

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Debbye Turner Bell

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## Overview of the Collection

<b>Repository:</b>	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
<b>Creator:</b>	Turner Bell, Debrah Lynne, 1965-
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Debbye Turner Bell,
<b>Dates:</b>	August 12, 2014
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2014
<b>Physical Description:</b>	6 uncompressed MOV digital video files (2:58:11).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Broadcast journalist and veterinarian Debbye Turner Bell (1965 - ) is a motivational speaker and anchor for Arise News. In 1989, she became the first delegate from the State of Missouri to win the title of Miss America. Turner Bell was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on August 12, 2014, in New York, New York. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2014_229
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Broadcast journalist and veterinarian Debrah Lynn Turner Bell was born on September 19, 1965 in Honolulu, Hawaii to Gussie Turner and Frederick C. Turner, Jr. Raised in Jonesboro, Arkansas, Turner Bell graduated from Jonesboro High School in 1983. She went on to attend Arkansas State University, where she received her B.S. degree in agriculture in 1986. In 1991, Turner Bell obtained her Doctor of Veterinary Medicine degree from the University of Missouri-Columbia.

In 1989, Turner Bell won the Miss Missouri pageant title. Later the same year, she

became the first delegate from the State of Missouri to win the Miss America crown. After winning the title of Miss America, Turner Bell became the national spokesperson for Ralston Purina's Caring for Pets Program. In 1995, she was hired as a host of the Public Broadcasting Service animal show, "The Gentle Doctor", and as co-host of KSDK's entertainment magazine show, "Show Me St. Louis", where she was nominated for multiple Emmy Awards. From 2001 to 2003, Turner Bell worked as an on-air contributor to CBS networks' "The Early Show", and from 2003 until 2012, she served as a staff correspondent for CBS News. In 2013, she was hired as an anchor for Arise News.

Turner Bell has hosted "48 Hours on WE" and appeared on Animal Planet's "Cats 101" and "Dogs 101" series. She has also hosted the Miss Missouri, Miss Florida, and Miss Georgia pageants, and was a Miss America Pageant judge in 1997 and 2011. Turner Bell has appeared as a guest on numerous television programs including "The Late Show with David Letterman", "Oprah", and the "Today" show. In addition, she has served as a motivational speaker for over twenty years. Turner Bell's honors include the University of Missouri - Columbia, Black Alumni Organization's Distinguished Alumni Award; the Outstanding Young Alumnus Award from the College of Agriculture, Arkansas State University; Outstanding Alumnus Award from the University of Missouri-Columbia; and the First Place award for Outstanding Reporting from the New York Association of Black Journalists. In 1998, she was named a Distinguished Alumna of Arkansas State University, where she established the Debbye Turner Scholarship and the Gussie Turner Memorial Scholarship. Turner Bell received an Honorary Doctorate of Humane Letters from the University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff, and was inducted into the Arkansas Black Hall of Fame in October of 1994.

She has served on local, state and national boards, including the Children's Miracle Network, the National Council on Youth Leadership, the Missouri Division of Youth Services, the Mathews-Dickey Boys Club, and the National Advisory Child Health and Human Development Council as part of the National Institutes of Health. She served as director of the Consortium of Doctors from 1994 to 1995.

Turner Bell lives in the New York City area with her husband and daughter.

Debbye Turner Bell was interviewed by "The HistoryMakers" on August 12, 2014.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Debbye Turner Bell was conducted by Harriette Cole on August 12, 2014, in New York, New York, and was recorded on 6 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Broadcast journalist and veterinarian Debbye Turner Bell (1965 - ) is a motivational speaker and anchor for Arise News. In 1989, she became the first delegate from the State of Missouri to win the title of Miss America.

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## **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®.

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## **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.

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## **Controlled Access Terms**

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

### **Persons:**

Turner Bell, Debrah Lynne, 1965-

Cole, Harriette (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

## **Subjects:**

African Americans--Interviews

Turner Bell, Debrah Lynne, 1965---Interviews

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## **Organizations:**

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

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The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

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## **Occupations:**

Broadcast Journalist

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Veterinarian

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## **HistoryMakers® Category:**

MediaMakers

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## **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 Debbye Turner Bell, August 12, 2014. 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).

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## 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.

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## Detailed Description of the Collection

### Series I: Original Interview Footage

Video Oral History Interview with Debbye Turner Bell, Section A2014\_229\_001\_001, TRT: 1:28:06 2014/08/12

Debbye Turner Bell was born on September 19, 1965 at Tripler Hospital in Honolulu, Hawaii. Her mother, Gussie Lee Jones Turner, was born in 1939 in Hayti, Missouri. Gussie Lee Jones Turner was adopted by her aunt and uncle, Gussie and Robert Jones, and raised in Kennett, Missouri. She worked as a psychologist and rehabilitation counselor. Bell describes her paternal extended family ancestry and spending time at her paternal great-grandparent's farm in South Texas. She talks about the history of "Juneteenth," commemoration of the announcement of emancipation on June 19, 1865; though emancipation was declared effective January 1, 1863. Bell's father, Frederick C. Turner, Jr., was born in 1937 in Jonesboro, Arkansas. He became one of Arkansas State University's first two black graduates in 1960. He served two tours in the Vietnam War, and joined the Texas

Employment Commission in Austin in 1982 after his retirement from the military service. Bell's parents met in Jonesboro and married in 1960.

