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# An Interview with Audrey “June” Taylor Henry

An Oral History Conducted by Claytee D. White

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The Boyer Early Las Vegas Oral History Project

Oral History Research Center at UNLV  
University Libraries  
University of Nevada Las Vegas



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The transcript received minimal editing that includes the elimination of fragments, false starts, and repetitions in order to enhance the reader's understanding of the material. All measures have been taken to preserve the style and language of the narrator. In several cases photographic sources accompany the individual interviews.

The following interview is part of a series of interviews conducted under the auspices of the Boyer Early Las Vegas Oral History Project. Additional transcripts may be found under that series title.

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## PREFACE

Audrey “June” Taylor Henry first memories are of watching her parents dancing on stage. They were members of the Brownskin Models, a touring carnival show in the mid-1930s. It was a demanding, but lucrative, career for the couple. Audrey grew up with the care of nannies while her parents toured.

Audrey soon itched to be dancing on stage herself. During her school age days, she recalls, she eventually gained admission to the prestigious New York School of Performing Arts. Though her studies were interrupted by the challenges of long-distance parenting, Audrey did graduate from New York Performing Arts via correspondence.

In 1957 Audrey was twenty-two and an accomplished dancer. During this time, a series of serendipitous” moments would begin to propel her career. One such encounter brought her to Las Vegas for the first time as an end-dancer for the chorus line of the Cab Calloway show. By the 1960s, she was touring; internationally to a wide range of countries. Along the way she married, had two sons, choreographed for her father, now living in Canada and received some acting training.

After 30 years of dancing and with two school aged boys, she was seeking a different career. For a while she sold Negro history books over the phone. Meanwhile, she was hoping to get an on-air radio job. Though she did not want to pursue an acting career, it was an audition for a play in the late 1960s that ended up leading to a radio opportunity in news.

Audrey earned undergraduate and master’s degree in education and counseling, maintained a successful ten-year radio broadcast career. She has resided in Las Vegas since 1992 and is an active member of the community with a special interest in education. She is also the author of *The Sound of Applause*, a book that describes “how minorities used carnivals as a vehicle to find a better life.”







This is Claytee White and I'm with Audrey June Taylor Henry. And we are in Audrey's home in Las Vegas. Today is the 26th of February, 2010.

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(Claytee) SO HOW ARE YOU TODAY?

(Audrey) I'm well, thank you.

WONDERFUL. AUDREY, JUST START OFF BY TELLING ME ABOUT YOUR EARLY LIFE, WHERE YOU ARE FROM, WHAT IT WAS LIKE GROWING UP THERE AND WHAT YOUR PARENTS DID FOR A LIVING.

Okay. I was born on *The Brownskin Models Theater Road Show*. As I understand it, my parents were touring with Mr. Irvin C. Miller's variety show. Apparently, Mr. Miller's revues enjoyed popularity in the South during those days. Later it is noted he came to New York and tried his hand at Broadway producing. Anyway, my debut into this world occurred on the theater tour while the revue was appearing in Tennessee; with Dad as the master of ceremonies. Finally, mother a chorus dancer could end her maternity leave. I arrived after the late show. Mother said she'd hoped to give birth in Canada; because that was the next stop on the tour. To her dismay, she couldn't hold out that long. So be it, from the segregated South, Miller's revue traveled to Canada continuing the tour with me along.

WHY WAS SHE HOPING YOU WOULD BE BORN IN CANADA?

Mother never talked about it. But I think, she thought being born in Canada was better than being born in the segregated South. Some twenty-two years later fate arranged that my oldest son be born in Canada. Interestingly, he became the first African-American child born in the small town of Chicoutimi, Quebec; a French Canadian Province. Residents of the hamlet only spoke French. We were instant celebrities! Our photograph appeared on the front page of the local newspaper. Doctors, nurses, and staff watched closely as my baby's skin color changed. They had never seen a black baby. Therefore, their gleeful reaction to my son's natural pigmentation, which occurred daily, visibly pleased them. We found the hospital staff's reaction charming; enjoying them as much as they enjoyed us. His birth occurred several years before the Black Consciousness Movement in the States. Nevertheless we were not placed in a segregated hospital ward. Surely in America we would have been.



OKAY AUDREY SO GETTING BACK TO YOUR YOUNG LIFE.

Okay back to my early life it is. Well, I traveled with my parents. My first memory is being off-stage in the “wings” watching my parents perform an apache dance. Dad did a lot of dance lifts with my mother often culminating with him pushing her to the floor. She would scream faking an injury. As a result, I didn’t particularly like watching their apache dance, because I thought he was hurting her. I remember crying and hitting my father each time they came off stage.

SO YOU WOULD TAKE UP FOR YOUR MOTHER?

Exactly, my next memory is the photo I showed you of my father holding the microphone for me to sing. The lyrics in the song were, “You must remember this, a kiss is just a kiss, a sigh is just a sigh, the fundamental things apply, as time goes by.” I recall one particular white man came daily to the segregated theater. I don’t really remember the city. Apparently, he came just to hear me sing that song. As I sang, he would double-over in laughter. I must have been four or five years old. Well, I was mortified! Crying I would ask, “Why is he laughing?” My mother would respond, “He’s laughing because you’re so cute.” However, dad said, “Why don’t you let her sing a little girl song? Because that’s why he’s laughing.” Mother was adamant, “NO! This is what she wants to sing!” So that’s what I sang, copying the stylistic mannerisms of adult female singers, with arms and facial expressions. No wonder that man would break-up. Probably it was obvious I was a child and not a midget. Still I was indignant! His reaction was an affront to my performance.

WERE YOU STUDYING KINDERGARTEN LESSONS?

My parents hired a Board Certified tutor when it was time for me to go to school the first year. By that time we were on the carnival show. A 1935 law required that showbiz kids had to have a qualified tutor or attend school. That’s the reason Professional Children Schools developed; to accommodate the education requirements of working youngsters.

NOW, TELL ME ABOUT THE CARNIVAL

Okay. Probably the best description of the carnival is what my youngest son quipped, “It’s like waking up in Disneyland every day.” Certainly, it wasn’t as lavish; still there were all the rides,



games, and carnie kids running down the midway jumping on the ponies. We had the fun house, cotton candy, candy apples, fireworks, dancin' waters and best of all we could ride all the rides free. The carnival was a fun place to be as a child. The Disney Worlds and theme parks came after the carnival sawdust midways. Accordingly, my son made the comparison as a young adult after seeing Disneyland. My children also grew-up around carnivals prior to pre-school. And, they continued visiting the midway until my parents retired in the late 1960s.

#### HOW DID YOUR PARENTS GET INVOLVED IN THE CARNIVAL?

Possibly had something to do with Mr. Miller? That's the man my parents worked for when I was born. Miller's *Brownskin Models* worked carnivals and theaters. Also Dad met African-American showman Leon Claxton. And Claxton had worked for the circus; before he became known as the African-American King of the carnival midway. I don't recall ever meeting Mr. Claxton, but I heard about him as a child and young adult. I did meet the other African-American showman Jerry Jackson, and his son and daughter; we were children. There were other African-American Showmen, but none as well-known as Claxton, Jackson, and Taylor. That's all I know. Dad never told me, but he loved the carnival. My father always spoke of Mr. Miller with respect and may have used him as a mentor. My father is from Bermuda; he only came to the United States as an adult. In a like manner, his family emigrated from Turks Island to Bermuda. Actually, Dad was sent to the States with instructions to become a physician. His uncle found him a job in a hospital as an orderly or other non-professional staff. Dad often told me that he just didn't like being in a hospital around sick people.

#### APPARENTLY YOUR FATHER REALLY ENJOYED ENTERTAINMENT.

Absolutely. He loved entertainment! On the other hand, his negative feeling about the hospital proved opposite to the exhilarating pleasure he experienced attending Radio City Music Hall or the Roxy Theater. He enjoyed show business. Similarly my mother appreciated Radio City, the Rockettes, and Broadway. Before marriage to my father, she had been a Regalette at the Regal Theater in Chicago; a chorus of African American dancers. The Regal Choreographer patterned the chorus after the Cotton Club dancers.

#### WAS YOUR DAD ON STAGE BEFORE THE CARNIVAL?



Yes, he sang with a group and solo. He often worked as a straight man for comics and even danced ballroom with his first wife and later with my mother. At another time, dad auditioned for—oh, my goodness, can't remember the name, but it was one of the old Broadway shows. He got the part. I don't know if Mr. Miller was involved in the production. Dad, however, didn't stay until the show opened. He explained that in the old days there were not unions to protect the performing artists. As a result, they didn't get paid for rehearsals. His uncle evicted him when he wouldn't become a physician. Therefore, he had to find paid employment. The professional unions are really good. Twice I was elected as an artist representative at Screen Actors Guild. Being a performing artist must have been awful without unions.

THAT WAS REALLY MEAN! HOW DID HE MANAGE?

Presumably, he survived with connections like Mr. Miller and other people he'd met. Even so, Dad was temporarily homeless. One night he slept in a basement which turned out to be his cousin's home. Dad's story is fascinating. My father believed the carnival would provide a good income. Fortunately he was correct. Back in those days carnivals were big business and garnered very fast money. Showing in towns still referred to as a "Still Date" the people would arrive late in the day. Nevertheless, the revues could perform 5 or 6 shows that evening. The state fair dates were

INCREDIBLE!!

It was nothing to make \$20,000 or more in one day.

WHAT DO YOU MEAN FAIR DATES?

The state fairs include attendance from people throughout the state. Yep, everyone comes to the city where the fair is held. Proudly they bring homemade pies, cakes, food stuff, and handiworks. Sometime they bring cows or pigs to enter in a contest, but that is only part of the state fair. In the past, the fair included a carnival midway where attendees flocked in droves anticipating fun and shows. The sawdust covered midway had rides, games, food joints, a side-show, an African American variety show, and a Caucasian burlesque revue for adults only. The Fair highlight, a Grandstand Revue featured a big celebrity. At a certain time nightly there was a special midway attraction like, *Dancin' Waters*, *Man Blown out of a Cannon*, or *Trapeze Artists*. In Canada these



fairs are called expositions. These state fairs still exist in the States and Canada. The midways have changed, but are still representative of the past state fairs. Several movies have been made about state fairs. One film was titled *State Fair* back in the 1940s or 50s.

HOW COULD THEY EARN SO MUCH MONEY?

Well, I was speaking about the African American Revue. Other venues were separate. I've no idea what the front office grossed; or the rides and other exhibits. However, the revue would start performing shows as early as eight o'clock in the morning and continue performances until midnight. Of course, the midway had to close at a certain time. Anyway, around 9, 10, and 11pm the midway would begin to thin. That means the people would start going home. My guess is the front office enjoyed a substantial financial gross.

AND PEOPLE WERE PAYING?

To be sure people were paying like 'hmm two dollars for matinees and five dollars for evening shows per ticket. Of course, that money wasn't entirely for the shows or rides. There was a split with the front office that owned the carnival. You know a percentage arrangement. Back in those days that was very good money. It's not bad in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

YES, MANY WORKERS WOULD LOVE TO MAKE THAT KIND OF MONEY NOWADAYS.

Moving forward a bit, I'm recalling when they put me in school at St. Aloysius Catholic Elementary in New York. Some of the children's families were on social services. My mother bought me a white fur coat, white fur hat, white fur muff, white boots trimmed in fur. I looked like a little fudge-popsicle. That was my Sunday church outfit. Well the first day I wore it—oh, my goodness.

YOU WORE IT TO SCHOOL AS WELL?

Oh no, only to church or on special occasions. After the first time I wore my furs the students chased me home often calling me "Audrey the rich B." At first I didn't really understand the problem. A very savvy lady, my mother told me to invite them on the carnival during summer vacation. So I did. I invited a few classmates out on the carnival for a week or two. Following



those vacations I was in like Flynn. My schoolmates loved the carnival because it was fun. You know they could ride all the rides and enjoy all the kid stuff on the midway free. Their attitude toward me did a complete turnaround.

SO WHEN YOU WENT TO SCHOOL IN NEW YORK, HOW DID YOU ARRANGE IT SO THAT YOUR PARENTS COULD STILL PARTICIPATE IN THE CARNIVAL?

Well, my parents arranged it. First, they employed a Board Certified tutor; when I was singing and dancing. I had a job! But Dad wanted me to attend a regular school with other children. I loved the show; I thought all the performers were my relatives. We were one big happy family as far as I knew; having never met my real relatives. I thought Marybelle the lead chorus dancer was my aunt. I called her Auntie Belle. She was from New Orleans and taught me all the chorus routines. She's deceased now of a brain tumor. Her last years were lived in Atlantic City, New Jersey.

AUNTIE BELLE WAS A DANCER IN THE REVUE'S CHORUS?

Yes she was the soubrette. Often I smile recalling Auntie Belle saying, "Baby June, when we go get our paychecks, you stand in line with your suitcase packed, and tell your father he's got to pay you or you're going to quit and join Silas Green!" I followed her instruction and would stand in line with my suitcase waiting for my paycheck. Often it was a "draw" against my paycheck. Nightly allocations depended on how business was that day and evening. A partial salary draw was often received by everyone until the state fairs; when I.O.U.'s were satisfied. Those cash draws can be compared to profit sharing.

SOUNDS LIKE YOU ENJOYED THE SHOWBIZ ENVIRONMENT.

Oh, I loved it! About my formal education, I think my tutor had wanted to travel a bit, but she really didn't want the carnival life. She didn't want to travel every week or two or live on a train. She was an educated woman. My mother hired her up north somewhere; she probably found travel interesting. A trooper she stuck it out remaining as my tutor for about one school year. She said I was spoiled. Certainly she was right. All the show people, dancers, and carnies spoiled me. I'd never had a spanking. My tutor said, "If you don't start getting your lessons, you're going to get one." True to her word, she gave me my first spanking. I don't remember her name. The tutor



began my formal education. God bless her. The nuns were pretty handy with their rulers and leather straps too. We'd get a few hits on our hands or legs if we misbehaved.

YES, I'VE HEARD ABOUT THE NUNS.

When my parents put me in school, a series of nannies stayed with me. They used to be called guardians. Oftentimes it was one of the female dancers from the show that took care of me. Many of the girls who joined the show were not necessarily performers. Similar to Mary Ann they became entertainers in the stage-show trying to get out of the south; so they joined the carnival. My mother taught them the routines because she was a dancer. Mother studied in Chicago and had worked as a professional dancer. In any event, all chorus dances are made-up anyway; because all dances are made-up. Occasionally one of the dancers got pregnant. Maybe she married somebody on the show which often happened; or maybe not. Whichever, she would stay in New York as my guardian during her pregnancy and her husband or boyfriend would continue working on the show. She'd rejoin him following the baby's birth. When that happened my parents would get a new nanny for me.

INTERESTING TELL ME MORE ABOUT THEM.

My two longest guardians were Mrs. Vesta and Mrs. Corrine respectively. Mrs. Vesta was the wife of Uncle Reno the comic on the carnival and theater tours. When on the show, she took care of costumes; making many of them. Later, I had Mrs. Corrine who just wasn't a very good dancer, but joined the carnival show to get out of the south. After her, I had Brownie, a female impersonator. He took care of me for quite a while after my parents bought their home in Long Island. Brownie was a female impersonator. Although when he took care of me he wasn't in female clothes or anything. On stage he performed as a female impersonator. I called him Uncle Brownie and he loved me. It was mutual. Uncle Brownie thought of me as his little girl. I had a series of nannies. And periodically my parents would come home for a brief period. My maternal grandmother took care of me in New York briefly but she liked Chicago. Notwithstanding, she was also an episodic alcoholic. That's probably the main reason my mother never drank; neither did I following mother's example. I also never used drugs.

PEOPLE TEND TO THINK EVERYBODY IN ENTERTAINMENT DRINK OR USE ILLEGAL SUBSTANCES.



That notion is far from true. Even back then, the famous people who did those things to extreme were always in the news. Often left alone, I credit my peer group of focused performing arts students for not getting into drugs. In terms of my growing-up in New York at first it wasn't too bad. Actually it was pretty good! Holidays I would receive huge boxes which contained a present from everybody on the show. Eventually, I began to miss the show, and my parents not being around a lot. My mother hadn't wanted to send me away from the show at all. She's the one who got the tutor through the Board of Education somewhere. My African American tutor probably had had a tough time finding regular employment in her home-town school district during segregation. Probably my tutors' departure fit with dad's plan of wanting me to be a normal child. Well, he at least won the argument to send me to a regular school. It took me quite awhile to adjust. Until St. Aloysius my upbringing had been non-traditional.

TELL ME ABOUT THAT PERIOD OF YOUR LIFE.

