Cleveland. Nate Jones where he's from. Anyway, he came out her --

Adriana

(inaudible).

Patterson

Yeah.

Cox



He came out here and he met me, and I introduced him to my best friend at that time, he was a lawyer. And then he -- after that, he became a judge. And he just now is sort of retired, but he's still being judge for a lot of things.

Patterson

This is you and Jimmy?

Cox

That's me and just people at the Kappa fraternity event.

Patterson

47th Grand Conclave --? What is that?

Cox

I think it's Conclave, but that looks like it's Conclave.

Patterson

Conclave? Kappa Alpha Psi fraternity.

Cox

Anyway, she -- they got married shortly after they met, he just was in love with her, and she was so dear and sweet, and they got married, and she got pregnant, and she had the baby and came out here to be with her mother while she had the baby, and had that -- what did they call it, depressed -- when they get very depressed, some kind of thing that they do with -- anyway, she died. It was the saddest thing. And --

Patterson

So those were sorority people in your sorority. OK. Let's get -- these are just recreation, huh?

Cox

That was in Seattle, that was visiting my uncle and my aunt's brother and his wife. No, that was not his wife; that was -- his wife is over here, but they were just out having dinner or something.

Patterson

Let's get this picture of you here.

Cox

I don't like that picture?

Patterson

You don't?

Cox

No.

Patterson

Aw, why?

Cox

I don't know. It's not --

Patterson

I think it's nice.

Cox

I've seen better ones than here. I think my uncle was trying to put something together. But anyway, it didn't work.

Patterson

And that's your daughter's report card, huh?

Cox

Straight A's, except these little things like art and practical arts, that doesn't count much. She was straight A in elementary and junior high and high school, she was really great. Really --

Patterson

She was a good student, huh?

Cox

Mm-hmm.

Patterson

OK. Well, let's see what we got going here.

Cox

There's my dad, and there is where I am, that's my brother.

Patterson

This is your dad. That's an interesting hat; about when was this taken?

Cox

Oh, gosh. I really -- I don't know, it must have been -- it's in Idaho; it's a long time ago. Here's my grandpa and grandma; here's Johnny, here's Carol, here's Johnny. Here they are with Santa Claus.

Patterson

And this is Johnny playing the violin. That's cute.

Cox

He's kissing his little sister, I think. And there's Carol's birthday, and a cousin. And then this -- these are -- this is Inez [Porque] -- I can't think of her -- her husband as well, he passed away a few years ago. But we went together to Europe; we had a tour in Europe, and we had the best time. She's funny all the time.

Patterson

I think we had a color picture of her in the last round. This is your uncle, huh.

Cox

Mm-hmm, my dad's brother. And here's little Jeanie that died.

Patterson

OK. Let's see. Oh, this is Jackie Robinson.

Cox

I knew him (inaudible), and he wrote this on the back of the picture.

Patterson

Oh, this is great. We've got to get this.

Cox

And I had to make a copy of it, because we couldn't see it. We tried to look --

Patterson

How are you with that, Adriana? This is Jackie Robinson and a hand-written note from Jackie Robinson to Betty. Wow, that's -- so now what was it that -- could you describe your relationship with him?

Cox

Oh, just friends. When we came here, I went to [Pasadena JC] for the first two years, and he went there, and when I went to UCLA, he did too. We weren't dating or anything, but he was just always very friendly and nice. Here's Johnny and Carole, and that's Gregory, he's a neighbor boy. He and Johnny see each other now a lot.

Patterson

OK.

Cox

And here's Inez again; her husband's -- when I said we had so much fun. And this is my Jewish friend; oh, she's wonderful. That's Beverly. And Johnny looks like her graduated there.

Patterson

Let's see. Trying to get to some of the photographs we can see with the camera.

Cox

That's my husband. My dad -- my other brother, daughter.

Patterson

Now, this is the California Eagle newspaper again. And what were they -- it says "debutantes."

Cox

These are -- the [Links] choose so many girls to be debutantes, and so Carole was chosen, along with others, and there were 23 for their annual --

Patterson

-- event.

Cox

Yeah.

Patterson

These are Johnny --

Cox

Yeah.

Patterson

-- Carol --

Cox

I hadn't realized she was so much taller than I. And here is -- this was the Links event, when they had a big (inaudible). And this is her escort.

Patterson

That's a pretty picture.

Cox

These are all the girls, and seeing my mother and dad were there, and Johnny was there.

Patterson

Now this is --

Cox

This is a long story. Carol was talking, and this is Johnny's version of what he wanted to say -- there are two of them here. This was --

Patterson

The summer class of 1965, Dorsey High School. So that was Carol graduating?

Cox

No. Let's see. Johnny graduated in '63, and she was three years later; she'd be '60 --

Patterson

It says Carole Alston, summer class of 1965.

Cox

'65 -- two years after Johnny, I guess. I don't know. And that's Mother's best friend, one of them. And that's Aunt Grace. That was a neighbor.

Patterson

OK. Now what was going on here?

Cox

Mother was a founding member of Womanhood Week, and I think when you turn the page, she was the Mother of the Year, but she was voted.

Patterson

National -- the 2nd annual session of the National Association of Negro Business --

Cox

-- and Professional Women's Club, currently in (inaudible), New York. They went to New York because she was chosen --

Patterson

Well, I know the two women were (inaudible) --

Cox

And they were so funny.

Patterson

-- delegates, they were --

Cox

When we get that age, it's so funny, because they -- there was another, I think Aunt Julia was with them, and one of them, they got up in the morning, one of them got up first and went downstairs, and one of the others tried to get ready and get dressed, and she couldn't find her girdle. And it turned out that the one downstairs had the wrong girdle on, and they just had so much fun laughing about things like that. They were just -- they were so cute.

Patterson

Let's see. It says Mrs. Pauline Earl Yarbrough, the Woman of the Year, shared her spotlight with Miss Alita Washington, the Girl of the Year.

Cox

Yeah. And I was so happy for her, because when she lived in Idaho, there was nothing like that for her, no social life, and she came here and she just got into her acting and her -- she did the Lost in the Stars, and anything anybody -- they all wanted her to be something, and she'd just go right on. She was just -- Aunt Julia said their house was like Grand Central Station, people coming and going all the time. She loved people.

Patterson

OK. Let's see.

Cox

So here's the Woman of the Year.

Patterson

OK. This is another -- it was a brochure of the actual event, or the program rather?

Cox

Yeah. 1965.

Patterson

OK. And let's see, what else do we have here? Social news, testimonial, reception --

Cox

I don't remember the year.

Patterson

OK. So there's lots of stuff here about that, this is the Eagle Newspaper covered it. Oh, this is the debutante.

Cox

Well, the Link s--

Patterson

Carole Alston, that's your daughter's activity. And commencement --

Cox

This was for the Church of Religious Science; my mother and dad took a class, that was their religion and they took a class, so they were on the list as one of the graduates, and I was very proud of them. They were always doing something to get ahead.

Patterson

Now, did you attend?

Cox

I don't think so. I don't think -- I don't really remember being there, I don't know. It seemed like I would, but I don't --

Patterson

I mean, the art -- the stylization of the graphics at this time period was so great. This Dorsey High School commencement program is --

Cox

Johnny was '63, and I guess this is '65. I thought she was three years -- must have been just two years, I don't know.

Patterson

OK. This is the Sentinel newspaper.

Cox



Yes. Dad sold his business and went into Real Estate when he came here, he got his papers in order and passed the test and all, and this was their realty company, Consolidated Realty. Oh, this is --- excuse me -- that's Johnny, at Chapman College, had a Ship of the Seas, the Seven Seas, and Johnny went first because he was a student at Chapman, and I made a cake with a ship on it, and they had company over to see them.

Patterson

Now, what was this occasion? You said it was a Ship of the Seven Seas, it's March, 1966.

Cox

Well --

Peterson

And he was -- yeah, can't see it. You can see the Chapman.

Cox

He signed up to go on the ship.

Patterson

Oh, OK. They were studying on the ship, right?

Cox

Well, yes. And Johnny, he -- I told him that they had a ship -- I saw it in the paper or my mother saw, and he said, "But I couldn't go," or we couldn't afford it. I said, "Do you want to go?" He goes, "Yeah." I said, "Well, then, you're going." And so the next year --

Patterson

Yay, mom.

Cox

-- Carole had to.

Patterson

"I got to go too."

Cox

And Carole went three times. She went the second time, she wanted to go again. I said, "Carole, you just went." She says, "But Mom, they're going to South America, and I speak Spanish." And I knew she did, so I let her go. And then the first time, I said, "Now, I want you to have experience at a black college, I want you to go to college, at least a year." She didn't want to go, and so she went reluctantly, and she was so unhappy, she did not like it, and she signed up with the people that she knew to be a teacher's assistant free on the ship again, three times. I said, "Carole," -- she said, "Well, Mama, I don't have pay; I'll be the TA." What could I do? And she's been almost everywhere in the world several times; she loves traveling. And she got herself into a job as a tour director at -- some music thing where they have people come and take tours, and she had that little job, and then next thing I knew she had an assignment to go -- she's been to China three or four times, even since before the changeover, and she's been to Africa four times, and she's just -- and she speaks languages, she's --

Patterson

She's quite a -- she was quite a young woman, even then she was adventuresome.

Cox

She is. And when she graduated, she wanted to go back to Cal State, and I said, "No, I would think you wanted to," and yes, she did, and she graduated on the Dean's list. So I can't say anything.

Patterson

She had her own mind, huh, what she liked to do. Who are these two people?

Cox

That's my mother and my brother. That's Herman. There's Jimmy.

Patterson

Let's try to find a big one so Adriana can get a good shot. Let's see what we've got here that the camera can -- I think most of these are smaller shots. Oh,

here's Tom Bradley. That looks like -- is that a photograph? It almost looks like painterly.

Cox

I don't know what it is.

Patterson

Oh, it was the location of your polling place. So it was a political ad.

Cox

I don't know, but that's -- I think at the time when he appointed me Commissioner of Cultural Affairs.

Patterson

I'm going to put this back in here. OK, let's -- I'll just for now, just --

Cox

Don't worry about it.

Patterson

Yeah, we'll go back through so we won't lose it. OK, let's see if there's anything else large enough -- no, that was it for the large ones that can pick up with the camera. OK. Now there were a couple of big ones down here that we didn't get the first time.

Cox

I think they're there on the chair.

Patterson

Let's see where -- oh, here. Let's let Adriana get an image of these. This is a nice large one of Fred Waring, you and Fred Waring. And again, yeah, now about that. He was supportive of the BEEM organization?

Cox

No, he was giving a class having to do with choral music, and another girl and I went, it was up north somewhere. And it was very good. I just was glad to be able to meet him and to be part of that.

Patterson

So he wasn't down here in Los Angeles when you met him. OK. And --

Cox

Those are my Oberlin (inaudible), I had heard about a scholarship at Oberlin, and I had graduated from UCLA, and I think I worked for one year at some place typing, it was horrible, and I wanted to go to Oberlin. So I was there for a year and a half, and John (my ex) came over to school, and the girls said, "Oh, you are so sweet," I told them I wasn't interested in him; "You must be crazy! He's the most wonderful guy!" And, oh, they just went on and on and on.

Patterson

So they convinced you to --

Cox

Well, yeah. They said I was crazy, and I don't know --

Patterson

And this is you here?

Cox

Uh-huh. They kept on --

Patterson

They broke you down, huh.

Cox

Young and silly!

Patterson

And this --

Cox

That was the note to my parents thanking them for what they'd given to me.

Patterson

Your education.

Cox

UCLA.

Patterson

BA, 1942.

Cox

And this happened in '43. I left to go to Oberlin for a year and a half. It was a wonderful experience, it really was.

Patterson

Great. Those are wonderful. Wonderful photographs. OK. So let's pause and go and get the other -- because I think we've gone through all of these. 45 to 77. OK, now this is a very, very pretty picture.

Cox

She's a sister to Velma. Velma was once married to my brother, and -- that's Jimmy and that's me.

Patterson

I was just wondering -- this is a whole -- what is this? It's a silver set?

Cox

Silverware. A whole set of silver.

Patterson

That's your mom and dad, and -- let's see, let's find a big one. Here, these are Carole. Certificate of Commendation, (inaudible) -- she went to Audubon.

Cox

They made her senior councilperson.

Patterson

OK. So she was a good student, Carol. Carol the great student. And let's see --

Cox

She went to camp, and she said, "I'm having a lot of fun," blah-blah-blah, and all that, and then she says down at the end, "but please send me an extra dollar or two. Here's the address." And that was Johnny when he was awarded the --

Patterson

Citizenship award? "Found worthy in character and citizenship," at the junior high school, Audubon. They both went to Audubon then.

Cox

Yeah.

Patterson

And this is Christmastime at home. Oh, look at this. This is a concert; it says this is a concert --- it says it's a photo for a Master's degree concert.

