

Interview with Bil Moss
Interview 1 of 3
April 23, 2009

Bil and I met in the living room of her house at 1270 Huson, the same house she and her former husband Harold built in 1953 after moving to Tacoma from Detroit.

Kristina L. Walker: You were born in Detroit? Or you're from Detroit?

Bil Moss: I was born in Detroit in 1932.

KLW: Okay. And, what was your family like?

BM: Well, my grandparents had come up. My grandfather had brought his family up to Detroit from Alabama to work in the Ford plant, in the automobile industry, and his two youngest daughters he brought with him. He had five children altogether but these were the two that he brought with him. And I don't know too much about them because in growing up there was that separation between the north and the south. So I grew up, I don't think that I've ever been, well, I went through Huntsville a couple times, but that I've ever made any connections in Alabama.

KLW: Oh, okay.

BM: So I grew up. I went to elementary school and middle school and then I went to the High School of Commerce which was a business school for high school. At that particular time, I guess it was like the WASL¹ is here in the eighth or ninth grade it was decided whether you would go on to college prep or you would go to business or to general. At that particular time, there weren't places in college prep. At least in Detroit that my parents were aware of. African American young women would go into college prep. What that amounted to was that I was sent to the business school which was across the street. There was a bridge, and on one side was the High School of Commerce and on the other side was Cass Tech, which was a college preparatory school. Mostly boys. And where I went was mostly girls. But we used the same lunch room. (laughs). It was interesting. It's developed now that the High School of Commerce is not in that location any more but Cass Tech is and it is both male and female. Also during that time, African American children, particularly in my neighborhood went to Miller High School, which is the high school that Joe Lewis' sister taught at but it was in the black area so I was sent out of my neighborhood in order to go to school. And helped to more or less integrate the High School of Commerce.

KLW: The business school you said was mostly women. Was it mostly African American?

BM: No, it was mostly Caucasian. It was mostly the women. To my recollection, the black women that went there would today have been assigned to the college prep. I got an excellent education. It was an excellent [school]. It's still well-recognized in the city as being a good place to go if you plan to go into something like accounting. I took a double major, at that

¹ Washington Assessment of Student Learning is a state-mandated test for elementary through high school students.

time, stenography and accounting. So, you were encouraged to - - the options I had at that time for jobs. . . . That was the other thing. That was one of the reasons you went to that school was that once you graduated there weren't a lot of places that you could go that - - other than, for the skills that you would have obtained there. So I took state exams in my last year and so from there I went to the state health department in Lansing, Michigan. And I worked in the engineering department. IN the meantime, when I graduated from high school, Harold Moss' sisters were in the same classes with me. So, that's how I met him. Upon graduation, his parents gave his sisters a party and I was invited and so that's where I met him. And he, that summer, as a graduation present his parents gave them a trip to California. In the meantime, while he was in California, he was called up for the National Guard. He was in the National Guard and he was called up for the Korean Conflict. So, over the first year, we wrote back and forth and then went home on leave, in September 1951, (I graduate I June of 1950) and in September of 1951 I married.

KLW: And that whole time you were working at the state health department?

BM: Hmm, mmm. Yes, I was working there. Lansing is about 82 miles from Detroit. So I came home most weekends. But then after we got married in September 1951, in December of 1951 I came to Tacoma. So, I've been here since 1951.

KLW: Before we get to Tacoma, if I can take you back to your family a little bit. Do you have siblings?

BM: Yes, I am the oldest of seven.

KLW: Wow.

BM: I have two sisters and three brothers that are living and I have one brother that passed when he was about 35. And, of course my mother. As we grew up my grandmother lived with us. My grandmother, after 35 years of marriage, my grandmother and my grandfather divorced. And my grandmother lived with us. And so she was with us growing up in the early years.

KLW: So, your household was your mother and father, your grandmother, and all of your siblings.

BM: Yes, all seven of us. [laughs] That was typical back in that time. People had a lot of kids - five, six, seven kids.

KLW: Can you tell me a little bit about growing up in Detroit in your younger years?