Well- On the first Halloween that I was allowed to go trick-and-treating alone in New York, there was an ugly episode. At the time, Mrs. Vesta was taking care of me. She liked me a lot. She and Uncle Reno only had one adult son; named Herman. He fought in World War 11. On that Halloween, I was attacked as my friends and I ran, played, and rang bells to get candy. We were fourth graders at St Aloysius, and were soliciting our candy in the block where we attended school. The Rectory was in the block but not the convent.

WAS THERE AN ADULT WITH YOU OR JUST YOU CHILDREN?

It was just us kids. Things were different back then. At least we didn't hear about all the bad news. Fortunately I wasn't raped or molested. Anyhow, I learned a valuable life lesson, other than caution, being polite has its rewards. Prior to that episode, everyday on my way to school the same young boy stood on the stoop of his apartment building smoking a cigarette. At our school, we wore blue uniforms so people knew we went to Catholic school. Anyway, daily that boy would speak to me. In response I always looked at him, nodded, smiled briefly, and said hello. Still I kept walking, didn't stop, but never ignored his greeting. On that Halloween a group of boys grabbed me, and pulled me down the steps into the outside cellar of a basement apartment. Meanwhile, the boy I always answered with "hello" to his greeting came sauntering down the stairs. Probably he was the gang leader. Seeing the gang had captured me, he ordered,



“Let her go. She’s a nice girl!” They let me go immediately! I ran like a track star all the way home.

OH, YOU WERE LUCKY!

You bet! I arrived home to Mrs. Vesta crying terrified and begged her not to tell my parents. Somehow I thought being grabbed was my fault. Of course, she told my mother and father immediately. I will always remember that boy because he literally saved my life. Following that failed attack my parents bought a house in Long Island. They moved out Harlem. Sadly Mrs. Vesta opened a restaurant in a Harlem bar and no longer worked as my nanny. I only saw her a couple of times after we moved to Long Island. She had taken good care of me. And, I liked her too.

RAPE OR ATTEMPTED RAPE AND MOLESTATION ARE HORRIBLE CRIMES.

In response to that statement I quote a New York taxi driver, “From your lips to God’s Ears.” Meanwhile, it broke my heart to leave the nuns; I cried so hard my mother cried too. For me it was another family lost. Our new home was diagonally across the street from a public school. Still mother convinced dad to hire a driver that would chauffeur me to school every day in Harlem. As a result, I was able to complete 5th grade at St. Aloysius. No luck the following school year, dad put his foot down, and made me attend public school for 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, and 8<sup>th</sup> grades. Clearly changing schools made sense. Although P.S. 140 was different from St. Aloysius. We had more science than religion. Another adjustment.

AND DURING THOSE TIMES WHEN YOU WERE LIVING IN LONG ISLAND WHAT WERE THEY DOING FOR A LIVING?

Same thing show- business. See, they had a winter show and a summer show. They played the Apollo when I attended St. Aloysius. That’s the famous African America Theater on West 125<sup>th</sup> street in Harlem. My classmates and their parents saw their show.

SO YOU CONTINUED TO STAY WITH OTHER PEOPLE WHILE THEY TRAVELED

Yeah. Other people were hired to take care of me while they traveled and worked.

I SEE.



Other people were hired to come take care of me. So that's how it was. Although, my parents would come home sometime. One year they stayed home several months; it was nice having them at home. Always we were together during the summer and holidays. If they didn't come home for the holidays, during my adolescent years, I would travel to be with them for the holidays. After Christmas, they would send me back to Long island.

IN SOME WAYS IT SOUNDS LIKE YOU RAISED YOURSELF.

Although true, I didn't think of it in those terms; but you are probably right. At one point, one of the women who came on the show was a single mother, with a daughter named Harlene. Both mother and daughter are deceased. But when Dorothy, Harlene's mom joined the show, Harlene lived with me. It was great having her there for company. Basically, I was an only child; raised by myself. My mother had two daughters by her first marriage, but they grew-up in Chicago reared by their father and paternal grandparents. We didn't meet until I was five years old. Frequently a lonely child, I loved the role of being a big sister. For me it was fun, but probably got on Harlene's nerves with me bossing her around. Bless her heart; Harlene lived with me in Long Island a couple of years. In the house, it was just the two of us. And when school let out for the summer we'd join our parents on the show. We'd dance on the show during the summer. Harlene became quite a good dancer too. Percy, her husband, gave me a first person account for my book in which he mentions meeting his beautiful wife on the show. Subsequently, Harlene and Percy bought a home and raised their five children in Long Island. Harlene's husband and my first husband (my children's father) were in the same singing group.

WERE YOU AFRAID BEING ALONE?

Not so much. More lonely than anything. After graduating from 8<sup>th</sup> grade I attended The New York High School of Performing Arts. It was the prototype of such high schools in the United States. It was also the school that the television show *Fame* was based on. Students were only able to audition if they had a B+ average. Dr. Patricia Rowe was the director of the dance department. Many years later, I bumped into Dr. Rowe at New York University. NYU is where I got my masters in Educational Theatre with a specialization in Counseling. During the same year, I also saw Dr. Dycke who had directed the P.A. drama department. Only I bumped into her when I volunteered at The Associated Artists of America which was located at Actor's Equity.



Mr. Frederick O'Neal was the Director of the Three A's and AFL-CIO technical artists' division. The AFL-CIO gave me a small scholarship toward my masters. In schools I made life-long friends, at Performing Arts, St. Aloysius, and Long Island. Fortunately since my parents were away so much my friends—were good focused kids. Granted I was lucky too. Life was different back in those days, but I shouldn't have been left by myself so much. Fate intervened; finally my parents were forced to take me with them. A child should not be left alone. Its lucky child services didn't put me in foster care. Apparently the neighbors never reported the situation.

#### SO WHAT WAS THE REALITY OF THAT SCHOOL COMPARED TO WHAT WE SAW ON TELEVISION?

Nothing was reality with exception to great training in the performing arts and academics. There were dance, drama, and music departments. All the students were super talented and bright. A student required a B+ average to audition. We studied all different genres of dance; and across disciplines. Arthur Mitchell and I were selected to attend The School of American Ballet, founded by Balanchine. I went but didn't stay, because I was forced to leave home. Arthur remained with Balanchine and the rest is a wonderful deserved history.

#### OH, WHY DID YOU LEAVE?

Sadly a dichotomy existed between my parents on who I should become. While that's not the reason I left; their differences probably influenced my later choices. Ideally Mother had one vision and my father another. For example, Dad had experienced the South; he couldn't imagine why Mother wanted me to learn things like French, ballet, or opera. He didn't think success possible in those genres for a black girl. He was wrong. Consequently, he felt I would garner more success in the variety field; or as a rock or blues singer. In terms of financial reward, he was probably correct. In any event, I couldn't sing rock, pop, or blues. In elementary school, Dad made me promise not to sing once when mother took me for a Broadway audition. True to my promise, I didn't sing. Mother was hurt and furious! After that experience, singing in front of an audience became very difficult for me. Alas as I grew-up singing was impossible if I had to stand in front of a microphone. Mervyn often made me talk to music in performance. That wasn't a problem. Still I've often wondered if the man who laughed at me (when I was a child) remained in my psyche. Perhaps the difference of opinion between my parents silenced me? Who knows? I was absolutely microphone shy in terms of singing. Okay, I didn't answer the question.





Charles Taylor's







THAT'S INTERESTING SINCE YOU PERFORMED SO EARLY.

Well, I could and can talk;-sing if I don't see a microphone. After a time, while performing in Europe I began to sing a bit. Always softly, sort of like jazz or blues ballads. The Scared Hearts of Mary, an order of all black nuns at my first school, encouraged mother to put me in the choir. She tried but I wouldn't sing. As an aside Claytee, those nuns remain the only complete Catholic order of their racial persuasion that I have ever seen. Interestingly, I sang for my opera instructor and popular singing coach. Dad only came once, even though he'd seemed excited by my vocal range. Nonetheless my opera lessons stopped.

WHAT ABOUT THE PRIESTS?

The priests were Caucasian. One of the black nuns was from France. This followed World War 11. I studied French with her at the convent. Sadly I lost the language over the years, but having studied it made Italian easier to grasp when I lived in Italy. However, I'm not fluent in Italian either only conversational. Because all ballet terms are in French, those lessons were comfortable for me. Mother had a very good sense of the arts. The early French lessons made it easy for me to pass that class in high school. My mother signed me up for piano at the convent and opera lessons with Maestro Bruno. My father was surprised to learn I was a lyric soprano—but he still didn't get it. I played saxophone in the school marching band and hated every minute of it. Dad made me stick with the saxophone for a few years. Conversely, I rather enjoyed lessons in popular voice, but those lessons ended. This interview brings back a lot of memories.

OKAY-TELL ME WHY YOU HAD TO LEAVE HOME. I'M SENSING AVOIDANCE.

You are absolutely correct. Okay back to the point, at a certain period when I was in high school Uncle Brownie left—I don't know the reason. It may have stemmed from neighbor complaints because of his sexual orientation. Often following his departure I was left alone. By this time, I'm a teenager. It's a hard time; even if your parents are present. Fortunately, my good friends at school and in the area were there for me. And I also had a dream for my future. My paternal senior aunt lived several blocks away. She came from Bermuda to live with her daughter. Aunt Lizzie checked on me periodically. Still even though I didn't want to leave Performing Arts I asked to attend boarding school. Harlene was gone and I was always alone again. My teachers didn't know about my home situation.



DID YOU GO?

No. I hated the thought of leaving P.A. and The School of American Ballet which I also loved. My dream was to attend Juilliard upon graduation. Mother said she would ask my father about the boarding school. Later she asked if I wanted to live at the convent. I said no. Dad finally told me he had solicited his aunt from Bermuda who lived in the area to look-in on me. Her daughter Estelle played piano, and had won a scholarship to some famous music school. Therefore, she would work with me in voice, dad said. That never happened-the voice part, but Aunt Lizzie did look-in on me from time to time. She baked great cookies. It wasn't my choice, but I never went back to Maestro Bruno either. I continued ballet and performing arts. No further mention was made of boarding school. My parents went on tour after instructing me to be good and go to school.

AND YOU ASKED TO GO TO A BOARDING SCHOOL.

Yes, but they didn't let me go for their reasons which pertained to my two half-sisters. They had an on-going argument about them coming to live with us in New York. Continuing about my reason for leaving to be with my parents, at a certain time something frightening happened. It occurred during a period of being home alone for several months with only Aunt Lizzie making her run-throughs.

OH, I SEE.

That photograph you're looking at of me upside down was my audition piece for acceptance into Performing Arts. That particular number was taught to me at age 10 or 11. My teacher for lyrical gymnastics was a German gymnast whom I studied with when I was in elementary school. Mrs. Ford said she had waited years to find a little girl to teach that specific number. What a gift it was! My first performance of that solo piece was at an annual recital at Carnegie Hall. As a teen, I performed it on television's *Super Circus*, as an adult in two Cab Calloway Shows, and finally in Mervyn Nelson's *Jazz Train*. It was a very different number. I often received standing ovations.

THAT EXPERIENCE MUST HAVE BEEN NICE.



Memorable. The frightening incident I mentioned made it impossible for me to remain at home by myself; without an adult living in the home. As a result, I became very afraid. I had to leave home. My parent's carnival revue was appearing somewhere close in Pennsylvania or New Jersey. A group of my friends took me there. They were Diana my best friend, Leon who married Ethel my other best friend, and Curley who I thought of as my brother. At that time, Curley and Diana were dating.

TOOK YOU WHERE YOUR PARENTS WERE?

My friends took me to my parents explaining it was dangerous for me to be home alone. What happened was a boy came to the house looking for my half-sister. She had started coming for the summers. Let me brief you on the situation; the young man was a medical student she'd met during the prior summer. At that time, she was attending summer school in New York in preparation for her high school graduation; in an effort to graduate on time. Anyway, the young man came to visit her. In fact, she hadn't as yet come to live with us permanently. After that, she came to live with us following her high school graduation; which came later. She was five years older than me. She's now deceased.

SO SHE WAS THEN WITH YOUR PARENTS?

Actually, no she wasn't with them as I recalled. [On editing the text of this interview, and reviewing the timeline, she was still living in Chicago.] She had started coming for summers and became very friendly with my paternal female cousin who had recently come to the states from Bermuda to study nursing. My half-sister and cousin were the same age and oddly had the same birth month, with birthdays a day apart. My half-sister was one year behind in school, and needed to make-up classes. She graduated the following year from a three year high school in Chicago. Before graduating she spent one summer in New York with my paternal cousins and their mother. Cousin Cynthia, Cousin Robert and their mom lived in our home during that summer. My half-sister while attending summer school lived with them. Whereas that summer when she met this young man I wasn't there. Diana and I were on the summer carnival show perfecting our performance technique. And we were earning money so we could buy our school clothes and essentials for the fall school semester. Diana and I had worked on the carnival several summers for the same reason. Encouraged by my father, my cousins and their mother had



come from Bermuda so I wouldn't be alone. Unfortunately, that arrangement didn't set well with my mother. Therefore the original plan didn't work out. And, that's another story entirely. At the same time, mother had had a plan for me to live with her cousin, a school teacher who lived in Long Island. That plan didn't set well with my father. As their discourse continued my situation remained in limbo.

OH, THAT'S WHAT YOU MEANT ABOUT THE SUMMER JOBS?

Yes. Anyway, this young man came to the door with his friend. At a knock, I answered the door. Something I wouldn't do now. He asked, "Is your sister home." I replied, "No she isn't. They're on the road." All my close friends knew the situation. I didn't bother explaining my half-sister didn't live with me or that she was my half-sister. So, anyway, I was about to close the door, but he put his hand on it and he asked, "Would you mind if we come in for a glass of water or something. We drove a long way." I said sure and opened the door allowing them to come inside. He asked if I had anything to drink. "Yes some soda or water" I responded. He laughed and started looking around and said, "You're by yourself?" I replied, "I told you they are on the road." A short version of a long story, he tried to attack me. The bigger guy, his friend, grabbed him in a neck lock and pulled him outside.

OH MY, THAT'S TERRIBLE! NO WONDER YOU BECAME AFRAID. SO THEN WHAT?

The bigger guy yelled at me, "Close your door! Lock all your windows and do not open it for anyone you don't know!" God Bless that guy. I don't even know his name. Meanwhile, as the big guy was literally dragging the would be rapist outside, the attacker was trying to pull away while yelling; "I'll be back. You hear, I'll be back." I was hysterical. When they came to the door I was practicing my dance selection for mid-term exams. At Performing Arts we had academic tests as well as performance mid-terms in our primary performing arts disciplines.

WHAT DID YOU DO?

Hysterical I called my friend Diana who called Curley who then called Leon. Diana told me to call my aunt. I obeyed. My friends came to my house and said, "We've got to get you out of here. You can't stay here by yourself anymore." My aunt came and took me over to her



daughter's house where she lived. The next day my friends came with a car and took me to my parents.

OH, AUDREY HOW AWFUL!

I finished high school. But this episode occurred during my junior not senior year; as Kenneth told you. I wasn't sent to boarding school, but was forced to leave Performing Arts and Balanchine's school anyway. I finished at Performing Arts through Professional Children's School. This is the school where professional children go and complete their work by correspondence. I missed my last year and a half at performing arts, but that's where Professional Children's School sent my work for validation. I also actually attended the local high school in towns where the show appeared until I completed all requirements. And like my dear husband told you, "That incident changed the course of my life." Even so, Claytee, you know there are no mistakes only life lessons. Nonetheless, I was a child, a teenager, caught in the middle of my parent's squabble. Would you believe years later, I'd repressed what happened, the same man came back and finally raped me. Let's change the subject please.

THAT'S AN INCREDIBLE STORY! OKAY MOVE ON IF YOU WANT.

The woman I acknowledge in my book, Dr. Rowe directed the dance department at Performing Arts; she sent me to Balanchine. I met this dear lady again while attending New York University for my masters. Interesting, I didn't recognize her at first, but she remembered me right away. Real teachers always know their students. Dr. Rowe said, "You know Audrey had you stayed at the ballet school, you may have been cast as a little clown during that period. And, just maybe that wasn't for you. Arthur being male was able to partner one of the regular dancers." She stopped and thoughtfully continued, "Maybe you were to do something else. Perhaps you were to have the exposure. You understand the difference." What she meant was: I know the difference between the arts and entertainment.

OKAY-SO GO AHEAD IN CHRONOLOGICAL ORDER. SO YOU FINISHED...

I'll try to stay on course. Yes, I finished high school.

SORT OF BY CORRESPONDENCE?