Cox

That was -- somebody took that for the advertising.

Patterson

So this is what you wore for your Master's concert, you played piano for it, or -  
-?

Cox

Yes. They had me wear it for the concert (laughter).

Patterson

Oh, you're so sweet.

Cox

Thank you. You're (inaudible). No thank you, honey.

Unidentified female

You don't want any?

Cox

Not right now. Are you going to have some?

Patterson

Now, what are you going to have?

Unidentified female

(inaudible)

Patterson

You have cereal. (laughter)

Unidentified female

Special K, (inaudible).

Patterson

(whispering) Caliente. Let it cool off. OK, I don't want to soil the photographs.

Cox

I'll hold this for you.

Patterson

OK. Here we go. And let's see, try to get something big here so we can see --

Cox

This is graduation from junior high.

Patterson

OK, with John.

Cox

This is a band uniform, he was in a band.

Patterson

OK, now he wasn't playing --

Cox

-- violin.

Patterson

-- violin though.

Cox

Drums.

Patterson

He played -- oh, yeah. That was a little more boyish, I guess, for him.

Cox

Outstanding for Life Science.

Patterson

So you exposed both of your children to music lessons, huh?

Cox

Yes, I did. I wish I had made them stay with it, but it got to a point where they -- and it's a little hard when I was working all the time anyway.

Patterson

What is this?

Cox

Oh, Jimmy, when we got -- I guess it was when we got married, or at least these are people he worked with, for the state. And they wanted to take him for dinner, because he's going to leave them and go to -- he was going to -- not the post office for mail, but for real estate, he sold -- people who wanted to buy -- at the post office, he would go and make -- he would help them to know how to do it. He was leaving his -- these two people, their company.

Patterson

And they're giving him a dinner. OK. Let's see, what else do we have here that we can see that's big enough to see? Los Angeles City School District. Oh, this is for Johnny, huh.

Cox

Honor, he's going to be in the honor class, a seminar in science. That's Carole. She received straight A's.



Patterson

And --

Cox

Oh, this is getting ready to go on the ship. Johnny went first --

Patterson

Oh, from Chapman College?

Cox

Mm-hmm.

Patterson

OK.

Cox

I don't know.

Patterson

It's hard to see these on camera. Let's see if there's anything large here that we can look at. Oh, what's this?

Cox

That? I don't know; it looks like something political.

Patterson

You weren't in this, huh?

Cox

No. Mother and dad and some lady.

Patterson

Let's see, these are all for your daughter.

Cox

National Education Association --

Patterson

Moral and spiritual values. OK. I just wanted to see if we could catch something of you in here that was big enough.

Cox

Eat your sandwich.

Patterson

(laughter) OK.

Cox

This is the last one. The others are in folders, because there came a time when -- well, when my advisor out at UCLA wanted me to tell him what I wanted to involved in. I said "I want to know more about our people," and I said, "but there are no books." He said, "Oh, but there are." Naturally, he knew, and he gave me a copy of Eileen Southern's "Music and Black Americans," the most wonderful -- it just has everything, and that made me wake up, you know, that there are books in there and things, and I was supposed to be doing that on my sabbatical, and so every chance I got, I did it. And then when Eddie Meadows said, "Who are you?" And I told him, "Bette Cox." And he said, "Well, what are you doing? What do you teach?" I said, "Music," and he said, "You should belong to the Black Music Caucus." I said, "What's that?" And he said, "Well, that's -- all the different ones throughout the country (inaudible) our music, and want to know more about it."

So anyway, that was the beginning. And about that same time at UCLA, they had -- they were offering scholarships for the summer, or for two or three weeks or something, I don't -- and I, of course, had to have that. So I said, "Oh, yeah, I've got to have that." So I went on my first opportunity to have information about our people and music. And these things in folders now, how many times -- I must have gone 20 times in the semester, or maybe not a semester, because every year, I'd go to wherever they were going to have a meeting. And the first one was -- Indiana University has a wonderful music department on this -- so I went there, and while I was there, I met someone who was going to do the same thing at Virginia State, it's on the same topic, but it's different, so I had to come home and tell Jimmy, "Honey, I'm back, but

I've got to go back again next week, or next two weeks;" I said, "They're going to have another one at Virginia State College." Anyway, I was doing all this, and every time that there was a notice, I'd go. And I think I must have gone to about 20 over a period of a few years, because it was once a year or whatever.

Patterson

But you had already started BEEM during that time.

Cox

No.

Patterson

Not in the beginning, but --

Cox

No, because see, BEEM -- after I went to enough of these, I realized that I've got to be the one to know more about the Black experience. And so I had met -- I had talked with Eddie and met him, to really get to know him, and Richard Yarborough -- my maiden name is Yarbrough -- I contacted him because I had seen his name on something from the school, from UCLA. And I said, "I just wondered if we might be related, because my name is Yarbrough too [homophones despite spelling]. So we didn't ever find out if we're related, but we got acquainted. And so I told him what I wanted to do. And so between him and Eddie, more than anyone else, they helped me get some people who -- like Gordon L. Berry, he was at UCLA -- you don't know him. Well, anybody, we got together about 15 -- maybe just about 12 people, and that -- I have to show you that album. They were all professors except me, and I think all of them were better than me, and it was my idea, and they were all willing, and so we started the BEEM Foundation in 1981, I think it was.

And the first thing we did was we wanted to do a movie on Blind Tom. And it's a long story, but anyway, we got it going, and I was Executive Producer at KCET, and it was produced, and we won, I think, five honors that year, and it was considered the best -- whatever it was, for children. And on the -- and it was at KCET, and it ran quite a little bit. And that was the beginning -- that was the first year, that was 1981. And after that, we'd been trying to get something else going, and gradually, they went back to their work -- they

came to meetings, I think, for maybe a year or two, I don't know. Maybe -- because they were with me when we did Blind Tom, but I was the only one that wasn't a Doctor and a Professor. They all were -- they were way up here now.

Patterson

But you were motivated.

Cox

I was, and ever since I've been motivated, we've been doing BEEM. But most of them, when the professors began to drift away, I could see that they didn't have the time, or they maybe -- they thought maybe I should have other people too, I don't know, because they were much more knowledgeable than I was. And so I began -- we didn't -- they weren't coming regularly, I began to pull in people that I knew from the School District who were advisors, something above just a teacher. So I began bringing in people like that, and they have been working well through the years now -- educators.

Patterson

So it founded --

Cox

(inaudible)

Patterson

OK. I want to ask you about this when she gets the tape rolling --

Cox

He was my student, he was a little boy --

Patterson

When she starts the tape, then we'll get the story, because this looks interesting here, sort of a snapshot of African-Americans in that time period.

Cox

Well, when he went to our school, he went on to junior high at other schools, but I don't think he continued with it, I don't know why, he was outstanding,

and I just knew he was going -- I knew he was going to be something, but he didn't continue. His mother was a nurse, and I think she was very busy, didn't have much time to devote to the kids, his sister too. I think he drifted away; I didn't hear from him after he left our school. But at that time, I thought he was outstanding.

Patterson

OK. So this is a program of the Metropolitan Symphony Orchestra. Tell us about this, and who these people were.

Cox

I didn't know about the other one, but I just knew that George Spell, was a fine pianist, and that he was in our orchestra, and he was with us for two or three years, and then it was time for him to go to junior high. And I never did hear anymore.

Patterson

So what was the Metropolitan Symphony Orchestra?

Cox

I don't know.

Patterson

But this concert took place at Crenshaw High School on 11th Avenue, 5010 11th Avenue.

Cox

1970.

Patterson

Gladys E. Timmons, President, Member, Symphony Lead of Los Angeles County. Louis -- or Louis Palange was the cultural director.

Cox

They weren't like the Southeast Symphony; they were mostly black. But evidently, this is just another symphony orchestra.

Patterson

You say they're mostly black people playing in this?

Cox

No.

Patterson

Oh, they're not.

Cox

No, I was saying that at Southeast Symphony, they're mostly black members, but this one is some symphony I don't know anything about at the time. And I guess knew that he was going to be playing, and I wanted to go. I don't know whatever happened.

Patterson

What was his instrument?

Cox

Piano -- violin.

Patterson

Violin. OK. Let's see. OK, well, I think maybe -- here's a great picture of your mom. Let's close it out with your beautiful mother.

Cox

Yes, she is beautiful. Just wonderful. So sweet and loving.

Patterson

It looks like some interesting art in the background. Where was she here?

Cox

I don't know. That looks like -- what's that like, AM to Spain?

Patterson

Pan Am.

Adriana

Can we hold on just second?

Patterson

Sure.

Cox

She was so happy to be here, and she came in time for my second child, my little daughter. So she had a little bassinet made up for me at her house, and she was always doing for her people, just wonderful. She loved to be involved with anything I was; she'd be holding the phone, or holding the microphone, for William Grant Still, and I --

Patterson

I remember that photograph.

Cox

Yeah. She was right there and everything.

Patterson

She's so full of life, wasn't she. Just interested in culture and the arts.

Cox

And Aunt Julia said the house was just Grand Central Station, all these people in here coming and going, she would tease her about -- she had so many people that loved her, always coming over, and it wasn't to drink, because she didn't drink; they didn't have liquor. But she was just good company.

Patterson

Just vitality. Are there some other folders that you said you wanted us to see? What time -- how are we doing for time? How are you feeling, Bette? Are you a little tired?

Cox

I'm fine. Are you fine?

Patterson

Mm-hmm.

Cox

(inaudible), they're brown. They're by that chair, underneath the couch. Get the ones of his hand. And I think (inaudible), and I think they (inaudible, noise on tape recorder). I had (inaudible).

Patterson

OK. What do we have here?

Cox

Oh, I was appointed to the National Endowment for the Arts. I had to go to Washington --

Patterson

Now, you go ahead and move us through this. I mean, we may not get all the images, but we'll just watch you remember what's in here.

Cox

Might be -- \$50,000 worth of instruments to a black school on Crenshaw. \$50,000 worth of music instruments. And that was our gift to them, because they didn't have any instruments.

Patterson

Oh, at Crenshaw and Freemont High Schools.

Adriana

Can you sit up again?

Patterson

Sure, sure.

Cox

This was a magazine. I can't think of this lady's name, but she publishes magazines. LA City Sheet, that's what they called it. And then they opened it -- she does this Beverly Hills, so, you know, it's supposed to be something else,



because it is (inaudible). And she found something, she put this in there about the --

Patterson

Oh, that's you. And what was this in here for? What was the story?

Cox

Oh, it was just about me and how I do what I can.

Patterson

Sort of just a general overview.

Cox

I guess when I was appointed to the NEA, and this is that part of the --

Patterson

Now, this is the National Endowment for the Arts, and your appointment to -- as a member, as a member of the NEA Music "Grants" and Policy panel.

Cox

To decide who's going to get the grant. And this is Dr. Warwick Carter, who is now the president of Chicago College in New York, and he's a musician also.

Patterson

Oh, let's see him.

Cox

He and Eddie -- I think Eddie introduced me to him.

Patterson

This is such a pretty photograph. I love it, and I saw it on the cover of the book. Now, the book I have just has the plain black cover, but Don Lee White has a soft cover of Central Avenue with this on the cover of it, so we just saw this photograph the other day, and it's really beautiful, such a great photo.

Cox

Well, I just wanted to point these out to you.

Patterson

[Claude Aldam, Cab Calloway]. That's awesome photographs.

Cox

-- a lot of newspaper.

Patterson

Anything in here you want us to see?

Cox

Well, maybe. I don't know.

Patterson

Let's see what this is.

Cox

These are different ones.

Patterson

Local music history of blacks recorded. Oh, look at this big pretty picture of you. "Pressed for research materials documenting the music history of blacks in Los Angeles, a local writer turned to the only sources available.

'Contemporary [grios], the people who lived the history,' she said. Bette Yarbrough Cox, former music teacher in the Los Angeles school system, interviewed more than 30 elderly musicians and music teachers as the major sources of materials for her recently published *Central Avenue: Its Rise and Fall, 1890 to Circa 1955*." And you said, "Contemporary grios were a rich resource, because that is where the history is. These are the people who live the history: they experience the good and the bad, the positive and the negative. They were the ones who could tell it like it really was." And you're here with your book -- this is the edition that I saw. That's great. And what is this newspaper? The Herald American News, serving Downey, Norwalk, Santa Fe Springs, a Wave newspaper.

Cox

(inaudible) some of these people, they kept writing it, wanted me to come and give me (inaudible).

Patterson

And what else is in here? Anything else that we should look at? Oh, here you are. The Wave newspapers, and you are in here, "Bette Yarbrough Cox, author of Central Avenue." So this is promotion and publicity for your book, and this is February 4, 1998. Let's see what else, just real quick. Oh, that's the \$50,000 donated to schools. Now, this says, "National Black Music Caucus, in 1997, Atlanta, Georgia."

