

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Genois Brabson

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Wilson, Genois, 1949-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Genois Brabson,
Dates:	July 30, 2002
Bulk Dates:	2002
Physical Description:	5 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:05:11).
Abstract:	Fire safety specialist Genois Brabson (1949 -) was the first African American woman firefighter in Fort Wayne, Indiana, where she is a fire safety specialist and parole officer. Brabson was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on July 30, 2002, in Fort Wayne, Indiana. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2002_139
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Genois Brabson, the oldest of eight children, was born on August 15, 1949 in Phillips County, Arkansas. She was raised in Fort Wayne, Indiana and attended college there, graduating from Indiana University in 1974 with a B.A. in sociology and a desire to work with young people. Brabson then joined the Fort Wayne Fire Department, where she earned accolades for her work in fire safety education.

Brabson was the first woman to work as a fire dispatcher in Fort Wayne when she began in 1975. Then, in 1979, she became the first woman to attend the fire department's training academy. She worked as a fire educator and inspector until 1987, when she received a promotion to fire education director. Through her fire awareness seminars, Brabson taught both fire department employees and Fort Wayne residents, especially elementary school children. She sought and received block grants to provide smoke detectors to low-income families. When she realized the need for specialized training, she adapted her presentation for hearing-impaired children. She performed tests to determine whether smoke detectors could be designed to increase their effectiveness for hearing-impaired people and the tests showed that adjusting the pitch and location of detectors made a significant difference. Brabson also tailored her presentation for disabled people. Her fire awareness seminars are credited with saving the lives of at least two children.

Brabson has been the president of the Black Fire Fighters and a member of the Big Brothers-Big Sisters mentor program. In 1986, she was granted a Women of Achievement Award from the YWCA and a Philo T. Farnsworth Award for a children's fire safety video that aired on public television. The American Legion declared her the Indiana Fire Fighter of the Year in 1990. She was the first African American woman to receive such an award.

In 1995, Brabson moved on to new challenges and became a probation officer for Allen Superior Court Family Relations Division. She counsels juvenile offenders and their families, showing children and parents how to cope with anger, communicate and find solutions. She is married to James Brabson and has one son, Marlin.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Genois Brabson was conducted by Larry Crowe on July 30, 2002, in Fort Wayne, Indiana, and was recorded on 5 Betacame SP videocassettes. Fire safety specialist Genois Brabson (1949 -) was the first African American woman firefighter in Fort Wayne, Indiana, where she is a fire safety specialist and parole officer.

Restrictions

Restrictions on Access

Restrictions may be applied on a case-by-case basis at the discretion of The HistoryMakers®.

Restrictions on Use

All use of materials and use credits must be pre-approved by The HistoryMakers®. Appropriate credit must be given. Copyright is held by The HistoryMakers®.

Related Material

Information about the administrative functions involved in scheduling, researching, and producing the interview, as well as correspondence with the interview subject is stored electronically both on The HistoryMakers® server and in two databases maintained by The HistoryMakers®, though this information is not included in this finding aid.

Controlled Access Terms

This interview collection is indexed under the following controlled access subject terms.

Persons:

Wilson, Genois, 1949-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Wilson, Genois, 1949---Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Fort Wayne (Ind.)

Occupations:

Fire Safety Specialist

HistoryMakers® Category:

CivicMakers

Administrative Information

Custodial History

Interview footage was recorded by The HistoryMakers®. All rights to the interview have been transferred to The HistoryMakers® by the interview subject through a signed interview release form. Signed interview release forms have been deposited with Jenner & Block, LLP, Chicago.

Preferred Citation

The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Genois Brabson, July 30, 2002. The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection, 1900 S. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.

Processing Information

This interview collection was processed and encoded on 5/30/2023 by The HistoryMakers® staff. The finding aid was created adhering to the following standards: DACS, AACR2, and the Oral History Cataloging Manual (Matters 1995).

