

Biographical Description for The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Avon Kirkland

PERSON

Kirkland, Avon , 1936-

Alternative Names: Kirkland, Avon , 1936-

Life Dates: November 27, 1936-

Place of Birth: Jacksonville, Florida

Residence: Berkeley, CA

Occupations: Film Producer

Biographical Note

Film producer Avon Kirkland was born on November 27, 1936, in Jacksonville, Florida, to his widowed mother, Lou Mae Durham Kirkland. His father, William Kirkland, died in an accident prior to Kirkland and his twin sister, Yvonne Kirkland Moody's birth. After matriculating through Jacksonville's Donald Cookland Elementary and New Stranton High, Kirkland, obtained his B.S. degree in chemistry in 1958 from Clark College, now Clark Atlanta University in Atlanta, Georgia. In 1964, he received his Ph.D. degree in organic chemistry from Washington University in St. Louis, Missouri.

Between 1964 and 1967, following three years of work as a research chemist for the Sinclair Oil Research Labs in Harvey, Illinois, Kirkland began to lose interest in science and spent a year in New York City studying the guitar. From 1967 to 1968, he used his scientific training to design and facilitate a multifaceted after-school educational program for inner city children. This experience helped him create an elementary school reading and math programs for the Behavioral Research Labs of Palo Alto, California. In 1973, he took another year off and spent so much time watching television that he decided to pursue work in the television industry. From 1974 to 1977, he was the director of Instructional Service for KQED in San Francisco.

In 1977, Kirkland became the executive producer of "Up & Coming," an hour-long drama featuring a black family, which ended in 1982 after twenty-five shows. Kirkland enjoyed this work immensely. He founded New Images Productions, a non-profit media production company in Berkeley, California, then devoted to creating films about the lives and experiences of African Americans. He serves as the primary writer, director and producer for many of the company's projects. His work includes "Up From Slavery: The Triumph and Tragedy of Booker T. Washington," "Ralph Ellison: An American Journey,"

"Street Soldiers," "Simple Justice" and "Booker." His films have received many honors and awards including the Blue Ribbon Award in 1981; the 1986 Prix Jeunesse International Prize; The CINE Golden Eagle, Best Public Affairs Documentary and a special showing at the 2002 Sundance Film Festival.

Mr. Kirkland is divorced and has one son. He resides in Berkeley, California, where he enjoys music and competitive tennis.

Avon Kirkland was interviewed by HistoryMakers on April 6, 2004.

Related Entries

Kirkland, William [CHILD_OF]
Father

Durham- Kirkland, Lula Mae [CHILD_OF]
Mother

Durham, Cassie [GRANDCHILD_OF]
Maternal Grandmother

Kirkland, Richmond [GRANDCHILD_OF]
Paternal Grandfather

Kirkland, Donald Jean [SIBLING_OF]
Brother

Kirkland Moody, Yvonne [SIBLING_OF]
Sister

Kirkland, Avery Julian [PARENT_OF]
Son

Lewis, Evelyn []
Ex-wife

Clark Atlanta University [STUDENT_OF]
[from ? to 1958]

B.S.

Washington University [STUDENT_OF]
[from ? to 1964]

Ph.D.

Sinclair Oil Research Labs [EMPLOYEE_OF]
[from 1964 to 1967]

Research Chemist

San Francisco State University [EMPLOYEE_OF]
[from 1975 to 1976]

Instructor, Technology Department

New Images Productions [EMPLOYEE_OF]
[from May 1982 to ?]

Founder

Scheinfeld Foundation Education Project [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from September 1967 to September 1968]

Director

Behavioral Research Laboratories [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from September 1968 to September 1973]

Vice President, Operations

KQED Public Television (San Francisco, Calif.) [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from September 1974 to November 1977]

Director of Instructional Service

National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences (U.S.) [MEMBEROF]
Member

National Endowment for the Arts [MEMBEROF]
Participant