Cox

They now call it [NASPAN], but that --

Patterson

Let's see, what was -- so this is Dr. Warrick Carter -- was this the time that you just were talking about, when you went to this in 1997?

Cox

No. It was -- I think it was that year. Let's see, I think so. But it was to the NEA to Washington.

Patterson

But it was at the same time period.

Cox

I don't know.

Patterson

OK. George D. Adams, T. Marshall Jones. Alfred Dionysus Wyatt, Sr. Local and regional honorees. Wayman A. Carver, Cleopus Johnson, Kemper Harold. OK. A celebration of African-American music. That was its 25th year, in '97. And what is this? This is probably a review of your book, or -- let's see. The second annual Los Angeles Times Festival of Books will be held April 19th. Did you participate in that at UCLA? April 19th, and that would have been -- what year?

Cox

I did two different years, two different times, I did that.

Patterson

Do you remember the years? I'm trying to find it in here.

Cox

I think it was -- the book came out in '97, I think it might -- either '97 or '98, and then again the next year. (inaudible)

Patterson

I'm going to say this was so delicious. (laughter) You found out my secret.

Mercedes

(inaudible).

Cox

My hands are shaking.

Patterson

Oh, so Honor Society --

Cox

Mercedes, you know I'm just playing.

Mercedes

I know.

Patterson

OK. Information for History Conference. So this was academic or business affiliated? BEEM Foundation for the Advancement of Music, and so you participated in this history conference for the Historical Society of Southern California?

Cox

I just -- I think I put that yellow on it, because I thought maybe I should have, and I just didn't have time, I think. Because it's in Pasadena, or does it say there? But I think it is in Pasadena.

Patterson

Avenue 43, that's up at Eagle Rock, that area, Pasadena area.

Cox

Yeah. I just was doing more than I could.

Patterson

It was just too much, huh. OK, what do we have here? History conference.

Cox

Same thing.

Patterson

Oh, this was the same event?

Cox

I don't know, but it was the same --

Patterson

The Southern Californian History Conference, set for January 23 at [Autrey] Museum. And let's see -- "Groups, of course, have been a major influence on the history of the community; Lawrence Degraff, professor of history at California State University Fullerton, will present an overview of the life of the African-American in the city, and Bette Cox, director of the BEEM Foundation, will present the music and musicians of Central Avenue until 1950, when the avenue lost its role as a major music center. George Sanchez, professor of history at USC, will explore the relationships of the Mexican-American and the community at large. So this was something that you participated in, and let's see, the date was 1998, so you had just finished your book. And this is the Autrey Museum, OK. NASPAM, here is a NASPAAM newsletter -- you've got lots of shadows on that, don't you? How's that? Worse?

Adriana

Better in the shade. Maybe a little bit further down, to the left.

Patterson

OK. So this is a NASPAM newsletter put out by the membership chair, fall 1999. And it contains the mission statement, and membership news. Early payment and dues, "Help NASPAM with early payment and dues." Website, the 2001 national conference. OK. And then this was a conference they had in 1999. Do you remember that one?

Cox

I think so.

Patterson

Did anything interesting happen during that conference?

Cox

If I remember correctly, it was in the evening, and I think -- my part was in the evening, because I was late staying out of town, and I don't think there were hardly any people, there were a few people, because -- I don't know, I guess I did my job, I gave my -- whatever.

Patterson

You presented on your book? You did a presentation on Central Avenue? OK. Now I see you have an obituary, what's this?

Cox

Milt Jackson.

Patterson

Milt Jackson, (inaudible) with modern jazz quartet.

Cox

Modern jazz, I loved that group. I just loved the way they played. I don't know what they do know, I haven't seen them for a long time. I guess maybe they were able to get somebody else.

Patterson

They played in Los Angeles quite a bit, didn't they?

Cox

I think so.

Patterson

And let's see, anything else here? I think we've gone through this pretty well. All right, and that was that folder. Now let's see, it looks like we're working back through time. So this is the 1990 Los Angeles City Cultural Affairs Commission Performing Arts tribute reception.

Cox

Every -- for Black History Month every year, this is the year I would have had Albert come and sing.

Patterson

And this is Dr. Albert McNeil up here.

Cox

And I think I had a folder for every year, because every year it was something that somebody did for it, and I think it was pretty -- it was very well-received.

Patterson

OK. Let's see what else we have here. So here's a jazz concert, this is the Sentinel newspaper, Thursday, September 6, 1990. The BEEM Foundation presents outstanding jazz concert. "Los Angeles music enthusiasts are always assured of an exciting musical experience whenever the BEEM Foundation, with Bette Y. Cox as coordinator, presents a musical event. The first annual free jazz concert, sponsored by the organization, was held recently in the Kinsey Auditorium of the California Museum of Science and Industry, and attracted a large audience of jazz aficionados and others." Oh, it says down here, "Mrs. Cox presented a very impressive history, and in some respects, nostalgic recollections of life and times in the vibrant years of jazz on Central Avenue. She recounted a long list of clubs, such as Club Alabam, Club Memo, Dunbar Hotel, Ivy's Chicken Shack --" Don Lee White, he said he played there for a couple of nights -- "and others, which were meccas for the performance and appreciation of jazz. Jazz greats such as Count Basie, Ella Fitzgerald, Erroll

Garner, Sarah Vaughn, Cab Calloway, and innumerable others added their talents to make for a flourishing jazz scene in the days when life was peaceful and exciting. Talented Clora Bryant, trumpeter, opened the program with a tribute to Dizzy Gillespie. So you knew Clora Bryant, and you -- were you able to -- what would you say about her? What was the most impressive thing that you remember about Clora Bryant?

Cox

She was extremely talented, and unfortunately, she had to give up blowing and so forth. But she just had so much talent in her younger days; she would have something to say, and when she would play, I don't know -- it was fun having her, because she made a lot of people happy. It was good.

Patterson

OK. So we have that, and -- OK, what's going on here Leimert Park, so let's see, in 1992, it's -- this article, let's see -- it was the LA Times, October 18, 1992. "Leimert Park, giving black music its due. Bette Cox recalled Sam Brown, who in 1936 became the Los Angeles Unified School District's first black secondary school music teacher. Cox and her organization, the BEEM Foundation, honored the 83-year-old former Jefferson High School teacher at a scholarship luncheon last year. What was that like? What was Sam Brown like?

Cox

Oh, he was so wonderful, and he was -- he had suffered in a way, because when he graduated cum laude from the USC School of Music, so you know he was talented. And yet when he graduated, they wouldn't give him a job, and he had to go with some singers, and he'd just be one of the singers. He didn't get anything for all his work. But after so long, because he did this for a lot of time, just going on the road with this group. And finally, he did have a couple of professors there who really knew how great he was, and they tried to help him, but finally, he got the word that if he would be willing to come at night and teach at night, night school, and have at least, say, 15 or 20 students, that if he would do that, they'd let him have a job like that. And so he went ahead and he did that, but to their amazement, he had about a room full of people who wanted to come in; all he had to do was tell his choir, the church, to come, and they came. And they did beautiful work, and the whole thing was a



success that way. And finally, after he had done this for probably a year or two, they gave him a job at Jefferson High School, just for so long, to see if he could make it. Of course, he did, and he just became famous as the best music teacher, best everything. He would teach them in the school at night; he would let them come with him to go to the nightclubs. Not inside, just to be outside listening with him there. And a lot of the ones who were famous now, they learned from him, and they had a whole lot of experience. Anyway, and I know people that I interviewed who taught -- who he taught, and they have so many marvelous things to say about him. And so anyway, he's gone now, he was wonderful, what he went through to get a job. He finally was asked to come and teach at this fabulous place in Beverly Hills, and I mean, he had never done that. (phone ringing) Mercedes, can you get that? Either he or Timmy will have to --

Patterson

I'm trying to see if you have -- where was this?

Cox

Ask Jimmy if he got it.

Mercedes

OK.

Patterson

Now where was this taking place in Leimert Park?

Cox

Let's see.

Patterson

Do you remember the venue? Oh, it's out of your home. OK, I see it down here. So they called it Leimert Park, this area that's actually -- so this was an interview apparently you gave in your home, Aaron J. Aubrey. OK. All right, I see.

Cox

He's a wonderful man. I was so sorry when he died. I guess not well. But he went through so much, and people didn't appreciate him. He finally was recognized.

Patterson

Well, he'll certainly be among the greats in our history of African-American music professionals. So what's going on here, all these goodies? Let's see, 1993, Cultural Affairs Commission Musicale.

Cox

Every year I had a different one. That was '93, but these are all the same. But I had '85 and every year, and it was very successful.

Patterson

So this included Natalie Cole, Leona Mitchell, Florence --

Cox

Leona Mitchell, yes. And Natalie Cole --

Patterson

James Wong.

Cox

I went to Vegas three times to try to get her or her agent, to try to see if she would come and perform for us. And I couldn't seem to make any headway, but I called when I got back and talked to her office, and I went three times, and they finally said that she could come, but she couldn't perform, they wouldn't do that, and they gave me a video, and I guess they expected me to play it in place -- that she wasn't going to sing, and I didn't have the sense enough to play it. This was the very last program that we did, the very last one, and I didn't want to -- I wanted it to be so good. And I had part of (inaudible), I had Leona Mitchell, and I had -- her husband was a student of mine. And what's the other one? Oh, gosh, he was so great. I had him on three programs.

Patterson

Lawrence James Wong was one, and Elmer Bush.

Cox

Yeah, that was my student. And Michael is at Indiana University.

Patterson

Michael Gordon, and Victoria Gordon.

Cox

Oh, that's somebody else.

Patterson

So these were the participants.

Cox

Each year I'd have a different program, and everybody would have one, I'd give them, and they'd also get -- the inside would give the information of the people involved, all the history, so it really -- I did it just so it would be fine and wonderful.

Patterson

This is also in 1993 at the Hyatt LAX Fifth Annual Jazz Brunch.

Cox

That's what BEEM has, an annual brunch, it's our fundraiser, gets some scholarship money.

Patterson

Let's see, what's this?

Adriana

(inaudible)

Patterson

Sure, sure. Sorry. Barreling through this. How's that? Shall I move it?

Cox

(inaudible) light on too much. That's something I wrote about, my background, in Twin Falls, Idaho, and all that.

Patterson

Well, it looks like you have a few. May I have one?

Cox

Not all the pages are there.

Patterson

Is it -- oh, yeah, it does say continued. Blind Tom, let's see. This must be both of them. This must be one and then two. OK, you have several here. OK, well, it looks like we've gotten most of it out of there. That was actually -- was that -  
-

Cox

'93, this is --

Patterson

This is the same one. I would have you shoot this, because it's a little -- maybe a little bit easier to see. He has one with a Xerox of this. OK. Great. This is the last one out of this folder; let's see what we have here. 1994, these letters, no program in there. OK. Let's keep going. Halfway through these, let's see. This is the right -- OK. (laughter) It's like a treasure hunt. OK. Now, this says, "City of Los Angeles, the Los Angeles City Human Relations Commission, Human Relations Week Annual Celebration Luncheon at the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion." Do you remember what that was? Did you --

Cox

No, I don't.

Patterson

Were you part of that?

Cox

It doesn't say City Hall --

Patterson

Yeah, it's got -- apparently it was an official City of Los Angeles thing, and National Black History Month celebration, 1983. More Than Soul, Black Arts in America: California State Polytechnic University Pomona, so did you do -- let's see if your name is here. Did you do something with this?

Adriana

Can you hold that still?

Patterson

Sure, I'm sorry, yeah.

Adriana

(inaudible)

Patterson

OK, sure. I'm looking here to see if you were -- oh, Dr. Eddie Meadows -- let's see. Music seminar presenters for this, a presentation focusing on the black aesthetic experience, the meaning of music in certain contexts, i.e., an aspect of musical value which transcends mundane and structural significance. And we have Mr. John Patton and Ms. Barbara Sherill, St. Paul Presbyterian Church, Los Angeles, Dr. Donald Ambrosen, and Mr. Phillip Clark, music department, Cal Poly Pomona, Dr. Eddie Meadows, department of music, Cal State San Diego -- oh, Professor Don Lee White, Department of Music, California State University Los Angeles, Dr. Lance Williams, ethnic studies department, USC, and moderator, Dr. William Carter, Cal Poly Pomona. And so -- oh, and the art panelist, Dr. Samela Lewis, and Dr. Jane Hewitt, cultural historian, Dr. Mary-Jane Hewitt.

Cox

(inaudible) Samela Lewis, I can't --

Patterson

She's a distinguished scholar of African-American arts, the visual arts.

Cox

But where -- is she teaching?

Patterson

She was at Scripps College at that time. I don't know that she's teaching now. But this sounded like a great event. Wow.

Cox

And when was that, let's see --

Patterson

1983, February 24th. And what's this? Congress spotlights Women in Music. And this is you, Bette, presenting a certificate of honor to Lorenza Jordan Cole during the Second International Congress of Women in Music at USC.