Other Finding Aid

A Microsoft Access contact database and a FileMaker Pro tracking database, both maintained by The HistoryMakers®, keep track of the administrative functions involved in scheduling, researching, and producing the interview.

Detailed Description of the Collection

Series I: Original Interview Footage

Video Oral History Interview with Genois Brabson, Section A2002_139_001_001, TRT: 0:29:30 ?
Genois Wilson describes her family background and childhood. Her mother, Bernadine Cokes Young, was born in 1932 to Hattie Cokes and McKinley Cokes in Holly Grove, Arkansas. Bernadine Cokes Young's parents had moved from Georgia to Arkansas, and she believed that her grandparents were slaves in Georgia. In Arkansas, Hattie Cokes lost much of her family to tuberculosis.

Wilson's father, Leonard Young, was born on July 18, 1928 to Samantha Hurd and Permeader Hurd in Blytheville, Arkansas. Young claims to have given McKinley Cokes a cow in exchange for his daughter's hand in marriage. Genoia Wilson was born on August 15, 1949. In 1953, her family moved to Fort Wayne, Indiana, where her father worked as a construction worker and her mother worked for Magnavox. Her family attended Pilgrim Baptist Church, and Wilson attended Hanna Elementary School and Harmer Elementary School before being part of the first integrated class at Central High School.

Video Oral History Interview with Genoia Brabson, Section A2002_139_001_002, TRT: 0:28:30 ?

Genoia Wilson describes her childhood and the beginning of her career as a firefighter. Wilson attended Hanna Elementary School and Harmer Elementary School in Fort Wayne, Indiana, where was an enthusiastic and curious student. In 1958, she began attending Central High School as part of their first integrated class and remained there for middle school and high school. After graduating in 1968, Wilson married her first husband, a laborer with the Zollner Corporation. After her husband was drafted to serve in the Vietnam War, Wilson enrolled at the University of Saint Francis for a year and in 1971 enrolled at IPFW, Indiana University-Purdue University in Fort Wayne and gave birth to her son, Marlin Adams. She graduated from IPFW with a B.A. degree in sociology in 1974. With no jobs in sociology available, Wilson applied to work as a police officer and became the first female dispatcher in 1975. In 1979, she became the first woman to attend the Fort Wayne Fire Academy.

Video Oral History Interview with Genoia Brabson, Section A2002_139_001_003, TRT: 0:29:15 ?

Genoia Wilson talks about her career as the first black female firefighter in Fort Wayne, Indiana. In 1979, Wilson became the first woman to train in the Fort Wayne Fire Academy. While some of the firemen were skeptical of her abilities, Wilson found support amongst the training chiefs and her classmates. After graduating, Wilson went to the Fire Prevention Bureau and attended the National Fire Academy, where she started a fire safety team at the Fort Wayne Fire Department. With this team, Wilson specialized in teaching elementary school children, providing smoke detectors to low-income families, and teaching the hearing-impaired. In 1989, this program led to the development of Safety Village and the Survive Alive House, where children learned how to protect themselves from a house fire. In 1995, Wilson retired from the Fort Wayne Fire Department. By this time, at least sixteen women had been hired by the fire department.

Video Oral History Interview with Genoia Brabson, Section A2002_139_001_004, TRT: 0:30:31 ?

Genoia Wilson continues to describe her career as a firefighter, her plans for the future, and her legacy. She reflects upon her difficult relationship with one of the women who joined the department and who became Fire Prevention Chief in 1989. After leaving the Fort Wayne Fire Department in 1995, Wilson became a probation officer for the Allen Superior Court Family Relations Division, where she continues to work with kids. She shares a memory of her older sister who died in a wood-burning stove fire in 1951 and how that inspired her career as a firefighter. She reflects upon her family and legacy of inspiring children. She ends the interview by narrating her photographs.

Video Oral History Interview with Genoia Brabson, Section A2002_139_001_005, TRT: 0:07:25 ?

Genoia Wilson continues to narrate her photographs.