BM: What I remember was that we moved to a neighborhood when I was about 10 or 11 that was just beginning to integrate and that we had a lot of relations. We had a German lady on one side, we had a Russian family on one side. I can't say that we say that we did a whole lot of stuff because that was during the high point of segregation. Even though I was in Detroit and it was less of a factor in the North than it was in the South. Still, as I look back on it of course, I didn't realize it then, as I look back on it we were rather contained.

13:06

My mother was somewhat of an aggressive kind of person so when we moved to this community, my mother bought a house. At that time, I don't know if, you're probably too young to know, the house was kind of a duplex and we had a full house upstairs and a full house downstairs. That's where I was raised until I went off to Lansing to work in the health department.

13:49

So, then, I got married. And we came to Tacoma. I should back up a little bit because on the segregation and discrimination and so forth. I evidently was very protected because I remember and I cite it often. I remember that I used to get in great debates in Lansing with some friends that I had met. We had this big to do about. I would say "well, if you get your education and you do this and you don't get in trouble and blah blah blah, there's no discrimination. And so I always felt that there was a way around. Not really, really knowing.

So, when I came to Tacoma after we married, Harold was discharged in about well - - I came in December and he was discharged in May. And so that meant we wanted to buy a house. In the mean time, when I got here, I had gotten a job out at Fort Lewis. That was interesting because the fellow that was the head of the Masons here, the African American Masons (they were separated at the time), was the janitor at Woolworth. And so, that kind of amazed me. And so when I went to Fort Lewis, there were maybe a half a dozen African Americans and I went as a secretary to start, non-military on the whole post. That was when I began to recognize that, you know, I'm out of my little cocoon and things aren't what I had thought they were. You know and some of these discussions, I was defending, saying "if you do the right things, you'll get the right rewards" Well, not necessarily.

We made some friends that were about our age and every Sunday, we'd get into someone's car and we'd go all over the city house hunting. Looking at property and so forth. And we finally decided on a place on Pacific and 50 something. A minister was getting sent to Alaska and so he was selling his house - furnished which was good for us because we didn't have a whole lot.

KLW: Now, when Harold was in the military, were you living on base?

BM: No. No, we were living at 1509 South I [Street] which is down in the middle of hilltop.

KLW: So 15th and I, right?

BM: Uh huh. It was in the hilltop. Hilltop was different. Hilltop was integrated, there were bakeries. We lived on I, on K St (which is now Martin Luther King) there were bakeries, there was a theater, there was grocery stores. It was an integrated kind of community. Although, there weren't African American business people in that area. But there were all kinds of, in fact, I think what I can remember is there were a lot of Italian people that lived in that area at that time.

This minister was glad to see us because he wanted to go on to his next assignment. And so he told us that he would *love* to have this young couple that would like to buy his house. And we had, because we were just starting out and I had been working ever since that September that I

got out of school which would have been 1950 so I would have been working going on a year and a half. And one of the things that my grandmother always taught me was that you always put some money away. War bonds were the big thing in that time. I had a war bond. We had some income and then after we got here, we opened up a bank account at Fort Lewis. (This builds into something). This minister said that he would be glad to sell us the house. Then he called us and said "I'm having some trouble from my neighbors. And I'd like for you to meet with them 'cause if you make the impression that you made on me, I'm sure that they will welcome you into the neighborhood."

So, one Saturday, we made arrangements and we went to the house. The first house on the corner, we decided just to drop in on. And we could see the lady looking out at us, but she wouldn't open the door. We knocked on the door, she wouldn't open the door. And of course, this was kind of disappointing so we went across to the ministers house (the one we wanted to buy) and the doors start slamming, front door, back door, however many doors there were, there were people from the whole neighborhood coming to see us. But their objective was that they didn't want us in the neighborhood, that their property values would go down, that it would cause the neighborhood to become bad, and all the technical things. Now this was in 1952 – 53, sometime in there. And that experience, for me, was the experience that brought to light to me, that things weren't as rosy as I had always figured that they were.

KLW: And you're 20 years old at this point?