Patterson

Do you remember what year this was? I don't see a date on this.

Cox

Isn't it up here?

Patterson

No, it's not up here. This is the Wave newspaper.

Cox

When could that have been? Oh, it must have been --

Patterson

The reviewer is Doug Washington, music critic for the Wave. So it says, "Representatives of 20 countries recently joined distinguished American women at the Second International Congress of Women in Music at USC in celebration of the accomplishments of women musicians from the 10th century to the present." And it goes on to say later, "The seminar began with a presentation by Dr. Ora Williams, professor at CSU Long Beach, on black American women composers. Williams was followed by Bette Cox, local music educator and historian, with a slide lecture presentation titled Black Women in the Musical Arts." And this is you -- so Lorenza Jordan Cole was there with you --

Cox

Yeah, she was my teacher.

Patterson

This is the Folk Arts Council in 1983, addressed to John -- is this John Cobert?  
"On behalf of the Folk Arts Council, I would like to thank you for your wonderful presentation on the blues."

Cox

I think that was at the museum, some museum, wherever they were having an event.

Patterson

Was it the Egg and the Eye, perhaps, on the Folk Arts museum, there's one on Wilshire.

Cox

It was on Wilshire.

Patterson

Not the Egg and the Eye, but I think I know the one that this is. Folk art -- I'm trying to remember the title of it; I just got a brochure from them recently. The audience was enthralled with -- what is this, 60th? -- your explanations --

Cox

Explanations and the music.

Patterson

With both, it looks like S-O-T-H -- yes, with both your explanations and the music.

Cox

All in all, it was a very special thing.

Patterson

Yeah, all in all.

Cox

Yes. It was Folk Art Council; it was at that museum -- I don't know if it's still over there.

Patterson

That's -- oh, yeah. This is the one. It's right across the street from the Los Angeles County -- Craft and Folk Art, that's what it's called. Craft and Folk Art. yeah, 5814 Wilshire Boulevard.

Cox

20 years ago.

Patterson

That was great. So you went around the city and presented in various venues the research that you'd accomplished. And Altadena, Ethel Tracy, supporting the craft and folk art -- apparently was involved with the Craft and Folk art museum, Ethel Tracy, she's thanking you for supporting the Craft and Folk Art Council, celebration of the blues program. "I know how difficult it was for you to do this program at that period in your life. Your presentation gave me the strength to fight again for the rightful dignity of black art, and I hope you receive strength, and I hope you receive -- I hope you receive strength from the appreciation of your program. Thank you again." Was that a difficult time in your life, Bette? 1983?

Cox

I don't know what she meant, what she was thinking about that.

Patterson

Hm. Ethel Tracy.

Cox

'83, 1983.

Patterson

What do you remember about her?

Cox

I don't remember, except her name, that's familiar, but I don't really --



Patterson

OK. So this is '84 at the Conrad Hilton in Michigan -- I mean, on Michigan Avenue, in Chicago rather.

Cox

Oh, I went to that --

Patterson

Music Educators National Conference.

Cox

It's now called --

Patterson

Here's Warrick Carter's name again.

Cox

-- it was the National Black Music then.

Patterson

Dr. Yvonne Cheek, national president. OK. We'll do this folder and then we'll wrap it up; it's getting late. We're out of tape, just about? OK. Hall of Fame, OK. And this is the program for it, I suppose. Mack? Who is that? "To Bette, best of luck." Mack Robinson?

Cox

Yeah, I guess so.

Patterson

Do you know him?

Cox

I knew him from Pasadena days.

Patterson

OK. This was that other event. Human relations weekend, no presentation. Mack Robinson autograph, Olympia gold medal -- oh, I see -- Olympic gold medalist.

Cox

Oh, that's Jackie's brother, Mack.

Patterson

Oh, OK. Jackie Robinson's brother -- oh, Mack.

Cox

Mack is his brother.

Patterson

Mack Robinson. 1936 Olympics, gold medalist. Do you remember what his sport was?

Cox

No, I don't.

Patterson

Hm. OK, that's interesting. OK. Why don't we wrap it up today, we're only halfway through this folder. Gosh, you knew Jackie Robinson's brother, and he was a gold medalist in the 1936 Olympics.

Cox

I know Jackie better.

Patterson

Yeah, but that's still interesting; it's interesting history there. So we're at the 1983 through '89 folder, halfway through it.

Cox

Now, if we finish these --

Patterson

And there's only one more. '85, '86 -- [END OF recording]

## 1.7. Session 6 (February 9, 2007)

Patterson

-- this article actually about? It was reviewing your book, right? "(inaudible) resource materials documenting the history of black (inaudible) social writer, contemporary griots." Actually, I think we did shoot this. I think we did shoot this particular article. And what is all this? Did we go through this?

Cox

I doubt it.

Patterson

We went through some of your --

Cox

They're just little things that when the book came out, people wanted to see and talk about, and I would get extra little things published.

Adriana

I'll just roll then.

Patterson

OK. Yeah, we are -- February the 9th, 2007 with Bette. And we're going to walk through some of the materials that she's collected over the years, regarding her wonderful work. And so one of the things that you've done among many that are very, very outstanding is that you've written "Central Avenue, Its Rise and Fall: 1890 through Circa 1955," and this is -- this was written about and heralded as a major work for the history of Los Angeles for its black citizens and musicians. So after you wrote this book -- well, maybe we should go back. Before you wrote the book, what was your greatest motivation? What was it that made you decide to do something so comprehensive? What drew you to Central Avenue?

Cox

Well, I didn't grow up in the city, and I didn't really know a lot about Central Avenue. And when I came here to go to school at UCLA, I didn't come over to Central Avenue, most of the girls didn't, because we just were supposed to be

ladies and not going to nightclubs and all that. But whenever there was an opportunity to maybe -- just happened to see a famous person like Duke Ellington or something, and we could walk down or drive down the street and see him, because people would sort of move around Central Avenue and the Dunbar Hotel especially, and if somebody very famous was in town, they were pretty free about moving around without waiting to be introduced, they just could be recognized, and they didn't mind it at all. But as time went on after I had finished college, finished UCLA, I began to get more interested in things that were kind of forbidden to a lot of the younger girls. And I think because I majored in music education, and a lot of my friends, of course, were music people, and I just became kind of acquainted by Buddy Collette, because he was that -- everybody knew Buddy, and if you were in a club, a member of a club, and your club was going to have a big event or something, quite often even the younger ones knew about Buddy Collette, and maybe he'd come to -- if it's something out on the schoolyard, he might come over the schoolyard, and you could see him, and it's like looking at a famous person.

But I got interested in all of this, because I was interested in music, and I began asking questions, and as I became more and more involved, people became more and more telling me something that they thought I just didn't know about. And I really can't say exactly when I started thinking about the book, but I just began to get more and more interested because of my background, and after I graduated, and then I went away to Oberlin, Oberlin School of Music, and I learned a lot of other things; I just became more and more interested in anything to do with music. And when I came back from Oberlin, then -- well, I don't know. I just kind of fell in love with the music of LA, because I didn't know enough about it, and I knew that I could.

Patterson

And so not knowing much about it was as much a catalyst for you getting out there and learning as anything else.

Cox

It was. It really was. And people like Buddy Collette, who became a good friend, and he would tell me about Sam Brown, who was the first and only black music teacher in the schools of Los Angeles. He was a marvelous musician, and I got well-acquainted with him, and I was proud of him, and I

learned a lot of things from him, and I so often wish that I had had some of his training when I was at UCLA, because when I did teacher training, I was sent to a school in -- it was near UCLA, and there weren't any teachers there like Sam Brown, they weren't our color or anything. But I just -- I learned a lot just by knowing him, after I became very well acquainted with him. And he, one day, was willing to let me do an interview, and I did a complete interview on him, and he gave me some old, old albums that were very exciting in those days, but right now, some people would still think that they're great, and I still have them, and some of the people who performed in them were people who were his students, and like me, I guess, like I have a picture up on my piano of Billy Childs, and I was his first music teacher in the schools, he was in third or fourth grade, and he wanted a violin, and I was all out of violins, but I gave him a cello, and he stayed at the school I think three more years, and played cello in my orchestra.

Patterson

So what was your process for collecting some of these oral histories (inaudible). How did you -- did you just call people up

Cox

I think so. After I met Sam Brown, who was the first music teacher in the town that was black, I think that I admired him so much, and he told me so much that it led me into meeting other people. And one person would lead me to another, and I just couldn't keep out of it; I had to know more. And I just began to write notes, and I think when I first started my BEEM Foundation, I think that the friends on the membership knew a lot more than I did, because they were professors at UCLA and at -- oh, different places, different cities in this area, and they were much more acquainted with the whole thing than I would be, because I had only taught in the schools. But these were people who were really wonderful professors in whatever university they were at, and it just seemed as though they said things that made me wake up, and they'd say, "You need to meet this people more. You've met some, now meet some more, and get some pictures." And they inspired me, and I went to KLCS, the school district station, and I asked them if they would interview some people on their stage if I brought the right people in.

Well, anyway, I began that way, and I think at first I didn't get too much with them, but when I really made some progress was when I went to the telephone company downtown. They were very interested, and they wanted me to -- I could use their station that happened to be in Pasadena. And so it seemed to me that every other day or so I was in my car picking up one of the musicians and driving them to Pasadena. And we'd go over there and get on the stage, and -- not the stage, but we just -- they gave us a nice comfy seat, and they would want us to start talking. And with my mouth, always asking questions, I got a lot of information, and I passed it right on. I think I must have interviewed about 20 people, at least.

Patterson

Now, who was recording?

Cox

The Pacific Bell TV station, which was in -- I guess it still is in Pasadena.

Patterson

Oh, so they actually did the recording for you

Cox

Yes, they did.

Patterson

-- and you were able to collect the tapes that they recorded, and --

Cox

And I still have them, and some of them are in the book, the conversation that we had, and I learned more about each person and what they are doing, and what they have done already, and that was part of what went into the book. And there it says "oral histories," I just had them listed, all the ones -- in fact, I think they almost had to stop me, because the woman that was so helpful in getting us set up with them, she worked there, but she became vice-president, she had a lot of power. And she came over one day when we were doing all this, and I think they must have mumbled something, "I thought you were just going to do a few," you know. And she said, "I want you to do all the ones she asks you to do, and just go right ahead, it'll be all right." And that's why I got --

a lot of them were so well done because they had so much information, and they were so anxious to do it; they were just as anxious as I was. And so as many -- I think more than that many, I think I had at least 12 at least.

Patterson

So you have some interviews that you didn't even include in the book, you have more than you used. So when did you start thinking about actually compiling the book? Was it during the interview process?

Cox

I guess so, because I had -- I was collecting so much information, and I said, "Well, why don't I put this on paper, because other people might be interested like I am. I just think that they're wonderful people; they were so genuine.

Patterson

Did you transcribe the interviews yourself, or did you have someone to help you?

Cox

You mean to write them as they were talking?

Patterson

No, to actually begin to transcribe the oral interviews onto the paper.

Cox

No. I would just do it as they -- well, not as they talked, because they were just getting that all on the screen, but I did -- how did I do that? I have to think about it. But I know that I did play them at home -- I guess that's what I did. I had so much that I was involved with, I hardly almost remember for sure. Excuse me.

Unidentified Female

Hi. Good to see you.

Patterson

Would you bring some cold drink for Adriana?

Mercedes

Cold water? (inaudible)

Patterson

Yo tambien. Thank you. OK, so you began to build this book, and did you begin to talk about the fact that you were building it, or did you just sort of hibernate into your office, and go through the process until it was finished? How did that work into your life, into your personal life, actually writing this?

Cox

It seemed like it was taking a long time, but there was so much that they had to say. Like Buddy Collette and Sam Brown; they had so much to tell, I couldn't even put it all in one book. And so I think that I just did as much as I could for each time that I would review, and then talk about it with my members, because they had asked me to make copies for all of them. And I tried to do that, but some of them came out, and they were too -- they just didn't -- they didn't come through as clearly as the originals; they did beautiful originals for me, and then they gave me some -- I have some that are masters, and then I have some that are part of what they made like copies from. And the only ones that I used, like for the book or for any program, would be the very best ones, the originals. But they have always been very well received, and they meant a lot to me for getting any information for the book.

Patterson

So there were other sort of springboard activities that came out of the writing of this book, and you began to be reviewed around town, and then there was the exhibition at the California African-American Museum that came out of your work. Talk about that experience a little bit. Here we have some of the materials that you --

Cox

At the museum? Well, I think through my contact with different people, either people who referred me to other people and people that had so much to say for the book, there was just so much that I had to write down that I began to realize that it was really a book, and I hadn't thought of it to begin with, but I did have enough for a book, and I just began to think in terms of having



somebody help me with the typing, and with actually making it well done. So it took a lot of time, and I could hardly believe I did it.

Patterson

So what was the publishing process like, getting it published? How did that begin to happen?

