

Interview with Lela Knox Shanks

Interviewer: Anne Schuff

Anne: The following interview is conducted with Lela Knox Shanks for the Star City Treasures AmeriCorps Oral History Project. It took place on January 9, 2007 at her home. The interviewer is Anne Schuff.

Could you tell me about your childhood?

Lela: Well, um, I started life in Oklahoma City, I was born in Oklahoma City in 1927 and I my parents lived on this ranch, uh, outside of Okeema, OK, I should explain. When it time for my birth I was the third of the last three children and my sister and brother had been born in um, at home and my mother decided she wanted me to be born in a hospital and so she went to Oklahoma City for my birth, but when she got there she found out that the black patients could only stay in the basement, in the hallway, a bed, one bed behind each other. And that was that was that was accommodations for blacks at that time and so my mother decided that she didn't want that kind of accommodation, and so I was born in a house that was owned by her godparents in Oklahoma City. And of course I was born at a time when segregation was legal, in America. That was legal up until the Civil Rights legislation was passed and the last of the legislation was passed in about 1960, um 9 or 1970. The first legislation was passed in about 1964 or '65 and, but then, that was just for a part of it. And so up until so most of my life, over half of my life, I spent living at a time when it was OK to discriminate against people because of their skin color being darker than white. So, um my uh I stayed on the ranch until I was school age and then my mother decided that she felt we should go to city schools, my siblings were a brother was about ready to go into uh, junior high school or high school and so my mother wanted him to able to have a better school than this little country school. And so we moved to Oklahoma City where we stayed for a short, a few years until my parents bought a 2 1/2 acres in a little place called Green Pastures, OK. It was a settlement, all black settlement, because see the housing and everything was segregated in those days and however my mother in the time that we lived in Oklahoma City, my mother did move into, moved us into an all white block, and I say my mother because my father had stayed on the ranch at that time because uh he was a foreman there and this was during the depression, and he had a hearing problem, and he felt secure in his job there on the ranch and so for the for a period of time after we moved to Oklahoma City he stayed on the ranch and we would go back on forth visiting on the weekend and sometimes in the summer I would go and stay with him for maybe a week or 2 cause I really missed my Dad. uh but anyway, my Mother did move into a block that was all white in Oklahoma City. And the police came and told her that if she did that uh that they would arrest her well the landlord told my mother that he would get her out of jail if they arrested her. And I don't know my mother perhaps had worked for this landlord and as cause what she did working as a maid, that was what she did, and she possibly had had known this landlord and uh so my mother did we did move into that all white block and the police did come and get her and they took her down to the station and I was just a little girl, but I remember her saying that she took her tatting with her. Now, do you know what tatting is? OK, it's you have a little uh steel shovel and you uh make fine lace with it. Well, my mother knew how to tat and knit and crochet and so uh do all those kinds of that hand work and so she said "I just sat there tatting until they released me." So they just kept her, I don't remember the time now, but she wasn't there over night they kept her for a few hours and we did remain in that house. And um so um my I know my my mother was very uh she was a free spirit she was not to be intimidated by Jim Crow or anything else that was the kind of strong person she was. So um we moved to this little acreage and that's really where I say that I grew up. I spent most of my life at one time there. And um but I didn't I went to school in Oklahoma City and I didn't have a school bus to get to school in Oklahoma City cause they had a country school out there. But here again it was not accredited, the school in Oklahoma City was, and the whole purpose for moving from the ranch was so