BM: Mmm, hmmm. And I cried all night. One, it would have been such a gift for us to have moved. You know, the furniture was nice, they were leaving everything, we didn't have to buy anything, it was in a nice neighborhood, it already had the lawn and all that kind of stuff. It was just such a disappointment. So, then that created a different mindset relative to where my place in Tacoma [would be]. But we continued to look and we ran into another Sunday, we, I don't know if we got his name out of the paper or what, but we ran into a situation where we met this realtor and I don't remember where it was but it was next to a railroad track. We said "We really don't want to be next to the railroad tracks and have the train." And he said "Oh no, no, the trains only come by once in the morning, you get used to it, you don't even hear them after a while." This was after church so it was about 1 or 2 o'clock. Beep beep, beep beep, you know, here it came. So, that didn't work out and became memorable as another.

24:00

Then we met another real estate person. I don't think he was really, well, he may have been a real estate person, because he took us around different places and he brought us up here.

KLW: To this house?

BM: Well, no, we built this house. He brought us up to this property. At that time, there were only about 12 houses in this area. It was a dirt road, but it was beautiful, this was all woods and the houses, they had just built the school, and the houses that were here were all individually built. And so he brought us to show us. The tree weren't this tall, you could see almost to Sixth Avenue. And the tallest tree, you couldn't see at this window [points to window].

KLW: Oh, wow.

BM: And across, Cheney Stadium and all of that area, Fred Meyers, it was all woods. It was really beautiful. And so we thought “oh, good” but then miss smarty decided she would call the owner. We were told there were 40 acres up in here. It had been a chicken farm and that this man was trying to sell. His name was Mr. Wright. So, I call Mr. Wright and I told him that we were interested in the property. We knew which lot it was, the real estate fellow had told us. And I asked him, trying to be straight up, I asked him if he would be opposed to a Negro (because we were Negroes then) buying this property because I wanted to make contact with him to buy it. He starts back skating, saying “Well, I have another piece of property somewhere else but you know, I have these 40 acres up here and I’m trying to sell it and if I sell it to you, then I won’t be able to sell the rest of it so I’d rather not sell this piece.” But he was giving me an alternative that was someplace where that problem would not exist. We had a friend who was very fair, a male friend, he was of mixed race but he looked Caucasian. We got him to call and go and buy it for us. Then, we went down to the assessor’s office and had it transferred over for a dollar. We could do that then. But that’s just the beginning of our problems.

27:45

We had an African American/Negro architect but he couldn’t get a license in Tacoma. He had to be, I forgot what the title is, an assistant. He couldn’t get a license to practice in Washington State. But he could be an architect’s assistant – that’s not the terminology but I can’t remember what it was. We had him draw our house, our plans, which I still have, and he designed the house and we proceeded to try to find someone that would build it.

Oh, I have to back up and say the reason we were brought and shown this property, was that the person that brought us had a conflict with Mr. Wright, the owner, because he had done work for him and he hadn’t paid him. So he decided to bring us down and show us this property. And then we proceeded, once we had bought the property and transferred it into our names, we proceeded to get the plans. We actually had the plans because we had planned to go back to Detroit. Detroit is flat. So we had the plans designed mostly for a flat piece of ground.

KLW: This doesn’t look like a very flat piece of property!

BM: No, we had the plans designed mostly for a flat piece of ground. He had drawn up the plans for us. So, we proceeded to go to the bank. First the bank at Fort Lewis where we had our account and then the banks around - and we were black balled! We could not find a bank, and we didn’t have a whole lot of money, but we had more than the 20 percent for a down payment. So, eventually, it winds up that we have to go to Portland to get the construction [loan].

What happens is, then we try to find a contractor that would build it for us. We found this contractor and he would have trouble getting the financing so we had to go to Portland to get the construction loan and we had to go to Seattle to get the mortgage. With him, it turns out, he was a contractor that would get paid from one house and instead of finishing that house, he would put that money into building another house so eventually, while he was working on our

house, the feds caught up with him. See how the story goes, it seems like every time we get a break, something happens. In the meantime, we moved in here in April 1955, you know, we got the house built.

