

Audio Transcript: Dale Rascoe interviewed by Kyera Singleton

This audio transcript has been lightly edited for clarity.

KS: [00:00:06] All right. Hi, Dale. It's so nice to see you. How are you doing?

DR: [00:01:02] It's chilly here in New York. It just refuses to come and stay. Mother nature's got this bipolar thing happening. You know, mankind is messing with her.

KS: [00:01:34] Yeah it is. The weather is all over the place. But that's neither here nor there. I figured it would be really great to just talk a bit about your life and all of the amazing things that you were involved in. And then also connect over the theme that we have, which is very interesting theme. We have the theme of taste. And we've had a few conversations and we've exchanged a bunch of messages. Because when I first got taste, I was like, oh, whoa, okay, that's going to be that's going to be fun. And I think we can go in a bunch of different directions. And so I'm just really excited to see where the conversation goes.

DR: [00:02:37] Definitely. Taste is good.

KS: [00:02:39] So how about we just get started? Can you tell me your name? But then also where are you from?

DR: [00:02:50] Dale Rascoe and I was born in Ossining, New York, which is not far from where I am now, which is Yonkers in the the county is called Westchester. So Ossining, where I was born, is more north, and I'm presently in what they consider southern lower Westchester County.

KS: [00:03:15] So I have never been to Ossining, New York, but I've been to Yonkers a few times. A really close friend of mine is from Yonkers. And I think so is Mary J. Blige right?

DR: [00:03:32] Well she's, I think either Yonkers or Mount Vernon, definitely. Yes. And so everybody in Westchester has claimed they discovered her. And oh, yeah. I do know it was-- so everybody, everybody, everybody, everybody!

KS: [00:03:59] I love that. That just goes to show how big of a figure she is, how much of a celebrity she is that everyone--she's a daughter of the entire area.

So I'm really curious, when was the first time that you became aware of the Black Panther Party and with that, when was the first memory that you had of kind of racial oppression and injustice?

DR: [00:04:53] So my parents' house was on State Street, which was about four houses down from Sing Sing Prison, and thus Ossining: named for the Native Americans, the Sing Sing Indians that were there. So Sing Sing Prison being so close, we all had in our minds crimes that someone would do to be there. We knew people who were there from our neighborhood, and there was never a very far point from criminals and Sing Sing prison and our home. And when you had the lights dim in the area or a brown out, it was because the electric chair was being used. Now, I don't know if that's true or not, but so that whole vibe of crime and being in an institution and how there was that racism there, that came

about then. The guards at that time were primarily white and the people that were incarcerated were brown and black people. I didn't right away have a sense of being young and having the need to be protected. I think that we were watching television and there was a news program on, maybe even Walter Cronkite. And he was talking about the poor South, and there were children there who were shoeless. Blew my mind. I just could not believe that there were children in the United States who didn't have shoes. So it was then that an entire connection was made about being an adult, incarcerated, and ending up there because of things that happened when you were young. The people that were guarding them were white, and the people that were preventing these young Black children from having shoes were white. So that's how my young mind processed it. And I was furious that that could happen. So I think that that's when things began to percolate in my mind that this isn't right. And I think I probably began to think about doing something about it at around that age.

KS: [00:07:45] Okay. And can you remind me, like around what age again?

DR: [00:07:49] Yeah, I want to say nine or something. That's when I remember first having the understanding that there were really, really poor people and Black children down South and then the lean-to houses. So it was after that, that the more political side of it and more of the truisms about why that was happening came to me. And I still had a lot of fury about why there was that type of injustice. But it was a lot more developed, it was a more educated point of view. How large the actual problem was. But at first it was just a child without shoes and tears wanting to well up in my eye. This ain't right. This ain't right. And then when I did join the Black Panther Party, it was the teachings that we had in the political education classes. And those occurred at the different headquarters we had. And also reading the Black Panther newspaper. Those were the things that gave me a larger understanding. But still, at that time, we were very, very racially motivated. So it was the pigs, the man, the white, the black. So the point of view was a somewhat narrow one because it was based on race as opposed to the generalized oppression that actually exists, and that the system of oppression doesn't so much care what skin color you are. It's about other things. So that grew even for us.

KS: [00:10:04] I want to just back up a little bit before before we get to the part where you join the party. So you have this encounter. You're learning. You see this television show that's highlighting the plight of Black children. You're young at the moment, but you're also growing up very close to a prison. I'm curious as to how you all talked about this in your house or how you all talked about this in the neighborhood or how you all talked about this in school.

DR: [00:10:53] So, I think that because Westchester County was so greatly divided particularly at that time -- with the white middle class and upper middle class and some white poor and then Blacks who were working class and poor -- there was such a division there that if you, as a young person went anywhere, it was explicit. So in school, there was that tension between [the fact] that there were so many white people and fewer of us. So when we talked about things, it wasn't a discussion that was had. It was more of either an argument or a polarized conversation.

So an example would be: we would definitely use those names and slurs like "the Guinea", and we would talk about "the Crackers." We had conversations about what they did and how they were wrong. And I know that they were calling us names as well. My girlfriends and I, when we were hanging out together, we weren't talking about things from the wider point of view. For example, my girlfriend's father worked in the prison. He was an excellent

cook, but at that time I don't think any of us really put together that he was such a good cook because he worked there, or he got to work there because he was a good cook. We just knew that we would have cheesecake over at her house, like maybe once a month, and it was delicious. And I didn't have the connection between him being there and the guards being white, and what was his relationship like with them, or even the prisoners that were in there. But without a doubt, there was that same kind of polarization: prison, and then in our community my girlfriend's father being a cook there at the prison, and the people in our community that were white, and we Blacks were coming in.

Our house was owned by Italians. And when they left, we were able to purchase it. They were Italians and "the Guineas" that we would talk about, and our food was definitely something. My mother and I are very, very fond of food. I did learn how to cook because mom didn't like to cook. Her saying was something along the lines of: she would work hard to fix it; we would sit down and eat it just to go in the toilet and flush it away. So her fondness of food was only to eat it.

Now me-- I loved cooking and I cooked like a Guinea and I used a lot of garlic, but she loved it. So she needed to criticize it and she needed to talk about it from a racial point of view, another point of view. But I made and make some good lasagna. And I know that for the crowd and I that we were hanging around with, we at times would have the 45 records that we would play: Otis Redding, I think Aretha Franklin around that time? The Temptations and the 45's that we would spin. And sometimes I would make pizza with the Chef Boyardee dough and they had cans of tomato sauce or something? Cheese on it and sit around and talk. And if there were any guys around, we were definitely dancing. So it crossed over into that also. So mom loved the food and talked real bad about the people.

KS: [00:15:25] Well, this is really fascinating to me because I think in many ways, food becomes a way to bring people together, right? It is often a time in which we sit around from one another. We have conversations, we eat, we laugh, we talk. But I'm also struck by the fact that, you had this friend and what you remember about her dad is this cheesecake. And now that you can reflect on it is that he is also cooking, and Sing Sing, and how the prison is a backdrop to your everyday life, I would assume. And one of the other things you talked about was the racial segregation of Westchester. So it seems like from a very early age, you were very much aware of that racial segregation.

So I'm curious, what became the motivating factors for you to become politically involved? Do you become politically involved when you join the Black Panther Party, or did you have moments of political involvement while you were still in New York?