that we could get a better education. And so um I never had any sure way of getting an education I had to just uh catch a ride everyday, to get to school. And I did a lot walking, which I hated, thought it was so unfair, you know how children always think things unfair, and perhaps it wasn't unfair, but I'm still a strong walker today. And I get my start very early. Um, and I, I um my parents both of them always worked, my father finally joined us and my parents always worked so I would have been an early latch key kid. And um they had this one the happiest days uh for me would be when my mother happened to get off maybe for some reason she was able to get off work early and I would come home and dinner would be ready. Because usually I ate, had to eat dinner, oh, 8 O'clock and I never hardly ever washed dishes, because by the time we got through eating it was time for me to go to bed because I would have to get up at 5 and 6 in the morning to try to catch a ride to get into town to get to school and see people didn't have jobs where you had to be at work at 8 O'clock you see these people were doing this hard labor and unskilled labor and so they had to be at work report to work by 6 and 7 so they had to leave the uh country an hour earlier. So, um, a lot of times some of those days I would miss a ride miss all the rides, that I could catch there was one point in Oklahoma City where uh the cars would come by to give anybody a ride you usually gave people a quarter or 15 cents or something like that everybody didn't take anything but if people took something well that's what you would pay them. And uh sometime I would walk down there and I would have missed every ride. 'Cause I was usually I always had something after school a play practice or some student council meeting or something and I would miss the ride. So then I would have to figure out where might somebody let me stay for the night. Weren't any telephones. Um, and out there in the country and so um that that was uh difficult. uh And in many ways my parents I had to develop a sense of independence very very early, of of how to take care of myself. And um I kind of resented, as a child I resented that. Um but realize now that its just one of those things that helped to make me stronger. I never felt unloved I always felt that my parents loved me. But, I just felt neglected, often felt neglected. But I know now that my parents like all other parents and all other people. People do the best they can with what they know how to do at that time, and with what they have to work with at that time. My parent's life was work. That was work. They got up early in the morning to go to work. They were making very little, not that they weren't smart people, but those are the wages that were paid for being a uh maid, and a cook, as mother was. And my father uh was a hot carrier and that, those are the people that hard labor carrying wheelbarrows, um concrete, and its just some labors. And um so as a saying their life was work and um today you know people its so important for parents to go to the children's school. And in fact I heard someone say that the studies show that if a father goes to his child's school four times that the grade the of the child improves and if that had been the my case, I would I would have failed all the time, because how could my parents get off from work to come over to the school. And most parents most parents today are in the same fix. Most people who work, at you know anybody who's working for minimum wage, they don't get leave. You go and tell a boss I need to go over to the school. Do you want your job? And and this is something that we aren't reckoning with. How uh parents, the average working person can't take time off and go doesn't have the kind of job or the kind of leave where you can take off and go to the school. Um, I didn't work when my children were growing up. And I was over at the school all the time. My husband had the kind of job where he could take off and he didn't he he was not a person who was eager to take off as long as I could take care of it, but he could take off. But, so many of the working poor aren't able to do that, they can't afford to do that. And they are you know, the people so many of the working people today are in the same fix that my parents were in. Um, 80 years ago, 70 years ago. Um so I graduated from high school in 1945, from Douglas High School in Oklahoma City, and then I couldn't go to my state school and take journalism because blacks couldn't go to school with whites see, that was against the law. And so fortunately my parents um could send me away, and so I went to Lincoln University in Jefferson City, Missouri. And it's all that working that they did and trying prepare for me to be able to go to school neither my brother nor my sister went to college, so I was the first one in my family to go to college. And that's where I met my husband Hughes, we were

sweethearts in college and I we married secretly 'cause it was oh it was you were in disrepute if you were married and in college because uh well the Dean of Women back you had Dean for Women and you had a Dean for Men. And um you were deemed a bad influence for the unmarried girls. If you lived the dorm and so that's why we got married secretly cause we didn't want - Hughes he continued to stay in his dorm and I stayed in mine. We had gone to a little town outside of St. Louis and got married, but the Dean of Women found out and so she called me and told me I was going asked me and I told her yes and she said well you have to move out of the dorm because you're a bad influence. And so and so I uh stayed out the dorm for a semester and then after that semester my husband had his undergraduate work for law school qualify of law school and the law school was in St. Louis and so then we were separated the next two years may we visit when we have train fare, but um he was going to school in St. Louis and I was finishing up in Jersey City and so I graduated with a degree in journalism in 1949 and uh he graduated in 1951 went to law school and uh then he went he wanted a he never wanted me to work he started out that way not wanting me to work outside the home and uh and we never could agree about that and so I would go I would work I worked on but just for short periods of time I worked on um the St. the Chicago Dependo which is a weekly, black weekly newspaper - I worked on that and I worked on the St. Louis Argus and then I worked on the St. Louis news um but uh I find after four years um after we'd been married four years then I had my our first child in 1951 and so I didn't work after that but my after my husband had graduated I started telling that because he could not have practiced unless I had had a job because what we would we live off of for him to started in a practice. And so he wanted a secure job as secure as he as we thought one could a job one could get at that time and he was from a family of twelve I was just one of three so he was very conscious of having some security coming from a large family and very supportive family and very tight family and very loving family but times were hard and he grew up during the depression and so uh when people couldn't get jobs. So it was very important to him to have to have a very secure job and he thought that maybe working for the federal government would be the greatest place of job security and so he went to the US civil service commission office which was right there in his home town of St. Louis and I don't if young people now know about the United States Civil Service Commission and that if you want to get a job with the federal government that that's where you go. I don't know whether you all know about it now but anyway is your job federal - AmeriCorps, it's a federal program but maybe they give the money to the states and then then maybe then the states administer it.