Have to go back to another thing. We had never set foot on this property, we had this property almost a year because we didn't want to upset the neighbors. Harold had two friends, one was Hispanic, one was Caucasian, and he brought them up here to show them the property and they threw the door open and ran down, all this was woods, and they ran down and they stood out there. We had never set foot on the property.

KLW: The contractor that started it, finished it?

BM: No, what happened was, we lived in it for about a year because he could pay off certain things and he had to satisfy the feds. We almost had free rent. It took a year to straighten out things and in the meantime we were here. We didn't have to move out. But the neighbors were wonderful. We had a pharmacist living next door who is now retired and he made his own beer and he said, "They seem like a nice couple to me, if they don't mind my beer, then I don't mind them." On this side, was the person that had the, it's a place where men's go when they're homeless. I remember his name but not the organization. His name was Reverend Shaunnessy. He was very nice, he had little grandsons over there and they were very nice.

Everyone *appeared* to be nice. There didn't seem to be any trouble except that everyone was starting to put in gardens, this was a fairly new area so they were putting in their yards and their flowers and so forth so I joined.

Oh, back up. When we moved, what little furniture we had, we had at the time, the moving van brought it for us and as we were getting off the van, a little boy ran down the street and say "Hey daddy, the Niggers are moving in!" [laughs]

We moved in, and nobody bothered us, and we had it set up with our friends that they would call every hour or so to make sure everything was alright and we weren't burned out.

KLW: Was that kind of thing happening in Tacoma? Was that a worry?

BM: We didn't know, but all the stuff that we had gone through, we just, we may have overacted. It didn't appear and after we moved in, nobody bothered us. A couple of the neighbors did come over and as I said, on both sides of us, (the Rescue Mission is where he worked [points next door]) the neighbors seemed to be fine. But I joined the Garden Club and I went to two meetings. And they disbanded Garden Club [laughs].

KLW: Really?

35:55

BM: Yeah, they said "well, we decided that we" I don't know if they really disbanded but that's what they told me.

KLW: So that was a neighborhood group?

BM: Uh-huh.

KLW: I assume you were the first African American in that group?

BM: I had to be that because I was the only one here and all of the people there had to do with what was happening, planting trees, they not only looked at their yard but they looked at the neighborhood and how we could make the entrance to the neighborhood beautiful. In the neighborhood now, you'll see where some of the plantings are connected.

I had one child that was a year old when we came and the second child was born right after we came. They're a year apart. They grew up here. They appeared to always get along with all the kids. I remember this one incident when my youngest was about four years old, and I heard this clamoring outside and I went to the door to see what the kids were doing. There were no sidewalks, the kids just played in the street and we didn't have to watch them or anything. I heard this, "Nigger! Nigger!" and it was my son calling some kid. He hadn't heard it here and evidently, he had learned that that was an angry word that you called people when you got upset because that was the only relationship. I don't know if somebody had called him that, but he knew he was upset about something and that's what he was doing. I had to call him in and give him a lesson in proper language.

Otherwise, the kids grew up, they went to DeLong [Elementary] School which had at the time, they almost integrated the school, there were maybe just a handful of black children down at the school that's right on the corner. Then they went to the school that's on 12th.² It's still there now. That was about the time of integration in Tacoma Schools. The schools, they weren't segregated, but because of where you lived, you went to neighborhood schools and so naturally, my kids went to the schools out here which were all white. Or mostly white.

KLW: You have two boys?

BM: Yes, two boys and then we adopted later, a girl. We went to the school here and integration became a problem with my kids because by that time, when they got into middle school, by that time all their friends were white. This is where they grew up. It became a problem with them, because they were not used to the situation. They were not used to integration, of course they had some black friends but they didn't live around here and they didn't go to school together. Most of the blacks that went there, were bussed up from the Hilltop and bussed up to the school.

They went on to Wilson High School, which was just being built because Stadium High School was overcrowded. The Stadium people didn't want to be divided up to go to Wilson. But the north end people went to Wilson, there was no Foss at the time. My oldest son graduated from Wilson. My second son got in to drugs and didn't graduate. Of course with six years difference between the boys and when we adopted the girl.