DR: [00:16:47] I was so young. As soon as I was of legal age in New York, I jetted out of Ossining and I got on a plane by myself and went to California. And it was there that I wanted to be with my childhood sweetheart. But I told myself, if the two of us being together doesn't work in about maybe two years -- I'll give it one year -- then I'm joining the Black Panther Party. I would definitely feel that that was my calling. But I loved that man. So I wanted to give that a chance and be with him. Being political wasn't really... It wasn't the kind of thing that we were doing.

So when I was hanging out there in Ossining, I had a desire to learn more. And I wanted to get the Black Panther newspaper. I wanted to look at it. I wanted to read it, but I didn't really want to talk to my girlfriends about it. I was far more interested in boys, far more interested in food and chocolate. But I also thought that the furious anger that I felt when I read the Black Panther newspaper was something they didn't share with me. We never

talked about politics. And I felt that I was somehow different than they were, and that what stirred me up didn't stir them up. And that it in fact, would pull us apart if I talked about just how much I wanted to change the world or do something. So no.

KS: [00:18:51] How did you get access to the-- how did you get ahold of your first Black Panther Party newspaper?

DR: [00:19:01] So one of my one of my girlfriends and I, we would take the train down to Harlem and to stop 125th Street. There was the Apollo Theater not far from the train stop, and then on the corner Panther men were selling the newspaper. So if we had a good day it was a twofer. We could go to the Apollo Theater, catch amateur afternoon, I think it was then on Wednesdays, and then also get a newspaper, come back home. So we just had one heck of a time entertaining and seeing some of the best people there and then being able to get the Black Panther newspaper, but not really explore it or talk about it, even to ourselves, especially on the train coming back. We were two Black girls amongst a sea of a lot of white people. And then certainly not at home, not with mom or dad, who never really gave me the idea that going into politics or community work was good. So I thought, well, no one's really interested in it. And I would just be isolated if I were to talk about what I really felt and how dearly I felt it.

KS: [00:20:31] So you have this burgeoning racial consciousness. A lot of that is coming from seeing how Black children are treated. And because food is such an important part, I'm curious, you talked about the lack of shoes, but what were some of the other issues that you really cared about in that moment that were impacting Black children or Black people? And did the newspaper, when you read it maybe alone in your room or off by yourself, how did that help put things into context for you?

DR: [00:21:18] Yeah. It was really a difficult thing to have. There was a line that went through everything. And the reason for that is because so many things weren't spoken of. So many things were secrets. So many things were things you didn't talk about. So for example, bringing the Black Panther paper home, I didn't show it to anyone. I kind of had it curled up when I read it by myself alone. My father did not talk politics to us. So when I was reading the Black Panther newspaper alone, I didn't have an opportunity to run past any of the ideas with him. I do know that I was able to watch television with Daddy, look at Dr. Martin Luther King and see how Daddy was riled up about that or anything about Malcolm X. It was as though the household would listen, but everybody was a little afraid he was just a little wrong. So watching those things with Daddy, I used him as my guide, my guidepost. Well, how was I to receive them? Who was the good person and who was the person that was just a little bit too off the path? And so that was Malcolm X and Dr. Martin Luther King.

Then in addition to that, we would travel down South and we would see our relatives. And it was so unspoken of, so much so that the questions weren't asked. We would drive by the water fountains and it would be "Colored only" or "White only." And then we'd drive further. And then there was a movie theater and I'm like, well, Mommy, can we go to the movie theater? "Whites only." So no one explained to me what any of that meant. So of course I'm like, well, Mom, who's the Coloreds? What? Why? What is it they can't do? And what does this mean, "only?"

Yeah, so being down South, it broadened [my perspective] so that it wasn't just children without shoes, but it affected their daily life, where they could go for recreation, where they could or couldn't eat or drink. So it became clearer to me. But I had to ask adults specific

questions, which made me think I was a child who was doing something wrong. I was noticing things that I should not notice, I should not question, and maybe even should not care about. So that was growing up in that situation. And remember my mom at that time, she would sprout things like "the Guineas" or "the Wasps", but she never talked about how it was that we purchased the home from them, or why were they all running away from the neighborhood that we lived in, there in Westchester. So seeing that took some time.

KS: [00:24:35] I want to get to your time in California, but I want to ask one last question about growing up in Westchester County. So when you talk about seeing the type of segregation that Black people experienced in the South, but then also seeing the segregation around you, what were some of those issues? You talk about the South, but what were the issues in Ossining where you grew up? What did that look like?

DR: [00:25:07] So it, again, was so close to me that at that time a lot of it I didn't recognize. One thing would be there would be parties and there weren't any white people, but it didn't really register to me. They didn't live near us. And then there were the special classes for people that were a little they called them, oh, special education children.

KS: [00:25:32] Special ed.

DR: [00:25:35] No, it wasn't such a kind name. Okay, BOCES was, I think, the place. And they went there to learn a trade instead of being in an academic environment. So those people that were in the bus, they were Black and they were guys. So that was going on. But again, things not being explained, I would see that. Then also in school, there were the people that were in fights a lot and the people after school that were in fights were mainly the Black girls and the Black guys. And then you had the athletes there. Now the athletes were somewhat more elite. So if you were a Black guy and you were an athlete, you could mingle with the white people maybe go over to their house for dinner, which we would not just generally do. So that was something that was more open to them because they were athletes.

But I remember there was one night when things got a little rowdy. It was Halloween and when they did get rowdy, it was just all of us from the neighborhood, all Black kids. We were putting Coca-Cola on cars and watching it fizz and have the paint go away and just acting crazy with rotten eggs. Well, the police came over to us and they singled out one guy. And they did that and called him by his name. Wow. How did they know who he is? How do they know his name? Then I thought: he's had previous contact with them. So out of all of us in a crowd, they go to him because they've had previous contact. He's Black. They're all white, except for one. One police officer was Black.

So it again, set up for me in my mind what was going on, but it wasn't talked about at my house. So I didn't really have an ability to put it all together. I knew that one Black police officer that the community had some ambivalence about. They're proud that he's a police officer, but how could he turn on us and do that? And how will he represent us? And that he was the person calling out the young Black kid. And even in school, I said something the next day about it and that I was upset because Robert, the guy that had been singled out, was treated poorly and the teacher just wasn't having it. She knew that if in fact Robert was called out, it had something to do with him doing something wrong. So I didn't have an opportunity to feed my interest and my hunger to know what it was that he did wrong. And she wasn't about to tell me. But of course I was going to protest their taking this child at a time when it's only Halloween.

KS: [00:28:53] Yeah. So you graduate high school?

DR: [00:29:01] No, I did not. So I think the senior... no, my junior year in high school, I dropped out and then so for days I had to pretend that I was going to school. So my mother-- no one knew. I just decided I was going to drop out. And so I get up and go out like I'm going to school every day and then come back like I was supposed to. And I got tired of doing that. But the reason I got out was because the guidance counselor told me that I really shouldn't think about going to college. It was something that I shouldn't think about, but maybe there were other things and other ways she could direct me. So the college guidance counselor didn't want me to think about college. I'm like, that doesn't sound right to me. I don't want to be here. So I walked out of the school, and I just didn't go back.

I did go to a school nearby, a private white school. And I walked in and told them that I should be there and they needed me. So I got to go there, had a scholarship, and it was when I had to further process things because they were all white and rich, upper class, the very least middle class. So I began to have to process how that was and that these are children and what is it that we have in common? And how is it that I can utilize some knowledge here for things that I want to do in the future? So there's a lot of conflict, a lot of unanswered questions. But without a doubt, without a doubt, I knew I needed to go to California, find my love, and see if I could become the political activist that I thought would change the world and help answer so many of those questions.

KS: [00:31:12] Okay, so you get to California. Around what age are you when you had head there?