Yes, that's correct. Correspondence through the Professional Children's School and Performing Arts, because I was actually a student at the Performing Arts High School. P.A. would send my lessons to P.C.S.; I was working on the show again. P.A. sent work for several weeks at a time. I would complete the lessons. Often as we traveled I attended the local high school and participated in regular classes, but still completed my homework for Professional Children's School and mother sent it back to New York. So I officially completed high school. My mother really stayed on top of that situation. Regrettably, I was not in New York and did not attend the graduation ceremony. After completion I continued touring with my parents. That kind of education happened to a lot of professional kids. Travel is also educational though. By that time I'd seen every State, a few Islands, and much of Canada.

SO WHAT WERE YOU DOING IN THE SHOW AT THAT POINT?

Dancing, dance was my passion. I also helped mother train the chorus dancers and choreographed some numbers. Dance was my life; loved it, breathed, ate, and adored dancing. Never thought ahead about doing anything else. Eventually I decided to change careers. Many people could not believe it was true. For example while working with my parent's revue I fractured my foot. The show was appearing at a little nightclub in Miami. Somehow I tripped leaving the stage; that's how it happened. They took me to the doctor because my foot really hurt. After examination and x-rays the physician told me the foot had to be put in a cast. Well, Claytee, I thought the world was ending. I said, "A cast? If you put my foot in a cast I won't be able to dance!" the doctor replied, "That's exactly the point young lady."

HOW LONG WAS YOUR FOOT IN THE CAST?

About six weeks.

TELL ME WHAT CAME NEXT?

I mentioned earlier in our interview that Harlene and I married fellows who sang in the same group. They were the featured act on my parents show. I fell in love with the handsome baritone in the group. All the girls (groupies) liked him, but he liked me. Too late I learned he also liked a few of the groupies. Much to my parents' dismay next thing you know we got married. Soon thereafter we had two children fourteen months apart. Our marriage didn't last which didn't faze



my parents one bit. I had two sons. Whereas I am my father's only child, he was the eldest of six boys. So after my boys were born the focus went to them. My parents helped me raise my children. Actually, they lived with my parents most of the time. Although I supported my sons financially they were their primary care givers. Eventually following my career change I had the boys during the summers. Holidays we always tried to be together. There were a few times my sons were only with me. However when I toured, my sons stayed with my parents always except once when they remained in Canada with my half-sister; because they were in school. They were never left alone. The following school year I kept her daughter in Miami. Where I'd had my sons in school the prior year.

WONDERFUL! YOU WERE LUCKY TO HAVE PARENTS THAT COULD HELP.

Yes, very much so. Moving along in chronological order, in 1957 we were performing in Miami at the same show club where I fractured my foot a year or so earlier; on "The Colored" side of town. That's what we were called back then. "Colored" or "Negro." Remember? At the same time, *The Cotton Club Revue* featuring Cab Calloway was appearing on Miami Beach; which remained segregated. The production was the first major revival of that revue since the 1930s with Lena Horne and Josephine Baker, et al.

OH YOU WERE IN THAT SHOW?

Not then but later. Walking down Second Avenue in Miami, I bumped into Charles. Young from high school in New York. Surprised to see me he asked, "June, what are you doing here?" My birth name is Audrey June Taylor and in those days everybody usually called me June. He left school to join The Norma Miller Dancers currently appearing with Cab Calloway's 1957 revue. One day Charles Young while still in school, during lunch break, he came over to me and said, "I'm leaving school. I know what I want to do. So I'm going on to do that." And then Charles said, "If you ever need a job join us." During lunch break at Performing Arts the school D.J. would play records and most of us would dance socially. Often I danced with Charles or Arthur. Anyway in 1957, I bumped into Chazz in Miami, (He renamed himself), and he said, "If I had known you were here I would have told them. They're looking for female chorus dance replacements"

HE WOULD HAVE TOLD WHO?



He would have told Mervyn Nelson and Clarence Robinson about me. They were looking for female chorus dancers because the show had been held over. Incredibly serendipity has happened to me throughout my life. Apparently, some of the dancers only signed on for a certain number of weeks and had to return home for various reasons unknown to me. Dee Dee was one of the dancers planning to leave. The reason was unknown to me. I didn't know her. Dee Dee left shortly after I came on board, therefore, I never really got to know her.

YES, THAT'S LIFE. THINGS HAPPEN WHEN WE LEAST EXPECT CHANGES.

Yes, I told a friend a couple of weeks ago I've enjoyed several serendipitous occasions during my years. My buddy remarked, "June that's God."

THAT'S RIGHT.

Wait until I tell you about how I got into radio. That happened the same way. Let's finish this section first. I keep jumping around.

OKAY, CONTINUE WITH THE COTTON CLUB.

Well, the director of "The Cotton Club" was Mervyn Nelson. Indeed as Chazz stated they were looking for dancers as replacements. My babies were young. My concern was should I try out or not. Other than Chazz, there were other dancers from New York Performing Arts H.S. and they all knew me. Specifically, the choreographer wanted trained dancers. A few of the girls from my parent's show auditioned but didn't make the cut. I did. My ballet lessons began in elementary school. And Auntie Belle taught me chorus dance steps from age two. The choreographer Joel Nobel, now deceased, really liked me. Clarence Robinson was considered the senior choreographer. Although, Mr. Robinson no longer danced or choreographed he had been part of the 1930's Cotton Club in Harlem. For that reason, Robinson assisted Joel in keeping the choreography true to the original routines. With that accomplished, Mervyn as director pulled everything together. I was hired at the end of their Miami tour. One week after being in the revue we left for Las Vegas. My life was changing.

SO YOU JOINED THEIR TOUR AND YOUR KIDS STAYED WITH YOUR PARENTS AT THAT TIME?



Yes. My sons were with my parents whenever I was on tour with a major revue. Later working with Stoney as a dance team my youngest boy often traveled with us. Always that was difficult leaving one or both boys, but I had to support us. Consequently, I was a trained professional dancer/actress; with no office skills or other vocational aptitudes during that period. And I had excellent training: ballet, tap, lyrical gymnastics, modern and jive. Ballet from second grade through Performing Arts and American School of Ballet.

WOW! THAT'S GREAT YOU HAD SOMEONE TO DEPEND ON LIKE THAT.

Yes. That was fortunate for my sons and me.

SO HOW OLD ARE YOU AT THIS POINT?

Oh, around 22 years old.

SO IN 1957 YOU CAME TO LAS VEGAS FOR THE FIRST TIME?

Exactly. We finished in Miami traveled to Las Vegas and performed at The Royal Nevada Hotel/Casino. At some point later it was imploded. Debbie Reynolds was appearing at the Flamingo. She gave us a closing night wrap party.

I WANT YOU TO TELL ME THAT STORY ON TAPE.

Okay, happy to do that. In 1957, Ms. Debbie Reynolds told "the powers that be" at the Flamingo Hotel/Casino that she was going to give our cast a wrap party at the Flamingo. Reynolds insisted we walk in the front door saying, "These people are performing artists and they are my guests. They will walk in the front door or I will close my show." That's wonderful. You know, we couldn't live on the strip. We had to live on the Westside at the place off MLK Blvd. A French name.

MOULIN ROUGE? OR WAS IT MRS. HARRISON OR MRS. SHAW?

Yes, that was the name Moulin Rouge; it eluded me for a moment. Although I think some of our cast stayed at rooming houses. At that point of my life I was quite bashful; never hung out. I wasn't anti-social just very shy, and comfortable only when on stage. Ergo I didn't feel as glamorous as the other dancers. Interestingly, my confidence soared as a dancer; therefore, my



entire demeanor changed during performance. Off-stage I was a very different personality. A characteristic shared by many performing artists.

I'VE OFTEN HEARD MANY ENTERTAINERS ARE VERY QUIET OFF-STAGE.

That's true. I was very good friends with Barbara Taylor,-no relation. She was one of Norma's dancers. Barbara is deceased. You know Claytee; she was one of those people everybody loved. Nobody ever had anything bad to say about Barbara. She was very kind to me until she died. Barbara worked with Norma many years. Barbara lived at the Moulin Rouge too in the room next to mine. The showroom of the hotel/casino where we worked wouldn't serve us food between shows. We performed two shows nightly-a dinner and a late show. Mr. Calloway took care of the situation just as Ms. Reynolds did at the Flamingo. Both threatened to close their shows. Finally we were served backstage between shows.

WELL WERE YOU WITH CLARENCE ROBINSON AT THIS TIME OR CAB CALLOWAY?

Cab Calloway was the headliner. The show's star. Mr. Robinson, as I mentioned, was the senior choreographer. Joe (as we called Joel) actually choreographed the numbers. At least it was Joe who auditioned me. I wasn't in New York when the show rehearsed. It was Joe who taught me the routines in Miami. Joel was the person who placed me in the line as an end -dancer. Let it be known, my mother didn't want me to go with The Cotton Club. Even after two children she was still trying to get me to return to New York and go back to The School of American Ballet. Bless her heart. I probably couldn't have been readmitted by that time. Dad knew Clarence Robinson and absolutely didn't want anyone to think he was pushing me. He made certain all the girls from his little revue auditioned. Fortunately, I was the only dancer on my parents' show who had ballet and modern dance training. The dancers in the Cotton Club were trained dancers. And there's the difference. My audition survived the cuts.

SO THE PEOPLE YOU AUDITIONED FOR HAD A SEGMENT IN CAB CALLOWAY'S SHOW? IS THAT HOW IT WORKS?

Nope. Not quite. They were integral to the show's production.

SO HOW DID IT WORK? HOW DID CAB CALLOWAY GET INVOLVED?





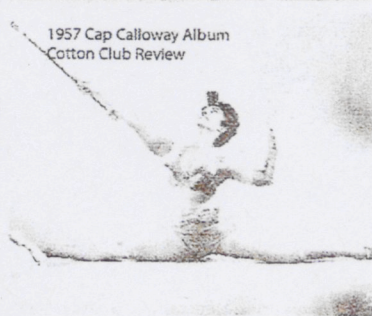
Addrey June Taylor-Henry Charles A. Taylor





Audrey June Taylor

Backstage, Milan Italy  
Josepine Baker Show



1957 Cap Calloway Album  
Cotton Club Review



Cab Calloway was the headliner. "The Cotton Club Revue: Starring Cab Calloway." This was the first major revival of the first Cotton Club of which Mr. Calloway was also involved, as was Duke Ellington, Lena Horne, Josephine Baker, the Nicholas Brothers and lots of the older entertainers. The ol' timers like we all become.

THAT'S WHAT I MEANT.

Great! Mervyn Nelson was involved in getting Mr. Calloway for the revival and organizing the producers and choreographers. Essentially, Mervyn was the power behind the production. Not the moneymen but the production adaptation organizer. He directed the show after the choreography was completed. Mervyn put the idea of the show together, how it was going to flow, and segues while in theory maintaining the original conceptualization.

WHO ACTUALLY HIRED YOU?

In terms of my hiring- the final decision was made by Mervyn. He told my father I was the only dancer from his show that he wanted. Following that show, I did four other shows with Mervyn. Chazz to whom I do not speak anymore; also told Joe, Clarence and Mervyn about me. And other dancers from Performing arts also spoke up for my hiring. I got a solo spot shortly after joining the show. Guess, I couldn't have been unworthy.

SO YOU WERE TALKING ABOUT EATING WHEN I BROKE IN WITH THAT QUESTION.

Right. Okay. Basically, Mr. Calloway who was the only one that could go into the Casino threatened to close if they didn't serve us. The show was successful and enjoying a box-office business. Mr. Calloway was light-skinned with straight hair so he blended -in with the customers. We didn't have money to lose in the Casino anyway. We just wanted maybe a sandwich and a coca-cola between shows.

WELL, YOU COULDN'T GO INTO THE CASINO ANYWAY.

You have that right, Claytee! I think we were in Las Vegas about eight weeks.

DID YOU EVER HEAR ABOUT THE RESTAURANT FOXIE'S WHILE YOU WERE HERE IN LAS VEGAS?



No. I don't recall hearing about it. Remember this was 1957.

RIGHT. BUT THIS WAS A RESTAURANT THAT DID SERVE BLACKS. IT WAS THE ONLY ONE.

Was it on the Westside (neighborhood)?

NO, NO, NO. IT WAS ON THE STRIP.

Oh, on the Strip? I remember going somewhere between shows for a walk periodically. Often Chazz walked with me holding his camera. We were just getting fresh air, but Chazz an amateur photographer, is quite good. He was always taking photos. Anyway, we often walked to this outdoor food stand. At home in New York I have a picture Chazz took of me leaning against the food stand; in full stage make-up-eyelashes and all. I recall it as only an outdoor stand. Could that have been Foxies?

MAYBE YOU JUST DIDN'T NOTICE. HOW LONG DID THE SHOW RUN AT THE ROYAL NEVADA?

A few weeks. This was the first time away from my babies and my parents' show. So, it was a real exciting experience. A big new professional challenge! And it was completely unexpected. We performed four weeks or so in Vegas. They were 13 weeks in Miami, Florida. Mervyn hired me toward the end of their Miami run. The revue only had a week before closing when Joel placed me in the chorus line.

SO TELL ME WHAT THE SHOW WAS LIKE. DESCRIBE THE SHOW TO ME.

Okay, my pleasure. There was an opening chorus number. First Mr. Calloway would come on with his *Hi-Di, Hi-Di, Ho* actually he did the full *Hi-Di-Ho* later in the show. Before the opening he was directing the band overture. Honestly, I remember the band playing and us chorus dancers standing in the wings ready to "Hit It" the orchestra was phenomenal. The popular singing group The Orioles sang: "Life is a song and dance, Life is a joy. Life is a gay romance, Life is a toy. Life is a Wheel of clover .....And so forth.

We dancers were in the wings ready to come on stage. My placement was front-line end dancer. That is called an anchor-spot. I was stage-right end and Roxy Young was stage-left end-



line-anchor. I replaced Dee Dee who left the show in Las Vegas where she remained-as you know. I never really knew her. The choreographer placed me as the front-line-stage-right end, immediately following hiring me in Miami. In chorus lines, the dancer goes where placed by the choreographer.

DEE DEE JASMINE OR DEE DEE COTTON?

I only remember Dee Dee Cotton. She was a brown-skin little cute dancer. Right?

YES.

She was short?

UH-HUH.

Is she still alive? I heard she had died.

SHE PASSED AWAY LAST YEAR.

Oh, I see. Recently speaking with Joan Myers-Brown in Philadelphia, I explained since I've been here I've never seen Dee Dee. Also for a couple of years in the late 60s while living here I didn't see her then either. The first time, I did see Roy McCormick the show's 1957 road manager. It was rumored Dee Dee left the show to get married. On my hiring, Joel apparently placed me in her position. Before my audition, my assumption was several dancers planned to leave. Since then there's been innuendos that I displaced Dee Dee. As a new hire I didn't have any power to insist on a position. I was lucky to get the gig.

SO YOU WERE CONSIDERED A PONY?

Yes, not a showgirl. Continuing with the show we entered the stage wearing white leotards with half chiffon skirts in back and a dropped piece in front that covered the crotch area. We danced in satin medium-high heels and wore flesh colored net stockings. We wore long white elbow gloves, rhinestone necklace and earrings. We entered as the singing group neared finishing their song. Upon entering we danced to our places performing the ensemble's jazzy choreography. Shucks, Claytee, we were dancing up a storm. At a certain point, the Norma Miller Dancers took the stage. The chorus backed upstage to give them the full downstage area. When Norma's group literally blasted on stage, the chorus ensemble made an exit shortly after they appeared. The



dancers in Norma's group were terrific. Chazz the one who initially mentioned me to everyone was in that group. Chazz was a very talented dancer; and a tap dance teacher. Unfortunately, many years later Chazz and I do not speak.

CHAZZ TOLD JOE AND EVERYONE ABOUT YOU?

Yes, I told you we bumped into each other on Second Avenue and he said the choreographers were looking for dancers; and Chazz told them about me. He performed with Norma's group, and they opened with the revue in Miami. They came from New York. Meanwhile, I was in Miami with my dad's revue.

OKAY-I UNDERSTAND.

Stoney, my first professional dance partner, was also in Norma's group. Ultimately I eventually joined Norma's group, and after one year or so Stoney and I left her group together. He had been with Norma 13 years. However, his departure wasn't my fault. Sorry that information is ahead of my story. The following season 1957-58, Chazz called and asked me to join Norma's group. Truly, Chazz loved me as a dancer; and couldn't believe it when I changed careers. I had to explain over and over and over that I did not stop because of any problem. Although I explained repeatedly that my choice did not stem from a personal problem, but simply needed to stop doing so much traveling. My kids were attending school. Chazz never understood. He also wasn't thrilled with me leaving Norma's company with Stoney. Before you ask, NO, Chazz and I were only friends, nothing more ever. That's true as God is my witness! We were regular, non-romantic friends.

NOW, HE WHO? WHERE IS HE?