² Bil's boys attended DeLong Elementary and then McCarver Elementary.

All of this time, we had been real active in the PTA and we've been in the Urban League. We've seen these organizations develop and grow. Women's organization, the Colored Women's Clubhouse on Yakima and 23rd, we were involved in that.

KLW: What was that?

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BM: City Association of Colored Women's Club. I think that besides churches, it was the first fully-owned black organization's building in Tacoma. That came about by a lot of volunteers, they got support from Bates and support from the Carpenter's Union and people loaned their skills. Electricians. When they moved into that place, and it was about 25 or 26 women, that carried that organization and moved in when it was brand new. It is still there. The women are, they're older than me, they're in their 80s. And it's still being used. In fact, that's where the Black Collective meets every Saturday morning. It's on 23rd and Yakima.

KLW: So, that was already established when you got here?

BM: No, it was built after.

KLW: Were you involved in that? Were you one of those 25-26 women?

BM: I was involved but I was never on the board. I was always active. They did the first food bank in Tacoma. Later the city took it over. They broke those women up into five different groups and these groups, they had a male organization that was kind of working with them. They had a young people's organization. They broke those women up and they would take on different issues or services. They still do to a certain extent.

KLW: Do you remember when that was formed? What year?

BM: No, but I'm sure it's on the Web.³ It did work with woman's issues. Training young women, and dealing with women. That was one part and then the other part was my involvement in the social issues. I got involved with the Sickle Cell project and Dr. Tanbara. That came as a result of belonging to, or being a part of an organization called the Tacoma Chapter of Links. We did community service. That was during the time when Sickle Cell was just beginning to be noticed. And as a result of Dr. Tanbara working with us (a pediatrician) - the health clinic and community health in Salishan is now being named for him. We got him to speak to a group and I chaired that committee. As a result of that, we were able to pull together, at that time they had a health director at the school district, they had the Pierce County Director of Health, about six or seven different specialists to work on this Sickle Cell project, which was later funded by the government. I think it was funded even before the one in Seattle was funded - the Sickle Cell project for screening and later, through Dr. Tanbara's persistence, it became, I think I want to see a law, that all babies, when they're born, are tested for [inaudible], Sickle Cell and a number of those hereditary diseases and I was really involved in that.

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³ The Washington State Association of Colored Women's Club was formed in 1917 in Spokane. Tacoma's chapter was formed soon after. The association is Christian in character, non-political, and non-profit.

KLW: And was that just because it was something that the Links group was working on? What drove you to do that work?

BM: What drove us was we were going to do an education session. It was something that nation-wide, you know like diabetes, people [needed] to be educated right at the very beginning because it was realized that, at that time it was thought, black people, Negroes, African Americans, I don't know I get them all mixed up thought that it was a black disease and being a black women's organization (the Links), we wanted to educate the community and being a part of that organization, we would make assignments and I was the chairman of that group. The idea was to get Dr. Tanbara, because he was a pediatrician, to get him to come and do a session with the people in the community to talk about sickle cell – you know, the same way you talk about sex, or the other things that we do nowadays. As a result of that, he was very interested, he got other physicians, he got the University of Washington and it became a project for the city. The structure was a little different than it is now because before the program was funded, the school had a medical director on staff and the director of the health department and another specialist at St. Joe's and they did some studies on it and they would come out and give us sessions every month or so relative to it and eventually we were able to do some of the screening ourselves before the school district was set up on Saturdays. Sessions so that we could do screenings of everyone – parents and children – because at the time, we didn't know a lot except that we knew that we had some sick children and that it was a predominantly African American disease, it was thought. Although it was from the Mediterranean area also.

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We used to [live] the farthest west in Tacoma. The farthest African American family. I think the end of the city was at Orchard Street. Beyond Orchard was all wooded until you got way down to the water and that was in the county. So we were really far out. After we were able to build, I became involved on the board of the NAACP.

KLW: When was that?