DR: [00:31:21] So the legal age in New York wasn't it 18 legal age to drink, right?

KS: [00:31:30] I only know the legal age as being 21, so if it was younger...

DR: [00:31:36] Oh, no, I couldn't have been 21. I was in my first year in Marymount.

KS: [00:31:44] Okay. So you were 18?

DR: [00:31:47] I really think so, yeah. Yeah. So I finished that and that's when I went.

KS: [00:31:53] Okay.

DR: [00:31:53] California. And that's when I met up with my childhood sweetheart, and we were together for just a year or two, and it became really clear that he had no idea how to survive in the world, wasn't able to take care of himself, and definitely not the two of us. And I knew. Well, I gave it a good try.

KS: [00:32:17] Okay. So where were you at this point? You were in...

DR: [00:32:22] North Hollywood.

KS: [00:32:23] North Hollywood, okay.

DR: [00:32:25] And then the Black Panther Party headquarters that we went to, we had to drive to in our Cadillac that had no brakes and we had to use the emergency brake if we wanted to try to stop. So we would go there and have class there. And I think that my boyfriend knew how interested I was in it, but I don't think he really understood that. Those were the times that were going to mark the end of he and I being together, and the beginning of me being romanced by the Black Panther Party or dedicating myself to it and

my service in the party. But that's exactly what it was. I was being exposed to it, and I was just taken in.

KS: [00:33:16] So what were some of the classes that you were taking that led to this kind of romance with the party?

DR: [00:33:26] So the political education classes: PE classes were for everyone that was in the party and people in the community. So we would come get together there in the front room of one of the headquarters, and headquarters were someone's home, a building. And there we had classes. So the class was reading the newspaper or a revolutionary book: Mao Tse-tung, "The Art of War," "Little Red Book." And from each one of those political books, we were reading something, a passageway, and then talking about it and having it be interpreted to what was going on today. So it was the first opportunity that I had someone to speak to me about what politics were, and how the poverty that Black people had related to generalized depression, and what America was about. It was really the first time that that was all laid out clear for me, and that it was free. We were free to talk about it and to examine it.

Now when I say we were free to talk about it, what I should really say was that we were very free to talk about how there was the pig and Black people. We weren't necessarily free to examine: well, is that the right terminology? Should we really call these cops pigs? So it was very much that we were being indoctrinated to a certain language and to a certain way of thinking, but I was so hungry just for anyone to talk to me about political theories that I gravitated towards it pretty much without question.

And then of course, later in life, when I had less of a zeal for just consuming anything, I became more discriminant about how I saw things. I was more willing to be courageous and look at things from different sides. But at that time in my life, I knew that I could help change the world, feed hungry children, which we did with free breakfast programs, giving them a hot oatmeal and eggs. So we were feeding children. We did have shoes that we gave away and clothing. So that was happening. So in my young mind, I saw myself as correcting what had led me to be teary eyed when I was younger in Ossining. And that was the time for me, when I felt I was beginning to realize my purpose as a person. And I was very young then. That was the beginning stages. Let's see, that must have been around 1970 or so, '71.

KS: [00:36:40] So you say that you were starting to find your purpose and you talk about political education and understanding the way that Black people are treated, but also being able to counter that, to be able to provide political education to others and to be able to feed children, to be able to be in community with others who have the same values. So you join the party. You know that you can change the world. Can you tell us about some of that early time in the party, you went underground?

DR: [00:37:21] Correct.

KS: [00:37:22] So what was that like? What was your experience?

DR: [00:37:27] Yeah, so I was just entirely too crazy for my own good. And the experience was completely nothing like I was prepared for or could have thought it might be. I know that I came into that experience because of my hard-headedness, and it reminds me, there were two times in my life when I too quickly volunteered for too much. When I was really young, we were in kindergarten or pre-K and they said, who's right-handed? And I looked around. I saw everybody had their hand up. I don't have anything in common with them!

And there are a lot of white kids. So I said, well, I can't be right-handed. So when she said, who's left-handed? I raised my hand. And that's how I became left handed for the rest of my life, which proved to be cumbersome.

Same thing with the Black Panther Party. We were operating in a manner that you would normally see selling newspapers, feeding children, having programs for the community. And then there was a call for people across the country who were Panthers to fold up where they were and go to Oakland, the Great Migration. And when that call came, we were seated there in the front office area, and the officer of the day--the person who was manning the phone and making certain that the whole front area and the house, the headquarters, was kept and maintained secure--that person said, well, you know, we're leaving in this area here; who wants to stay and who wants to be here? Even though they'd be like just a few people. I had no idea what he was talking about. And when he said, we're going to leave, but who wants to stay? I'm like, okay, I'll stay.

And it turns out he was talking about being there in a clandestine way, without the programs there to protect us so that we could actually point to and say, this is what we're doing, and without any affiliation with the clinic. Because they--free food, everything that was a program with the Black Panther Party--left and went to Oakland. And we did not have the protection of a headquarters or a place that we could go to, or have our brothers and sisters, comrades around us. It was just a handful of us, practically all women. You read their names of when you talked about how we were arrested. So a very few of us stayed and did not have a good understanding of why. Other than that, we were human bookmarks because we were told that at some point in the future, this area would be used for something. So it was developed by the Black Panthers. It was an area that had been mined with different programs that were free for the community. Then all of the Panthers who were doing that were told: gotta leave. Make this migration up to Oakland. And they did.

But we few stayed behind and we kind of had our feet there, but we weren't being seen and protected by being seen and having other people see that we, the Black Panther Party, were there. So we did go out and we did continue to collect and sell newspapers, but we couldn't drop a dime to headquarters and say, well, you know what? It's not looking like this is a good environment. Or, you know, I think there's the pigs that have been following us for a while, or we need to come into headquarters right away. We didn't have the protection and the security of being able to call on them, to be near them, or to have them be near us. But we were doing the same thing that we had done when the program was actually there, and we could point to the free food program. We could point to free breakfast, and we could point to where it was that we had other things going on there in the community.

And as it turned out, our purpose was to be there to receive the brothers that were traveling through us to then go on to safer places. Say from Oakland and the area there in the north to us in Southern California, one of our safe houses, and then to go forward to other places that they could be free and perhaps never return to the life that they had prior to that. So they were safe and saved from prosecution, jail time, perhaps another rivalry group, maybe a gang or such, and whatever threat it was that they were facing. They could be safe from that by going to where we were living in one of our safe houses, and that was within the network of the underground and that kind of tunneling system, the underground there in Southern California, which had, I'd say, some of the most self-sacrificing... yeah, self-sacrificing young people I've met.

KS: [00:43:10] I'm not sure many people really understand kind of what it's like to be in the underground, so could you give us a little bit of insight into what your daily life might have looked like while you were underground?

DR: [00:43:33] And it's so funny that you say that because when I do speak of that time at a workshop-- I have one workshop that I talk about that time in my book and then additionally, I do have classes that I give for people learning how to write more and memoir. And that's when I talk about that time and someone always says, well, did you dig a hole? Like, no, darling, underground doesn't mean that we were subterranean. It meant that we weren't there for you to look at and see and question about the things you thought you should question us about.

