

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Darwin McBeth Walton

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Walton, Darwin McBeth
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Darwin McBeth Walton,
Dates:	November 22, 2008
Bulk Dates:	2008
Physical Description:	6 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:53:40).
Abstract:	Educator Darwin McBeth Walton (1926 -) authored several acclaimed children's books, including "What Color Are You?" which was named a landmark book by the Chicago Historical Society. Walton also taught for over twenty years in the public schools, and was an instructor at National Louis University. Walton was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on November 22, 2008, in Lombard, Illinois. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2008_142
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Author Darwin McBeth Walton was born Jane Darwin McBeth on September 16, 1926, in Charlotte, North Carolina, to John and Mary McBeth. Walton graduated from West Charlotte High School in 1944. After attending Johnson C. Smith University and Howard University, Walton received her B.A. degree in music from the Chicago Conservatory of Music in 1950. She later returned to school and received her M.E. degree in teaching from National-Louis University (NLU) in 1973. Since 1978, Walton has designed and facilitated five courses in teacher education for NLU and remains in the education arena as student teacher supervisor there.

Walton brings music and twenty years of public school teaching to her reading and writing audience. As a participant in the "Author in the Schools" Program and the "Open Book" After School Program in Chicago's inner-city schools, she is a frequent visitor to classrooms and libraries throughout the Chicago Metropolitan area. Walton published her first book, *What Color Are You?*, in 1973. It was published by Johnson Publishing Company and was one of the first books about America's diversity to be used in public schools. It was named a landmark book by the Chicago Historical Society. Her next book, *Overcoming Challenges*, is the story of astronaut Major General Charles F. Bolden, one of the first four black astronauts in the U.S., and the challenges he faced in his quest for education during the 1960s. Her highly acclaimed contemporary middle-grade novel, *Dance Kayla*, tells the story of a young girl who was uprooted from her beloved farm life in South Carolina to begin anew with a family in Chicago. It was chosen one of the best books of 1990 by the Banks Street College of Education Selection Committee. Her other books include *Kwanzaa: A World of Holidays*; *Nana's Kitchen*; two books on the Underground Railroad: *They Walked With Courage* and *Jetty's Journey*; and two early readers: *Part of My Family* and *Families Are Special*.

In 1998, Walton was elected Outstanding Woman Leader in the field of Racial Justice in DuPage County. She was honored again in 2003 with the Distinguished Alumni Humanitarian Award from National-Louis University.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Darwin McBeth Walton was conducted by Larry Crowe on November 22, 2008, in Lombard, Illinois, and was recorded on 6 Betacame SP videocassettes. Educator Darwin McBeth Walton (1926 -) authored several acclaimed children's books, including "What Color Are You?" which was named a landmark book by the Chicago Historical Society. Walton also taught for over twenty years in the public schools, and was an instructor at National Louis University.

Restrictions

Restrictions on Access

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

Restrictions on Use

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

Related Material

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

Controlled Access Terms

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

Persons:

Walton, Darwin McBeth

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Walton, Darwin McBeth--Interviews

African American women authors--Interviews

African American college teachers--Illinois--Chicago--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

National-Louis University

Occupations:

Educator

HistoryMakers® Category:

EducationMakers

Administrative Information

Custodial History

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

Preferred Citation

The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Darwin McBeth Walton, November 22, 2008. The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection, 1900 S. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.

Processing Information

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

Other Finding Aid

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

Detailed Description of the Collection

Series I: Original Interview Footage

Video Oral History Interview with Darwin McBeth Walton, Section A2008_142_001_001, TRT: 0:29:20 ?

Darwin McBeth Walton was born on September 16, 1926 in Charlotte, North Carolina to Mary Simons McBeth and John McBeth. Her maternal family had Irish and Cherokee ancestry, and lived in Blaney, South Carolina. There, McBeth Walton's maternal grandfather, Napoleon Simons, inherited a sixty-acre cotton farm, where McBeth Walton's mother was raised. She completed the eighth grade at the Mather Academy in Camden, South Carolina; and, with her family, attended the Sutton Branch Baptist Church, where she met McBeth Walton's father, whose brother was the pastor. McBeth Walton's paternal family had Scotts Irish ancestry. Her father grew up on a farm in Columbia, South Carolina, and left home as a young man to become a barber. After marrying, McBeth Walton's parents moved to Greensboro, North Carolina, where her oldest sister was born; and then relocated to Charlotte, North Carolina, where they established a barber shop and a dry cleaning business. They raised five daughters, including McBeth Walton.