BM: Gosh, I don't know. It must have been in the early sixties.

KLW: Is that something you did with your husband?

BM: Yeah, we did everything together, up until we divorced. I was assigned to the housing committee. We had gone through our [housing] thing and Tacoma still did not have open housing. So I was successful in getting two people from the city council, Jack Warnick and Clara Goering.

[phone rings]

BM: Clara Daring and a couple other people were able to push the open housing ordinance through the city council. I'll have to get those dates for you. We got that through the council but then it went to referendum.

KLW: How did you get it through the council?

BM: Because we had the two city council people and I developed a committee. The way I work, I try to get people who are involved in the issue, that have some recognition in the issue that I'm involved in. We worked together to develop a strategy, whereby, we would have the outcomes that we were going after. So Clara Goering and Jack Warnick were two people on the city council that shepherded that. Of course, still today, when the city council is reviewing something new or going to pass something new, the community comes in and either supports it or they don't support it. We were able to get it through. The city actually had an open housing ordinance but once it hit the papers, there were still people who didn't support it and they took it to referendum and it was voted down. But it wasn't long after that, that it was open anyway. I don't know if it was a federal law or what it was, but it wasn't long after that. I don't know if the referendum is still on the books or what. But anyway, that was another project that I was really, really involved in.

KLW: When you were trying to gain community support for something like that, were you knocking on doors and talking to people or just through the clubs you were already involved in?

BM: Not knocking on doors, because there was a small black community at the time and by Harold being involved like he was, we had the advantage of meeting a lot of people so that we had a more integrated power base than most people would have at that time, [most] African Americans would have.

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One of the other things we also did that I was involved in was Friendship Teas. That was during that period of integration, the Jewish Community was real active in supporting open housing and the NAACP. One of the developments was that we developed the Friendship Teas. Once every year, and I think it was in May or sometime, there would be four or five people that would commit to open their houses and then people would go visit the different houses. I did that a couple of times. People could come and see how you lived and you could meet people. So, I was always involved in a multi-group, multi-racial situation which wasn't typical for African Americans at that time.

In addition, I went to church. I had the church that I belonged to, I went back to school, I belonged to a sorority. So I had resources that maybe other people didn't have. And that still stands today.

KLW: Did you start the Friendship Teas with that Jewish Community Group as well? Were they part of forming that group?

BM: I think so. I was not part of forming that, I was just a participant. What they tried to do, was to open houses of different ethnic groups and my house just fit the African American group. There were others because I think that every year they had an African American. And they had Jewish and Italian, different houses. You just spend the day going from house to house and having tea and cookies and crumpets and talking to people and meeting people. The intent was that you would become more comfortable with each other. Actually, I think that more things like that were done in Tacoma *then* than now. People are more segregated *now* than they were at that time. At least people were trying to bring about [acceptance].

Harold was the president of the NAACP and the vice-president was a Unitarian minister. During that time (our kids were getting up in size) and we decided to transfer to the Unitarian church. It was only a few blocks, miles, from here. We transferred to the church and developed a different – you know about the Unitarian church? – it's sort of non-biased. It gave my kids an experience in all kinds of religions and meeting all kinds of people and having all kinds of different religious experiences based on acceptance of everyone.

KLW: Where were you going to church before that?

BM: We were going to Bethlehem Baptist. Harold's folks and he were Baptist and I was Methodist. We lived down the street from the Baptist church so we just walked there. I attended but I was never real active.

KLW: But then you became active at the Unitarian church?

BM: Yes, in fact, I was the church secretary for a while.

KLW: So, you said you grew up going to a Methodist church?

BM: Mmm, hmm. AME [African Methodist Episcopal].

KLW: Was that a big part of your life?

BM: My grandmother was very active but my mother wasn't. We went to church on Easter. I was never in a church children's group.

KLW: I have this idea that in the fifties and sixties that your church group was more your community, that it brought neighborhoods together more than it does now? Is there truth to that?