Here's an example. We were living in a house in a community that was well off: manicured lawns; just looks like any other house in the row of houses; California; everything is flat. So you look down that whole cul-de-sac -- we didn't live in a cul-de-sac because that would just be completely unsafe and not secure -- but you look down that whole row and they all looked exactly alike. You couldn't pick out which one was the house that had a lot of Black Panthers in it. So we didn't look like who you thought we were from the outside. Then if we went to the gas station, we kind of looked like the other people that were there and people wouldn't think to us where are you guys really from? Where do you actually live? So we were blending in, in plain sight while doing something that was not at all looking like what we were doing. And then another example of that would be that we did not travel in the manner that most people did. And by that I mean to say we weren't in cars alone. There was always at least one other person with us. We didn't go to places just on a casual whim. We didn't go to places that weren't either pre-planned or that we weren't checking in by phone back at the house, too.

So we were monitoring ourselves to protect ourselves and wherever we went, people would know and try not to be too far away from us and being able to check in. So an example would be: you wake up in the morning and-- You just wish you didn't have late night watch. So the last watch at night is when you're covering the perimeter, and you're carrying a pistol with you, and you're making certain that the perimeter is clear and safe, and that you aren't under surveillance yourself from the pigs or FBI or whoever. So if you have that late shift and then you're the person that goes from that shift and you're getting up-- oh, man, that was just hell! So yeah, so let's say you were the person with the late shift and then you got up with everybody else. So you go from outside to inside to eating something and getting yourself together and leaving. Where did we go? We would go to places that we would sell the newspaper and or have informational flyers, etc., on the programs and collect for the programs, procure for the programs, have donations that we would collect for them. But we did that not because we were going to go back a few streets away and go to the program and give the program those things. But instead, what we would do we'd have those things sent from Oakland to LA-- what's that, hundreds of miles?

KS: [00:47:36] Yeah.

DR: [00:47:37] Yeah, hundreds of miles away. Or we would be out and we would develop contacts. Tanya, particularly with doctors in the area and lawyers so that we would have an internet [i.e., network] there that we could fall on and not slip through if we were to be arrested and/or if we were to encounter someone who came to our safe house and they needed to have legal advice, or if we became ill, or a couple of the sisters there became pregnant and delivered. So those were the kind of missions that we had from day to day.

So we were there to have ourselves be in the community and make friendly connections with people, new connections, continued to cultivate the connections we had with whatever lawyers or medical persons, professionals, students and people. And also we were there to be able to have any procurement of finances, etc., and that was what it looked like. We were out in the community dressed like a person who was somewhat a modest or moderately dressed person, and we would be out going in and out of an office, but no one would say: nefarious activity. No, we just look perhaps slightly odd that we were a Black person in an area of a white office building, but nothing that would set off sensors and say: take her to jail. So that's what an average day would look like during the day.

Coming home at night, it was the same thing as going out. You would always look behind you. Who's following you? Who's not? You'd have a certain route that you would take to come back home. And that this route was something that we stuck to, because we knew that if we did bring anyone home with us -- let's say one of the guys that was there hiding out at the house was there -- we would be responsible for bringing these unfriendly people to the house. So going out, coming in, really being conscious of the route that you're taking, who is and who's not following you. And we were all taught different techniques to use with the car to be able to do that. I think we were really good with some of the things that we did.

KS: [00:50:09] Can you just be a little bit more specific? So essentially, you all are protecting people. You're ushering people from location to location. I think if someone were to think about the underground, there is this complex system because y'all are offering protection, correct? Is that what I'm...

DR: [00:50:40] For example, we would be at home and in one of the safe houses and maybe that evening there'd be a knock on the door. And one of the guys who needed to have us be a place where they could hide out at would be at the door with someone who was bringing them to us. So they would have the accompaniment of one of the people that was bringing that person to us. So you have those two types of people, and those two individuals knock on the door. They come in, and a lot of us would know the person because we have been in service with that person previously. So that person comes in and maybe we have an assigned -- well, not too many people had their own room -- so there might be a bed. Most people had a bed. Some people slept on the floor. Anyway, so they'd be assigned where it is that they would be, and they would unpack to whatever extent they had, and that would be receiving them. And then what they would do the next day and the next day would depend upon why they came down there and who might be looking for them and interested in their whereabouts.

KS: [00:52:10] Yeah, got it. So the next question that I would ask is: some of you worked a lot of different jobs while a part of the Panther Party and one of the positions that you had-- or you talked to me before about was going to Jimmy's Lamppost in Oakland. So at some point you go from Southern California to Northern California and you end up in the Oakland area. And you were the assistant manager at Jimmy's Lamppost. And so can you tell me about your time at the restaurant? And how did spaces like Jimmy's or other local hangouts or bars become a place of community building for you all?

DR: [00:53:06] Because I had been underground and that was my entryway into the Black Panther Party, there was more of an unstructured line of activities I had that were not, say, working as a teacher in the school. So sometimes I was plugged in to a place and I didn't necessarily know why. At one point I was told go be an assistant manager at the Lamppost. I did not have any experience in managing accounting or anything like that, but

they thought it would be good for me to be there and to observe things that were going on there. And it was my loyalty to the Party that encouraged them to have me go there, as opposed to some skills that I had. Now, other people that were there, they had an excellent opportunity to commingle with the Black Panther Party members. People from the community would come in. There would be a time for all of us that were there to have a moment to relax. So working ten hours... would be able to come in and get something to only go back to work, another shift someplace else. I think we all slept maybe a total of four hours, possibly five, if you were lucky, a night.

So that was a nice place to go to for food and to relax. So Jimmy's Lamppost served as a place that we, the Black Panther Party, was able to have an income from because Jimmy was related to the Party by blood, and then also not only the income, but we were able as Panthers to be able to go and have some relaxation time. So that was part of the service of that.

Then I do want to say, though, that I believe that when people are, say, in the military or in service, that food has a completely different meaning than it does if you're just out willy-nilly because you eat anytime you want to. If you're out in the world, you can take a break when you want to. On the weekends, you get up. Maybe you do have a pancake, or you have eggs or you have chocolate. But when you have more of a strict regimen in the military and the Black Panther Party, if you're on tour, then what you have is a real relationship with food whereby it's more than just nourishment.

Like we were in our house and none of us really knew how to cook that well for a large group of people, a whole household full of people and other people coming in. So it was misery working all day and many hours and on your feet, going around, and then coming home. Misery because no one really knew how to cook and you couldn't relax and eat good food. So it was misery upon misery. Then Russell Washington came, who was one of the people that was doing the cooking at headquarters. And so when he came, we were all so happy. We knew we'd be eating and we would have time to relax with some good food: Southern cooking, smothered pork chops and rice and things that were essential as comfort food and also essential to us being able to relax.

So food was like that then and as well. When we were out in the community, you wanted to have a territory or an area where you knew that you could stop and take a break and have some good food, because we got to have, I think, one break during the day. So we had like \$0.50 or something that we would carry around with us to be able to call in and let people know where we're at and track each other. And then you were able to have one break to eat during the day. So you would want to be in an area where you knew that there's some food. Being near college campus-- oh my God, that was the best! You knew they would always have those little carts and I remember discovering crepes. That was near UCLA. They had one of those stands or something? So that just meant a lot to me. And all of us, we were always thinking, where will I be that day? Uptown, downtown more exclusive area where there's a Saks and Neiman Marcus or nearer to the hood and eating chili dogs. So wherever it was, we all thought: when we take our break, this is the food we're going to have. So you kind of look towards that because it was hard work and you were standing on your feet a lot. We didn't know anything about wearing shoes for that purpose. So it was hard work. But food became important and just a real time to frigging relax.

KS: [00:59:07] So I'm curious: you were on assignment at Jimmy's Lamppost, what other assignments did you have while you were a part of the Party?

DR: [00:59:21] I was working in the photography cadre and then also in the kitchen at the school, and then Jimmy's Lamppost, and then I was on assignment a couple of other times. So special ops would be something that you would consider being underground. And then I was on assignment with one or two other special ops and that was my tenure of about a decade.