Stoney Martinee. He is deceased. Simply put, Stoney was a dynamic, gorgeous, tall, very dark, bald-headed compelling personality on stage. Mind you, they were all excellent dancers. Norma's group featured the lindy hop. The boys had single dance solos, but the finale of their number featured the couples dancing the lindy—with all the fabulous lifts. A real showstopper! Norma and her partner were downstage center. Norma throughout the show had a couple of comedy bits with Mr. Calloway. The show was fast paced. As Norma's group ended, Will Gaines, a tap dancer entered. Norma's group made their exit leaving Willie on stage alone. The



show had several featured acts-Joe Chisholm's novelty routine with high hat and cane, female singer Sally Blair gorgeous red head, The Orioles singing group, and a couple of featured production numbers where all the dancers danced. It was a wonderful revue. Lonnie Satin was the featured male singer. There was also a little girl. Mr. Calloway sang the song "Evalina" to her. Hines, Hines, and Dad were in the show the next season (1957-58). I had a photo of Maurice and Gregory Hines taken by Chazz. It's probably home in New York. They were little boys but their faces never really changed. Comedian Slappy White was also in the 1957-58 production, and Malcolm Dodd and the Tune Drops singing group. Many years later, Malcolm played the bridal march at my wedding to Kenneth. In 1958, we again played Miami, but not Vegas. And, of course, Cab Calloway closed the show as before with his *Hi-Di Hi-Di-Ho*.

SO THE 1957 AND 1958 REVUES WERE THE SAME?

Essentially yes, with some choreography and cast changes.

OKAY- I UNDERSTAND.

In the 1957 revue, I must mention my luck in acquiring a solo. Joe Chisholm, the very slick, classy novelty act hurt his knee. Mervyn put me in as a replacement. Remember the entire cast saw my dad's show; which included my lyrical gymnastic routine. When Chisholm returned Cab Calloway told Mervyn to leave me in the show too. I completed that season in the chorus and as a soloist.

WHERE DID THEY SEE YOU ON THE CARNIVAL?

No, Claytee. They visited my dad's show in Miami at a nightclub. Dad's revue worked theaters and nightclubs during the winter months. Carnival season occurred during the summer. The entire cast from the 1957 Cotton Club came over to see the show at Café Society. My former schoolmates, Chazz, Leona, and Lorraine, kept telling them to go see me dance. I was officially hired the night they came and brought Mervyn Nelson.

OKAY. THIS IS AFTER EIGHT WEEKS?

No this was 1957; the Cotton Club Revue appeared 13 weeks in Miami. The musical revue's stay had been extended. Despite that, I was a late hire; brought into the show as a replacement for one



of the dancers scheduled to leave. Afterward the show on closing in Miami went to Las Vegas. Prior to the show's closing in Miami, I only worked with them one week.

BY THIS TIME YOUR PARENT'S SHOW IS IN A NIGHTCLUB AND YOU ARE WITH THEM.

Yes, I'm with my parents. I've graduated high school, and now have two children. Still a couple of people other than Chazz remembered me from Performing Arts High School in New York. At the risk of being redundant I'll try to make this clear. As I left the stage at the second-rate nightclub where my father's show was appearing—Mervyn Nelson was standing at the corner of the stage next to my father. As I made my exit from the stage, my father grabbed my shoulder and asked Mervyn, "Do you want to take anyone else?" to which Mervyn replied, "No, only her." Apparently the two of them had been discussing who he wanted to hire. My father looked at me as if to say "You heard him. You are the only one he wants to hire." Following that show, I performed in four shows with Mervyn directing; *Jazz Train* was the fifth.

OKAY, THE NUMBER YOU PERFORMED SOLO IN THE FIRST SHOW WAS THAT THE SAME NUMBER YOU AUDITIONED WITH FOR PERFORMING ARTS?

Yes it was the gift that kept on giving; gifted to me by Mrs. Ford my lyrical gymnastics teacher/coach and first ballet teacher. She selected me from among her many students.

SO IN THE COSTUMES WERE DESIGNED FOR THE COTTON CLUB REVUE?

Yes that's correct.

AND ALL THE DANCERS WERE TRAINED IN THE CAB CALLOWAY REVUE?

Absolutely. Some more than others. The majority of us had ballet and modern dance training. Back in those days many dancers of color were trained in ballet in order to pass Broadway auditions. Nevertheless, there still wasn't an abundance of jobs for African American dancers back in those days. Katherine Dunham reigned supreme with her dance company for Blacks on legitimate stage. Dunham employed mostly dancers of color.

YES I REMEMBER THE NAME KATHERINE DUNHAM.



One of the major dancers that came out of the two "Cotton Club Shows" is Joan Myers-Brown who found Philadanco Dance Company in Philadelphia. Joan has done a splendid job training young dancers at her school. Her dance company travels the world. We spoke recently; after I sent her one of my books. During our conversation, she mentioned that one of her students is working in Vegas. I believe he performs with *Cirque du Soleil*; and has a dance studio over by Holsum. Joan's school is really a gift to Philadelphia's artistic culture.

OH, YES, THE HOLSUM LOFTS.

Yes. He studied at Joan's school; she's the founder and director of Philandanco.

DO YOU REMEMBER WHAT THE PAY WAS LIKE?

Honestly, I don't. Maybe it was somewhere around \$250.00 or not higher than \$500.00 per week. Seemed like a lot of money to me back then. I recall sending most of my salary back to my parents for my children's care. I never saw a full paycheck.

YES. AND WHAT WAS TRANSPORTATION LIKE GETTING YOU FROM THE ROYAL NEVADA TO THE MOULIN ROUGE WHERE YOU WERE STAYING?

Somebody had cars that took us. I recall we didn't take the bus. Oh, that's right—Las Vegas didn't have a bus line back in 1957. The full bus line started in 1992.

OKAY-YOU WERE TELLING ME EARLIER ABOUT MEETING SOMEONE HERE AND SOMETHING ABOUT RADIO?

I'm sorry. Keep getting off the track. I ran into Roy McCormick who lived here. Haven't seen him since, but he introduced me to Ernie Marshall. In turn, Ernie introduced me to Maury Stevens who gave me a radio program slot. Finally, hired for my first job in radio. Before it happened, I had tried to make the transition for at least three years or more. In hindsight it really wasn't a long time; but then it seemed like an eternity.

OH, THAT'S CURRENT?

Not really. The start was around late 1968 -70 here in Las Vegas. All together I worked in radio media approximately ten years including my first job in Las Vegas. And that was on KLAV



Radio as a D.J. hired by Maury Stevens. In New York/New Jersey I was a broadcast journalist hired January 1, 1972 under an AFTRA group contract.

BUT YOU WORKED MUCH LATER ELSEWHERE?

Well, later. First in New Jersey on WNJR, and Mutual Black News Radio Network. I began both jobs in 1972. Mutual was national and focused on news about African-Americans which included positive news as well as crime.

WELL BEFORE YOU START ABOUT RADIO-FINISH ABOUT DEBBIE REYNOLDS.

Okay. Our Vegas show was closing. Debbie Reynolds invited our cast to the Flamingo. She wanted to give us a closing night party. She told the Flamingo executives, "These are my friends, they are performers, and they will walk in the front door. And if they don't I will close my show." So we walked in the front door. We had great figures and we showed them off in our newly purchased tight dresses. And we also purchased fur pieces. Proudly we walked in the front door of the Flamingo Hotel/Casino and had a wonderful time at Debbie Reynolds expense. Her gesture of friendship and support for equality is something I will never, ever forget. I mention it in my book. Simply to extend a belated thanks.

YOU WERE IN A PRIVATE ROOM?

No we were not! We were down in the casino. We walked down the front stairs into the casino and remained there for our entire party. There was a big buffet. We were not segregated. It was really a big brave gesture by Debbie Reynolds.

SO AFTER THE SHOW ENDED WHAT HAPPENED?

Okay. We went to New York City from Las Vegas and performed at Theater Under the Stars. The outdoor theater considered under the umbrella of Broadway houses, according to Mervyn. Ours was booked as a limited engagement. Something like four weeks as I recall. Following that run the show closed.

WELL WHAT DID YOU DO AFTER?



Afterward following that engagement, I returned home in Long Island to my sons and parents. Then after a few weeks Chazz called and asked if I was working. When I answered no,- he inquired if I wanted to join Norma's group. I said yes. My mother didn't want me to go with Norma's group. She didn't understand; since I had been a soloist on the Calloway show why now join a group. Well, I was shy and didn't like traveling alone. At Café Society, Norma saw me lindy with Jerome in Miami. In fact Jerome Williams taught me the original lindy. He worked with "Whitey's Lindy-hoppers" the original signature group in which Norma had also performed. Frank Manning was the group choreographer. The original group organized at "The Savoy Ballroom" in Harlem. In addition, they performed in Australia, and in many countries with their act. On Broadway, the lindy-hoppers performed in *Hells a Poppin*. Following his partner's death Jerome left the lindy-hop group. Thereafter, he joined my dad's summer and winter revues where he remained many years. In fact, I remember Jerome being around when I was ten or eleven years old. He became family. Jerome taught me and a few of the chorus dancers the lindy as performed in the signature Savoy Ballroom group.

YOU MET A LOT OF PEOPLE WHEN YOU WERE YOUNG.

Yes, I grew up around performers. I met Sammy Davis Jr. when he worked with his dad and uncle, BB King, Louis Armstrong, Billie Holiday, Mantan Moreland, Step n Fetchet, and numerous others. Norma had a friend who told her about me before I bumped into Chazz. Norma's buddy Geri Grey saw me performing in my Dad's revue in Miami. Geri is deceased, but she was one of my big supporters-a one person fan club. She was the wife of a well-known jazz musician. I believe his name was Wardell Grey.

WHERE DID GERI SEE YOU PERFORM?

Geri came often to "Café Society" the nightclub where my dad's show performed. Geri came to watch me dance. She gave Norma glowing reviews about me.

OKAY, CONTINUE.

In any case, after the 1958 "Cotton Club" closed Charles "Chazz" Young called me. You recall he and I went to the same high school? I had also met Stoney when I was a little girl at the Mary Bruce Dance School in Harlem. Mother wanted me to learn ballet so she didn't let me stay at Mary Bruce. Moving forward to 1958, I did join Norma's company. Truthfully, they were



excellent, fabulous, and wonderful! I was a member of her company for the 1958 version of *The Cotton Club*. In the final analysis, however, I really didn't want to be a lindy-hopper. Not that anything was wrong with it. Simply that genre wasn't my career choice. Admittedly the lindy is an art form often called "Swing" "Jitterbug" and/or "Lindy." My personal desire was simply to explore other styles. Caucasian film star Betty Hutton performed the "Jitterbug." Honestly there are so many names which describe that couples' dance. On television's "Dancing with the Stars," it is called "Swing." Nevertheless, whatever it is called "the jive" began at Harlem's Savoy Ballroom. Norma Miller was part of that first group; as was Jerome Williams and Frankie Manning.

YES, I UNDERSTAND.

Stoney, too, wanted to explore other genres. He was simply tired of being a lindy-hopper. After 13 years he wanted to go out on his own. Stoney danced with the lovely Barbara Taylor and loved her dearly, as did everyone. Still he felt the time had come to spread his wings. He asked me to be his partner. I was leaving anyway. Stoney did not want to take Barbara and we didn't ask Chazz; because, the move was not to destroy Norma's group. Again this is something else Chazz never understood.

YES, I GET IT.

Okay. 1957-58 "Cotton Club" I danced as a member of Norma's company. And prior to the revue also worked throughout the summer with her company in the Catskill Mountains in New York. The Catskills were a summer entertainment Mecca. The plush hotels and showrooms catered predominately to a Jewish clientele. In New Jersey, we performed at a major supper club, The Town Casino, with Sammy Davis, Jr., and at Harlem's Apollo Theater, all quality jobs. Around the carnival, I'd met The Will Mastin Trio featuring Sammy Davis, Jr., when I was young. Probably Sammy didn't remember me; but he often pulled me out of Norma's line to dance with him in the finale. Stoney and I teamed up following my year in Norma's company. It was comfortable being in Norma's group, but it didn't complete my career choice. Nor Stoney's after so many years.

UNDERSTANDABLE THAT PEOPLE MAKE CHANGES FOR CAREER MOVES.



You know Claytee, Norma left Whitey's Lindy-hoppers. Eartha Kitt left Katherine Dunham. Norma didn't like losing Stoney-one of her featured dancers, but neither Norma nor Barbara who danced with Stoney in Norma's act was as disgruntled as Chazz. He asked a million times, "Why didn't you ask me?" We were NOT trying to break-up Norma's group! Even after Stoney and I left and were billed as "*Stoney and Audrey June.*" We performed once as a team in the same revue with Norma's group.

#### HOW DID NORMA REACT TO THAT?

Norma never made a scene. She asked Stoney to dance with Barbara and do his solo in her act. He asked me if I would mind if he partnered Barbara for the lindy. I said, "Of course not." Stoney decided not to perform his solo in Norma's act though; but did in the revue's major production number. Interestingly, Stoney's best girlfriend Leona had worked briefly with Norma and left the group. Apparently, he wasn't ready to make a move at that time. Leona attended Performing Arts too and was a beautiful woman and dancer. Norma told me later she had feared Stoney would leave with Leona. The truth is he didn't leave with me. I was leaving. Before we began as a team, dad booked me solo as an opening act with Louis Armstrong. I didn't like being booked alone. The revue, our first as a team, was another of Mervyn's shows which featured Cab Calloway. Then it was no longer "The Cotton Club" but *Get on Board*. Joel was choreographer without Clarence Robinson. Of course, Norma hated to lose Stoney, but Whitey's lindy-hoppers hadn't wanted to lose her either. Stoney and June went to South America.

#### WHERE DID "GET ON BOARD" GO?

Oh boy, we went to South America! Rio and, San Paolo beautiful country.

#### WHAT WAS THAT LIKE FOR SOMEONE ABOUT 23 YEARS OLD?

Wonderful! Fabulous! Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Just beautiful. We appeared at the Copacabana Supper Club and lived at a hotel overlooking Copacabana Beach. The sand was all white and mostly guys were on the beach at night playing guitars. They all sounded like Carlos Jobim. The rhythms were fantastic. They played the classical guitar. We also went to San Paolo and Buenos Aires. In Rio our wrap party was held in a penthouse with a view which overlooked Rio. So very



beautiful! Once again I forgot to bring my camera. You learn so much about other cultures traveling. Stoney had been to Australia, but this was my first major trip overseas. I loved it.

#### WHO ELSE WAS FEATURED IN THAT SHOW?

My new-found buddy was the singer Ketty Lester. We're still friends. We met in that show. Ketty had a hit record back in the 1960s "Love Letters." After she married, and gave birth to a son, she stayed home in Los Angeles. Ketty continued singing and got a part in the television series "Little House on the Prairie" as the schoolteacher. Funny story, just before we were almost ready to go back stateside Ketty and I went shopping for gifts. We were in Argentina. Anyway, we didn't know all the stores closed for siesta. All workers go home and have lunch with their family. Everything stops-everything closes. No taxi, bus, nothing. We had to walk back to the hotel. A very illuminating experience on the importance of family in Latin culture. In many instances, the focus on family in the Latin culture remains apparent; in New York Sunday in Central Park you see Dad, Mom, Grandmother, Grandfather, and the children all together. Of course, as some Latinos become Americanized this custom changes to some degree.

#### OKAY, WHAT HAPPENED AFTER SOUTH AMERICA?

Stoney and I played the Dallas, Texas State Fair with my parent's show. It was the first time Stoney had ever appeared on a carnival midway. He really enjoyed himself. His mother came to visit us too and enjoyed a really fun time. My kids were there. Before Dallas, Stoney and I played engagements in Canada with The Ink Spots; we were featured in Montreal at the big Momarte supper club, and played Harlem's Apollo Theater with Duke Ellington these were all booked by my father. In 1959 Mervyn called Stoney and wanted our team for the *Jazz Train* European tour which opened in Rome, Italy January 1, 1960. Mervyn Nelson wrote and directed *Jazz Train*, the producers were Mannie Gurian and Alex Valdez.