BM: Right. When we came here, there was one Baptist church (that was Bethlehem), one AME church and one "holiness" church (these are black churches). There were three churches, now there are four or five Baptist churches, there's still one AME church – the same one – and there are a number of Pentecostal, or "holiness." churches. There were none in Lakewood because Black folks didn't live in Lakewood or Fircrest. So, they were more centered right down in the area because all three of those churches were down in the Hilltop area – are still down in the Hilltop area. Now Bethlehem Baptist has moved to the east side.

1:04:48

It was easy to have a center of African American people and they were active because they were the NAACP, they were the City Association, the same people were in all of these organizations. So, when there was a march for jobs, it involved the churches, the Masons, the same people all the time.

KLW: And the Unitarian Church was back here?

BM: It was back out here [in this neighborhood] and I think there were maybe three African Americans, well one African American family – our family – because there were other African Americans but they were inter-married. We probably were the only black family that went there. That was out of the district because that was on [inaudible] Boulevard and 12th Street.

KLW: You were talking about the housing committee work and the Friendship Teas and some of these very progressive things that were happening to educate and promote understanding. Is there anything else you wanted to say about that?

BM: That's part of why I get the feeling that there were more attempts *then* to bring people together and do things together and do social kinds of things than there are *now* because people aren't so spread out and they do have a lot of the stuff that they were working toward. At that time, we were building, and there's not the connection. It's like when the women yesterday at the luncheon [Jane Shanaman] said that her mother kind of adopted me, adopted us, and she brought me to the Y [YWCA]. She introduced me to the board and got me on the board when they needed someone to do the books, she was the one who made that happen. She introduced me to Jane [her daughter]. Jane lived in Lakewood, Lakewood was a very exclusive place. We were invited to Jane's house and her children were about the same age as my children and the kids all played in the pool together.

So, I had those kinds of contacts and over the years it seems like I've always been able to relate to those kinds of situations. So, when I attempt to do something, they serve as resources. When I was on the city council, when I was on the League of Women Voters. I was, in a way, the "black single." Although I care very much about these people and they care very much about me. But I got that exposure. Initially, I think that it came from Harold's involvement and as that happened, then the Jewish community.

I was the first director of Planned Parenthood. And that came about, I don't know, Judy Fortier - she's president of NARAL, I think now - and Katie Haas, who is Jewish. At that time, I did not have a degree. They pushed me to apply for this position and it turned out, I was hired. And I was director for 11 years. The reason they wanted a Planned Parenthood because at that time, the health department did the family planning but they would not serve minors. There were no abortions involved at that time.

KLW: What were you doing before Planned Parenthood?

BM: I was at the YWCA.

KLW: So, the YWCA was first and then Planned Parenthood.

BM: I went from the YWCA to Planned Parenthood because Judy worked as the recreation director at the YWCA when I was there. I don't remember when I met Katie. She was Jewish, well, actually, she married a Jewish man. We became almost like sisters. When we had to travel somewhere, Katie and I went together. That's the way I got my exposure.

1:12

I went from the YWCA to Planned Parenthood. From Planned Parenthood to Group Health. In the meantime, Harold and I had divorced after 22 years [1973]. We had been married 22 years and then we divorced. I went back to school. We had a friend, a couple, who, when I finished school, he called me and asked me if I would like to manage a clinic. And of course, sure, here I was out here with three kids. But I thought it was [in] Tacoma and he said Federal Way. (I didn't even know where Federal Way was! [laughs]) And so, they hired me. I was the manager of the Group Health Federal Way Clinic for about six years.

KLW: So, did you drive up there every day?

BM: Yeah, I finally found it. You know, there were no highways, so I would go out [Highway] 99. It's on 320th and Pacific.

KLW: So you could take that the whole way?

BM: Yeah, so I went for six years and then they changed directors and they asked me to set up programs to get more diversity in Tacoma. So they promoted me out of the clinic into the Pierce County area to try to develop more recruits for the clinic, more skilled people for the clinic.

1:14.11

KLW: For the staff?

BM: Yes, for the staff. So I did that for three years. Then we had a change in the person who was in charge of this area (from Federal Way to Olympia). They got a new person who told me "What I pay you, I can buy another pharmacist!" [laughs] So that was the end of that.