Anne: I think it's actually a grant to the city.

Lela: Oh a grant to the city OK OK well that's even uh further away I'm sure there's some uh federal oversight because it is federal money. But anyway my husband uh went to the office and this is after he got his degree in '51 and the clerk there just told him point blank we don't give those applications out to Negroes. So even though he was a a disabled veteran, he had volunteered for World War II, had returned with a purple heart had this law degree but that was the law didn't matter that he was qualified and this is theses are historical facts that happened over and over and over again that most Americans majority in the majority culture don't have the slightest idea but these things happened and so when he couldn't get the applications we thought well gee were going to have to go somewhere where you can get applications at least so we studied cities and states trying to find one city or one state that had some kind of Civil Rights Commission. And and we found that Colorado was the only state or was one of two states I can't remember now but it was just one or two states that had a state Civil Rights Commission and so we said well we'll move to Denver and so that's what we did. And of course my husband didn't have a job we were just striking out and our oldest child Nina who was who is will be 56 actually this year I don't know if she'd want me tell that but maybe not (laugh) but um she was six weeks old when we left St. Louis and my husband just never liked his hometown after that when he couldn't even get the applications to apply for a job. So we moved to Denver and Denver was just like heaven, for me anyway because coming from Oklahoma where every thing's segregated you couldn't go to the swimming pools, you couldn't use the bathroom in stores downtown, uh you couldn't go to the

lunch counters, you couldn't go eat out, you couldn't go to the amusement parks, you couldn't do go any to any of the public places they were just for whites and and in Denver all the kids could go swimming they could you couldn't I couldn't even go to the downtown library in Oklahoma City, they had a special library in the black neighborhood. So Denver was just like heaven, and uh Nina our oldest uh always well from the time she was when she was about three she drew a stick picture of a man in a tuxedo that she had seen on television and she thought right away well she must have some artistic talent three years old you know and sure enough she's an artist and that's she sent me that piece for a my birthday in September and um all the rest of the sculptures around here she did um so uh anyway we took her to she took art lessons at the art gallery and just all kinds of opportunities that I knew nothing about when I was growing up and um uh and but when it got time for her to start to school ok this is when we began to see the segregation and discrimination in Denver, and of course this is something that most people don't really understand, but from the very beginning the Africans were brought over for economic reasons so prejudice and discrimination from the beginning have been for economic reasons. It wasn't because whites just didn't like people with dark skin. But it was these were easily identifiable people and the way they dehumanized them in and uh rounding them up from the west coast of Africa putting them in the pens separating them out from people of there tribe putting with people who were there natural enemies in their homeland and people who spoke a different language you know all people from Africa don't speak the same language they come from all those different countries and they have their language they have their own music I mean they're distinct countries and distinct cultures and people and um uh but so it's always been about economics people will say well isn't it about economics now, well it's always been about economics. Um well and I say that to say that in my neighborhood, which was which would be called a poorer neighborhood because there was discrimination in housing there, I don't know how much you know about red lining and I won't go into all of that or the banks conspiring to the even today even as recently as sometime last year there was an article in the Lincoln paper that was telling how whites when whites and blacks apply for loans with all things being equal they will still there still more prone to deny the blacks than deny the whites and also they charge higher interest rates to the blacks this was a story from just last year so there was discrimination in Denver and we knew it from the time we went there but we were so happy and so relived to be able to have some freedom that we hadn't had before that we just ignored it until we had to face it and so we lived in a poor neighborhood we were a young couple just getting started we didn't have any inheritance or any rich parents that were going to help us with the down payment on a home and some fancy area or something and in our neighborhood there were Blacks, Whites, uh Hispanics, certainly Hispanics, and Asians so we had everything in our neighborhood but it was in the poor part of town so the children were going to have to go half a day to school they weren't going to be able to go all day to school but across town in the rich white part of town, the kids were uh 1 teacher to 20 uh children uh but not so where there were the all these ethnic groups and poorer economic people so uh that's really when I became probably I guess that would be the time I became an activist is when my child's going to go half day to school and after me having to get out on that dusty road every day and catch a ride into town and the hardships I had in getting an education and my child's not going to get a decent quality education why I wasn't going to stand for that one minute and not try to do something about it of course I started teaching my children at home. I mean buying workbooks and uh when Nina started at school after I had to face those double sessions but to do something about it I called the NACP the local NACP and I called the local Urban League I don't know if you know about the Urban League but these and I we don't have time for me to explain all this to you but these are things that you could inform yourself because these would resources where you can get information about the state of Black America from the Urban League because they put out an annual report and it's a national organization one of the oldest organizations in fact the Malone Center started was started by the urban League at first and then it became to get jobs for black people and then it became the Malone Community Center. But anyway, um uh I called the Urban League called the NACP and I didn't get

