Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Dr. Bette Catoe

Overview of the Collection

Repository: The HistoryMakers®
1900 S. Michigan Avenue
Chicago, Illinois 60616
info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com

Creator: Dr. Bette Catoe

Title: The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Dr. Bette Catoe,

Dates: June 17, 2004

Bulk Dates: 2004

Physical Description: 4 Betacam SP videocassettes (2:03:40).

Abstract: Pediatrician Dr. Bette Catoe (1926 - ) helped integrate Washington D.C. area hospitals including Providence Hospital, Columbia Hospital, and Washington Hospital Center. Catoe was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on June 17, 2004, in Washington, District of Columbia. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.

Identification: A2004_083

Language: The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Pediatrician Dr. Bette Lorrina Catoe-Strudwick was born on April 7, 1926 in Washington, D.C. Her mother was a White House pastry chef and government worker and her father was a taxicab owner and driver. Catoe’s parents divorced when she was a young child at which point her mother gained custody and raised her in Washington, D.C. She was educated in Washington, D.C. public schools and received her high school diploma from Dunbar High School in 1944.

Catoe received a full academic scholarship from Howard University, where she earned her B.S. degree in chemistry and physics in 1948. Her career ambition was to become a nurse or lab technician until she received a scholarship to Howard University’s Medical School. While a medical school student, she pledged Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority and married her husband, Warren Strudwick. She was only one of seven women in her graduating class when she received her M.D. degree in 1951. In 1956, she began practicing pediatrics in the basement of her home, allowing her to work full time and raise her three children. In 1958, she helped to integrate Washington, D.C. hospitals. She moved her home-based medical practice into a downtown Washington office. By 1971, she had seen thousands of children and continued to provide medical assistance until she retired in 2003. In 1966, Catoe was elected as an at-large member of the Board of Trustees of the Medical Society of the District of Columbia, a post she served in for over thirty years. Ten years later, she was elected as a delegate to the 1976 National Democratic Convention in New York.

Her involvement in a number of civic organizations including the AKA Sorority, Jack and Jill of America, the NAACP, the Urban League and the Links. Catoe and her husband, Dr. Warren Strudwick, have three grown children; two are physicians and the other is an attorney.
Dr. Bette Catoe was interviewed by "The HistoryMakers" on June 17, 2004.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Dr. Bette Catoe was conducted by Racine Tucker Hamilton on June 17, 2004, in Washington, District of Columbia, and was recorded on 4 Betacam SP videocassettes. Pediatrician Dr. Bette Catoe (1926 - ) helped integrate Washington D.C. area hospitals including Providence Hospital, Columbia Hospital, and Washington Hospital Center.

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:

Dr. Bette Catoe

Hamilton, Racine Tucker (Interviewer)

Lane, Edgar Carey (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews
Dr. Bette Catoe--Interviews

African American physicians--Interviews
Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Dr. Bette Catoe

Organizations:

HistoryMakers (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

HistoryMakers® Category:

MedicalMakers

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


Processing Information

This interview collection was processed and encoded on 8/11/2011 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, June 17, 2004

Video Oral History Interview with Dr. Bette Catoe, Section A2004_083_001_001, TRT: 0:30:09
2004/06/17

Dr. Bette Catoe begins the interview by discussing her family history. Catoe recalls her mother, Laura Beola Catoe, as being the epitome of a strong African American woman. Catoe discusses her mother's working in the White House as a cook during the Franklin D. Roosevelt administration. Catoe describes the food her mother made as being gourmet in quality. She then describes the
personality of her father as being smart, but one that never attained his full potential due to a lack of parenting growing up. Catoe remembers attending Washington, D.C. area churches, and how the church was the center of family life. She then describes her education in Washington, D.C. as well as the teaching methods that were used.

**African American Families**--Washington (D.C.)

**African American parents**--Miscellanea

**Education**--Washington (D.C.)--1900-1940.

**Washington (D.C.)**--Social life and customs.

---

Dr. Bette Catoe goes into further detail about her experiences at Morgan Elementary School in Washington, D.C. She describes the teachers as being newly educated in the most modern teaching techniques. Catoe remembers being a child who used to enjoy going to the beach, reading, listening to the radio, and sewing. Catoe believes that her drive to become a doctor came from living on Swann Street in Washington D.C., a street that was home to many area doctors. When Catoe and her mother moved to the 2200 block of Ontario Road she began to resent her father for being with his new family so quickly after the divorce. Lastly, Catoe details how she enrolled in Howard University with the help of a scholarship that made the tuition only $50 a year.

**Education**--Washington (D.C.)--1900-1940.

**African American neighborhoods**--Washington(D.C.)

**African American physicians**--Washington (D.C.)

**Divorce**--Washington (D.C.)--1930-1940

---

Dr. Bette Catoe describes her education at Howard University in Washington, D.C. as being superior in content. While attending college, Catoe majored in chemistry and physics, pledged Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, and would eventually meet her husband Warren Strudrick. After receiving her B.S. degree, Catoe applied to Howard Medical School and was accepted. Catoe describes how she chose to be a pediatrician instead of a gynecologist due to institutional sexism. In 1951, Catoe graduated from Howard Medical School. After graduation, she did a year long internship followed by a three year residency. After completing her residency, Catoe opened a practice in her basement, a time she remembers fondly due to the freedom of the hours of operation. During the late 1950s, Catoe and her husband integrated three Washington D.C. area hospitals; Providence Hospital, Columbia Hospital, and Washington Hospital Center.

**Historically Black Colleges and Universities**

**Integration**--1950-1960

**African American medical students**--Washington (D.C.)

**Sexism in education**--United States.

**Hospital administration**--Washington (D.C.)

---

Dr. Bette Catoe discusses the changes that occurred in the type of patient she was treating towards the end of her career. She believes that most of those
patients’ parents were not in control of their children; this caused Catoe to quickly treat the child’s physical ailments and then work on the parent-child relationship. Catoe provides her personal beliefs about teenage pregnancy, the importance of sports and arts in a child’s life and the disturbing fact that children are becoming immune to violence they see on TV and in video games. Catoe remembers being a delegate at the 1976 Democratic Convention as an opportunity to see the political process at work. In closing, Catoe reflects on the current medical system; one that she believes is not focused enough on the patient-doctor relationship.

African American physicians--Washington (D.C.)
Patients--Care.
Parent-child relationship.