KS: [00:59:59] Do you want to share some of the assignments that you did when you were sent out to take photography?

DR: [01:00:08] Oh, okay. So special ops would be, for example, being underground. The other type of assignments would be, say, going with the camera to capture what was going on. So anything from a student protest to supporting a candidate for mayor to a trial for one of our comrades. We would go there and we would take the photos and come back to the newspaper and have Michael Fultz, the editor for the paper at large, and then Emory, he was the minister for the for arts and culture. So pictures were important to him as well. So after we took the pictures we would develop the pictures. They, those persons and others, would review the pictures, see what they were going to be placed in the newspaper. And if we did a good job and we got good bread and butter photos, which is having everyone placed in the photograph where they should be, as they should be full frontal with Elaine or one of the other persons that were an officer there in the party. That was good. There wasn't any trick photography back then, you know? You got the picture or you missed the picture. And if you missed the picture, that wasn't good.

KS: [01:01:47] So you said Elaine. Did you get to photograph Elaine Brown? Is that the Elaine that you're talking about?

DR: [01:01:53] Oh, yeah. We all use first names. That's absolutely right, I did.

KS: [01:01:59] What was that like? That's really cool.

DR: [01:02:03] I would say that when you did something well, either photographing Elaine or something else, then you felt good about what you did. But primarily other people were satisfied or felt good about it. So if she in fact was pleased with what you did and the editor was pleased then that was good. If on the other hand you caught them in a wrong pose or their back turned at an important time or you miss them totally, then that wasn't good. And being with her and shooting her I thought was kind of... I don't know, like a womanly privilege in a way. I know she liked having me photograph her, and very often when she was out my assignment would be to be with her. The other people were all guys. At that time I was the only female. Now, other females had been there and then left. But at the time I was there, I was the only female. And having her ask for me gave me a sense of me not only being like a soldier, but an artistic soldier. So I liked that.

KS: [01:03:38] An artistic soldier with that. That's a really interesting phrase. I really like that. I want to ask you a little bit more about how you were one of the only women at that time doing some of that photography. You talk about when you're in the special ops being one of very few women in your cadre of folks. So I'm curious, when you're thinking about the revolution and when you're thinking about changing the world, how does gender play a part in revolution? How did you start to understand gender roles?

[brief interruption]

DR: [01:04:56] You asked me something, I lost track.

KS: [01:04:57] I was just curious: you mentioned a few times your role as a woman in the party and in special ops and photography. So how did you start to understand gender roles in the underground or whenever you were on assignment? And I think more importantly, how did you start to understand sexism while a part of the underground and the party?

DR: [01:05:26] Now I love that question because you're asking a couple of different things that some people would answer very differently. For example there was recently a book tour that Erica and Stephen Shames were on: "Women of the Black Panther Party." So it was at that time that the fact was brought out that there were more women than men throughout the Party, and definitely in administrative roles such as at the school, educationally, and in other places. Now, there are people who will say, well, that's not at all true. There were definitely more men. Well, the men were prominent and the men were certainly iconic figures with the black beret and or black leather jackets. But that didn't mean that they were more in number. And I think that sexism was something that came up and was addressed in a couple of different ways, but wasn't uniformly held as an idea. So you could have different men and different women thinking differently about it. And even statements made that were contradictory by people in the party on that. So there was no one single way that you could say we all looked at sexism. I don't know if it was actually a word then. I definitely did not hear the word misogyny the entire time that I was in the Black Panther Party. But those things were happening. But we didn't exempt--I wasn't one of the women that examined them.

KS: [01:07:28] Yeah, I was going to say, so what does that actually mean? I guess it's more of: how did you feel as a woman in these spaces, even if you weren't examining them in terms of having lots of in-depth conversations about the role of sexism? How did it impact you as a woman in the movement?

DR: [01:07:52] So when I was underground, the amount of women were of about or more than the amount of men. So that meant when we were together and we were home, it was the sisters and maybe one or two other brothers. But there was not a single sister that said, here's what we're doing and we're doing this now. Here's a plan for tomorrow.

In fact, the people that were in charge were all men. So Jimmy was head of the whole underground network. So he told us when we would leave that house, go to another house where it would be, what it would look like. And also Russell and Sheldon looking at the maps about where we were going to get to, where we were going to go and exactly our route and what was going to happen.

But we women, yes, we would assist with the driving. And yes, we were the people that actually were the face for where the owners for homes that we rented went to, but we didn't have the ability to say, this is the next neighborhood we're going to. So we knew that we would have to look a certain way. We knew that there was attire that we'd have to have. And we also knew that we could say things like, we are school teachers and that a lot of the other people -- especially the people that came through there and needed to go someplace else -- that that wasn't something that they could do. But it was a vital part of being underground. So I don't think that any of us were thinking this is a terrible thing, that we were being treated differently or used. I think that we all were proud to serve, but that we later in life when we looked at things, I think that's when we saw, hey, wait a minute, what was I doing?

And underground the same rules of conduct didn't apply. An example would be unwanted attention by one of the male comrades. Being underground, you didn't have that same

level of command. You didn't have the ranks that would receive your complaint and review it and then talk to you and/or the brother. That didn't happen. It was all at the whim, so to speak, of the person who was leading at that time, who was Jimmy. So the men were not going to complain about unwanted attention from a woman. But yeah, the other thing did happen that other way. And we didn't have our complaints warmly received. Sometimes we were either dismissed or we would have confrontations.

So the confrontation would look like: you worked all day long, 8 to 10 hours on your feet. You have your break. Hopefully you were in a place that had good food. You travel for an hour or two or less to come back home from where you were. You come inside and Russell hopefully has made some food for you, which makes it now getting towards the good part of the night. Let's call it 8, 9, 10 o'clock and you can barely hold your eyes open. But you do want to report that a male has done thus and so to you. Well, by the time another male comes in so that you can speak to them, you may be the only two people awake in the house. So there was that level of either fear or concern or feeling, feeling like you're about to walk into an unjust situation. So you think, dang, you know, I got to tell Jimmy that so-and-so did this and no one was around you, and it was just you and him. Is he in a good mood? Had he been drinking? Was he high? Who's near him? So he's the one brother that you have to talk to. Then another brother who's always going to be around him. And you're the only other person and you're a woman. So there was not a feeling of protection. There wasn't a feeling of: we appreciate you; we got your back and brothers and sisters are the same. It was what we the men... [long pause]

KS: [01:12:49] And so in those instances of receiving unwanted attention and not feeling as though you could always speak up about it or speak about it without there being some type of retaliation, how did that then create... Did you and the other women talk about it? How did you all navigate that so that you can have protection amongst each other or did you just feel as though you just had to do your job and just try to keep the men at bay?

DR: [01:13:33] It was very complex. As you know, one of the tenets of being in service is you don't have rumor mongering. Loose lips sink ships. So we weren't gossiping. And if at night I'd bring up that I've had unwanted attention by a brother, if I bring that up to someone, and then for a couple of hours I'm missing? People and women aren't: well, where did she go? Well, what happened to her? Why isn't she here? So it was very complex. You wanted to be able to be seen as someone who could be trusted with a secret, but at the same time, you knew that that secret could very well be something like you just got the doodoo kicked out of you, or you saw someone who did, or you saw you saw an act that was not a principled act. So there were those layers.