#### WAIT! FIRST WHERE DID YOU TRAVEL WITH THE SECOND COTTON CLUB?

Miami, it was just Miami. This is the revue in which Hines, Hines, and Dad appeared, comedian Slappy White, and featured singer Abbey Lincoln. I was one of The Norma Miller Dancers. At some point (1958) Stoney and I worked with Cab Calloway in Washington. The engagement was just before *GET ON BOARD* that toured South America, Stoney and I were no longer with



Norma. Barbara McNair was the featured singer in Washington. *Get On Board* was the last show that we performed in with Cab Calloway; it was written and directed by Mervyn Nelson, who began his career as a performing artist. He appeared in *New Faces* on Broadway during the 1940s. Mervyn preferred writing, directing, and teaching. He was a great teacher. Working so often with Mervyn provided opportunity to study acting with him too. My youngest son also studied acting with him. Following that instruction, my youngest son was accepted into Yale University drama department; recommended by my program directors (The Swortzells) at NYU and supported by Merv's coaching. *Jazz Train* was Mervyn's favorite musical piece, which he left for me to adapt; which didn't make me popular- especially with Chazz. Interesting since Chazz never danced in that show, but he did know Mervyn before I did. However, he didn't study acting with Mervyn or work with him as many times as me. This is what happened; by the time Mervyn died I was writing plays, after attending New York University with a glowing recommendation from him to be accepted into the master's program. I had a BA and also worked with Joseph Papp's *Playwriting in the Schools*. My master's degree is in Educational Theatre with a specialization in counseling. Essentially, *Jazz Train* is an educational musical play for theatre. Chazz doesn't write plays; he teaches and choreographs.

#### EDUCATIONAL THEATRE AND WHAT DOES THAT MEAN?

*Jazz Train* delineates a progression of music and dance predominately inspired by African Americans. Educational Theatre teaches in a performance arts format, documentary, and/or music, poetry, film.

#### OKAY I UNDERSTAND. WHAT DID YOU AND STONEY DO NEXT?

In 1959, two shows were leaving New York City for Europe. One was a night club revue starring Duke Ellington. They played a cabaret in London, England. And *Jazz Train*, a musical theatre production which opened in Rome, Italy, at Teatro Lyrico. Stoney handled our contracts enjoying being the male partner of our team. No! We were not lovers. Stoney was gay. Gay men are still men, and he felt he should take care of certain business issues, for example rehearse the orchestras when we toured. Those things were okay with me. He always checked with me. Working with Norma, he had never had an opportunity to do any of those things. Basically, in her group he was a chorus boy dancing in a featured act. Stoney loved Norma, but children



grow-up. He told me Norma wanted us to go with Ellington as her group was with that show. Stoney said, "I don't want to hurt Norma's feelings, but we're a team and we're going to Italy," to which I responded, "Okay." That was a transition for both of us. We broke-up after the one-year European tour with *Jazz Train*; during which we also appeared in the film *La Notte*.

WELL THAT PARTNERSHIP WAS SHORT-LIVED.

We re-partnered later, but during our separation he did not return to Norma's group. Following our split, he danced briefly with Helen Hayes (African American) and after her he partnered with Shirley Cook. Both teams were excellent but didn't last long. Solo he worked as a choreographer and tried his wings at management. The first act he brought over was *Sugar Candy*, a very lovely African American showgirl model type. She graced the stage in a couple of Mervyn's productions. Essentially she sat or walked around in scenes. We called her "eye candy." She was a very sweet person, and provided financial support for most of her family. After the fact, Stoney told me that Sugar had had a chance to be featured in a revue at *The Crazy Horse* in Paris. That show-club is where Josephine Baker became famous. *Candy* invited Roxy Young to go with her and somehow the deal fell through. Aside from that bit of information, Stoney enjoyed being on his own. Actually we danced together three or four years. Away from Norma's group he danced with me longer than any other partner. Of course, Barbara was his partner thirteen years for the lindy in Norma's group. On his own, he experimented with different partners, choreography, and management. As to the latter, he learned a great deal from being around my father.

WHAT DID YOU DO FOLLOWING THE TEAM BREAKUP?

Separated from Stoney, I formed a trio and later headlined my own revue. When the revue was produced Stoney returned as my primary partner. For all of us it was a period of searching to find our niche. I had *The Audrey June Trio with Jon Lei and Shirley Cook*. After a couple of years Shirley was replaced with Jo Neal. When the trio ended *The Audrey June show* was produced featuring Stoney Martinee and Jon Lei.

WHY DID YOU TWO BREAK-UP?

We started having silly arguments. That's all. As I mentioned Stoney was gay. Therefore, obviously, we were not lovers. Just the same, despite the obvious, he decided because we were



dance partners we should get married. In contrast, I felt differently. To make matters worse, on occasion, my youngest son traveled with us when we were not on a major show tour. Let me be clear, the reason his sudden interest in me was problematic did not stem from his sexual orientation, but from the marriage factor, and that he began to see us more as a family. Please know I didn't worry about him being around my son. Contrary to some people's thinking, I am aware simply because a man is gay does not make him a pedophile. I had a gay nanny and have many gay friends. The real problem was he became very possessive of me. Stoney had been with Norma so many years independence was a novelty he had not experienced professionally. Nonetheless, his new attitude made me uncomfortable. Simply put, I am not a lesbian woman and didn't want a gay husband.

#### WHAT WAS ROME LIKE?

Wonderful! It was Fab-U-lous! I have some write-ups that mention Stoney and June-that's how our team was billed. We toured Italy, Switzerland, Germany and some small towns in France. We didn't go to Paris, England, or Spain. The *Jazz Train* headliner was Leslie Scott light opera baritone, Herbie Stubbs light opera baritone, Ketty Lester Musical Theatre "Frankie and Johnny," James Mosby show-tunes, Linda Hopkins blues singer who later won the coveted Broadway "Tony" with her one woman show based on Bessie Smith introduced in this show, Marie Young a soprano who later joined Metropolitan Opera, Rosalie Maxwell contralto now deceased, Euralie Leonardos a mezzo soprano, Blondell Cooper vaudeville song and dance, Shirley Cook, Helen, and I were principal female dancers. Stoney, Jon Lei an ex-Dunham dancer, and Matt Cameron were principal male dancers. All three males are deceased. The other featured dance team was Cook & Brown. Ours was a touring musical theatre show and did not carry regular understudies. Production budget concerns probably made hiring understudies too costly. Therefore, those of us in the show covered others in the cast. For example-Ketty and Linda covered each other, I covered Blondell Cooper, Shirley Cook covered me with exception to my lyrical gymnastic number which was cut if I was ill, Marie and Rosalie covered each other and so forth.

#### NOW, WAS THIS AN ALL-BLACK SHOW?

Yes. I have a cute story about Berlin, Germany. Do you want to hear it?



## SURE I WOULD LOVE TO HEAR THE STORY.

Okay. We're in Berlin and several local social workers were sent to Mervyn. Remember following World War II there were numerous bi-racial children left in Germany. For whatever reason some of the mothers did not keep their children. As a result, they were placed in orphanage(s). They were called "the brown babies," and were beautiful bi-racial children with kinky hair.

## OUR BLACK HAIR?

Indeed! So, the social workers were looking at us, and wondered how we made our hair straight. Actually in the early 1960s we were wearing wigs. I got my first wig in South America. However, we didn't confess. Anyway, Mervyn came to me and explained the problem. He asked if we could help. Meanwhile, Mervyn was amused. He said, "Suddenly you girls can't go out without your wigs. What happened to your own hair?" With that said I agreed to organize the girls, and we unpacked our hot combs and curling irons, set a date and told Mervyn to bring'em on. The social workers brought the children and we started straightening and braiding their hair. The care-givers called the children's hair "angry." They meant no harm. The social workers looked as though we had worked a miracle. All were thrilled with the happy ending.

## IT WAS JUST LIKE OUR HAIR?

Absolutely! Before we used the hot combs, the care-givers combed the children's hair and it would bounce right back up. All the children took hair after their fathers even though most of them had very fair skin. What a wonderful tour! Exposure to other cultures, my confidence had flourished. No longer bashful I made some very good friends on that tour. In 1961 *Jazz Train* closed after showing throughout Italy, Germany, small towns in France, and Switzerland. We had American and Italian producers. At that time, the major American producer was the husband of the well-known actress Julie Harris. The hope was the show would return stateside and go to Broadway. Nevertheless, Stoney and I broke-up our act and I had an offer to remain in Italy.

## WHAT DID STONEY DO?

Oh we began talking about the "brown babies," sorry. Remember I told you Stoney formed a team with Helen and I organized a trio with Jon and Shirley. Well, Stoney said, "If you're



staying in Italy I'm staying too." I replied "Okay, fine with me." Later I often joked and told him I was his favorite partner; meaning during the period he was on his own. A few of the other cast members remained in Europe also: Felix White, a dancer formed a company in Sweden, Herbie Stubbs' wife joined him and they remained in Europe for many years, and Jon Lei, Stoney, Helen, Shirley, and I also remained. After a rather brief period, Mervyn called for us to return, because the *Jazz Train* was opening in Canada. Jon, Shirley and I didn't go, but Stoney and Helen went—the show flopped and that was the end of *Jazz Train*. Mervyn so loved that show. If I live long enough I'm going to adapt that show for him, as he requested. The reviews from Canada called it "Outdated" this was approaching the mid-1960s. The "Black Consciousness' Movement" had begun. Stoney returned to Italy. Working in Europe was such a different atmosphere from being in the states. We worked consistently.

SO YOU FORMED A DANCE COMPANY?

No, I formed a trio.

OKAY. BUT YOU WERE PART OF THE TRIO?

Yes-It was *The Audrey June Trio* because I organized and created it. And, I set the style- the total concept was mine. I asked Jon and Shirley to join me and both had solos and billing. When I asked them to join me in a trio both said yes. Similarly, later I had my own revue *The Audrey June Show*. Shirley worked in the trio over two years, but she and Jon began feuding. Their arguments were compounded by Roxy who wanted to join the trio. I helped Roxy get an agent; because, I knew her from the 1957 Cotton Club. I didn't want her in the trio and neither did Jon. Shirley was a strong terrific dancer. I consider her one of the best of our era. That's the reason I wanted her in the trio.

WHY WOULD YOU WANT A STRONG FEMALE DANCER? YOU SAID OTHERS HAVE ASKED THAT QUESTION INCLUDING JON.

My belief remains surround oneself with the best. The three of us (Jon, Shirley, and I) respected each other as performing artists. Funny, though, people always thought Shirley was well trained. She wasn't. Shirley was gifted! Absolutely terrific. A natural dancer. Shirley only had to see something one time and she could do it. A dance sage by birth. Shirley's cousin was Altrovese



who became the wife of Sammy Davis, Jr., who was a trained dancer. Shirley told me when they were growing-up, Altrovese on occasion would teach her a few steps. Altrovese attended Performing Arts H.S. What really made our trio so good was the contrast between Shirley and me. The trio was excellent. I built it on our individual personalities and styles. It was a real winner. Unlike most one-man two-women trios, Shirley and I did not dress alike. Shirley told me she had never studied. And, I told her never tell anyone. This is the first time I have mentioned she was not trained. That simply didn't matter; Shirley Cook was a wonderful dancer.

SOUNDS LIKE A SMART IDEA. WHY DID YOU STOP?

Shirley was young and innocent. Roxy was shrewd and working behind the scenes to replace Shirley. We had an opportunity to go to Paris, France to open the show for Edith Piaf; but Shirley and Jon were bickering. Actually, Jon wanted his friend from New York to replace Shirley. We missed our Paris contract as a result of their arguments. Edith Piaf died about a month later. Ours was the last opportunity to work with her. That's when I decided to do something else. The confusion escalated between Jon and Shirley- instigated by Roxy. She had come into Italy following the close of the Duke Ellington Revue in London. Roxy wanted to join the trio. Finally, I got her an agent and gave her some costumes. I helped an old friend. But the damage was done.

WHAT DO YOU MEAN THE DAMAGE WAS DONE?

I wasn't aware of what Roxy was doing, but Jon and Shirley may have thought otherwise. Hindsight is 20/20. In any case, Shirley left and Jon wanted Jo Neal as her replacement. I said okay and meant it. I never wanted Roxy in the trio. I was just giving her a hand-up. Many years later, Roxy did the same for me. Anyway, Jo came over from the states; she was lovely, very nice, and also quite a good dancer. Different from Shirley but good. Jo studied dance at Juilliard. Anyway, the three of us completed several engagements. This included working with Josephine Baker at the Olympia in Milan, Italy. That was a memorable experience. Jo and I got along quite well. Still I regretted that Shirley missed that experience and others that followed.

YES I CAN UNDERSTAND HOW YOU FELT.



An interesting addendum- Jon adored Jo. Eventually, Jon started getting on her nerves. Jon like Stoney was openly gay. Nevertheless, Jo experienced the same problem with Jon that I'd had with Stoney. In hindsight it is quite humorous. We returned to Libya and went to Venezuela, Toured Italy, Switzerland, and Germany. It was time to end the trio.

SO YOU WORKED WITH THE FABULOUS JOSEPHINE BAKER! WHAT HAPPENED WHEN THE TRIO ENDED?

I think Jon and Jo worked together briefly. Then Jo began performing solo. I became the principal dancer in an Italian musical theatre production. My dance partner was a Caucasian from South Africa; who really didn't want a black partner. Too bad! Felix White of *Jazz Train* was also in this musical. This was followed by *The Audrey June Show*. Both Jon and Stoney became my dance partners in *The Audrey June Show*. They had featured billing but I was the headliner. The initial idea was to bring my show to Las Vegas. Now Jon was angry because my main dance numbers were with Stoney. It was really unsettling, exhausting. My mind screamed "Time out!" I'd reached a professional peak and felt it was time for a change. Time to move-on. So I did!

SO WHO KNEW HOW TO DO ALL THIS BOOKING?

My producer was Elio Schiavoni who managed all the legitimate theatres throughout Italy. He in turn worked with others. His girlfriend at the time, who became his wife, was one of the British dancers in my show. Remember *Jazz Train* had Italian and American producers. We worked all the time. My parents refused to come with my children to Italy. It was a situation where I had to make some difficult choices. Eventually I left and my show closed. I wanted Shirley to replace me, but she didn't want to work with Jon or Stoney. I asked Jo and she didn't want to work with Jon. So be it. All of my twelve back-up dancers were from England or Italy. The producers wanted an African American lead. I never regretted my choice.

YOU MENTIONED LIBYA?

Yes. The first time was with the trio. Jo Neal had replaced Shirley. The second time was with *The Audrey June Show*.



ISN'T LIBYA ONE OF THE MUSLIM COUNTRY?

Oh, yes it is. It's desert too and reminds me of Las Vegas in terms of natural scenery. The mountains, red sand, and climate. The stars at night seem very close and bright.

YES? BUT THIS TYPE OF DANCING WAS OKAY?

Absolutely. We were musical theatre performers. Belly dancers are Muslim, you know.

WHEN YOU WENT OUT DID YOU HAVE TO COVER YOUR HEAD AND FACE?

No. Even then many of the younger women were adopting western style dress. Not the older women though. This was the mid 1960s. Rebellion by young Arab women toward old traditions was occurring, as it was in many other parts of the world during that time. Watching television now is reminiscent of the changes that were happening in the 1960s. You know in Egypt, and Libya it seems old monarchies are being upset in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Back in the 1960s the United States had the Black Consciousness Movement.

THAT'S RIGHT YOU TOLD ME JAZZ TRAIN WENT OVERSEAS IN 1960.

We left New York City December 1959 and opened in Rome, Italy January 1, 1960. This period was like 1963- 64. Jo and I went to the Spa in Libya, and many of the older women had markings on their face or body. They couldn't believe that I had two children.

OKAY-WHAT HAPPENED NEXT?

Finally I left Europe around 1965-1966. I joined my family in Montreal, Canada where they had moved. Ultimately Stoney went to Iran. Jon and Jo remained in Italy but worked separately. Shirley married and still lives in Switzerland. She is a widow. Jon and Stoney are both deceased. Following several years in Italy, Jo went back to California. She stayed a few years and returned to Italy where she opened a dance school. Jo's school is located in Southern Italy on a little Island off Naples. Felix White, Herbie Stubbs and his wife remained in Europe. I don't know if they ever came back to the states. I tried to convince Shirley to take-over as headliner of my show. Of course, the name would have become *The Shirley Cook Show*. Shirley didn't want to work with Jon or Stoney and refused. In the long run when I left the show that was built around me closed.



SO HOW LONG DID YOU DANCE?

Professionally I started at age two and stopped in my mid 30s. After returning from Italy I did a few gigs. Some were only choreography. For example, the Black Teenage World Pageant I choreographed and served as Mistress of Ceremonies for over ten years. I taught dance in two NAACP Cultural Arts Programs with Vernon Washington. And again in another cultural arts program directed by actress/comedian Dorothi Fox at Reverend Ike's Church. Even so I was looking for a new career and had decided on radio. At day's end I still had two children to support financially. Oh, the pageant I mentioned awarded education scholarships.

YOU MENTIONED THAT RADIO HAPPENED IN 1972. WHAT HAPPENED BEFORE?