any answers from them like they felt there was anything they could do and so I just threw myself across the bed and just cried, just boo hooed boo hooed, and then all a sudden it dawned on me you going to have to do something it's not going to be anybody to do this for you, you have to do something so I got up there from there and I called these women mothers that I knew in the neighborhood we got together we got up a petition and went house to house getting enough signatures to take down to that school board and of course nothing happened that my children were there to see happen but eventually they did get temporary buildings until I can't remember now whether they built on or what they did or built another school or what I really can't I just don't remember all of that but I know that they did put temporary buildings up. So, um that was really the beginning of me coming out of being so comfortable and just trying to live a normal family life that was all my husband and I really wanted we just wanted to be like other people and just to have a normal family life. We didn't want to be doing all the things we didn't plan to do all things that we did but we had to do to it. It was just something that we weren't going to sit back and just take these inequities and this any inequality we just weren't going to do it. So, um so that was the start of my activist. Now I don't know where or how much more you want or what.

Anne: Um, How, I guess, um where did it go from there?

Lela: Well, one thing, if you can remember this or the people who might in years in years to come hear this, you heard me speak about how wonderful it was in Denver, but still, all aspects for the necessities of life for African Americans all those things were controlled by your skin color where you could live where you could go to school where you could work um and so I probably should all aspects of things that everything you need you have to have a job so you can eat and you have to have place to stay you have to be able to go to school so you can get a job so all of those things are necessary for human life but in America for people they were for people of color they were always controlled they were for people of color they were always controlled by the power structure the government the ruling the people who ruled the cities, um the people were the power structure I guess I should say but they are the people but they are the people who ruled because they are the powers that control the money in a city.

(phone) Ok I will I think was fixing to talk about my husband's employment he couldn't application in Denver in St. Louis well in Denver he could get the applications and he had a stack a portfolio of his test scores and as a Disabled Veteran this is something that your generation may not know a Disabled Veteran could get hear that phone the disabled you think that's going to be disturbing.

Anne: I think it's probably going to be picking up.

Lela: Ok I will let's see what could.

Ok I was going to tell you about my husband's employment in Denver he could take all those professional level jobs that uh he could take the get applications and could qualify for all of the professional level jobs with the federal agencies like US Treasury, Social Security Administration, IRS um all all the different he just and but uh what I was going to tell you was that the Disabled Veterans veterans just a veteran could get 5 extra points added to a test score to help them they speak um you know we hear about um what is it called when uh in Affirmative Action people always want a preferential treatment or but there's another word for it but I can't remember it right now. But anyway veterans got that they got 5 points added but if they were disabled as my husband was then you would get 10 points and so my husband would something like 90 something on the test just from his score alone and then they would add the ten points and he would be at the top of the register, he would never get called. For these jobs and we had a friend from Lincoln University who worked in that office and I don't know they might the people when they hired him he was very had very white skin but he was an African American and uh so I don't know if the office hired him thinking he was white or anyway he worked in that office and he would tell my husband that what "Hugh Hugh's I see your at the head of the register for dadada position", but my husband would never get called. And so my husband had worked at the Post Office that was the one agency that would hire black men back then and the one