I liken it to being in a cult, be it a religious cult, you're Baptist or Catholic or whatever, and you have a complaint and then you go to someone for wise counsel. So you do with that person says, and it sometimes doesn't feel right. Or one gal, she would kind of disappear every now and then and did not have any... It was as though she went away and came back just deflated and I never saw any bruises on her. But years later I heard that there was that happening to her and that's why she ended up leaving totally. But the reason that when we did [see] -- I saw her leave and come back -- the reason I didn't say, "Well, where were you? What happened?" is because again, I wanted to be seen as someone who could keep secrets by other people who were in leadership and could be chosen to do things that would be good for the party and be good for people at large. I'm the one you can pick to be there doing those things, because I'm not a person who's gossiping and I'm not a person who's loose lips will sink our endeavors.

But there's a really high cost to pay. One, I can't protect my other sisters. I can't protect myself because I'm not ratting out people that are doing things that are wrong. So there were so many personal sacrifices that all of us made, but the women that were there either were in equal number to or outnumbered the men there in numbers, in human bodies. But in terms of our ability to have leadership during the day, or over our activities, or over our lives -- anything from can I buy panties this week and have soap to I saw this really nice pair of shoes; I want to just spend an hour looking for shoes, comfortable shoes, and trying on different ones -- any kind of decision like that that I would want to have made for myself, I would have to go to a guy. And again: did he want to sleep with me? Was he high? Was he drunk? What was his relationship to so-and-so and would Jane be upset with me if I got the shoes and she didn't? And if she got them and I didn't, would I be upset with her? So it's really complex.

We were in a situation where we had no rules that were given to us. We were just kind of going on the fly. And the nature of really young people is such that we don't know what the heck we're doing. When you're 35 and older, you have all of your brain and it's working somewhat in harmony, but when you're younger, you don't know what the heck you're doing. You just know you have feelings and sometimes you get hurt or someone else around you does because you don't have the ability to dissect the situation.

KS: [01:18:20] So we've talked a little bit about how being on the run or underground kind of shapes your identity as a Black woman in the sense that you are often being asked to, it seems, choose the Party over yourself sometimes. I'm curious in terms of being that young -- you keep talking about you were all that young -- why did you think guerrilla warfare would make a difference and create a new world? Like you believe this could happen, right? You continue doing this because you believe that could happen. Why? What was it about these experiences when they were good that made you feel like you could create a new world?

DR: [01:19:20] Because I had never seen anything like it. I wasn't active in our church, so I never saw our church feeding people in the community. I wasn't a part of some school program or club that went out in the community and gave out presents maybe for Christmas or something. So I didn't know children in the community could have that happen in that method.

I didn't know any group that was doing anything that I thought should be done for the people that I knew needed to have them until I met the Black Panthers. They were doing what I knew should be done. And if the way that we were getting it done meant that there was some collateral damage, then I didn't know another way to compare it to, to say there's a better way to do this. I didn't know of any way other than that. So I did believe in it. I believe that was the only way.

Also our political education classes, they looked at places in the world that had been successful at waging war against the oppressors, and that by having self-sacrifice and subordinating your personal needs to the greater good, that's how these wars were won. That's how revolution was won. And it was an indoctrination. And also, if you put into that, a very tight restriction on where you live, what you're doing hour after hour, and sleeping only about four hours a night, well, you don't have someone who's industrious and wants to have a conversation with you about: is this really the right thing that we should be doing now? You're a dedicated follower. You're exhausted. And you have a lot of input coming in about how you must do. This is the right way. This is how people do this. And the line that we had was a line, a political line that we believed in.

KS: [01:21:44] Yeah. So I asked that question because I think for me it's: you all were so young, y'all were so young and trying to figure it out. But you didn't see any other models. This was a model and it was an important model. There was a way in which the Panthers really advocated for self-love, Black love, Black nourishment of our communities, Black political education. Those things are amazing. They they did change the world in many ways. The fact that we have free breakfast in schools is because of the work that you all were doing. Before there was a widespread sickle cell testing, you all were doing it.

I'm curious about when you now look back, what are the things that you think you all were villainized for? Or what did you think people misunderstood about the movement and about your goals?

DR: [01:22:48] So because we did have a certain type of bravado at that time, and because there were pistols and weaponry involved, a lot of people who weren't accustomed to that or who thought that we shouldn't have access to those things, they didn't want us to exist or they didn't want us around them. And they thought that we were just plain wrong. We were called gangsters or the kind of Black people they don't want their children to be. So I think that the misunderstanding of who we were came from those things. And it also came from a fear of the power that we did have, the power over the youth being able... Some of the iconic figures were quite charismatic. And I think there was that fear of, well, what are they going to do next?

KS: [01:23:55] As you've gotten older and you've had time to reflect -- I'm still stuck on how you describe yourself as also an artistic soldier -- and you talk a bit about doing photography, I'm curious what other what other ways have you nourished yourself?

[Interruption]

DR: [01:24:58] What did you say? Ask me dear.

KS: [01:24:59] I was just curious, you called yourself an artistic soldier and I'm wondering what other ways did you feed your spirit? Did you have a meditation practice? What did you do to maintain your sanity? Was it music? Was it dancing? How did you kind of nourish yourself? What made you feel like a human then and what makes you feel like a human now?

DR: [01:25:29] So then: I was insane. I had at least one nervous breakdown. I was literally on the edge, as you can imagine, not having control of even whether or not you are going to be able to purchase new underwear. Those kind of things made me edgy. Who's going to knock on the door next? Someone I have to live with. Someone I'm going to protect. What if I do so-and-so, would they get killed? I personally was on edge, so my downtime, my meditation, my artsy self didn't exist.

Now, when I did come to Oakland, there was some portion of that. But for me, I didn't have an opportunity to kind of look back at the work that I just completed and say yeah, I know this is good. I enjoy doing it. I didn't have that enjoyment factor going on. Then I was in service, hard core service and really having myself subordinated to a higher... So, Dale? No, not so much. No.

KS: [01:27:01] When you look back in this moment -- so you didn't have a practice that kind of grounded you necessarily-- but did you feel...? You talk fondly of your time when you're in the school or doing things like that that felt like it fed your spirit at that time.

DR: [01:27:30] No.

KS: [01:27:30] No. Even then, that still felt it was work.

DR: [01:27:33] I had nervous breakdowns. I was crazy and always thinking what's on the other side of the door sill. The other side of the car door. Now we collectively might have an opportunity to do things, like we had celebrations for birthdays. Revolutionary birthdays and a different theme, etc., but we were able to drink and dance the night. But I personally never felt that that was a comfortable thing to do explicitly because, well, what's going to happen after this? So that was my experience.

KS: [01:28:32] Yeah. You're always on the edge. So now--

DR: [01:28:37] And crazy. I just want to really emphasize that.

KS: [01:28:43] Okay. It seems that that's important for you to say that and I think in some ways, what I understand you doing is de-stigmatizing mental health, right? That de-stigmatizing: what it means to talk about mental health or even understand what that was, what was happening to you in that in that moment. So did you understand what was happening to you when you were having a nervous breakdown, or did you did you feel like you only really start to understand that after you left the party?

DR: [01:29:25] Sure. I didn't have any idea about how to take care of myself when I was there. I didn't know self care, so I didn't really recognize that I was having these breakdowns until later. But I knew things. Like I remember when I stopped dreaming. I really liked especially those flying dreams and going around. That was wonderful. Or dreams of being in hugs with people. So when I stopped dreaming, I knew that that was important. But I didn't see it as the harbinger of a lot of other uncomfortable situations. And I was in service. I wasn't entertaining myself.