Gosh. I bought a home in Miami and moved there with my children 1966-68. It was hard living though. I worked with Ruth Foreman's drama repertory company, sang back up with Christopher Columbus' singing group from which I was fired. We appeared at a major hotel on Miami Beach. Tommy and I did film extra work and worked in TV commercials. Initially, I went to Miami and choreographed a show for my dad, but that revue stranded. Following I talked on the front of his carnival show in Canada and at the Dallas, Texas State Fair. Finally, the second year, I got what I refer to as my first real job in telephone sales. I sold *The Encyclopedia of Negro life and History* to colleges and libraries by telephone nationally. Still it was a difficult time. I met Tommy and we married. Even after the marriage and sales job most of my income came from talking on the front of my dad's show at the Texas State Fair. My husband an aspiring actor worked as a man's clothing salesman between acting jobs or stunt work. He worked hard, but there just wasn't enough of our kind of work in Miami to provide a steady income. Tommy also tried to help me get into broadcasting in Miami without luck.

I GUESS YOU WERE TIRED OF MOVING AROUND?

You bet I was. Reviewing our interview we were grappling with the year that Dr. King was assassinated. Whereas it's difficult remembering all the past dates, it is significant that I clearly recall when Dr. King was killed; April 4, 1968 Dr. King was assassinated. Fortunately, I heard Dr. King speak in Miami before his assassination. I had had a gig in a showroom in Nassau and returned to Miami; where I had already purchased a home anticipating moving there with my sons. My boys began school in a Canadian Catholic school. I left them with my half-sister in



Canada for one school year where she and her spouse lived and worked in Canada. They moved there after my parents. Prior to Dr. King's death I moved my sons to Miami and enrolled them in an integrated public school. Previously my half-sister in Canada kept them when I made a trip to New York for dancers. At my father's behest I choreographed a revue for him that appeared in Miami at The Lord Calvert Hotel Lounge. Rehearsals were held in Miami. My dear friend from *Jazz Train* Jimmy Mosby, Barbara Taylor (Stoney's partner from Norma's company), Martie a dancer from the Cotton Club and Gwynne Tomlin Santiago came along. Sadly the revue stranded. Gwynne is still alive; and so is Norma Miller who now lives in Florida.

OH, YES I KNOW NORMA- SHE LIVED HERE FOR QUITE AWHILE.

Yes she did. Anyway from Miami we went to the Texas State Fair held annually in Dallas during October. It was during the period in Miami, when Dad's show stranded, that Gwynne introduced me to Tommy. Finally I got my children out of Canada 1966-67. Sadly at the end of the school year I sent them to Las Vegas where my parents had retired. They finished 5<sup>th</sup> grade through high school in Las Vegas. I didn't want to uproot my boys again. I spent the 1967-68 school year in Miami and kept my niece returning my half-sister's favor. However, at the end of that school year, Tommy and I moved to New York. As a result I sent my niece back to her mother in Montreal.

WHAT HAPPENED AFTER MIAMI?

Tommy and I went to New York where I introduced him to Mervyn who helped him get work in films such as *Cotton Comes to Harlem* (1969-70). Tommy helped me more with my sons than their biological father ever had. When Tommy and I separated that's when I came to Vegas to be with my sons. While in Vegas (1969-70-71) I worked for Centel Telephone Company as an information operator. All the while on that job, I was rehearsing how to use my voice for a radio program. When providing telephone numbers we answered, "Hello, Directory Assistance. May I help you?" Finally around 1970, the radio break came in Vegas on KLAV-FM. Maury Stevens hired me for a midnight to 6am music program. I played music from Broadway shows and talked about those productions.

SO WHEN DID YOU STAY IN LAS VEGAS FOR TWO YEARS?



The period just mentioned is when I stayed in Las Vegas. It may have been a few months shy of two years. My father was ill. My half-sister came to be with our mother. When she arrived I left immediately. That's another story. I've covered that in a play I wrote *Chains and Choices* which Mervyn loved. Mervyn was one of my valued mentors. My career path followed his somewhat, he began as an actor appearing in *New Faces* during the 1940s. He then became a teacher-director-playwright.

INTERESTING-SO TELL ME NOW ABOUT HOW YOU MET MAURY STEVENS.

Okay-During my stay in Las Vegas I bumped into Roy McCormick. We hadn't seen each other since the 1957 Cotton Club Revue. Roy had been the road manager for that show. We brought each other up-to-date; and I mentioned wanting to get into radio. He told me that Bob Bailey was big in local television and that Ernie Marshall was in radio. Roy introduced me to Ernie who had been a singer and M.C. at many places including the Momarte in Montreal. Ernie took me under his guidance. He invited me over to KLAV Radio, and introduced me to Maury Stevens. During our first meeting, Ernie showed me the UnitedPress International news wire, and I said, "I want to do a music show." Ernie a journalism major in college responded, "You never know what you will need to know in this business." Prophetic warning as you will see later.

OKAY, TELL ME ALL ABOUT IT.

Mr. Stevens asked if I had a tape. I said sure and went home and made one on my little cassette player. That was my audition tape. Mr. Stevens hired me. I continued working at Centel as I was only paid \$3.00 an hour at KLAV. It was a small station and D.J.s and all programs were expected to also handle the engineering board. Well, Claytee, I am seriously challenged when it comes to any type of technology. I worked at KLAV several months with the station paying for an engineer to handle the board for my program. So at a certain time, Mr. Stevens told me it was necessary for me to get my engineering license; as they couldn't continue paying an engineer. Preparing for the test, I studied, took the engineer's test, and failed. As a result I lost that job. Meanwhile, I had close to a year's worth of professional radio tapes. Mr. Stevens had forewarned me that the engineer's board would be my responsibility.

SO YOU GOT THE JOB WITH A LITTLE CASSETTE TAPE?



Yes-it was amazing. It was my time and somehow three angels appeared-Roy, Ernie, and Mr. Stevens. I was introduced to Bob Bailey, but never knew him well. Mr. and Mrs. Bailey were absolutely the first African-American family of entertainment in Vegas. Bob Bailey became Dr. Bailey and now there's a middle school named in his honor. That's so wonderful. Later (1990s) I worked there briefly as a substitute teacher. During my later stay in Vegas, I only met Mr. Bailey once. Ernie Marshall introduced me to him. All thanks to Ernie who helped me get a column in The Voice newspaper titled *Dear Sis*.

THE BAILEY'S REMAIN A WELL-RESPECTED FAMILY. THEY ARE STILL HERE AND INVOLVED IN COMMUNITY PROGRESS. SO WHAT WAS YOUR NEXT ADVENTURE?

Okay, Claytee, the adventure was probably my move back to New York. My father had cancer and I realized my financial responsibility would increase. Unfortunately, my parents had not been very good at investing or in paying into social security. Both had continued working after the carnival days ended. Dad lost the contract for the Texas State Fair only after moving to Las Vegas. One had nothing to do with the other. Simply put, changes in carnival midways were taking place. Mother worked as a nanny for a family for several years. Her employers really loved her as did their children. My father worked until it was no longer possible. He had a little concession at a Strip hotel. Mother got my half-sister to move from Canada to Vegas. Upon her arrival I left for New York. I did not forget to pack my tapes from KLAV Radio.

SO-YOU RETURN TO NEW YORK AND WHAT HAPPENS?

On return to the city, I stayed briefly with Eleanor my cousin in Brooklyn. However, commuting into the city for work was difficult. My dear childhood friends Ethel and Leon always welcomed me when I came to the city. My parents had sold their home in Long Island while I was in Europe. Anyway, I remained with Leon and Ethel for a few weeks; and moved-in with Ethel's sister Gail briefly. Gail's husband was away at law school. Gwynne an actress/dancer that I took to Miami for my dad's revue around 1966-67 told me Roxy was back in the states. During a visit with Roxy, she insisted that I live with her until I got situated. In the meantime, I was employed at the publishing company where I had worked in 1969 when Tommy and I were still together.

DIDN'T YOU MENTION EARLIER IN OUR CONVERSATION THAT YOU HAD HELPED ROXY AND SEVERAL YEARS LATER SHE RETURNED THE FAVOR?



Exactly, Claytee. You have a good memory. Yes, I moved in with Roxy. This is 1971. You know the years overlap occasionally. Anyway, this is when more miracles start happening. I didn't call my other best friend Diana Sands. Later she was annoyed with me for not letting her help me. Maybe it was a foolish choice but I needed to do it on my own. I knew she would have helped. Moreover, Ethel was always there. The three of us were best friends since high school. But by 1971 Diana was a famous actress. Everybody bothers big stars. We had communicated many years even when I was living and working overseas. Always Diana and I were overjoyed with the other's successes. However, by the time I returned to New York we had been out of touch for a while. It was a difficult situation hiding how well I knew Diana from other aspiring friends. Only Ethel knew. It was during this period that I taught dance and did choreography in cultural arts programs. During that period, one day Roxy asked me to go with her to Actor's Equity. Someone told her that there was a post for an important showcase production. The director and writer were looking for an actress, and she fit the description. Honoring her request, I went with Roxy so she could get the audition information. After that, we went to the audition; and Roxy insisted that I read for the part too. I refused. She insisted. I read and the director really liked me. I got the role.

OH MY! HOW DID ROXY FEEL ABOUT THAT?

Truthfully, not great. However my focus was radio and for that reason I didn't want to try for any shows at all. Not that I thought I was so good; just didn't want to get tempted to run that race. At the end of the day, I wanted steady well-paying employment. Because I still had two children that I had to support.

OKAY, FINISH THE STORY.

Well, my partner in the play John Frasier was a radio D.J., incredible! I told him, "I am interested in getting a job in radio." And explained that I had just finished doing a radio program in Las Vegas. John inquired if I had tapes. "Yes I do," I responded. After giving him my radio tapes from Las Vegas, he edited them at his radio station. The General Manager and Program Director wanted a female for their group contract. Upon hearing my tapes they hired me for news. Subsequently, they also hired Larry Hall a news reporter with the Newark Star Ledger to train me. My employment began under the new AFTRA group contract in January 1972. A



couple of months later I was also assigned to Mutual Broadcasting's Black News Network as a news correspondent. Remembering, when hired, the first time I ever saw a news wire Ernie showed one to me in Las Vegas; he said "You never know what you will need in this business." My father was hospitalized by the time of my hire. Fortunately he listened to me several times a day giving the news on national radio. Mr. Stevens and the program director from KLAV Radio in Las Vegas called to congratulate me.

NOW I UNDERSTAND WHAT YOU MEAN BY SERENDIPITY! WHAT'S AFTRA?

Oh, the American Federation of Television and Radio Artists. Yes, this was a time for miracles again in my life. My supervisor from my first real job in Florida had given me contact names in New York that I hadn't used. One was Warren Gardner who was the Assistant Press Secretary to Governor Nelson Rockefeller. That name was most helpful when I began work as a news reporter. I remained at WNJR Radio in New Jersey four and a half years, Mutual Black Network four and a half, and then moved to work at New York's WWRL Radio full-time and WVNJ Radio FM part-time, and later at television Channel 13. Around that period, I met my husband Kenneth. Prior to meeting him I bumped into Malcolm Dodd in 1972. At the time I was reading for a commercial. Malcolm was in the second Cotton Club that played Miami. During our accidental encounter, he inquired what I was doing. "Looking for an apartment" was my response. Long story short, it turned out he lived in the same building with Diana. Between the two of them I got an apartment in their building.

OKAY-SO ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT CURRENT?

No, that was 1972 up to around 1976 when I met Kenneth and continued through the 1980s. I met Kenneth in 1976 and we married in 1977.

A FEW MINUTES AGO YOU MENTIONED EQUITY. WHAT IS ACTOR'S EQUITY?

Actor's Equity is the union for Broadway Theatres and Theatre Companies. The member votes select annual Tony Award recipients for Broadway plays and performances. An important person in the arts, I interviewed the late Fred O'Neal who was artist representative for the Associated Artist of America an affiliate of Actor's Equity. During those years, Mr. O'Neal also represented technical artists in the AFL-CIO. Did I mention the AFL-CIO gave me a small scholarship when



I was working on my masters in Educational Theatre? Fred O'Neal and Abram Hill started one of the first actor training programs in Harlem during Roosevelt's Works Program. Their program is mentioned in my book.

#### IS THIS INFORMATION CURRENT?

No but we're getting close. During the Reagan era Fred O'Neal and national theatre arts teachers and companies were dismayed with public education cuts of arts programs. As a result, many meetings with teachers, and art enthusiasts met at O'Neal's NYC Office to discuss strategy. My current program the *Performing Arts in Learning* developed from that period. Accordingly my current program is a tribute to Mr. O'Neal. The name used for the program was coined by Mr. O'Neal. However, the new program is no longer the same design. Nonetheless the program's core intention remains intact. It has simply developed to meet new challenges of future demands that arts can address. Of course everything that was part of the past remains in a more developed form as part of the future. Unfortunately, other nuisance issues reappear too. Reportedly the current 2011 stopgap congressional budget resolution cuts \$40 million in federal arts education funding, according to Educational Theatre Advocacy News.

#### I SEE-WHAT EXACTLY IS THE "PERFORMING ARTS IN LEARNING"?

PAIL was originally designed only to keep separate art programs in public schools. Currently there's an abundance of literature referencing the use of art-infused subjects for academic education. Likewise other scholarly research has addressed theatre technical arts for vocational education. Initially, my effort to launch O'Neal's PAIL in Las Vegas stalled. Although, the Clark County School District approved of the program, its implementation proved difficult. Unless recently changed, there is only one woman who writes theatre art programs for Las Vegas schools. However, I was asked by a professional in Las Vegas to do something about the minority youth in terms of the arts. That's really the reason I tried to get the program started. In eager anticipation, I'd planned to do other things in retirement.

#### OTHER THINGS-LIKE WHAT?

In short, I'd planned to write and maybe do an occasional play, and voice-overs. Indeed stage is home for me. That's how I met the man who convinced me to tackle the minority youth problem.



He is a drama coach for theatre professionals. All the same, being employed seven years as a substitute teacher what he meant became obvious. There are many theatre college scholarships available nationally, but the applicants must be able to pass the audition. There are only three schools in Las Vegas focused on communication and the arts; although, several of the high schools have wonderful theatre programs. The CCSD theatre teachers are hard working and truly excellent at their craft. My student teaching for licensure completed at two high schools in Las Vegas gave me a chance to meet most of them. When the Bush "No Child Left Behind Act" began, the after school program provided provisional funding for arts and sports. Certainly the major focus was tutoring for academic subjects; sports and arts fell in the recreational category. My goal was serious arts training. Even though, personally I have never wanted to be a classroom schoolteacher.

#### SO YOU DIDN'T GET THE PROGRAM STARTED?

Correct, but several principals were very interested in implementing the program at their schools. When that effort collapsed, I worked as a teacher of Explorations in Theatre; for almost six months in a middle school. Well that didn't work either. The majority of students placed in the class had no interest in theatre. Together with my lack of classroom management skills my attempt to introduce aesthetic appreciation of performing arts failed miserably. Many bravos to schoolteachers; because, the really good ones dedicate their life to their students. The workload is tremendous; and far too much for me to handle in retirement. I resigned. My guess is I would have been fired anyway; it was very difficult. Nevertheless, I learned a great deal and may have helped a few students. Despite the fact I'd worked several years as a substitute teacher, and completed the coursework for licensing, I'd never aspired to be a classroom teacher.

Nevertheless, I respect and admire them. Schoolteachers are the backbone of our culture. In the interim, I also worked two long-term assignments as a substitute teacher in core subject classes: ESL and Literacy. Those assignments gave me a real understanding of some of the current problems. Overall it proved to be a worthwhile experience for me; and the PAIL program design.

#### WAS THAT THE FIRST TIME YOU TAUGHT?

No, but under different circumstances. I worked with Joseph Papp's *Playwriting in the Schools* in New York, which used drama to improve academic literacy. That notion spilled over to the



PAIL program. In Papp's program, I wasn't in the classroom as the "regular" teacher. We were a literacy program using the arts to improve reading, inspire writing, and achieve comprehension. The best plays written by the children were produced at the Public Theatre at the end of the school year. And as mentioned, I taught in several cultural arts programs. During the 70s such programs were numerous. I taught in two NAACP Programs and a separate program directed by Dorothea Fox at Rev. Ike's Church in New York. Each of these was after-school programs. The kind of teaching I like is educational theatre, which creatively informs and reforms teaching techniques through film, plays, documentaries, drama, and books. Know what I mean? In New York, I also taught four years in a correctional institution.

YES I UNDERSTAND WHAT YOU MEAN. THAT'S REALLY INTERESTING. TELL ME HOW DOES YOUR PROGRAM WORK?

Well, my baseline research study will add to the growing academic literature calling for art infused academic subjects, and applied academics, which address vocational education.

NOW WE ARE CURRENT?

Yes we are now current.