Federal Agency and he was working at the Post Office, but he would always have to work at night and I was having these babies every other year and I was just swamped with I just wanted a so called normal family life I wanted to be able to get up in the morning and have breakfast with him and just and then he come at night and not be working at night and so he quit the Post Office and took a job as a painter house painter he had been a house painter before he went to college before he went into the service. Because see he went to school on the GI Bill and um uh so after he took the job painting, the VA had his records and they kept up with the disabled veterans back then I bet they don't do that now. But they did back then. And his veterans claims officer called him in to his office and ask him why he was painting when the government had sent him to college for 6 years to get this law degree why would he go back to painting and so my husband explained to him none of these he's qualified went down and had taken the tests and was at the head of register for some many of them but they wouldn't hire him and so this Veteran Claims Officer called all these Federal Agencies in where my husband had because had taken his portfolio in there when he had this interview with him and showed him his scores and he called those heads of those agencies in and told 'em one of them needed to hire this man and so the Social Security Administration Director was the one was the only one that wanted to hire him. And so my husband got that job, with that's how he got the job though, did you see what I mean it wasn't just a simple as taking the tests and qualifying it was still something intervening for him even in this lovely Denver that I thought was such heaven well he had worked there for about uh let's see let's see how old was Nina he had worked for the Social Security Administration for about 6 or 7 years when he was the senior person uh in his position who was next in line for promotion. And when he applied for the job it was for a field rep her would be going to peoples homes taking there claims and going to hospitals taking peoples claims and so his boss told him "Why I couldn't promote this is the one were hiring now but he told him well I can't promote you to any field representative job you'd have to go out here knocking on these white women's doors and they open the door and see you and scream and we have a incident they call they police there's no way I could promote you", so my husband came home that day and said we're leaving Denver. And I said "You would leave Denver?" You know 'cause this was my heaven. He said: "I could leave Denver and never look back." And so we left Denver He transferred to um the Kansas City payment center and it was in Kansas City that we really began hot and this was in 19 uh 61. We had moved to Denver in '51 and we moved to we left there I thought we stayed 9 years it well it was uh it was it worked out to be 10 years I guess. So, um that's it was just always something where our lives our lives, they were controlled by race. Unless you just wanted to knuckle under and take what was being dished out to you and um uh so in Denver that's where we hum I mean in Kansas City when we got there well this civil rights movement had already started. Um, to back up in when when the Supreme Decision The Brown vs. Board of Education came down in 1954 I remember exactly where I was I in the bank in Denver and a man came in with the paper and these the Denver Post and has this big headline and I can't remember exactly what it said but it told that the Supreme court had outlawed segregation in schools, and I just started crying. I was so happy. I was just overcome with the fact that the sup something had something but see I thought that that meant the end of segregation in schools, but it didn't. Because the ruling said all deliberate speed. Well deliberate means you can take forever. It's an oxymoron, all deliberate speed. But in that moment, I was just overcome and elated, and then went Kansas City and that's when we had the fight of our lives because um, they civil rights movement was just really getting started. And full force. And all of the the things that we had thought that we could just have a normal family life that just wasn't to be for us because after about two we'd been there about two weeks some people came to our home and told us they were in this organization called the Northwest District Citizens Committee, and um and they were they the schools certain school had integrated in May but when the schools were uh but when they went the schools closed, they integrated, um but that uh the school board was planning to re-segregate them. And um and they understood I had typewriter, and they wondered if I would do some typing for them and that was they because I had a typewriter they wondered help out and so that's really see the