Video Oral History Interview with Debbye Turner Bell, Section A2014\_229\_001\_002, TRT: 2:31:09 2014/08/12

Debbye Turner Bell describes her experience growing up with her father in the military. In 1969, her father returned to Jonesboro, Arkansas. He was hired at Arkansas State University as an assistant professor of military science, making him the first black faculty member at ASU. Bell remembers staying with an aunt while her father was away in Hong Kong on duty. She talks about her father's experience in the Vietnam War; her parent's divorce and co-parenting; and her earliest childhood memories. Her mother, Gussie Lee Jones Turner, worked as a psychologist and rehabilitation counselor. Bell describes home life; including her mother's taking in of mental health patients and hosting a bible study group. Bell describes growing up in a predominantly white neighborhood in Jonesboro and developing a relationship with her older sister after the death of their mother in 1990. She describes her childhood personality; explains the unconventional spelling of her name; and describes wanting to be a veterinarian.

Video Oral History Interview with Debbye Turner Bell, Section A2014\_229\_001\_003, TRT: 3:29:38 2014/08/12

Debbye Turner Bell attended East School Elementary, Douglas MacArthur Junior High, and Jonesboro High schools in Jonesboro, Arkansas. Bell was raised in a predominately white neighborhood; her schools were predominantly white as well and she had an integrated friend group. Bell graduated from Jonesboro High in 1983, and enrolled at Arkansas State University. She and earned a B.S. degree in agriculture in 1986 and was accepted into the University of Missouri College of Veterinary Science in Columbia. She always liked animals and grew up with a house full of pets. Bell describes her entrance into the pageant circuit. In high school, she placed first in Miss Jonesboro and chose to keep competing in local pageants for scholarships. She placed first runner-up twice in the Miss Arkansas pageant. Bell

eventually won the Miss Missouri pageant. Bell talks about her experiences in both St. Paul A.M.E. Church and Carter Temple C.M.E. Church; and her acceptance of Christianity.

Video Oral History Interview with Debbye Turner Bell, Section A2014\_229\_001\_004, TRT: 4:30:46 2014/08/12

Debbye Turner Bell talks about Vanessa Williams winning Miss America in 1984. Williams was the first African American national title holder; Bell the third, after 1984 first runner-up Suzette Charles, in 1990. Bell remembers making a controversial statement at her first official press conference, and a critical article written by HistoryMaker Lynn Norment in response. Bell describes being the first brown-skinned African American winner of the Miss America and attempting to reconcile her previous controversial remarks--she appeared on The Oprah Show and wrote an editorial published in Good Housekeeping magazine. Bell describes financing competitions and talks about body type and typecasting in beauty pageants. She describes Miss America's pageant scholarship prizes; prize money may only be used in pursuit of higher education; Bell won a total of \$44,000. She describes the contemporary Miss America pageant and controversy between the Miss America and Miss USA pageants. Bell describes her winning moment in 1990.

Video Oral History Interview with Debbye Turner Bell, Section A2014\_229\_001\_005, TRT: 5:30:32 2014/08/12

Debbye Turner Bell traveled all across the country speaking about her platform of youth motivation fulfilling her yearlong responsibilities as Miss America. She even did an appearance on the 'Late Show with David Letterman.' Bell finished her degree at the University of Missouri College of Veterinary Medicine in Columbia, Missouri in 1991, and was hired as the spokesperson for Ralston Purina's Caring for Pets program. Bell transitioned from Ralston Purina, to reporting local news in St. Louis, Missouri and anchoring the entertainment show, 'Show Me St. Louis.' Bell eventually became an on-air contributor and resident veterinarian on CBS Networks', 'The Early Show.' She left CBS in 2012 and was hired as an anchor for global cable network Arise

News. HistoryMaker Lyne Pitts was instrumental in Bell's career at CBS. Bell married her husband in 2008 and has a daughter. Bell talks about her legacy, parenting, and her regrets. She also shares her professional advice for the next generation.

Video Oral History Interview with Debbye Turner Bell, Section A2014\_229\_001\_006, TRT: 6:28:00 2014/08/12

Debbye Turner Bell became an anchor-reporter for the show 'Show Me St. Louis' in St. Louis, Missouri in 1995. She learned the trade of broadcast journalism during her six years at the show. Bell describes her experience as on-air correspondent for CBS' 'The Early Show.' She explains how the network's number three time slot had advantages and disadvantages for the types of stories reported. As a reporter for Arise News, Bell traveled internationally, including to South Africa for Nelson Mandela's funeral. Bell talks about what she's learned over the trajectory of her career in broadcast journalism. She concludes by narrating her photographs.