

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Morrie Turner

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Turner, Morrie
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Morrie Turner,
Dates:	April 6, 2004
Bulk Dates:	2004
Physical Description:	6 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:55:38).
Abstract:	Cartoonist Morrie Turner (1923 - 2014) created Wee Pals, the first multi-ethnic syndicated cartoon strip in the United States. Turner also wrote several children's books including, "The Illustrated Biography of Martin Luther King, Jr." Turner was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on April 6, 2004, in Berkeley, California. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2004_041
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Morris Turner was born on December 11, 1923, in Oakland, California, but prefers going by the name Morrie. He attended Cole Elementary and McClymonds High Schools in Oakland and graduated from Berkeley High School in June of 1942.

Turner began drawing caricatures in the fifth grade. In high school, he expanded to creating cartoons. He joined the Army-Air Force following high school graduation, and while on guard duty, he drew cartoons. His work was noticed and

he was hired by *Stars and Stripes* to draw a series, "Rail Head," based on his own war experiences. Following the war, he created community affairs publications for the Oakland Police Department while free-lancing cartoons to national publications. *Baker's Helper*, a baking industry publication, was the first to buy one of his cartoons for \$5.00.

Turner had had no formal art training and sought the advice and encouragement of other professional cartoonists. When he began questioning why there were no minorities in cartoons, his mentor, Charles Schultz of *Peanuts* fame, suggested he create one. In the early 1960s he created a series *Dinky Fellas* that evolved into *Wee Pals*, a world without prejudice celebrating ethnic differences. In 1965, the series became the first multi-ethnic cartoon syndicated in the United States. *Wee Pals* appears in over 100 newspapers worldwide. On Sundays an additional panel is included called *Soul Corner* detailing the life of a famous person belonging to an ethnic minority.

Turner has written several children's books including *The Illustrated Biography of Martin Luther King, Jr.* Turner has been honored by the Cartoonist Society in 2000 when he was presented their Sparky Award, has been inducted into the California Public Education Hall of Fame and was recognized by Children's Fairyland in Oakland. He is the subject of a film called *Keeping the Faith with Morrie*. Bill Keene so admired Turner's work that he added a young black boy to his *Family Circle* series named Morrie.

Turner passed away on January 25, 2014, as a widower with one son and several grandchildren. He had lived in the same house that his father purchased in 1945.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Morrie Turner was conducted by Loretta Henry on April 6, 2004, in Berkeley, California, and was recorded on 6 Betacame SP videocassettes. Cartoonist Morrie Turner (1923 - 2014) created *Wee Pals*, the first multi-ethnic syndicated cartoon strip in the United States. Turner also wrote several children's books including, "The Illustrated Biography of Martin Luther King, Jr."

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:

Turner, Morrie

Henry, Loretta (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Turner, Morrie--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Cartoonist

HistoryMakers® Category:

ArtMakers

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 Morrie Turner, April 6, 2004. The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection, 1900 S. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.

Processing Information

This interview collection was processed and encoded on 2/5/2020 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 Morrie Turner, Section
A2004_041_001_001, TRT: 0:28:30 2004/04/06

Cartoonist Morrie Turner begins by describing his childhood in West Oakland, California and gives a brief family history, telling of his father and mother's backgrounds. Turner also discusses his relationship with his siblings, who are all deceased. He notes how he and his brothers worked to keep their relationship close after the death of their mother.

Video Oral History Interview with Morrie Turner, Section
A2004_041_001_002, TRT: 0:30:00 2004/04/06

Cartoonist Morrie Turner details his childhood growing up in West Oakland, California during the 1920s and 1930s, describing his neighborhood, his childhood friends, and his favorite activities. Turner talks about his family's church participation and describes the segregated facilities of Oakland. He then briefly discusses his schooling.

Video Oral History Interview with Morrie Turner, Section
A2004_041_001_003, TRT: 0:29:15 2004/04/06

Cartoonist Morrie Turner continues to discuss his school years and explains how he first starting cartooning in fifth grade, telling of how his family supported his talent. Turner says that racial discrimination prevented him from getting a cartooning job for the Walt Disney Company, causing him to join the Army after graduating from high school. Turner describes his service and how his time in the military inspired his first cartoon strip, 'Rail Head'.

Video Oral History Interview with Morrie Turner, Section
A2004_041_001_004, TRT: 0:29:03 2004/04/06

Cartoonist Morrie Turner shares the background of his first cartoon strip, 'Rail Head', and tells of the end of his

military service. Turner then details the creation and syndication of the first integrated cartoon in America, 'Dinky Fellows', which began in the 'Chicago Defender' and eventually ran in the 'Washington Post'. Turner then talks about traveling to Vietnam with other cartoonists to entertain troops as part of a USO show.

Video Oral History Interview with Morrie Turner, Section
A2004_041_001_005, TRT: 0:29:30 2004/04/06

Cartoonist Morrie Turner explains how his 'Dinky Fellows' comic strip evolved into 'Wee Pals', a strip celebrating ethnic and racial diversity. Turner talks about positive and negative responses to the strip, explaining the many negative responses came from black nationalists. He explains the creative process behind 'Wee Pals' and discusses the 'Soul Circle' segment of his strip, which devotes one panel every Sunday to an influential African American from history. Turner then discusses his other projects, including writing and illustrating children's books and making a film from his drawings of Martin Luther King, Jr.

Video Oral History Interview with Morrie Turner, Section
A2004_041_001_006, TRT: 0:29:20 2004/04/06

Cartoonist Morrie Turner shares several memorable moments in his life, including winning awards from the National Cartoonists Society, appearing on 'Mister Rogers' Neighborhood' and his friendship with 'Peanuts' creator Charles Schultz. Turner talks about his future plans for books and films, discusses his wife's struggle with Alzheimer's, and shares his hopes and concerns for the black community. Finally, Turner considers his legacy and narrates his personal photographs as they are recorded on videotape.