movement was already started and we just joined it. These people, oh these people were really uh true grass roots activists, and these people and been battling the segregated schools for years and years, and really hadn't gotten anywhere and we really didn't get anywhere either but we changed ourselves and that's really I think the meaning experiences in life that you set out to change something else, but what you do is end changing yourself and um but that's where we uh where active we lived in an integrated neighborhood but the school board would gerrymander around a black house where a black family and just some kinda some kinda way put it over in the district with the black kids or it would give a transfer to white child, whose in a predominantly black area and then just give them a transfer out but if the black family as we wanted to get a transfer to go to the new a school where it was just one teacher to 20 or 25 children where as in one of my children's classrooms it was one teacher to 45 kids, and so we here again we just weren't going to stand for it and so we uh decided we would boycott the school uh and I tried to enroll them in the newly built all white school which was as close as the black school was but of course they told me that I was outta we weren't in that district and uh so we couldn't go and of course and of course school board wouldn't give us any transfer cause they just wanted to keep that school all white. So that's when we kept our kids out of school for that year and that's what Ann sort of was and that's just part of it but um the piece that Ann did is about all these different things and um, um and then that um next year we and of course well that next year we put our kids in Catholic School and um this is something that um you'd should probably tell when I went to the Catholic Catholic went to the priest to see about getting the we were not Catholics um to see about getting the children in the school, um this had already been mapped out and planned by a group of Catholics that were a part of I think it's called Social Action Committee. It was some new committee I guess it had just formed in the Catholic church to look at issues such as Civil Rights and Human Rights and to come up with solutions, so some of these people had talked with the bishop about the Catholic school taking our children in for that next year because we didn't want to put them back in the public school because we just didn't know what would be done to them and the um so the bishop agreed and gave and told them where I should take the children to enroll them so I took them to this um parish to enroll them and one of the members of the social action committee went with me and we went in to talk to this priest his name was father Francis I was sitting down and so was the um man accompanied me his first name was Chester and I cannot remember his last name but when I was sitting down he was sitting down the priest came over to me stood over me and put his fist like this on my forehead if you give me trouble I'll have your damn neck. That's he said to me and I just had to choke back anything I wanted to say because I wanted to get the children in school. And so I had to take that. And the children did very well there um, and so far as academics and um then that next year uh I kinda got I developed uh problem of um palpitations and uh had gone to the doctor and the doctor said if I didn't stop what I was doing that I would probably have a heart attach in 10 years. And so my husband said well were leaving Kansas City and so he and he was having his boss had threatened to fire also on his job if he didn't stop what he was doing uh but his boss and he told him that he would recommend that he would resign so that they would fire him and he wouldn't have firing on his record but we talked and we decided that were gonna we would have to force their hand and the guy who his boss who had told him he was going to fire him he suddenly had a heart attach and so all that pressure was then removed from my husband but after I kinda got sick then we moved to uh my husband requested a transfer and we moved to Lincoln in 1965. and um, s when after we got came here I didn't really at first do very much because my husband I trying to recuperate and um that had been very stressful in Kansas City because our lives were threatened, our phones were tapped, we were arrested I had to go before federal grand jury the uh day of the march on Washington I had to go before this Federal Grand Jury. to tell why peacefully picketed Federal Building and so the stress had just really taken it's toll I guess but after we moved here but then my husband really I stayed home more he really was taken doing more he was more like the brain trust in Kansas City the strategy planning the behind the scene stuff and I was the one who ran for the school board who ran for the state legislature who was going out talking and demonstrating about

against the discrimination (cough) excuse me so when we came here he was the more the person who became more active and he was one of the charter members of the Nebraskans for Peace of the Vietnam war was really raging when we came here and uh he became a council man um for um the college for any young man didn't have to be college the young man who really wanted to become conscious objectors and he became a counselor uh for them along with um couple of other men who were with the United um Campus Ministries I think that's what it was called and um so um I our activities in Lincoln have really broadened to include not just civil rights but human rights and war. And um so and every Wednesday I try to picket the Federal Building to demonstrate for peace now to get us of Iraq. So, um I've skipped pretty much all of things in Lincoln, but um I think you have the main things.

Anne: Is there thoughts or any ideas you'd like to leave people with?

Lela: Well you know when people ask have things changed. I tell them now, you are the best gage of whether things have changed or not because if you have changed then things have changed but if you are still if you have not changed if you've broken out of the old tradition of whites feeling that they are somehow innately superior to people with darker skin if you don't speak out when you are in family gatherings or church or social gatherings or on the job gatherings where people speak disparaging of other groups uh then things haven't changed. But and I think that people in Nebraska have not yet I think people in Nebraska are well meaning people like people every where, but Nebraskans have not yet faced up to the racism that is that exists here. And and they never faced up to their feelings the insensitive things that people will say about others who are different. And, so if you want things to change, then each individual has to be a part of that change. I know I have changed and I continue to change I determined not to be not to die a bigot. Because a black person can be bigot too, a black person doesn't to keep people out of jobs and to do all the different awful things that people in power can do to you but you can still be prejudice and lump all people together and I'm determined that I'm not going to die that way. I don't want to be like that and so I I try to see people as an individual and try to see the life in them that's in them that's the life force in me and try to see how were just really connected together sisters and brothers and this skin color is just like uh like a spaceship or something a spacesuit or something it's just an outer garment it isn't not what really counts it's what's on the inside of us that's what really matters that's where the real person is. It isn't in how melanin you have. You know schools should be teaching these children about DNA and how it's says that were all 99 and 9 10th percent the same. In flesh and blood so I guess that would be my parting remarks.

Anne: Thank you so much for your time

Lela: Well thank you Anne for coming.