KS: [01:30:30] Mm-hm. So how do you take care of yourself now? When you reflect back on then the past, what have you done to regain your sense of self? What have you done to maintain your well-being and your sanity, in these days?

DR: [01:30:52] Good question. Now use the word regain. So I left Ossining and went to California to be with the guy I loved. He was someone who, again, couldn't keep a job, wasn't able to take care of himself financially and not me. So my mother's house, my father's house, living with this really young guy who didn't know anything, and then joining the Black Panther Party. I didn't leave the Black Panther Party and then reclaim anything because I didn't have it in the first place.

I had to debrief from all of those years. And debriefing meant unraveling what had gone on then, how it affected me, and what was it that I actually wanted out of life. And there was certainly a period of shame not being able to put on a resume that I hid people from harm, from the court system. And so shame, guilt, confusion and general insanity for years after that and understanding why and then coming to some kind of peace with myself about: was it worth it? Did I really want to do it? Or while I was in there, I just couldn't leave.

KS: [01:32:21] So in this moment, what made it worth it for you? When you reflect back on it, what--

DR: [01:32:28] You say it was?

KS: [01:32:30] So you don't think it was worth it?

DR: [01:32:32] No, I didn't say that either.

KS: [01:32:34] So well, what would you say?

DR: [01:32:37] It's very complex. Very complex. I'll give you an example.

In my memoir, I talk about my time underground. So to do honor to the other women that were there, I won't release and publish my memoir until I've gotten the okay from each one of them, or at least inform them. So that was about 55 years ago that we were living underground. The first decade or so afterwards were more, again, about beginning to try to process what happened. And maybe about 40 or 35 years ago, I tried reaching out to the women. I thought, well, it might take a year or so for them to really understand I want to speak to one of them. They weren't at the reunions. To get out to them was difficult. They're not on Facebook. People are like, well, I think they're one of the people that they don't want to have any contact with the Party anymore. Then another decade passed and it brings it to 25 years ago. Still nothing. No one's responding. Fifteen, ten years, five years. During that whole time, none of the women that I was underground with have even said, yeah, I'll talk to you. So a couple of years ago, one person took my number. Five years ago, still hasn't called me. Another person said hi. And I was giving a workshop and I invited her. She said, too much trauma. I couldn't possibly even attend.

So the answer for me is still being worked out. Was it worth it? You have a whole group of women that refuse to be in contact and communication with each other. Some of them gave birth while they were underground and I can only imagine the tensions and the feelings that some of them have about that, the situations that their children were in, either the mental health of the children, survival of the children, etc.. So was it worth it?

KS: [01:35:28] You are a ceramicist now, right?

DR: [01:35:31] That's one of the things I do. I was a fashion designer and I absolutely loved doing that.

KS: [01:35:40] What what what what drew you to fashion? Tell me about it.

DR: [01:35:43] So my fashions, the reason I love them is because they were all mine and the designs were mine. A lot of the purses were hand-painted on. Hats and scarves were matching. And I would use African fabric either for the entire piece or maybe I would have-- I like to have blends of European lace and mud cloth and pearls. I felt like that was just so wild because you don't normally see those three together. And so that was a lot of fun, a lot of wear and tear on the body though, especially the coats and taking them to fashion shows, having my own, going to places to sell. And it just wore my body down and I didn't really go into it with a business degree or with an ability to promote the business. Well loved what I did. Loved making clothes, loved having them there.

And then ceramics. Now I am having a great time. This is, I would say, the one thing that I've done that has pure entertainment value. No, that's not true. Also, I did several years of dancing that I would say was deeply spiritual, did a lot of African dancing, taught African dance, the live drumming. So yeah, that was spiritual and complete abandon when it came to having physical workout as well. And then the the fashion design and ceramics. Definitely my opportunity to do what I want to do and be me. So I've had those periods in my adult life, and I've understood the need for them and the importance of them.

KS: [01:37:50] What do you find healing about ceramics?

DR: [01:37:54] Oh, ceramics is good. Putting your hands into the clay. It's absolutely wonderful being able to make something. Oh my gosh. You know, what do they say in the Bible? God made man out of clay. I mean, it's wonderful. You can sketch it out first. So you conceive it, you sketch it, you find the clay you want, you make it. Holy moly. I mean, that's just absolutely wonderful.

And the anti-racist theme that I came there with under that scholarship is one that gives me a great deal of joy and allows me to think that I can be a representative of educating people about about being able to think better about ourselves, our humankind. You know ceramics is for people that have money and luxury money to spend and practically everyone there is white. And I think that being able to have other people come there is important so that some of the white people are able to see and interact with people of different cultures. I love being there because I think I add an element of being a frivolous person to a degree, definitely one who likes to explore different things. And also because the work that I have is themed in representation of Black women where you wouldn't normally find them in African artifacts and architecture. The pyramids, predominantly those structures. There's no mention of women either on the side of being in architecture or someone that was a laborer. So basically we were non-existent for those hundreds of years. So I reinterpret the situation such as, well, what would the pyramid look like if it were designed by a woman? And you know, it's been a real joy to look at it that way and to reinvent from what it is and what we've been told, to something else that would be another world. Having a lot of fun with that.

KS: [01:40:36] I like that idea of another world. And it's going to lead me to my last few questions. For you, what does Black liberation taste like? If you could imagine a world in which Black people were truly safe and free, what would that look like? What would that taste like? And what would you serve at your "we are finally free" party?

DR: [01:41:09] So I love chitlins. And I think I would make everyone at least try them. And with hot sauce, of course. And then they could have grits. You'd have to have grits with butter and then stewed tomatoes, okra, fried okra and fried green tomatoes. You got to have collard greens not mixed with anything else but collard greens with salt pork, not fatback, but salt pork. And a variety of desserts: pineapple upside down cake, coconut cake, sweet potato pie, chocolate cake-- no, red velvet cake with cream cheese icing. So everyone would have to eat those things and try each one of those things.

KS: [01:42:15] And what do you think freedom looks like or feels like?

DR: [01:42:19] Don't know. Haven't a clue. Haven't a clue! I would love to be able to approach that in my mind. But even in my most successful meditations, the most I'm able to do is to take myself down from the high pitched activity. But to actually like be in the groove of being at peace and free? But now wait, wait, wait, did you mean what does freedom look like for me personally or for the world?

KS: [01:43:16] I think however you want to answer that question.

DR: [01:43:19] So now for me. Easy, easy peasy. Dancing. Working out. Oh, man, if I could go and do some dancing right now. Oh, Perfect! And especially to live drumming. Yes. Complete freedom.

KS: [01:43:43] That would be complete freedom?

DR: [01:43:45] Oh, absolutely. Yeah. Sweating and jumping and arms flailing about. For sure.

KS: [01:43:53] I love that. That also feels like you are very much so present and embodied, you know?

DR: [01:44:04] What a thing that you say that because when people have been with me and we're dancing together, they will remark that it looks as though I'm having an out of body experience and I've even been told to wear white and or something on my head so that my spirit does not leave and go out. So it's interesting that you said the thing about the body, but no doubt my body feels good when I'm doing it, and afterwards.

KS: [01:44:38] And maybe that's what freedom, a part of what freedom...

DR: [01:44:41] Oh for me? Heck yeah! Yeah. I'm free on the dance floor. I'm free working out. I love the gym. Oh my goodness! God lives right there in that gym somewhere. No doubt. Absolutely. I'm very clear about that personal freedom there. And having that as a place that feels good.