Cox

I went to -- let's see, now who is this? Somebody was recommended for me who knew about a person who could write books very well, and they would have -- there was a person that they would get to -- whatever you do to have a book written and put down and get a publisher, those are the kinds of things I was looking for, and I happened to talk to the right people who knew the right people for each of those things. And so I ended up after some time by contacting the company, I hardly -- as much as I'd kept in touch with them, I have to stop and think of the name of it. But they were excellent, and I stayed right with them, and they stayed right with what I was doing, and pulled it through. And they sent me -- the first run of books was -- well, they were books that were soft -- they were not hardback, but they were soft and they were good, and I thought, "Oh, that's so wonderful, they sent --" oh, hundreds of books for me to sell. And I was so excited and I was so happy, and that was only the first run, because about a week or so later, I got the hardback, and I couldn't believe that it had a hardback. But you know, I got information from people who I had met through UCLA, through the schools, and people who have been helpful in any other way, but they were just good friends. I never tried to sit down and talk about how I did it.

Patterson

So you had a lot of support in getting this actually coming to its fruition, and you said of your own publishing, BEEM had its own publishing house, then is that how you set it up?

Cox

Well, I don't think so; I don't think we had our own --

Patterson

"BEEM Publishing." It says, "Published by BEEM."

Cox

Well, I guess so then. It's been awhile now. I just didn't know -- I just did whatever. Then it was just -- different people were very helpful and willing to share with me anything I needed to know. And I think a lot of the people on our board that were professors at universities, and they could throw little hints at me and tell me little things that I didn't know. So you know, I --

Patterson

You had support from your organization, and then really helped you when you needed it.

Mercedes

Would you like something?

Cox

Probably the same thing. We'll have some later, some soft drinks, whenever you're ready. Speaking --

Mercedes

Now you need agua.

Patterson

Do you want water right now?

Cox

I think so, yeah. Thank you.

Patterson

So -- OK, we'll stop for a second, drink some water. So what was it like working with the people that put together with you, or were a part of this exhibition at the California African-American -- so we have -- Albert McNeil participated, and [Marl] Young, Catherine Parsons Smith. These are people that I knew, like Albert I knew from school, we were at UCLA together, and I knew people that had accomplished something on their own, and they were fairly -- they were quite helpful, when I asked for any help. Albert had a lot of good information, and explained a lot about how he happened to get into the part of music that

he'd spent his whole life into, until this day, he's just all over the world, and very successful. A lot of the things that he said were very interesting, because I didn't know that, as he said, he went to the Catholic church, and every Sunday, after he left the church, because his mother wanted him to go to the Catholic church, but he would leave the church and go to a Pentecostal church, and I had no idea why. At first, he didn't say why, but he learned to perform in a different way through the Pentecostal church, and many times, he has a lot of talent to perform music that has a different kind of feeling or rhythm than what he would have had if he'd stayed only with the Catholic church music, quite different. Thank you, dear. I think there's a -- there's one of those somewhere.

Mercedes

(inaudible).

Cox

Yes.

Patterson

So in the exhibition, was it coupled with lectures and physical materials?

Cox

Well, during the actual exhibition, people come and just observe, and I had prepared a lot of written material for them to read and to take home and understand more. And yet there was just the number of people that came, and many of them knew some of the people on the wall in the pictures, but they were -- some of them had gone on, and others were still living, and I didn't know, because they were up in years, but some people could just talk and tell things that I thought was wonderful, because they added to whatever I could give them. And then I prepared -- I think it was one or two whole days, I prepared a place where they could come and talk about their own history and answer any questions that were asked, and I had sent for Ollie Wilson from the University of -- at Berkeley -- I can't say the name of it, but he's the, I believe, the head of the music department, and he was so wonderful, and he spoke. And then we had a panel where different ones who had special interests and special talents could join with each other and talk and share

their history, the things that they have learned and would pass onto us, so we had a whole day of that. And there was another day -- well, also, there was another day -- well, also on that first day, that first music, it was ragtime. And it was a kind of old, slow ragtime, which is not what people have learned to like since then, a lot of people wanted it to be very fast, like Eubie Blake does it. But the first early ragtime was very, very slow, and we had a gentleman to play it just like that, so that people would understand why, and we talk about that.

Patterson

Do you remember who that? (inaudible).

Cox

This is --

Patterson

Don't tell yet, wait until she comes back. You got to remember that.

Cox

Now, I'm looking -- yeah, where is it? Good coverage all the way.

Patterson

And this is in 1995, Milton McCoy, who we just mentioned, Sentinel music critic, talks about your Symposia series. And the BEEM Foundation, an acronym for Black Experiences Expressed in Music, presented a series of outstanding workshops, roundtable discussions, and concerts. The Kinsey Auditorium, adjacent to the California African-American Museum, located in Exposition Park, provided the setting for all of the symposia, with the exception of the final concert. So what was the Symposia series? This is before you published the book.

Cox

I think was --

Patterson

Was this kind of -- no, no, no, this was part of that whole exhibition, which actually did happen before you published the book.

Cox

And I think that that was held at the -- was it at the Kinsey Auditorium?

Patterson

Yeah, which was adjacent to the museum. I see. And it talks about Ollie Wilson's opening remarks, and O.C. Smith spoke about the life and teachings of Sam Brown, and Buddy Collette told of the irony of racism, (inaudible) directions on the spiritual. And Dr. [Hores] Boyer --

Cox

He was a visiting guest. He's at the University in Boston, just out of Boston --

Patterson

University of Massachusetts Amherst?

Cox

Amherst, that's right. Is that what it says? He was a professor there, and he may still be there, I don't know if he's retired, but oh, he's a marvelous pianist for Gospel music, especially. And I was glad I was able to get him to be on that program, because it brought a lot of attention to that kind of music.

Patterson

Now, Dr. Robinson at UCLA talked about employment motion pictures and television.

Cox

I don't recall who that is. That was a little bit out of my stint.

Patterson

And Ginger Smock, who you talked about earlier --

Cox

She's gone now.

Patterson

And [Bathany] Harrison from the University of Maryland was the moderator for the panel on performers of jazz and blues, and Clora Bryant --

Cox

And Clora Bryant is still here, but she is not able to sing anymore, or blow that horn. But she's still around. She was great when she was here; she played the trumpet better than anybody around, any of the men. It was wonderful. She lost her ability to do that because of her health. She probably worked a little too hard on it.

Patterson

(inaudible) New Orleans music, blues, an explosion of Los Angeles from the '20s to the '40s, moderated by Gerald Russell and included Floyd Lewis, Marshall Royal, Jackie Kelso, Russell Smith. And then this is cut off a little, Rugolo and Eddie Meadows.

Cox

Rugolo? Pete Rugolo? And Eddie Meadows, he's great.

Patterson

[Malba Liston, Mallie Letcher, Bira Ginger, Bye Wilson and Janelle Jawkins], the jazz ladies of the west. Wow, that was some Symposia series.

Cox

It was, and I was sorry that we didn't somehow advertise and have more people there, because they had such wonderful speakers and performers, and somehow we didn't get a really good audience there.

Patterson

April 13, 1995, was the date. So it was happening in April of '95.

Cox

I don't know, I think I should have contacted the school district, and had some of the students there, because the auditorium should have been filled, and I worked so hard on that to get just the people to be speakers; I guess I didn't work that hard on the audience.

Patterson

Promotion, well, that's a whole 'nother big undertaking. Sounds like it was a very --

Cox

Well, it was very successful, but I would like to have had more people to hear, and just to listen to some of those speakers that were outstanding.

Patterson

Let's see, this is the mocha -- Reach Out, 6th annual EYE, Emerging Young Entertainer, scholarship luncheon in 1996 at the Grace Ford Salvatore Room, Dorothy Chandler pavilion. What was that like, the Emerging Young Entertainers scholarship luncheon?

Cox

Well, isn't that Reach Out Music Center? Well, I was on the committee of Reach Out, and there were several of us, and we had our little programs, and we would try to help bring in people for different occasions. It was a very good thing; they don't have it anymore, but it was very good.

Patterson

OK.

Cox

And when I had the first event of the one in that last chair over there, when the Mayor appointment me to be Cultural Affairs Commissioner, then the first one that I brought in was William Grant Still.

Patterson

Oh, OK. Did you indicate something over on the chair? That --

Cox

I think all of those that are on that big -- all of those are a part of the event -- no, the other one.

Patterson

Oh, yeah. Oh, Commission events, Cultural Affairs.

Cox

And we had the first Commission event, I asked the members of the Commission, I said, "Let's put on an event for Black History Month," because we were earlier in the year, and I said, "Let's have something to celebrate black history." Well, I was the only one on the committee that would have been interested. But the -- so they joined me in that, and we did one every year for Black History Month from that time on, until the last time that the Mayor was there, and he went out. But --

Patterson

It was at the Trans-America Occidental Auditorium, where was that?

Cox

It's downtown, it's off of downtown, and it should still be there, because they improved on it, and we thought they were going to continue to use it, but somebody took it over, and they didn't want us to have it anymore, and we just -- I mean, we did, all of the time that I was doing those program, so but since then, we haven't been able to get it. And we used to put programs on all the time. But this was strictly for the Mayor, and for that particular reason, we did one every single year until he was going out; I think he was going to not be Mayor anymore.

Patterson

Gwendolyn Wyatt and George Shirley.

Cox

And I met George Shirley at one of the events that we had all over the country for the National Black Music Caucus, and George Shirley was just wonderful; he was an opera singer, and I had made friends with him and invited him to come and be on our program, and he did, and we asked him to come a second time, and he did again. I think he came all the way from Detroit.

Patterson



Now, this one is 1989, and it featured the Afro-America Chamber Music Society, introducing Gregory Jefferson. He looks awfully young; he was a young musician.

Cox

Gregory Jefferson was my -- well, he was my contribution, I'll say, because I saw in the Times an article about this little boy, he's 10 years old, 10 or 11, and that he performed so well for this program in Pasadena. And so when I saw that, I said, "I've got to get that little boy on our program." So I called, I wrote a letter to the school over there, where he went to school. And I wrote to the principal and asked her if I wrote a letter to his mother, would she see that the mother got it, and she did. And so I had written to the mother and said, "I'm doing a program for the Mayor of Los Angeles, and we want to have your son to be on the program," and she did. And that was the beginning of his great success, he's been all over the world now, and he's still quite famous. He's not -- I think he's 20 -- I think he might be 26 by now, I don't know. But he's still in touch; he comes and -- I still hear from him, and he's great. Gregory Jefferson.

Adriana

(inaudible)?

Patterson

Yeah, the light.

Cox

Does that say -- he was a flautist, wasn't it?

Patterson

It looks like a flute player. Let's look inside. It could be -- I don't know, I'm not -  
- my organology isn't the best. It's more than a soprano -- it's small than  
(inaudible).

Cox

But that's right, that's what he is, he plays the flute.

Patterson

Audiovisual presentation, Bette Cox, (inaudible).

Cox

Yeah, that's what he's holding on the picture on the friend.

Patterson

Oh, these were great. Cultural Affairs Commission.

Cox

Now that was the first -- one of the first ones that I did.

Patterson

This one was 1989, and you had a [Rodrie] J. Rodriguez who welcomed everyone, and then you introduced the master of ceremonies, presentation of the program, Larry McCormick, who was a television news anchor, and African-American television news anchor for KTLA, it was channel 11.

Cox

I got him to be our master of ceremonies.

Patterson

And then you did an audiovisual presentation, "The Legacy: in our time known and renowned before our time and later," what was that presentation like?

Cox

I think it was all about people of color, and that they were doing a quartet of classical music, there wasn't any jazz that day. But we had jazz beforehand, and a free lunch. There was food anyway; every day I had a good fellow who was good with his foods and all, we had a big auditorium, a big place, somewhere you'll see pictures of what they were doing.

Patterson

The Trans-America Auditorium?

Cox

It had a big auditorium and an outside -- not an outside -- not in the auditorium, a big room for reception.

Patterson

Do you remember what street that auditorium was on?

Cox

I think it was like Broad -- not Broadway quite, maybe a little further over. I'm going to find out, because I want to know why they're not letting us use -- I know the woman told me that they just didn't want to use it, because they need it for their own use, something like that.

Patterson

The Afro-American Chamber Music Society, are they the ones that play the string quarter #1 in C major by Chevalier de St. George?

Cox

Whatever it says, that's what they did.

Patterson

What -- tell me something about that Afro-American Chamber Music society?

Cox

Well, they're young, and they're pretty good -- not as good as some of the others, but they were young, and I knew they were working hard; I thought it would give them a break, and I had them play maybe something -- maybe they'd play something by William Grant Still?

Patterson

No, it looks like they'd just play the Chevalier de St. George piece.

Cox

They were -- it was giving them a break so that they could have a little publicity.

Patterson

Now it says [Michou] Banjo, Camille Nickerson, Gwendolyn Williams Brown, Janice White McCray.