SO TELL ME IDEALLY HOW YOUR PROGRAM WILL WORK.

Ideally, PAIL will be in elementary, middle, and high schools nationally. My guide is the FDR Works Program. PAIL programs will focus on different styles of learning. All students cannot learn through didactic or rote instruction. Similarly there are numerous vocational skills which can be acquired through technical theatre education. PAIL'S mission is to: (a) increase learning for kids struggling with academic subjects, (b) to increase aesthetic appreciation, (c) prepare students academically for college, (d) make them ready to gain scholarships, (e) provide skills for school-to-work. Realistically every student who graduates from high school will not go to college. Such choices are made for a myriad of reasons, one of which could be to earn tuition money. Hopefully, the PAIL program will eventually impact the drop-out rate.

THE FEDERAL PROGRAM THAT YOU MENTIONED IS THAT THE FEDERAL THEATER PROJECT?



Yes. My ultimate goal is a charter school K-12 in the arts and sciences. Meanwhile, in the technical theatre arts, there are so many avenues that can be explored including a summer jobs program. Of course the same is true for musical theatre and drama. Often students experiencing problems in school result from their family situation, poor economic conditions or a combination of both. Summer jobs in an area of interest provide experience and income. Similarly the FDR Theater Project provided on-the-job training.

DIDN'T YOU MENTION THE EDUCATIONAL THEATRE ASSOCIATION AND ACTOR'S EQUITY?

Absolutely-both organizations render assistance to youth theatre in their respective areas of interest.

SO YOUR CHARTER SCHOOL WILL BE A SCHOOL FOR THE ARTS?

What I really want is a charter school focused on arts and sciences.

I WANT YOU TO GO TO A WEBSITE CALLED BLACKPAST.COM.

Okay is it P-A-S-T?

YES. PAST .COM AND I THINK YOU WILL BE SURPRISED WHAT YOU FIND ON THAT WEBSITE WHEN YOU SAY WE HAVE SO MANY PEOPLE TO WRITE ABOUT.

Okay. Sounds like I will find lots of information on BlackPast.Com.

YES, INDEED YOU WILL. IT GETS OVER A MILLION HITS A YEAR.

I will definitely look at it.

YOU MENTION JOSEPHINE BAKER EARLIER IN OUR INTERVIEW. ANYTHING MORE TO ADD ON HER?

No, it was a two week engagement in Milan, Italy. She was very cordial to us and it was a delightful experience. Josephine Baker was a classic; a great entertainer and humanitarian.

AS THAT BEFORE OR AFTER HER LAS VEGAS EXPERIENCE? SHE CAME HERE IN 1952.



Oh it was many years later. We didn't go to Europe until 1960.

OH, SORRY THAT'S RIGHT. TELL ME ABOUT EUROPE AND DISCRIMINATION?  
WELL YOU ALREADY SAID SOMETHING.

Of course, African-American soldiers fought overseas during World War 2, but in 1960 black people were scarce in Italy. We were treated quite well. Now, however, there are many Africans and American Blacks in Italy. Probably conditions have changed to some degree; because, attitudes change when there are economic issues created by immigrants. That is not to imply anything other than a possibility of some attitudinal changes. My friend's daughter lived in Italy during the 1980s quite happily. My last trip to Italy was 1979 for a short vacation. Personally in the 1960s Italy seemed like Paradise. I didn't hear the word "colored-girl" until I returned to the United States.

WERE YOU IN FRANCE?

*Jazz Train* played some small towns in France but we didn't go to Paris. We performed in small towns in Italy where the people had never seen a black person; probably in France that also may have been the case.

WHAT DID YOU MENTION ABOUT SWITZERLAND?

Oh, outside of Zurich there is a stature of The Black Madonna and Christ Child. When we played there we visited her shrine. She is very beautiful. Seeing that statue was exciting.

SO WAS THE ROYAL NEVADA THE ONLY PLACE YOU PERFORMED IN LAS VEGAS?

Yes it was, on return to the states I didn't want to dance anymore. When I came to Las Vegas in the late 1960s, mother wanted me to go for auditions but I refused. Simply put, I didn't want to dance anymore. Nor did I want to go and audition. I was in my 30s. That being so, I did choreograph a revue in Vegas. All things considered, I could have come back from Italy with my own revue; I wanted a change. At this time, many personal effects are still in New York with my husband. I'll send you a copy of the Vegas choreography contract when I return home the next time.

IN YOUR BOOK YOU COMPARE LAS VEGAS TO A CARNIVAL.



Yes, it is recorded the initial idea for Las Vegas spawned from casinos created for the wealthy. Only Las Vegas originators wanted to accommodate the less affluent public. Clearly to me, in that core conceptualization, Las Vegas used the carnival inexpensive entertainment model; adapting the midway theme. It's not news that Las Vegas wanted to attract the middle and lower class workers. Not to be ignored is the fact that Showmen who invested in Vegas were carnies. Referenced in my prior notes that Melvin Jackson grew-up on carnival and theater road shows like me. Responding to my inquiry, Melvin agreed that a similarity between the LV Strip and a carnival midway exists. Without reservation carnival showmen were the creators of mass entertainment appeal at reasonable prices in early Americana. Simply put, the Strip is an upscale midway. Nonetheless, some years following Vegas creation, the hotel/casinos had to solve the problem of not engaging children. Certainly, the creation of Branson, which touted family entertainment, helped that notion along. In hindsight, that's when the midway games and the rides appeared on first-level hotel-casinos, and on their roofs. The Las Vegas Strip on a grander scale has all the glitz of the old midways. The Strip is just more upscale, elaborate, classy, or ostentatious; it depends upon who is looking. The midway sawdust is replaced by paved streets. Bally talkers which attracted carnival crowds to a particular exhibition are replaced by large ads with flashy accoutrement garnishing the outside of hotel/casinos. The strip a complete extravaganza on its' own is amplified by a barrage of lights. Essentially this reiterates what we discussed earlier in the interview, Vegas is new but it is built upon an old idea. Walt Disney also saw the potential of carnivals, and with the stroke of his genius made the playgrounds more creative, aesthetically improved, and conceptually brilliant. Accordingly many theme parks were inspired by Disney. Makes me wonder about spiritual issues like reincarnation.

THAT'S A LEAP!

Yes, maybe. On the other hand, there is nothing new under the sun. Only the form changes. Vegas is a reincarnation. During a conversation with a man in the Showmen's League he mentioned the "Jig" show. That's what carnies called the African American revue back in those days. I explained the term came from Shakespeare's era. Following Shakespeare's plays, which were held outdoors, the crowd would entreat the musicians to play music so they could dance "The Jig." During carnival days nobody knew what it meant or where it originated. Therefore some worried the name was an insult, while only a few intended it to be. What it meant, simply



stated was the “colored folks” perform lively dances in their revue. Initially, my book *The Sound of Applause* included in the title *Las Vegas the Upscale Carnival*. That subtitle remains a chapter but is not used in the title; fearing some might misunderstand the comparison. Consequently in a recent magazine article I don’t refer to the midway revues as “Jig Shows,” but as “Variety Revues.” Because that’s what they were a combination of dance, comedy, singing, and novelty acts. Whereas the jig is only a lively dance. Incidentally, reportedly there will be a permanent carnival set-up on the strip.

YOU MENTIONED SOMETHING ABOUT AUDIENCES?

Gosh, you remember everything. The comment was on the difference in white and black audiences. Again it referred to the “Jig Show” concept. During Shakespeare’s era audiences talked to the actors. In comparison, African Americans often talk back to actors performing in theatre dramas and musicals even now. While white audiences are quiet.

THEY TALK TO THE SCREEN EVEN IN A MOVIE THEATER?

Some, yes. I know a lady who told me she talked to Jennifer Lopez in the movie *Enough* when the actress beat-up her on-screen husband who had been abusing her in the film. African American entertainers always talk about the difference in audiences. My acquaintance stood up in the theater and shouted, “Get him Jennifer,” bet he won’t beat you anymore,” “You go girl!”

YOUR BOOK WAS SO INTERESTING. THOUGHT YOU MIGHT BE INTERESTED TO KNOW THAT OVER THE LAST YEAR AND A HALF TWO DIFFERENT PEOPLE HAVE APPROACHED ME WHO WANT TO CONDUCT AN ORAL HISTORY PROJECT ON RETIRED CARNIVAL PEOPLE IN LAS VEGAS.

Oh, Claytee, that’s great! A few live in Vegas. Perhaps I can provide you with some names.

SO WHY DO YOU THINK SUDDENLY IT HAS BECOME SO POPULAR IN OUR COLLECTIVE CONSCIOUSNESS ABOUT CARNIVALS AND LAS VEGAS?

Well it’s not surprising to me. Actually incidents like that happen so often it’s easy to believe there is a universal consciousness. Recently a television promotional ad showed a famous movie actress getting on an elephant in a scene. I’m not sure if it’s a new TV series or a film.



IT DOES SEEM CREATIVE PEOPLE SOMEHOW DO SIMILAR THINGS AROUND THE SAME TIME.

Yes, that type of thing occurs often. Although only one college to my knowledge has a course on the circus. In contrast, numerous films have used the circus or carnival as a backdrop. The professor teaching about the circus told me he's using my book for his class too. That's great! Specifically because people often confuse the circus and carnival; they are different genres. Another dissimilar situation is minstrel shows performed in a tent; likewise when Shakespearean actors came to entertain the early settlers they also performed in a tent. Obviously those were different entertainment styles. Outdoor entertainment flourished in America, but it began in Europe and Russia. Performance in tents made it possible for families to attend; clearly children couldn't go into taverns. Families still attend state fairs. In reference to outdoor entertainment, a few books mention African American Showmen, but my book is really the first, which covers their revues and back-story in-depth.

THAT'S GOOD FOR YOU I HOPE.

At the very least, historically the real story as it relates to African Americans, Latinos and carnivals is correctly documented.

SO AMERICANA! YES, THE STATE FAIRS WERE NEW AMERICA.

Remember all the movies about state fairs or occurring at state fairs. I recall Kim Novak in a movie titled *Picnic* where much of the action happened at the fairgrounds. There were several other movies that used the venue but I don't recall all the titles or stars. In Europe there's still the equivalent of state fairs. A few years ago HBO Television had a very dark story about midway sideshows. These shows had what was earlier called "Freaks of Nature." Barnum featured such entertainment in his New York museum.

SO THERE ISN'T MUCH ON AFRICAN AMERICAN PEOPLE THAT WORKED CARNIVALS?

No, not to my knowledge or research. I grew-up on the carnivals and so did Melvin that's how we know. Gwennette is much younger, but she remembers quite a lot about her father's carnival revues. Her dad was Leon Claxton, the king of the African American Showmen. Before my



book, only the names of the black showmen were mentioned by carnival historians with minor information. Moreover certain details Caucasian carnival historians simply didn't know about the African American or Latino experience.

I IMAGINE THAT WAS QUITE AN EXPERIENCE?

You're correct. Equally important, it's a very important historical period for African Americans and Latinos. Even so I only cover 1930-1960. In the past, black folks were used in some fashion with most of the traveling troupes. There were medicine shows, truck shows, and minstrel shows.

CARNIVALS AND THE CIRCUS ARE DIFFERENT. WHY SO?

Well, primarily the circus is presented in 3-rings under the big-top. That means one big tent. Clowns are a big part of the circus, and animals, but not with the carnival. The carnival has a midway with a choice of rides, games, and in the early days carnivals presented burlesque and musical revues in theater-tents. Those tents had a stage with footlights, spotlights, theatrical curtains, bandstands, just like any regular theater. I'll give you some photographs.

YOU MENTIONED YOUR BOOK. IT IS WRITTEN WITH QUESTIONS AT THE END OF CHAPTERS AND INCLUDES VOCABULARY WORDS WITH THEIR MEANING. SO DID YOU INTEND THE BOOK TO BE USED FOR YOUNG CHILDREN?

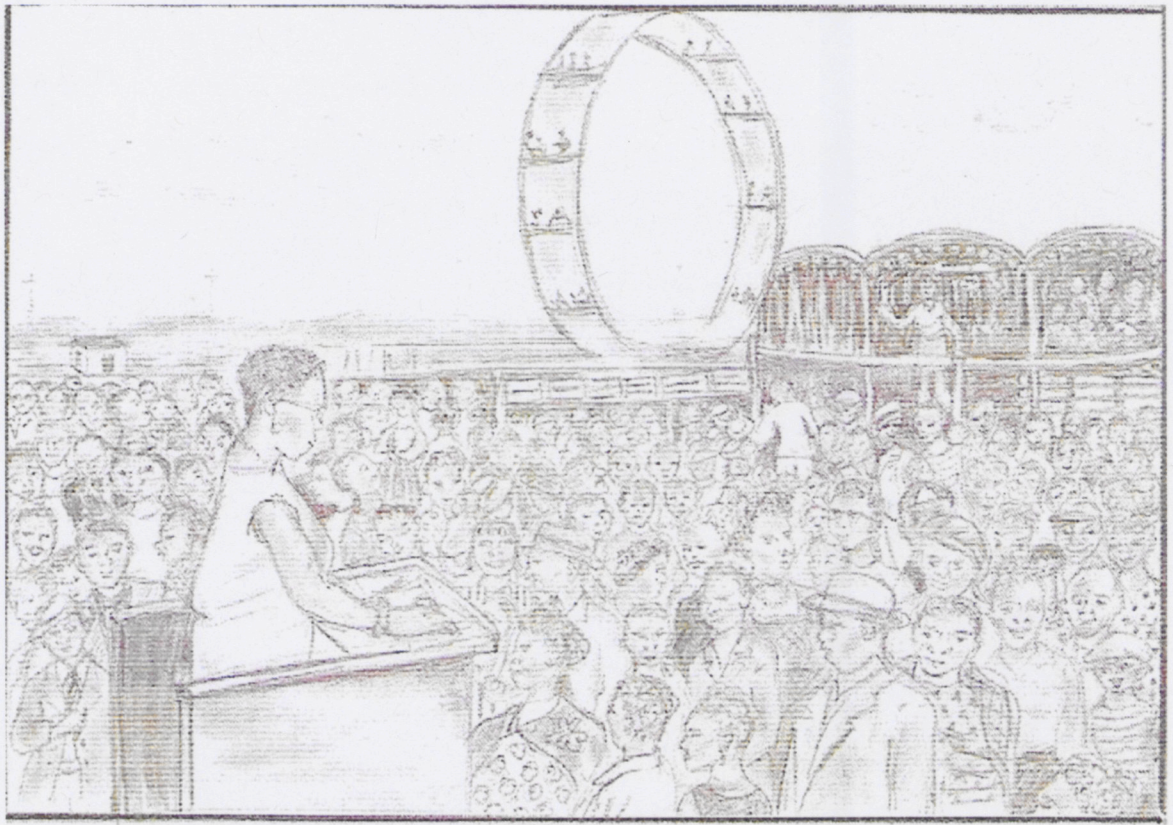
It's strange, Claytee. Honestly, in the beginning I wasn't thinking about children. I thought about writing this particular book for many years before I finally sat-down to write. What I really wanted to emphasize was the essential historical element. To accomplish that goal, Kenneth gave me the idea to interview other children of African American Showmen. That was a great asset to the overall concept. Sometimes when I write, unplanned issues come to mind. Therefore, I veer from my original outline. In a like manner following my deviation, the addition of vocabulary seemed right. Assistance for word recognition, comprehension, and writing prompts resulted from my experience in various classrooms. For seven years I worked as a substitute teacher daily and long-term in elementary, middle, high school, and alternative. While writing *Applause* it occurred to me that many children entering school are Latino. They arrive in the states during the summer and learn English words quickly, but they don't know the meaning of the words. Therefore, the children don't understand the context in which to use the words. Equally





Audrey Taylor Henry





Colored Day



This is where performers lived in segregated South. They decorated baths with curtains, mirrors, bedsprads, etc. Travel was also on train during carnival season.

The Sleeper Train

Pages from *The Sound of Applause* by Audrey Taylor Henry, about "outdoor forms of entertainment from the 1930-1960s."



important, many African American children also require vocabulary and comprehension assistance.

I UNDERSTAND WHAT YOU MEAN. BUT WAS IT JUST FOR YOUNGER PEOPLE?

Well, I think it is really good for 5<sup>th</sup> graders up through high school. *Applause* can also be used for college and high school drama courses for its entertainment and historical value. During my student teaching, students were constantly asking questions about segregation in theatre. And, these were not just African America students.

THAT'S INTERESTING.

Yes, I found it interesting also. The vocabulary and writing prompts were not in my original outline. Although it is different from Joseph Papp's literacy program where I taught, my book inspires children and teens to read and write. A least that's my hope; together with improving comprehension and reading fluency it equals literacy. The book combines storytelling with an important period in American history. Absolutely it can be used for middle, high school and college theatre classes.