For some months I did some student teaching, I mean substitute teaching. I had another friend who got me certified by the state, so I did that for some months.

In the meantime, Doug Sutherland, who had been mayor [of Tacoma] and was mayor at SeaTac, was running for Pierce County Executive. He didn't have any money and his wife and I were close. One of my soft spots is clothes and she worked at Nordstrom and we had developed a relationship. She asked me if I would coordinate his campaign. He didn't have any money and I didn't either. We felt that if I could work with people that a certain amount of money would be taken off the top which is what they would pay me. So that developed and that was another exposure because I was a Democrat and Doug was a Republican [laughs]. But this was a friendship thing and I wasn't looking at it politically. Even though Harold had been involved in politics, it was always non-partisan. So, when we were talking about the county executive, I didn't even think [about it]. He ran against a very well-known democrat. In fact, people kind of poo-pooed me [laughs]. But Doug won. It was close. It took 'em two weeks to work it out, but he won.

After he won, he asked me to come be his special assistant to him with a specialty in the county council. Because, at that time, the county council had one republican and, I think – what are there? seven of them? – the others were all democrats. He wanted to work in a relationship. He was doing an "Obama" where he was trying to work across groups, since he

was a republican. He wanted to spend some time working out a situation where they could all work together. So I did that and that worked pretty good for a while. When the county council people were dissatisfied or they wanted something done, or they felt staff wasn't responding to them, they would come to me. I would try to work that out to try to make everyone happy. After a while people started to settle in, that wasn't as necessary as it was, he began to have me do staff things. We developed evaluation tools and different kinds of things. I was on the management team so I was part of the budget decisions and part of the program decisions.

So, after I had retired (after Doug's first term), I decided I wanted to grow roses and take harp lessons.

1:20

In the meantime, Harold and I were available again at the same time, so we remarried. We had been married 22 years, we had been divorced 22 years, and then we decided to remarry. It didn't work because we hadn't worked out what had caused us the divorce in the first place. That's what happens.

After that, I got involved in the American Leadership Forum, ALF. And that put me in another situation, whereby, I expanded the number of people I knew, the number of people I worked with, the number of people who had similar thoughts about service in the community and that sort of thing. Then I became more active in my sorority.

KLW: This was the same sorority that you were in at school?

BM: Yes. Well, no. It was after school. See, I graduated in 1989. My family was gone when I graduated from UPS. After Harold and I separated, I went back to school. I went to TCC [Tacoma Community College] and then I went on through my masters at UPS [University of Puget Sound].

KLW: You did it all at once?

BM: Yes, I thought that if I ever stop, I'll never go back [laughs]. But it did take up the time.

1:22.10

KLW: I just wanted to ask you, you obviously have this naturally ability to lead and meet people and connect people. You made a very brief mention of your mother being an aggressive personality but that was the only thing you said about her. I was wondering what your mother was like and if she led you to be this person who was out in the community all the time.

BM: Well, my grandmother was more of that than my mother - - - I don't know how to express it. She was a "stick-to-it" type person but she didn't connect. She had her own kind of ways. I was closer to my grandmother than I was to my mother. My grandmother was the person who was at the house and that made sure that we were taken care of.

KLW: That was your mother's mother?

BM: Yes, my mother's mother.

KLW: She was also as active in the community as you?

BM: She was in the church. There weren't a lot of things. She was in the Eastern Star, which is the women's part of the Masons. My mother was too. My grandmother did church, my grandmother was (I always say "the ladies with the funny hats") a stewardess in the church until she died, she was always active in the church things, she belonged to the Eastern Star. There weren't a whole lot of things that black people, that poor black people, could do at the time. As I said, I never was exposed, I didn't belong to any church groups like choirs or anything like that. I went to school and I went home, and that was mostly what it was about.

KLW: Well, I have lots of questions but I think that's a good place to stop for today.

1:25 END INTERVIEW

Bil showed me her collections of photos, thank you's, birthday cards and awards from over the years.