African American women authors--Interviews.

African American college teachers--Illinois--Chicago--Interviews.

Video Oral History Interview with Darwin McBeth Walton, Section A2008_142_001_002, TRT: 0:31:10 ?

Darwin McBeth Walton grew up in an African American community near Johnson C. Smith University in Charlotte, North Carolina. She lived near Charlotte's Grand Theatre, one of the city's few all-black cinemas, where she occasionally saw Western and Shirley Temple films. McBeth Walton often listened to Ella Fitzgerald and Billy Eckstein on the radio; and, at six years old, sang publicly for the first time at a wedding. She joined the choir at Charlotte's Fairview Elementary School and Biddleville Elementary School, where she transferred during the sixth grade; and continued her choir involvement at West Charlotte High School, where she was once directed by Duke Ellington. After graduating, McBeth Walton studied for two years at Johnson C. Smith University, and then transferred to the music program at Howard University in Washington, D.C. There, she was mentored by musician Bessie Mayle, and won a scholarship from the Shotwell Manufacturing Company's vocal competition.

Video Oral History Interview with Darwin McBeth Walton, Section A2008_142_001_003, TRT: 0:28:40 ?

Darwin McBeth Walton transferred in 1947 to the American Conservatory of Music in Chicago, Illinois, after receiving a scholarship from the Shotwell Manufacturing Company. The school had a strong reputation; but, as one of the few African American students, McBeth Walton received less attention than her white peers. Upon graduating in 1950, McBeth Walton taught music, dance and drama classes through the Chicago Parks District. She stopped teaching in 1952 to raise her children, and occasionally modeled for Jet and Ebony. During this time, McBeth Walton also took dance and vocal lessons. She performed for two years at Pedicone's lounge in Lyons, Illinois, and then began performing at venues in Chicago, including the Playboy Club and the Palmer House Hotel. She sang alongside celebrities like Van Johnson and Jack Carter, and once received praise from Ella Fitzgerald after a show. With her Playboy Club trio, McBeth Walton traveled to New Orleans, Louisiana, where she stayed at a whites-only hotel.

Video Oral History Interview with Darwin McBeth Walton, Section A2008_142_001_004, TRT: 0:29:40 ?

Darwin McBeth Walton sometimes passed as white during her career as a

professional singer. On one occasion, she was pressured to quit a white music group after the manager remembered seeing her perform with an African American chorus. Nonetheless, Walton was highly successful, and recorded multiple albums before retiring in the late 1960s. From 1968, she taught at a Head Start program in Maywood, Illinois, and then became an English as a Second Language teacher in Elmhurst, Illinois. Walton earned a master's degree in teaching from National Louis University, and then began a twenty-year career as an elementary and junior high school educator in Illinois. She had a strong background in African American history due to her education at all-black schools, and taught courses in self-esteem and African American history at National Louis University. In 1973, Walton published her first book, 'What Color Are You?', in response to the lack of diversity in children's literature.

Video Oral History Interview with Darwin McBeth Walton, Section A2008_142_001_005, TRT: 0:30:20 ?

Darwin McBeth Walton wrote her first children's book, 'What Color Are You?' to promote diversity and acceptance among her students. It was published by the Johnson Publishing Company, and received acclaim. The book was used as a model for publishing companies seeking to diversify their textbooks, which previously included images of people of color only in degrading contexts. McBeth Walton's second book, 'Dance, Kayla!' was also popular; and, when the mainstream publisher refused to reprint it, McBeth Walton decided to publish it herself. She also published a book about astronaut Charles Bolden and a book about Kwanzaa. McBeth Walton collaborated with Glennette Tilley Turner on two books about the Underground Railroad, and also wrote the script for the Underground Railroad historical performance at the Graue Mill and Museum in Oak Brook, Illinois. She helped found the Black Literary Umbrella, a group of African American children's book authors in Chicago, Illinois.

Video Oral History Interview with Darwin McBeth Walton, Section A2008_142_001_006, TRT: 0:24:30 ?

Darwin McBeth Walton reflects upon her legacy, and her hopes and concerns for the African American community. She concludes the interview by narrating her photographs.