Cox

I knew some of those, but I don't know what happened to them, if they're still doing anything, because I haven't heard of them lately.

Patterson

Well, this is Margaret Bonds, who is -- who sang Hold On, and I know Dr. McNeil mentions Margaret Bonds --

Cox

Margaret Bonds didn't sing it, did she?

Patterson

Well, it looks as though she did. No, she couldn't have, (inaudible). So then she -- this was a piece that she wrote, that must have been the composer's slot here. She died in 1972. But she originally composed and sang this piece, Hold On.

Cox

Yeah.

Patterson

So this is quite a combination of --

Cox

Well, every year we'd have something different, and I think they finally just turned it over to me because it was my kind of audience and my kind of music and everything, and I think that they just attended, if they all attend -- I don't think they all did, sometimes they'd take a day off, or -- because it was always on a Sunday, I believe.

Patterson

Now, here you have Natalie Cole and Winona Mitchell in 1993.

Cox

That was the very last one we did. There was -- we had classical and jazz on the same program; we had classical musicians to play with a wonderful opera singer, and they also had Natalie Cole scheduled. And I went to Los Vegas three times to catch her, try to get her to be on the program, and I finally --

they walk me behind the kitchen and down some stairs to get backstage to see her, and I'd have a letter from the mayor to say that he was requesting that I be able to see her. And so anyway, I finally got to meet her, and she didn't have much to say; she didn't really want to do anything, I don't think. But anyway, after three trips, I went three different times, and finally -- I had been writing letters to her agent and calling on the phone her agent and doing everything, and they finally -- they wouldn't let her sing, but they were going to let her come. And I thought, oh, maybe we'll get her to sing, but when they came, they all came together, and they took her with them, and she was not going to sing. And so -- and we had a huge audience. This was the last thing we did before the Mayor was going to be gone.

Patterson

1993.

Cox

Mm-hmm.

Patterson

Now the year before that, I see you had -- you featured an ensemble called the Uptown String Quartet.

Cox

They were wonderful. They were kind of young, and they were individually talented, and they had been -- they had a group formed together, one of them is the daughter of a famous jazz man, I can't think of his name right offhand, but he's very well-known. They were just great performing.

Patterson

So it's Max Roche's daughter, Maxine Roche?

Cox

Yes, that's it.

Patterson

So it's -- there's a picture of Max Roche's daughter just inside of the program. It says, "Conceived by Max Roche as an innovative, unique approach to a

string ensemble, the Uptown String Quartet is comprised of four exceptionally talented young women: Diana Monroe on violin, Lesa Terry on violin, Maxine Roche," his daughter, "on viola, and Eileen M. Folson on cello."

Cox

And they were great, and his daughter -- he came from New York to be there, and he was very nice. Then since then -- I think they have split up, they haven't been doing that as a group. But Lesa Terry, who lives here now, and Lesa brought her whole ensemble and played for us one day for a program that BEEM was having. And it was just beautiful, the violin -- mostly all strings and violins; it was gorgeous. And I think she has done two or three programs for us.

Patterson

So they're not playing together as an ensemble anymore.

Cox

Not that group. She has her own group of musicians, and they're mostly strings.

Patterson

It says that their critically-acclaimed debut album, "Max Roche Presents the Uptown String Quartet," was released in September, 1989, on Phillips Records.

Cox

But, see, they go by Lesa Terry now, because she doesn't play with them, and they're not all together, I don't think. They're not here in LA, but she is. But they're all talented; they were just so wonderful.

Patterson

So this stint at the Los Angeles City Cultural Affairs was a very rich one, and you were able to exhibit some wonderful musical events.

Cox

Well, I don't think they were very rich, because the first time I did it, I had talked about it and said, "Let's do it," and we did it, but they were kind of

grumbly, because they didn't know where the money was coming from, and I didn't tell them, but I got my own money together.

Patterson

Oh, when I say rich, I mean rich in quality, not necessarily --

Cox

Yeah, sure. Absolutely. So anyway --

Patterson

You had trouble putting the money together with that.

Cox

Well, yes, because I had not -- I thought there was a way to get some money for something like that, and I was still new; I hadn't really looked into how to do it, and so I -- it actually sort of came out of my pocket, and my husband's. But the next year, I wasn't going to have that trouble, and even talked to the mayor, and I think the first time, I didn't get to talk to him, but I let it slide the second time. But the third time, it was like the first we played, and it was great. And the mayor saw to it that I always would have money for that, because he recognized the quality of the performers. And he knew that I knew, because I was music teacher. And he saw to it that I -- that there's always money for that program.

Patterson

So Mayor Bradley was really instrumental in promoting the arts in Los Angeles, and black musicianship, and --

Cox

Oh, yeah. And that last one, I knew it was going to be the last one, because he was not going to be there anymore. They were -- he was going to run not for mayor, he was going to be gone, he wasn't well or something. So I knew that, but I just worked so hard to get Natalie Cole, and on top of Natalie, because we were going to have both classical and jazz. And we were going to have classical and jazz, and we had her -- we thought we were going to have her to really perform, but as I say, they brought her, and they gave me a video, but they wouldn't let her sing, and I was very disappointed. But the audience was

almost climbing out of windows; there wasn't a seat anywhere. They all knew that she was very famous then, and they just crowded in, like everything, it was great. But then I had the opera singers, I had the two opera singers, George Shirley and the women's whose husband was one of my students, I can't think of their name now. But it's on that last program.

Patterson

On the '93 program?

Cox

Mm-hmm. And, oh, they were wonderful.

Patterson

So what happened right after '93? Did you try to work with the new mayor? Did you just leave the commission altogether?

Cox

No, I think -- was everybody leaving? I don't remember what happened. But I think -- see, Tom wasn't going to run for president, because he was going to go out, and I don't remember what all happened with everybody, because I think our commission -- we knew that we wouldn't be there. I can't recall what happened.

Patterson

So that last one was Natalie Cole, who wasn't performing, Leona Mitchell, Lawrence James Wong, Elmer Bush, Victoria Gordon --

Cox

Elmer Bush was my student, but they were wonderful with the classical music. And the jazz, well, we had some -- we always had Buddy and his group out in the lobby for the reception.

Patterson

Leo Mitchell was his wife, and it says that he was once a member of the Albert McNeil Jubilee (inaudible). So you have to be very proud when your students -

-



Cox

I really am. (laughter)

Patterson

(inaudible) little bit of a break.

Cox

And I think I'm very --

Patterson

Are you OK holding it? Is that going to be all right working this way?

Cox

You want some ice cream now?

Patterson

I'm fine, Bette.

Adriana

I'm fine with water. Water's fine.

Cox

Adriana. You have to have ice cream, because we have it for you. And so it's just a matter of when you want it.

Patterson

Look at that (inaudible).

Cox

But I really cherish those, because they were so successful. And I was on the board of the -- at the music center, what's it called -- Reach Out. And all of the Reach Out girls came and signed people in -- you know, they had the big table out there, and everybody had to sign in, they had to get an invitation to come, and then they had --

Patterson

The Reach Out girls? Who was that? They were like a welcoming group --

Cox

Yeah, and people sign in. If they got an invitation, they just go in and tell them that they're here, just sign in.

Patterson

Otherwise, did they pay?

Cox

No.

Patterson

This was all open and free.

Cox

Mm-hmm. But they were supposed to have an invitation, but they didn't have to pay. But most of them --

Adriana

(inaudible)

Patterson

Oh, OK.

Adriana

So we're recording on --

Patterson

Oh, good. OK. So when you were promoting these events for the Cultural Commission, you sent out invitations; you had built up a mailing list over time, and you sent out invitations. It seems to me -- I was out in the Ethno-Musicology Department.

Cox

What department?

Patterson

Over at UCLA, the Ethno-Musicology, and I believe I saw one -- you know what it was? I think my mom sent me one through the mail for the BEEM Foundation --

Cox

Oh, isn't that something?

Patterson

-- and I didn't really know much about it then, but I do recall receiving something that my mother sent me.

Cox

That would have been so nice if we had gotten acquainted that far back, and you could have been an assistant for you.

Patterson

Yeah, it would have been an honor to do that.

Cox

Well, we'd love it too.

Patterson

Well, I'm glad to be able to do this now. Let's see -- you know, this is sort of going back through time, but you've pulled out some more treasures, endless - - endless treasures you have here, Bette. These are promotion and it looks like reviews for piano recitals in the '50s, in the mid '50s, and you have a beautiful photograph here, which Adriana will get.

Cox

That was -- I had to do that for my Master's degree.

Patterson

Oh, this is your Master's recital. It says Sunday, May 27, 1956 at 3 p.m., at the West Side Jewish Center, which was at 5870 West Olympic Boulevard, and it was presented by Leota Patron Board of the Alphi Phi chapter --

Cox

Pi Lambda Theta --

Patterson

Pi Lambda Theta sorority. So how did it feel doing that -- when you were done with this? Were you nervous that day during your Master's recital?

Cox

Oh, yes, I was.

Patterson

Or did you feel like, "Oh, I've got this."

Cox

No, I was nervous, and I showed it, too. It didn't help me to show it. But Andre Previn -- you know Andre Previn -- his father was referred to me for my daughter, I guess it was. And he lived in Beverly Hills, and I didn't know, but I was told -- anyway, we went over to meet him, and Carole was about seven years old, five, six years old, very young. And he was so very nice, and he was not a music teacher, he was a lawyer, I think he was a lawyer, but he had been a music teacher, and he was so pleased with Carole, and he would have her sing, or he'd play a little note on the piano and ask her what key it is, was it B, B-flat, and then she'd do it, and every time she would get it, and he'd say, "She's got it, she's got it." I don't know why, but anyway, I was working on my practicing for my recital, and he -- I was paying him to be my teacher for that, just to coach me, because I had most of my stuff done. And because I brought her with me, he just freely did these little things trying to check her out. But anyway, eventually I had to stop coming, because I wasn't close and all, but I was getting ready. And so we didn't stay with him, but his name was on the program as my instructor. And his name was Jack Previn, I think. But anyway, he was a wonderful person; I got to know him, but he passed away sometime.

Patterson

Sonata in C-Major, by -- Sonata Pathetique, which you played when you were in Idaho.

Cox

Pathetique, I did the Pathetique Sonata, and that's the one that I was so good with that. But the very first one, the Sonata, it's not difficult, but I was panic-stricken. And I really was. And I just -- I know I messed it up, and I just went on everything else that went well.

Patterson

Now, I see there's a [Jubadance] in the bottoms.

Cox

By Dett, Nathaniel Dett.

Patterson

So you included some of your --

Cox

Uh-huh, that was good.

Patterson

And you went by Bette Yarbrough Alston, you were in your first marriage at the time. There's also a clipping here, a newspaper clipping, that says, "Mrs. Alston receives Cooper/PTA Life Award. Mrs. Bette Alston was awarded life membership in Cooper Avenue PTA at the recent Founder's Day celebration held in the school auditorium. Mrs. Alston (inaudible) for her outstanding accomplishments in music while seven past presidents were also honored for their service."

Cox

What was that last --?

Patterson

Seven past presidents were honored for their services.

Cox

Oh, I had forgotten all of that. I didn't even remember that I was vice-president; I don't know how that happened.

Patterson

You were just doing so much, couldn't keep up with it. Plus raising children at the time. That's wonderful. I'm glad we --

Cox

And then one day, they'd pick up the paper

Adriana

(inaudible). But who should I --?

Patterson

This is the [Plymouth]. 5870, is that building still there? The West Side Jewish Community Center?

Cox

I think so.

Patterson

They called it Los Angeles State College at the time.

Cox

Adriana, is it too cool now? It's getting cool. I'm wondering, are you too cool?

Patterson

How did you -- oh, I gave you this last time. Did I give Bette one of those? Did I give you this?

Cox

What was that? Yes, I think you did.

Patterson

Yeah, this is one of my mother's -- (inaudible). OK, let's see. What else should we look at here? Let me get this out of the way.

Cox

Just sit it over there on the table. Don't worry about it. Mercedes? Could you come here a minute, please? Let's see. You want to see that --

Patterson

Was there something over here? I think we got these -- unless you want me to take something away. Here, what's going on over here?

Cox

Could you get the glass for Adriana? The glass over there on the table.

Patterson

Here's one over here, that was mine.

Cox

Are you ready for ice cream, Karen?

Patterson

(inaudible)

Cox

Not hot today. (laughter) It is for us.

Mercedes

(inaudible)

Cox

Yes, you do. She's so flippy. (laughter)

Mercedes

She doesn't want ice cream. You want it?

Cox

You're sure you don't want it? She always says that. She likes cheese, remember?

Patterson

No, but I'm full; I can't eat anything; I had lunch, actually, before I came. This water is so good and refreshing.

Cox

Well, Adriana and I will have ice cream or cookies, or cakes, whatever. Let's see now.

