

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Elsie Rumford

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Rumford, Elsie, 1945-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Elsie Rumford,
Dates:	April 2, 2005
Bulk Dates:	2005
Physical Description:	6 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:50:07).
Abstract:	Suicidologist and school social work coordinator Elsie Rumford (1945 -) presented to the California State Senate Subcommittee on Medical Education and Health Needs in support of SB1814, the Suicide Prevention Act of 1974. Rumford worked with several public health and suicide prevention organizations to help raise awareness about the rising prevalence of suicide within the African American community. Rumford was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on April 2, 2005, in Los Angeles, California. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2005_095
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Suicidologist Elsie R. Rumford was born in Berkeley, California, on January 15, 1945; her mother, Elsie R. Carrington Rumford, was a teacher in Berkeley, and her father, pharmacist William Byron Rumford, was the first African American elected official in northern California. Attending Longfellow Elementary School, Burbank Junior High School and Berkeley High School, Rumford earned her B.A. degree in Spanish and sociology from San Francisco State University in 1967, and her M.S.W. degree from the University of California at Los Angeles in 1973.

Rumford's graduate thesis on the rising black suicide rate challenged popular thinking on the subject. After speaking before the Charles R. Drew Post Graduate Medical School, Martin Luther King Hospital, and the Suicide Prevention Center of Los Angeles in 1974, Rumford presented to the California State Senate Subcommittee on Medical Education and Health Needs in support of SB1814, the Suicide Prevention Act of 1974. Rumford appeared on many television and radio talk shows to discuss black suicides and worked as a script consultant to a suicide-related episode of *The Jeffersons* in 1976. Rumford worked as a clinical social worker for the Dignity Center, a Los Angeles Suicide Prevention Center program, from 1974 to 1975, and El Nido Services from 1976 to 1981. From 1985 to 1988, Rumford was a school-based counselor for the Carson Child Guidance Partnership Program for the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD), and from 1988 to 1996 she was their outreach coordinator. After 1997 Rumford began working as a team leader/DIS Counselor at the Los Angeles Unified School District's School Mental Health.

A member of the American Association of Suicidology; the National Association of Black Social Workers; and the National Association of Social Workers, Rumford received the Carson Coordinating Council's Outstanding Service Award in 1996. Rumford, who had three sons, remained a resident of Los Angeles.

Elsie Rumford was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on April 2, 2005.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Elsie Rumford was conducted by Larry Crowe on April 2, 2005, in Los Angeles, California, and was recorded on 6 Betacame SP videocassettes. Suicidologist and school social work coordinator Elsie Rumford (1945 -) presented to the California State Senate Subcommittee on Medical Education and Health Needs in support of SB1814, the Suicide Prevention Act of 1974. Rumford worked with several public health and suicide prevention organizations to help raise awareness about the rising prevalence of suicide within the African American community.

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:

Rumford, Elsie, 1945-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Rumford, Elsie, 1945---Interviews

Public health personnel--Interviews

African American social workers--Interviews

Community mental health personnel--Interviews

Health reformers--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

School Social Work Coordinator

HistoryMakers® Category:

EducationMakers

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 Elsie Rumford, April 2, 2005. 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 Elsie Rumford, Section A2005_095_001_001, TRT: 0:29:59 ?

Elsie Rumford was born on January 15, 1948, in Berkeley, California. Her mother, Elsie Carrington, was born in 1908 in Oakland, California. Her maternal great-grandmother was born in New Orleans, Louisiana to a black woman and a white government official. She was raised in San Francisco, California, where she met and married her husband, who was a doorman at one of the city's first hotels. Rumford's maternal grandmother married a man from Barbados and had three daughters. The family relocated after the San Francisco earthquake, eventually settling in Berkeley. Rumford's father, William Byron Rumford, was born in Courtland, Arizona in 1908. After his father abandoned the family, his mother remarried and moved to Phoenix, Arizona. After graduating high school, he attended several schools in California to study pharmacy. Rumford's parents married in 1932 and were active in civil rights causes. In 1948, her father became the first black elected to the California State Assembly from Northern California.

Public health personnel--Interviews.

African American social workers--Interviews.