THAT'S RIGHT!

My book was purchased by the Mayor's middle schools in Los Angeles for the elective classes. Those schools were not making AYP. *Applause* is easy reading storytelling not an academic book, but it is informative, with a focus on important historical facts not offered in our public school coursework. Likewise the book spotlights African Americans and Latinos in theatre, film, and music. That alone can encourage research. For example, Jay-Z, Lady Gaga, Justin Bieber, Jennifer Hudson, Beyonce and other popular performers. College theatre majors will find the historical facts interesting. My comments are not because I wrote "*Applause*", but it seems to be a little book that can be of interest to a large audience; more than I anticipated.

ONE MORE QUESTION ABOUT YOUR BOOK WHY DID YOU INCLUDE QUESTIONS?

African American children were the reason primarily. Many of our young children still speak "Black English." They hear it at home, which is no different from others who have come to America and learned English. Black folks adapt the language to their manner of speaking. Some



people will say, "Slavery has been over a very long time." Although true, many African American children are raised by grandparents or great-grandparents. Truly African American grandparents and great-grands are young in comparison to other ethnic groups. Slave women were impregnated quite young some as young as nine, ten, eleven or twelve. My cycle started at age ten. Oh, I could go on for hours on that issue. Simply put, once the vocabulary was there my thought was ask questions that will encourage them to conduct research and write too.

WONDERFUL, I THINK THAT'S EXCELLENT.

Thank you.

WHEN YOU LIVED AT THE MOULIN ROUGE WHILE YOU WERE DANCING HERE, DID YOU GET TO ENJOY ANY OF THE ENTERTAINMENT ON THE WEST SIDE OR CHURCHES ON THE WEST SIDE OR IN THE WEST SIDE COMMUNITY?

Unfortunately no, my socialization skills were poor, because I was extremely bashful. The incident which forced me to leave home shattered my dream of attending Juilliard. At least that is how it seemed to me at that time. That episode was compounded by my first husband's abandonment, leaving me alone with our two sons. There wasn't any place to go where I could accomplish my dream. In retrospect, low self-esteem made me think the other dancers had perfect lives and were prettier and just better than me. Interestingly, I didn't feel that way on stage. Barbara would make it a point to talk to me, but I never went out to socialize. My confidence was when I danced. As young Beyonce often says, "On stage I become Sasha." Many artists are painfully shy for a variety of reasons usually attached to issues of self-esteem. Certainly mine were self-esteem issues. My strength was my talent as a dancer so I used that to make a better life for myself and children.

SO DID YOU HAVE FOOD AT THE MOULIN ROUGE AT THAT TIME? DID THEY STILL HAVE THE KITCHEN OPEN?

Honestly, I don't recall. Our rooms were kitchenettes so I ate there. Sometimes I would bring something back from the food stand on the strip where we often walked between shows. Otherwise, during the day Barbara, Terri, and I would shop at the grocery store on the



West Side. My cooking skills leave a lot to be desired. Therefore, I would stock up on canned goods, frankfurters, cold cuts, and fruit and have it in my room refrigerator.

SO IS THERE ANYTHING ELSE THAT YOU WOULD LIKE TO ADD ABOUT YOUR LIFE—OR WHAT HAPPENED BETWEEN THE TELEPHONE COMPANY AND WRITING YOUR BOOK? AND WHAT MADE YOU WRITE THE BOOK?

Well, I give a lot of credit to Kenneth my husband for being able to write the book.

WHEN DID YOU MARRY KENNETH?

We married in 1977. He encourages me to do things I dream about. Of course, I accomplished quite a lot before meeting Kenneth. Nevertheless, I also dream a lot without taking action. Life circumstances forced me to reach certain goals before we met. For example, I had wanted to write for a very long time; and have written several plays. I learned to be very careful of dreaming too much out loud around Kenneth. Because the next thing I know he's pushing me to do it. He's my dream-maker. Honestly Claytee, Kenneth's mental energy is overwhelming. He can drive me crazy, but I love him for it. Still he's all about accomplishment; while I like to rest sometime.

DIDN'T YOU LIKE EDUCATION?

Oh yes, I liked school. When I lost my dream of Juilliard I experienced sadness. I loved Performing Arts and The American School of Ballet, but I was always alone. Sometimes the money was late and I didn't have carfare into Manhattan or lunch money. Still my mother was very much into education. Her maternal grandmother reared her in Mississippi until age thirteen; served as head mistress of the colored school. Mother was a high school graduate and an avid reader. She made certain I finished high school. My female first cousins on both sides went to college; paternal cousins' grew-up in Bermuda and my maternal white look-alike cousins in Chicago. For most of my school years, my marks were quite good. If I'd had my druthers I would have gone to college after high school. My father had had a college fund for me. However he let it go following a disagreement with my mother. Possibly I would have continued formal education had I not got pregnant. Clearly not having a college education added to my shyness



and inferiority complex. Barbara Taylor went to college. I made certain my boys went to college though.

SO WHY DIDN'T YOU GO?

I had to leave home and travel with my parents. After high school I got married, had two sons and that dream went by the wayside. The boy's father left us, but called later wanting me to come with the children. Nicely put I responded 'you must be kidding.' That was the last I heard of him until one son had graduated college and the other son had quit in his upper junior year. In my personal education journey, I started college before I met Kenneth.

I'M GETTING THE PICTURE. YOU WORKED AND YOUR PARENTS KEPT THE BOYS WHEN YOU TOURED.

Correct. On return from Europe I took one of those writing correspondence courses. And, eventually before meeting Kenneth, I enrolled in college; during those years I was already working in radio. Nevertheless it was easier to continue getting my BA and MA degrees after our marriage. Kenneth had my back. Now I am a doctoral candidate, an author and a cancer survivor. Before meeting Kenneth I had made certain my sons went to college. They were juniors when we met. On the paternal and maternal side of my nuclear family we are the only performing artists. Never have I wanted to be a classroom teacher. I love the arts.

SO YOU GOT YOUR DEGREES WHILE IN RADIO?

I started but had left radio before completing my masters. After radio I worked for Joseph Papp's Playwriting in the Schools a literacy program in public schools. In addition I worked as Director for Community Development at OIC-NY, and developed a communication workshop at Arthur Kill Prison. My masters' degree in Educational Theatre a specialization in counseling.

Consequently, after radio I worked several years as a family counselor. In Las Vegas I worked part-time for Big Brothers and Big Sisters, and P/T Juvenile Probation Intake. Also in Las Vegas I attended Sierra Nevada Teacher Education College for my teacher license. And, took a couple of courses at CSN post masters degree to satisfy substitute license provisions; subjects were Nevada Law and Political Science. Before coming out here I also took courses at New York University post my master's degree. Those NYU credits are too old for a transfer of credit



toward my doctorate. Oh well, that's life. I must mention that my travels and work experiences have enriched my life and education to an immeasurable degree.

WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO WITH YOUR PLAYS?

I'm going to publish and hopefully produce them and Mervyn's *Jazz Train*.

WHAT ABOUT YOUR BOOK?

The expectation is the book "*The Sound of Applause*" will be made into a mini-series. There are people who will be interviewed especially Mary Ann who worked on two carnivals. Those interviews have begun. The people must tell their own stories. The series is based on my book.

TELL ME WHO IS MARY ANN?

Her name is Mary Ann Jackson. In time after joining the carnival she married and divorced Melvin Jackson the son of one of the African American showmen. They have a daughter. Specifically Mary Ann exemplifies the young African American who used carnivals to get out of the South. Her cousin Alice had joined the carnival show a few years earlier. When the show toured Georgia, she located Mary Ann who was separated from her mother and other family members. At the time, I was not on tour but in school in New York. Briefly put, Mary Ann joined the show and eventually found her relatives in Connecticut. As most of the performers she adopted my parents; and became a performer. She credits my parents with giving her a life.

WHERE IS MARY ANN NOW?

She lives in Atlanta now with her daughter Constance Foster. Many years ago, after her cousin Alice had left the show with her husband, Mary Ann found her relatives in Hartford. Ultimately, she lived there and raised her daughter Connie. Mary Ann and Melvin divorced when Connie was quite young, but she made sure her daughter knew her dad and paternal relatives. Connie has an Associate degree in Public Relations; and is a very talented singer. Mary Ann became one of the featured singers on the show. Melvin is a musician so I guess music was in their daughter's genes.

SOUNDS VERY INTERESTING.



Yes, I think so too. I forgot to mention that Alice (Mary Ann's cousin) named her first child Audrey June after me. I remember feeling so honored. It was an unexpected compliment. At the time, I was still in New York in school. Unfortunately we lost connection with Alice when she and Lester left the carnival. Summing up details on Mary Ann's daughter, Connie is multilingual. She is fluent in English, Italian, and French. After going on tour in Italy, as I did years earlier, she remained there for a decade and married an African gentleman. Subsequently concern for her mother prompted Connie's return to the states. Mary Ann like me is also a cancer survivor. Their permanent home for now remains in Atlanta, Georgia.

#### WHAT DOES MARY ANN DO NOW?

She is a retired restaurant manager a job that followed her carnival days. She sings occasionally on gigs. Currently Mary Ann is looking forward to telling her story for the potential mini-series. She loved my parents and gives them credit, especially my mother, with teaching her essentials like how to dress, speak and in general how to conduct herself. When Mary Ann came on the carnival my oldest half-sister had come to live with us, and was there. I was in New York in school. Mary Ann always thought my half-sister and I had the same father. An idea my mother usually promoted. However, my two half-sister's father is Flanders Brooks. Last I heard, Mary Ann still thinks she knows more about my family than I do. It's rather endearing, because it points out her level of attachment to my parents. My family knows the truth.

#### WERE YOU AND MARY ANN IN TOUCH THROUGHOUT THE YEARS?

Off and on we made contact. I lived in Italy several years, but we connected through a mutual friend Skip; now deceased but had worked on the carnival. On return from Italy, my home for most of the years was New York. Eventually it was Mary Ann that helped me reach Melvin. My son Andre often met him on the golf course but never remembered to get his telephone number. Skip put me in touch with Mary Ann who had moved to Atlanta and she put me in touch with Connie. Finally Connie who was visiting her father put me in touch with Melvin. He and I met when we were children, but had not been in touch for years. I found Leon Claxton's daughter through the Showmen's League.

#### THE BOOK WAS COMPLETELY YOUR IDEA?



Yes. The complete story of the Showmen of Color had never been told. That was the intention of the book. Who the people were that joined the tour and why carnivals were important to their general well-being. My husband suggested trying to locate other children of African American Showmen. Leon Claxton's daughter Gwennette, and Jerry Jackson's son Melvin were both interviewed for my book. Actually, I am still searching for other folks like Mary Ann who worked on these shows for a possible second edition.

SO HOW DID YOU GET THE BOOK PUBLISHED?

I sent it to Dorrance Publishing. My book was placed with their subsidiary company Red Lead. Only changes made after the deadline of submission were charged to me.

SO IS THIS LIKE SELF-PUBLISHING?

Not really. I didn't pay to have my book published. Neither did I self-publish the book. Red Lead is print-on-demand but they pay all printing expenses; and place their books on Amazon.com, Borders.com, and Barnes and Noble and accept orders at Red Lead Press. The publisher offers public relations e.g. book fairs for which their authors are charged a fee; if they want their books included. Book Fairs are national and international. Some have been: the National Library Association, the Association of African American Librarians, State School Libraries and numerous other venues. Red Lead authors select in which book fairs they aspire to have their books included. For this service there is a fee.

WELL AUDREY I THINK THAT YOU HAVE JUST HAD AND ARE CONTINUING TO HAVE AN AMAZING LIFE.

Thank you.

SO I AM GOING TO END UNLESS THERE IS SOMETHING ELSE THAT YOU'D LIKE TO ADD?

Well, I think there is a real chance we might get a mini-series based on my book and also a film. In addition, a classic dance piece by a notable company is possible. The carnival atmosphere makes that choreography an intriguing prospect. During our interview my mother is mentioned numerous times, but I never refer to her as Vivian Anola Taylor. Vivian fondly renamed Mi Mi



by the grandchildren is the parent who introduced me to the arts and cultivated my appreciation for them. It would be remiss on my part not to acknowledge her aesthetic appreciation which contributed much to my life without providing her name.

THESE ARE THE CHILDREN OF THE SHOWMEN, WHEN YOU SAY WE WHAT AND WHO DO YOU MEAN?

Well, I always refer to them as we, although I will possibly go to New York to be the consultant on the mini-series. That's because the landmark document used for the mini-series is my book. Nevertheless, I think of the book as a collective history. The other two children of African American Showmen are Melvin Jackson and Gwennette Claxton both interviewed by me for the book.

SO THERE ARE OTHER FAMILIES, IS THAT WHAT YOU'RE SAYING?

Yes-the people who gave me first person accounts. They will tell their really important stories. This is the only book about the carnival that captures the African American and Latino experience. When most historians write about the circus or the carnival the biographers focus on Caucasian Carnies. That is not to imply that carnival historians never acknowledged African American Showmen by name because they have. However, they simply never knew the entire story. Caucasian Carnival historians never had to escape the Black Codes of the South. Therefore, it was easy to assume African Americans especially were simply looking for study work.

THE PRIOR TO THIS BOOK THE MAJOR MOTIVATION FOR AFRICAN AMERICANS JOINING CARNIVALS WAS MISUNDERSTOOD?

No. The main reasons were simply not explored or overlooked. In support of the carnival historians they didn't recognize any reason for exploration. Clearly all carnival historians realized the so-called "jig shows" made money. Furthermore the performers were considered entertainers though many were not. *Applause* is the landmark reference book about African American and Hispanic Carnies; because it notes how minorities used carnivals as a vehicle to find a better life.

THAT'S RIGHT. WELL, THIS IS A WONDERFUL INTERVIEW.



Well, thank you. Thank you for your interest. One more issue I have noted follows:

ADDENDUM/Additional thoughts:

Before we close please accept my apology for unintentionally misrepresenting some of the dates during our taped interview. I had to get with my sons to clarify some dates. I recalled being in Montreal when someone important was assassinated. That person was President Kennedy.

During Dr. King's assassination I was in Miami, Florida. It's easy remembering many personal benchmark dates relative to me and my boys. Nevertheless, when a person tours all the time exact dates tend to run together. I have clarified them here. Also please note Comic Red Foxx appeared in the 1957 version of The Cotton Club Revue.



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# New musical to Broadway, tour

NEW YORK (ANP) Manning Gurian will present "The Jazz Train," an all tan musical revue, next season in New York. Gurian, who was represented on Broadway this season with "The Warm Peninsula," plans to send the musical, staged by Mervyn Nelson Janis, on a coast to coast tour before bringing it into New York for a run.

"The Jazz Train" opened a 30-week tour last week in Rome at the Sistina Theatre.

Leslie Scott, who played Porgy in the recent European tour of the Day singer Linda Hopkins, the teams of Cook and Brown, Stoney and June head the aggregation of 33.

Following the Rome engagement "The Jazz Train" will play for a week in Milan, Florence, Portugal, Spain, Genoa, Turin, Bologna and many, French and the Scandinavian countries will also be included in the tour.

Alex Valdez is producing the revue in Europe.

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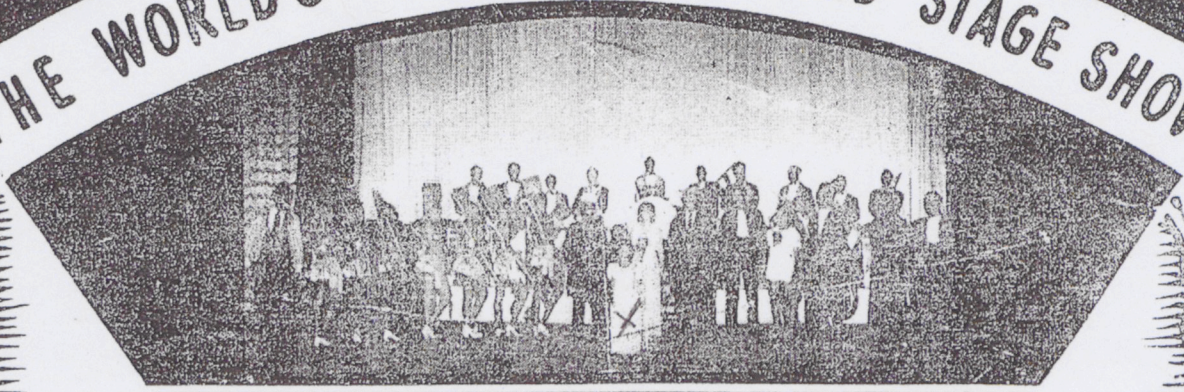
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