Patterson

Now, in November of '76, you've marked this off. This Popular Music of the Early 20th Century by Black American Composers. What was going on with that?

Cox

Let's see. 1976, that was the day -- oh, this is Music of Black Americans -- I wrote that section there, and --

Patterson

Is this part of the same event? The County Museum of Art, it says, has a policy which happily acknowledges there is more to art that meets the eye. Major exhibitions are often complemented by a series of relevant films --

Cox

See, this is the ragtime era, and I think, because I would have gotten Mr. Eubie Blake, I think that he would have gone back to Philadelphia, but Mr. Carpenter performed, and he was marvelous too, but he wasn't like 90-something like little Eubie Blake. But this was a very good program; they had asked for me to help with the program, and so these were the artists that I got for them.

Patterson

Now, what was this venue? Where was this?

Cox

It's a Music by Black --

Patterson

A Concert Complementing the Exhibition: Two Centuries of Black American Art, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, at the Leo S. Bing Theater, November 7, 1976.

Cox



I know what happened. That was the year that I started my first in-service class for teachers, and the word had gotten around to them, and they asked me to bring some music. You see, those were pictures -- I mean, they were artists' work; they wanted to have some music by blacks to accompany the work of the artists. Popular music of the early 20th century by black American composers. That's that picture of Jimmy and me at the top; that was at that same -- it said "extra, extra, at the museum," --

Patterson

Oh, so that was that night.

Cox

That was that same --

Patterson

So it says, Ivan Harold Browning was the tenor; Elliot Carpenter was pianist, Edgar Hayes, pianist, Eddie Dudley, accompanist for Mr. Browning, Teddy Edwards, drummer, Adolf Morris, bassist, and Bette Cox, narrator and visual arts. You wrote, "Music remains the most significant performing art of black Americans, hybrid art that it is. It is most accurately called Afro-American music, although it incorporates some European elements, it's most distinctive characteristic, rhythm, is derived from its African background. Black Americans, even in the 18th century, were composing so-called serious music, sometimes very black characteristics, sometimes not. Additionally, a good deal of the same serious music that was composed by non-black musicians often evidences black characteristics. This ocean of emotion has many lagoons, rivers, and inlets, extending to every area of the world. There are shouts, hymns, spirituals, gospels, and other great religious music. There's a vast array of secular music, including ragtime, blues, jazz, and others descendants, and their descendants, rock and soul. The influence of this exciting musical force is here to stay, and its tremendous worth cannot be denied." Bette Cox.

Cox

And I'm not a poet, but I was just moved.

Patterson

You were excited. Everything comes from passion. I'm with you, Bette, that's why it's so beautiful and so expansive. This is great. So the news was -- the word was out in the city that you were doing this educational series with the in-service program, and so the museums were getting involved, and that's great. It's a timely thing. Now what is this?

Cox

Well, I did a program on --

Patterson

The music of Mexico's great matadors: Gerald Wilson and his orchestra, November 9, 1991, at the Los Angeles Public Library, on Spring Street, funded by Repertory Foundation.

Cox

I had a Dr. Stevenson, I believe it was him -- I can't think of his first name -- to be one of the speakers for that. He knew a lot about -- you know him? UCLA?

Patterson

Yes.

Cox

Well, he was one of my speakers; I asked him, I wanted to see -- oh, excuse me --

Patterson

Music of Mexico's great matadors, Gerald Wilson.

Cox

wanted -- no, I'll be all right; I'm not going to pull it. There was something I wanted to show you.

Patterson

Oh, yeah. I see Robert Stevenson, talked about your book, Central Avenue, which unfortunately needed --

Cox

You know, I should have gone on and finished, and I could have gotten him; he was pushing everything I did like it was all right.

Patterson

Appreciating you.

Cox

I wish I had -- the last thing we were talking about in connection with teaching -- I didn't think I showed you this before, did I? That was the first school where I had the music --

Patterson

Oh, look at the kids! We've got to get this.

Cox

And I was just lucky enough to find it; I still have it.

Patterson

Hooper Avenue School.

Cox

Thank you, Mercedes.

Patterson

Bette Alston, who you know as Bette Cox. And we see her students at her --

Cox

Can you put it --

Patterson

Oh, look at them! They're so cute.

Cox

-- put it over there on that little table over there.

Patterson

Look at the little saxophonist --

Cox

No, take it over there. Thanks.

Patterson

Then there's a little girl over to the far right, as you stand in the picture, that didn't have an instrument. Was she a singer?

Cox

I don't remember. It's been too long. I don't know.

Patterson

I'm going to show it to you, so --

Cox

But I do want -- let's see this -- I do want

Patterson

(inaudible) glare?

Cox

These are the ones --

Patterson

This is why I'd like to scan, Bette.

Cox

Oh, that one? Those are big enough, aren't they? I thought it was these little ones.

Patterson

Well, it's just such a great shot.

Cox

I want you to look at these.

Patterson

I think these are the ones that we saw the other day. Yeah, these are the ones that we're going to need to do a -- I'm sorry, what can I do to help?

Adriana

Hold it a little bit more towards me.

Cox

Take this one too, these two.

Adriana

If you could just not crease it like that, and hold it as flat as possible?

Patterson

Yeah, how about -- I wonder if we -- actually, we could lay it flat.

Cox

These, the last two, I think are a little bit bigger maybe.

Patterson

(inaudible) you're in the shot. So are these the ones that you're going to allow me to -- OK.

Cox

And you will --

Patterson

And I'll just (inaudible) for us to turn in -- OK, Bette, thank you for trusting us with these.

Cox

Here's a big clip. Here's another one.

Patterson

May have a rubber band? That was they're not --

Cox

Need another one?

Patterson

I think -- well, might as well since you have one. OK, now here's --

Cox

You going to take that one too?

Patterson

Let me put this one first -- yeah, I'm going to slide this in. Now, the National Endowment of the Arts appointed you in 1997 to something, I'm going to pull that up --

Cox

To be on the panel, the history panel, whatever it says on the sheet.

Patterson

OK. It says, "The National Endowment for the Arts has appointed Bette Yarbrough Cox a member of the NEA Music, Grants, and Policy panel. Tell us about that. What did they expect you to do with that?"

Cox

Well, they had a panel of people, and I guess there were about ten on the panel, maybe not quite, I don't know. And then they would present music or information and comments, and they'd want us to make our comments, and express how we feel about it.

Patterson

And this is a nice overview of some of the things that you've done. Commissioner of Cultural Affairs in Los Angeles from 1982 to 1992, founder and president of BEEM Foundation, and, let's see, "Bette has written for a number of publications, including Black Music Research Bulletin and the Music Educators Journal, Music Educator News Magazine, (inaudible), for the Los Angeles Unified School System." So you wrote some curriculum guides; did that go with your in-service?

Cox

Probably.

Patterson

Appointed to the National Endowment for the Arts in music (inaudible), 1997, at the music educators national conference in April in 1998; she will be honored by the National Association for the Study and Performance of Ethno-American Music. This is a great -- do you have this -- this is a great overview -- (inaudible).

Cox

I'd have to look -- I'll look for it. I'll see if I have another --

Patterson

Yeah. Did you get to know her, or --

Cox

I can make a copy of it.

Patterson

No, I mean, what journal this appeared in.

Cox

I think it was in the newspaper.

Patterson

Which one?

Cox

Probably the Sentinel.

Patterson

The Sentinel? OK.

Cox

Do you want me to make a copy?

Patterson

Yeah. Why don't I -- well, why don't I -- well, either you can make a copy, or I can take it with me and copy it and bring it back.

Cox

If I could find another copy of it, I wouldn't --

Patterson

You might have one.

Cox

I might have one.

Patterson

Now, you've got some things over on the table that are some of the materials that look at your in-service programs for educators, and we can --

Cox

And did you see William Grant Still over here? I went to him -- excuse me. Was I?

Patterson

Yeah, we got that.

Cox

And this too?

Patterson

I think we got -- now let's walk this way, Bette, I've got you by the leash. We're going to go in and look at some of this in-service -- be careful of the cords, OK? Now, here we've got the -- some materials from the BEEM Foundation's --

Cox

Pardon me?

Patterson

Careful. You OK? OK, now this is actually a brochure or a pamphlet on the Blind Tom story that you did, and it shows the actor that was playing the role of Blind Tom at the piano, and who was that character?

Adriana



OK, (inaudible).

Cox

What do you need?

Patterson

We're going to sit. Why don't we sit?

Adriana

The light is like not having any light on it.

Cox

Oh, yeah. You can sit anywhere --

Patterson

She wants you to sit down.

Cox

Oh, OK.

Patterson

So that she can get the light on your face.

Cox

I can sit over here.

Patterson

Do you want to use that stool?

Cox

No.

Adriana

Here?

Cox

No, the stool.

Adriana

Oh, on the stool. Can I bring it over?

Cox

Sure. Anything you please.

Adriana

That might be too tall, but --

Cox

There. Get your ice cream before it melts.

Patterson

How's that going to be?

Cox

This is fine.

Patterson

Yeah. Are you comfortable?

Cox

Mm-hmm.

Patterson

Good. OK. Yeah, the Blind Tom, this is a little flier for it.

Adriana

I better go to this (inaudible) catch myself being there, it really would not be good if we had that.

Patterson

Maybe you can hold it, and Adriana can see that, or I can hold it for you, so I can hold it steady here.

Cox

You have steady hands.

Patterson

Yeah, this, of course, is -- you've talked about one of the four series that you did on black culture, about music culture. And these are some evaluations that the participants in your in-service series gave you in 17- -- 1776, (laughter) -- 1976, and they all were excellent. So apparently, they were starved for this information as educators, as music educators, huh?

Cox

Yes, and the word got around, and other teachers wanted to come, and I was sent to -- well, I was sent to downtown, just like that --

Patterson

Well, these are evaluations; some of the teachers were saying things like "Excellent course. Would like to see it offered on channel 28." And another teacher said, "I wish some of our musically gifted children could hear and interact with these great people." And some others: "Excellent planning and organization, thoroughly enjoyed the class. My knowledge of black music has really expanded. The leader, Ms. Bette Cox, is outstanding." And these are all teachers that participated, they were just -- they couldn't say enough good about it.

Cox

They were wonderful.

Patterson

So this was -- you really filled a need in the city at the time.

Cox

And they need it again right now; they don't even have music teachers in this - or orchestras or anything. But I don't --

Patterson

Did anything come after you at all that you feel like could carry on this process --

Cox

I knew only of one person that attempted to do it, but it didn't work out for her, she wasn't very successful, I guess. But nobody else has done it, nothing since. And I was thinking, trying to wonder if BEEM shouldn't sponsor one, because do you know how long it's been? I hate to tell you, but it's been 30 years. And you can see, after all those years, nobody has done anything except what I did on TV for them, and those aren't even there now. But I have -- the girl told me they belong to me, so they're mine. And I --

Patterson

And this is such a great time in a student's life to begin to be acquainted with black music, in elementary school level, and to be made aware of the black culture and its music history in the United States. It says that the program was an outgrowth of a staff development class conducted by Mrs. Cox in 1976 and '77 at Cienega Elementary School. Now, what was this newsletter?

Cox

I was promoted to come out of the school and go downtown and be a music advisor, so this was -- and anything you see, it's referring to my being music advisor. And then they would send me to different schools, and in the ballet -- and then when they started me on the television, then I had Eubie Blake once, and I had Maurice McGehee, and the New Orleans people, and Jim Standiter, and --

Patterson

And when was this? This was a newsletter, or what was this --

Cox

It was a newsletter.

Patterson

Put out by her?

Cox

By the downtown office.

Patterson

So it says, "Visual Arts Drama shows to air on TV; Ms. Cox has a workshop scheduled for February 20th in Area A." When they talk about Area A and Area K, what does that mean?

Cox

This area is, I think, E, and like where I used to be at the first school that I was at, I think it was probably a lower -- they were all different, just different parts of the city.

Patterson

Different parts of the city as divided by the unified school district? So it says that Ms. Cox has conducted extensive research in the ethnic music and development, and coordinated the performing arts series, "Two centuries of black American art," held in the fall of 1996 in the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. Oh, here's one that talks about Eubie Blake and the Los Angeles Times, "Black melodies are red-hot in Eubie." Oh, OK. This was a show that gave tribute to him, 1978. It was the show -- Eubie was coming to the Huntington Hartford in '79. OK. All right; anything else you want to say about the in-service series? I think we've pretty much got that, huh.

Cox

I think so.

Patterson

OK. And now the Blind Tom production won an Emmy, right?

Cox

Mm-hmm. I have in my den -- before you go, I'll show you; I have several awards from different places that show the -- all the different things for Blind Tom.

Patterson

It says creative technical crafts, it won an Emmy for that. Technical crafts, what did they mean by that? What were the technical crafts? What were they really celebrating?

Cox

I don't know. I'm not really that involved with TV to really know of a technique; it's not the planning of the whole thing, it's just something maybe with the -- just technical things, I don't know.