KS: [01:45:07] So I remembered that we had a conversation about your time at Jimmy's and then you mentioned Arlene Clark. I think Arlene Clark. And one of the things you talked to me about was the senior program and the food that was provided to seniors. And I was curious about how you talked about providing comfort to other people. Like in some of the work that you were doing, you provided comfort to other people. Can you just highlight a moment or two in which you felt--

DR: [01:45:48] So that that wasn't me personally, but Arlene ran the program called a safe program. And as its acronym implies, she was providing a sense of safety and comfort for the senior citizens and the elderly. And she did that by organizing food to be delivered: hot food and/or groceries. And they, those elders would eat up every part of it, not just the food, but having a young person come sit with them, talk to them, provide that comfort. So that was there in their home. And then also escorting the seniors to and from where their checks were cashed, because in those days there was no ATM, there was the mailbox that may have been broken into and/or you going to the check cashing place. So she provided safety for those two things: having them be fed, and then also the checks and just generally accompanying them where they needed to go. And we had transportation services that helped them with entertainment. So if they wanted to go out and go to a park, if they had an outing they wanted to go to, we would have escorts. We organized bus work.

KS: [01:47:10] Okay. Sorry, I didn't realize. For some reason, I thought when we talked about it before, I thought you also were a part of that. But I remember you talking about having like, coon stew and things.

DR: [01:47:24] Oh, yeah. And that was part of that underground life because it was important to have a presence in the the nightlife. It was really important to be those bodacious figures. And that meant that you had to be able to be in the after hours joints and be a badass when you're there. Now I loved food then. I love food now. So I had a healthy appetite. I could probably out eat and out drink a couple of the guys. T&T. Now, what was that? -- tonic, Tanqueray and tonic. Yeah, that was one of my drinks then. Oh my gosh. So Coon stew was the raccoon that was stewed up and you had to do it a lot because the gaminess in any type of those animals. But good stuff. Oh my gosh.

KS: [01:48:33] What else, what other things? What other foods do you eat?

DR: [01:48:36] So at those at those night spots, they had a lot of soul food things. Good grief. And big pasta things cooking on the stove. Lenny! I think was Lenny? Anyway, let's see what else. Oxtails. Smothered dishes. And ham hocks, pig tails. And then other parts of the chicken. So you'd have the dark meat primarily. And dark meat would be stewed. And then you'd have of course the the thighs and the drumsticks that were fried, but the chicken breast definitely. I loved chicken breast and barbecue a lot for a lot of the different meats.

KS: [01:49:41] And tonic. So that was your drink.

DR: [01:49:43] T&T.

KS: [01:49:44] T&T. Okay, we've been talking for a lot, so I don't want to take up any more of your time. But I wanted to just give you the floor. Was there anything else that you wanted to say? Was there anything I didn't ask you that you wanted me to ask you?

DR: [01:50:04] Yeah, I would like to say that part of service was not just thinking about how we could make a better world, but that in the moment that we were doing the service, we were making a better world for the community at large with free food, free groceries, free breakfast programs, free ambulance services, etc. The children were treated well. We loved on the children. We had a collective style of raising them. They didn't have a mother, they had mothers and were protected. No matter where they were or what was happening, they weren't running around willy nilly or insecure. No. Unsecured? No. So having that kind of loving protection for children and people that came from another person's body.

But you said your mind also? That was good. That was definitely good. And if we had been able to cultivate that, then that was one of the good things that we did to to help the world. How it translated later? Again, that story has yet to be written and I hope it is able to write itself well. So I would definitely like for those things to be included in the unselfish deeds that we did. Taking on the protection of our children and letting them know they're beautiful. They're Black.

KS: [01:51:57] So just with that said, you mentioned that you worked in the kitchen of the school. So you were essential to feeding children.

DR: [01:52:05] That's absolutely right.

KS: [01:52:08] And when you think back to that time, what makes you most proud?

DR: [01:52:17] [pause] Yeah. Now, I didn't actually take pride in any of the activities that I had. Like if I was placed in the kitchen or somewhere, I didn't take pride in those things. I certainly-- That's a complex one right there because there is the task and the assignment that you have at the time. And then there's what's going on around you and being able to see something that you recognize as being important to the universe at large. But then there's the actual tasks that you have, which is being someone working in the kitchen. So philosophically, you might be thinking and looking at something and recognizing that as a truth. However, what you're doing day to day and your your task might be kind of unrelated to it? Unrelated, you know? So it's pretty complex, I think.

KS: [01:53:44] So, so maybe pride wasn't the right word. We talked before about the children. You consider them your own. Y'all took care of them. You know, you protected them.

Speaker 4: [01:53:57] Yes.

KS: [01:53:59] Would you say that...doing--

DR: [01:54:03] It's [inaudible] getting something like that out of me, isn't it?

KS: [01:54:06] [laughing]

DR: [01:54:07] ... struggling now. How can I put this? Well, where's the positive now?

KS: [01:54:12] No, it's not even about it being positive. I think I'm just curious as to how did that assignment feel different than some of the other assignments? Did being around the children make it feel different for you than being in other aspects of the underground?

DR: [01:54:33] Yeah, there were differences if you worked at the school. You ate. If you worked at headquarters and where the newspaper was made, you slept on hard floors and you didn't eat.

KS: [01:54:48] So do you characterize a lot of your time in the underground as being hungry? Was hunger a major facet of your day-to-day?

DR: [01:55:03] No, I was not hungry. For food. When I was underground, I was having nervous breakdowns and crazy. Then in Oakland with all of our community programs and service, like I said, working at the school, you knew if you were around the kids or working at the school, you got to eat. That was very nice. And I wasn't hungry for food there.

KS: [01:55:33] So. But you were hungry for food in other instances.

DR: [01:55:39] Sure. Producing the newspaper. I worked doing that with the photography cadre and I don't remember there being any food there at central at all. Some other people remember going into the refrigerator and finding food. I don't remember that. So yeah, being hungry there.

KS: [01:56:04] And when you think about that, there is this hunger that's like a literal hunger, but then it also seems like there's also a type of hunger that is about a hunger to have control over your life. And then the school and other places, you understood what that was going to look like. You had a little bit more control. But I think I'm just stuck on the fact that you point out, "when I was at the school, I ate," as a core memory. So there are moments when you didn't eat or as you said, you didn't eat until late at night.

DR: [01:56:47] You know because being in the party was very much like being in a paramilitary organization and food might not be number one or number two or number three.

KS: [01:57:04] Yeah.

DR: [01:57:05] Things that are important depending upon where you're working, but at central and headquarters and where the newspaper was produced, like I said, I don't even remember being with a refrigerator that had food in it. I don't remember that. But other

people have told me that it did. And you'd be there for hours at a time and you'd sleep there. So that's a good period of time.

KS: [01:57:34] Yeah, and it's hard to function and to feel present when you're hungry.

DR: [01:57:43] But now, wait a minute. Let me be clear. You could go outside and there were places around. I don't remember what places or if you could get to the school.

KS: [01:57:55] Yeah.

DR: [01:57:57] You could go eat, but yeah. No.

KS: [01:58:04] Well, I just want to say thank you for everything that you've done. I know that being a rank and file member means that sometimes people don't hear your story. So I really appreciate that you're sharing it with us and I hope it gives people a taste to learn more about the people who did the everyday workings that made the party work.

DR: [01:58:34] Um-hmm, exactly. And I definitely know that my experience was highly personal and it's not emblematic of all women in the party or even most women. So I really appreciate that you've allowed me this time to give you this highly personalized story about one woman who was in the Party and how she saw things. It's I'm deeply appreciative of that time and that you took that interest. Thank you.

KS: [01:59:05] Thank you so much, Dale.