Community mental health personnel--Interviews.

Health reformers--Interviews.

Video Oral History Interview with Elsie Rumford, Section A2005_095_001_002, TRT: 0:29:32 ?

Elsie Rumford's father attended the University of California School of Pharmacy in San Francisco and was the first black pharmacist to be hired at Highland Hospital in Oakland, California. He was a member of the Appomattox Club and made history with his election as the first African American in the California State Assembly from Northern California in 1948. He continued to run his pharmacy throughout his tenure as assemblyman until 1966. He then served as a director at the Federal Trade Commission in Washington, D.C. when invited by former defense secretary, Caspar Weinberger. Rumford was influenced by her father's sense of humor and her mother's domestic prowess and care for others. She had two older brothers and grew up among the black community in Berkeley, California alongside HistoryMaker Leola "Roscoe" Dellums. She attended First AME Church in Oakland regularly with her parents and enjoyed the music of Fats Domino, the television show 'Howdy Doody' and the movie 'Island in the Sun.'

Video Oral History Interview with Elsie Rumford, Section A2005_095_001_003, TRT: 0:29:22 ?

Elsie Rumford's father was heavily involved with civil rights issues in his political career. In partnership with fellow California State Assemblyman HistoryMaker Augustus F. "Gus" Hawkins, he worked to implement the Fair Employment Practices Act signed into law in 1959. As chairman of the public health committee, he helped pass a bill that allowed for a free polio vaccine. Rumford attended Longfellow Elementary School, where she developed an interest in math; the predominantly black Burbank Junior High School, where she played volleyball and learned Latin; and Berkeley High School, where she was a member of the Bithynians social club. Her neighborhood had a significant Asian presence, so she learned of the internment of Japanese Americans during World War II. Her father's friendship with Cesar Chavez acquainted her with the efforts of the United Farmworkers of America. In 1962, Rumford enrolled at San

Francisco State College where she studied sociology and Spanish during the rise of the black power movement.

Video Oral History Interview with Elsie Rumford, Section A2005_095_001_004, TRT: 0:28:36 ?

Elsie Rumford graduated from San Francisco State College in 1967 with her B.A. degree in sociology and Spanish. Although her college years coincided with the rise of the black power movement and the advent of hippies, Rumford's traditional upbringing kept her removed from the era's cultural revolutions. From 1967 to 1970, she worked for the California's department of employment as a minority representative. When she uncovered and reported evidence of employment discrimination, she was ostracized. She left for a brief stint at the City of Oakland before beginning her master's degree in social work at the University of California, Berkeley. After a semester, she moved with her husband to Maryland and attended Howard University in Washington, D.C. She transferred again to the University of California in Los Angeles in 1972 when her husband was hired in the area. She wrote her master's thesis on suicide in the black community, and it revealed a higher suicide rate among black youth than their white counterparts.

Video Oral History Interview with Elsie Rumford, Section A2005_095_001_005, TRT: 0:29:11 ?

Elsie Rumford's master's thesis revealed a higher rate of suicide among African Americans, especially male youth, than previously assumed. Rumford discovered that a major motivation for these suicides was the loss of a romantic relationship. She also discovered that suicide attempts in the black community might not always be recognized as such, resulting in underreporting. Rumford received wide recognition for her thesis and was invited to continue her research with noted suicidologist Leonard Schneiderman; she declined, focusing on her family instead. Rumford was employed as a clinical social worker with the Suicide Prevention Center from 1974 to 1975 and El Nido Services from 1976 to 1981. From 1985 to 1988, she was a psychiatric social worker for the Los Angeles Unified School District and continued working in the district in the School Mental Health program. Rumford reflects upon her sons' and her parents' response to her career, her concerns for the African American community, her life and her legacy.

Video Oral History Interview with Elsie Rumford, Section A2005_095_001_006, TRT: 0:23:27 ?

Elsie Rumford's values were deeply influenced by her parents, Elsie Carrington Rumford and William Byron Rumford. Their professional success, personal happiness and service to the African American community instilled in Rumford a deep sense of pride in her heritage. Rumford describes how she wants to be remembered and closes the interview by narrating her photographs.