Patterson

So it was well done. OK. What other treasures do you have here? Annual NAACP Image Awards. Beverly Hills chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People is pleased to announce your nomination for a 20th annual NAACP image award in the following category: Best Children's Musical - Blind Tom, PBS, Bette Y. Cox, Executive Producer. Oh, yet another honor.

Cox

That was kind of thrilling, the sense of being -- no, I think my son and my daughter wanted to surprise me; they sent a big limousine for me, and we went to Wilshire and Western at that theater, and they had a big crowd there, with people who had received honors, or are thinking that they were going to get one, and then I didn't know, I had never been there, but it wasn't -- what's her name that has the difficult husband, with a voice, a strong voice? What's her name? Oh, gosh.

Patterson

Was this someone that was there at the event with you?

Cox

No, she was singing -- I think she sang a number. She sang that sound -- I can't think of anything now.

Patterson

And this was at the Image Awards. October 29, 1987. It was held at Wiltern Theater. And then here is something regarding Blind Tom that was kind of interesting, where your attorney had to correct them, as far as the credits that they gave. It says that, "Although the August 15, 1986 agreement between BEEM and KCET specifically provides that the executive producer credit for Bette Y. Cox will precede all other producer-type credits and advertising and publicity issues by KCET. KCET entered the Blind Tom program in the 16th International Children's Film Festival without any attribution of credit to the

BEEM Foundation or Ms. Cox. For your information, I'm enclosing a copy of the Festival program; however, except for the order of names, this error was corrected in the Festival listing of Ruby Slipper." So he had to call them on this, and make sure that you got the credit that you deserved for the Children's Film Festival. So why do you think that was -- was it just an honest mistake, or --?

Cox

Well, they wanted the credit, and they knew that I was not on their staff. But they knew me, they knew that I was there for a reason, and they didn't want to have to give that up; they want to -- let's see, there was something else that they changed and gave it to me, because they didn't do it. I don't remember now, it's been too long. But that's the way they were, and I just -- I spoke up.

Patterson

Well, it's good that this was corrected, and you got the credit that you should have gotten. OK. So anything else about Blind Tom that you would like to tell us?

Cox

I think it's all right there about that. Tommy, Tommy.

Patterson

All right, well, what else do we have?

Cox

That one over there, I don't know what that is. Got a couple --

Patterson

NAACP Legal Defense Education. 1985, Black Women of Achievement luncheon; apparently you were honored in 1985 at the Century Plaza Hotel here. And it has an overview of your bio, and let's see -- so was this -- tell us about this. What were they honoring specifically? It says developed a --

Cox

Well, they honor several people, I think. It just is my name, Commissioner of Cultural Affairs for the City. And also executive producer of BEEM productions,

and music educator and musicologist, graduate of UCLA, and pursued graduate studies at Oberlin Conservatory of Music and USC.

Patterson

So they were honoring your accomplishments. Good. I think we got this, the National Black Music Caucus in '84, National Achievement Awards ceremony. And these things you were doing, how did your family react to you being so busy all these years? How did they feel about that?

Cox

Well, they -- you know how families are; they're proud, and every little thing they think is something special.

Patterson

Did they ever miss you when you were going to all these things?

Cox

No, because by that time, my children would be missing me, if anybody, because my parents had done everything for us, and I just love them, and I'm grateful, and I like to give them credit for anything I do, because they made it happen.

Patterson

So did they attend any of these affairs?

Cox

Oh, my mother just loved to come to my school when my orchestra played. She loved to watch them, and she'd be sitting out there ready to help. And she went with me to meet William Grant Still, and held the microphone while he talked. She loved to be part of everything; she's willing.

Patterson

Now this article talks about ethnic music specialist Bette Cox as being honored at a luncheon held in recognition for retirement as music advisor of the instructional plan division of the Los Angeles School District.

Cox



That was when I retired, they had a big luncheon for me at the L.A. Music Center, and that was one of the councilmen who was -- who commented, and Tom Bradley was there, and he commented, and who else? Everybody, all my friends of everybody that was there, it was really beautiful.

Patterson

That's another Certificate of Appreciation by Los Angeles Unified School District for volunteer and tutorial programs. So you weren't getting any extra pay; that's another issue for all those things you were doing, you were doing them because you loved them, and working so hard here without extra compensation, just for the joy of doing it.

Cox

Yeah, I guess so.

Patterson

The BEEM Foundation newsletter, for the BEEM Foundation, this is something that you do monthly or quarterly?

Cox

Maybe twice a year, but I don't have to do it; I'd already assign it to somebody, there's always somebody who wants to write it.

Patterson

OK. Let's see, what do we have over there? Anything over there to look at?

Cox

I don't know. Oh, be careful --

Patterson

Over here by you --

Cox

A what?

Patterson

There's a pile there; let's look at that.

Cox

Poor Adriana thinks it's never going to end.

Patterson

This is about it. I just want to make sure we don't miss anything. OK, this is from Time Warner -- oh, so Time Warner actually was one of your backers to help cover expenses for your scholarship lunch in '92. So that was another side of this whole thing is being able to get the moneys to produce these activities -

Cox

Getting something from the National Endowment is difficult. I mean, of course there are some people who are good at writing those proposals.

Patterson

Did you have somebody at BEEM who helped you do that?

Cox

Probably I had someone who probably did it together, or at least these college and university people who are teaching every day, they are teaching people to write proposals, and they themselves just know how to write them pretty well.

Patterson

Now, here's an acknowledgement from the office of the Governor of California. He says, "I'm pleased to salute you for sharing the musical talents and ideas of citizens throughout California over the years. You've certainly come a long way from your childhood in Twin Falls, Idaho, to become a leading music educator. I'm especially impressed by your work to support and nurture African-American artists as Commissioner for Cultural Affairs for Los Angeles, and as Executive Producer of BEEM. Your musical skills and creative flair are impressive, and they've earned you a special place in California's rich artistic history. Please accept my best wishes for every continued success with your important work. Sincerely, Pete Wilson. October 16, 1994.

Cox

Isn't that nice? And I don't remember meeting him, but I think I did somehow, somewhere. I don't know. He could have had a secretary write that.

Patterson

Well, he seems to know about your life, starting in Twin Falls.

Cox

I think I have one more something I want to (inaudible). I'm sorry.

Patterson

Pick up that battery pack, Bette, right inside the chair, pick that up and take it with you.

Cox

Oh, OK. I think I'm into -- Mercedes? Will you get that for me please? (phone ringing) Am I doing OK on this?

Patterson

Watch that cord. I think this is it, Bette.

Mercedes

From the young musician (inaudible) --

Cox

Who?

Patterson

Young Musicians Foundation?

Cox

Oh. Well, tell them I'm in the middle of something right now. Could you come -- ask them -- right there.

Patterson

You should just take it. Go ahead, if you want to take a call.

Cox

Hello? Yes? Oh, yes, how are you? Fine. (break in audio) (background dialogue, inaudible)

Cox

Well, I'm going to try, but I kind of doubt -- my husband isn't doing so well, and I'm -- all right. Mm-hmm. OK. Well, I will certainly try. All right, thank you. Bye. Oh, he's a talker. Talks more than I do.

Patterson

OK, I think we got it.

Cox

I wanted to -- I don't think I showed you this the other day. Oh -- let's see. Wait -- this, I -- let's see -- this is the family, and I just really want to see if there's anything we can put in. This is --

Patterson

Now, we saw this --

Cox

-- when I graduated and went to Oberlin.

Patterson

We got those.

Cox

OK. Then this is my son when he graduated from college, because you know how we feel when we want them to know that we --

Patterson

Now this is a little underexposed -- here, this one might be -- you want us --

Cox

It's OK. Whatever.

Adriana

For that, I do need to come over --

Patterson

What is that stuff, Bette?

Cox

I guess I just want to say what they did. After he graduated --

Patterson

This is Johnny (inaudible), a proud moment for Bette.

Cox

At Palo Alto, he was chosen to be the Multicultural Specialist, so I knew he had a job. And did I show you, though, when they each got to go on the ship around the world.

Patterson

I think you did, you talked about it --

Cox

That was when Carole was going.

Patterson

OK. So this is (inaudible).

Cox

And this is when she won the top student in the country, when she was doing all the different things she does, traveling all over the world.

Patterson

(inaudible). She's traveling on the cruise ship, (inaudible).

Cox

Here she is with --

Patterson

What was her subject in school? What did she major in?

Cox

Gosh. She made the Dean's list, I know. I can't think of --

Patterson

International affairs, anything to do with languages? She spoke several languages.

Cox

I think legal, law, and international affairs; that's about it.

Patterson

(inaudible), she's carrying an instrument here. Is this a guitar?

Cox

Guitar.

Patterson

So she plays guitar.

Cox

Well, she used to. Here she is with some of the people on the ship; she was tour guide.

Patterson

And where was this --

Cox

Rio de Janeiro.

Patterson

Rio de Janeiro. (inaudible) left. A little piece of Bette and herself, through her daughter.

Cox

We were so thankful, I was, to my parents, and I was so happy when they agreed to move here and sell their property in the home and buy a home here. And Daddy -- this is their 50th anniversary, and he's putting a -- oh, that's all right. And then we were with them afterwards. That's all.

Patterson

So what anniversary was this?

Cox

50. Silver anniversary.

Patterson

Silver anniversary of Bette's parents.

Patterson

(inaudible) was very pleased with that. He was really happy.

Cox

Yeah. They were lovebirds forever.

Patterson

They're both very handsome people. And this is Bette's (inaudible), Jimmy?

Cox

Here's Jimmy. I don't know if this is important, but I try to have a family section.

Patterson

Of course. Bette and Jimmy together. He's always supported you.

Cox

Yes, he has.

Patterson

And he was a lover of jazz, so.

Cox

He's a what?

Patterson

He's a lover of jazz.

Cox

Oh, yeah. Always.

Patterson

OK. Great.

Cox

That's -- I just wanted a little family something in the end.

Patterson

Of course, yes. And they're important too, because they always supported you. It's like, we don't do things by ourselves, sometimes it seems like in the background, there's always people that are important to us and support us.

Cox

Very wise. Very wise. Was there anything else?

Patterson

Unless there's something else you can think of, that will do it. If there's something you'd like to say while we have the camera --

Cox

I don't think so. Was there anything else on the table that you missed?

Patterson

I think we got the table. One thing I would like to ask you, what are you doing now? What's the next thing on the agenda?

Cox

My son asked me that. I really don't know.

Patterson

What's the next project? What are you working on now?

Cox

At our meeting last time, the new president thinks that we should all have a certain goal, but I want to say, if it's regarding music, but I didn't say anything,



I just let it go. But I'm going to let them know that there are some things that I don't know as well as I'd like to, like for example, Elizabeth Taylor Greenfield was the first black opera star, she was the first black diva. And we need to do a Blind Tom on her. And also in the 18th century, there was a man who was born as a slave, his mother was a slave, and his father was from England -- from France. And he took him to France and educated him, he learned to play violin and he learned to compose, and he was regarded as someone who was mistaken for Mozart, and his name was Chevalier to St. George, and hardly anybody knows about him. And there are a whole lot of people like that, that at our next meeting, we're going to be deciding what we're going to do from here, because we've done what we could do with Blind Tom, and with everything else that we have talked about. But that's something a lot of people just don't know about, those people and a lot of others.

Patterson

And a lot of others. There's a lot of educating to be done.

Cox

That's right. But I don't -- it is hard for me to sit still. (laughter)

Patterson

As we can see clearly. So I know that you would certainly be someone that we would want to carry forward with these projects, because you've done them so well, and you've taught us all how to do them.

Cox

I was younger though then. (laughter)

Patterson

Well, you're still doing it. I mean, we can't even get through all the stuff you're doing.

Cox

Well, you're so sweet. You're an inspiration. You have -- who else could have made me get up in the night and put all these up for days and nights before I could come to this meeting with us?

Patterson

Professor Dje Dje, who really thinks so highly of you --

Cox

Thank you so much.

Patterson

We need to make sure that we got this opportunity with you.

Cox

Well, it's an opportunity -- it's an honor for me, and I'm just thrilled and so glad to meet -- not only you, but Andrea --

Patterson

Adriana.

Cox

-- Adriana (laughter). I swore I wasn't going to slip today. Adriana, that's so pretty, I don't know why -- do other people slip on that? I guess they

Adriana

Yes. A lot of people have a problem --

Cox

So I wasn't the only one. (laughter) But I really am thrilled, and to get to know you so much, we -- this isn't the end of it --

Patterson

We've got a couple of things -- loose ends to tie up.

Cox

I think so.

Patterson

So I would (inaudible).

Cox

OK. I think I showed you everything that was important.

Patterson

Are you OK? Usually she works on a tripod, Bette, but she's been carrying around the camera by hand this time. So that --

Cox

I won't do any more. I want --[END OF recording]

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