

Peace Drum Project
The Elder's Stories
2009

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Introduction

This year, as we wrap-up our ninth year of *The Peace Drum Project*, there is much to celebrate. A very high percentage of participating teens in recent years have graduated from high school and have gone on to college or community college. Many of them have stayed in touch with their elder partners, and the elders have followed their young partner's progress in school and afterwards. The project was in created in part to address the fear that local elders experienced when encountering groups of youth on the street or on the subway. So one important project goal was to alleviate the fear of teens among elders. From that original goal, we have created a powerful model for engaging young people with elders in a positive and meaningful way. *The Peace Drum Project* helps to deepen the connections between youth and elders, and builds understanding and greater support for each group within the larger community. In evaluations each year, the youth themselves rank their time with the elders as one of their favorite activities of the project.

Today's young people look forward to the future, but they also feel great anxiety about their ability to succeed in such difficult economic times. The lessons they have learned from the lives of this year's elders contain a great deal of wisdom about succeeding in tough times. Virtually every one of this year's elders grew up in difficult circumstances, but they have endured. They continue to find happiness in their families, their friends, and their activities in the community. Many had hoped to go to college themselves, but were unable to because of economic constraints. For most, family came first, but neither responsibility nor hardship kept them from seeking their dreams. This is a powerful message to our youth today who face unprecedented costs for getting an education—life is never easy, yet there are abundant rewards for hard work and sticking to your goals.

We are inspired by the lives of the elders we have worked with this year, and in recent years. Many of them have come from early lives of poverty and racial discrimination and have experienced multiple hardships. They have raised families under difficult circumstances and have lost children before their time. Yet, they are full of humor, optimism, generosity, and hope for the future. Their resilience is not only inspiring, but provides a road map for our teens who have this priceless opportunity to connect with them, learn from their experiences, and honor their wisdom.

We know that we have only scratched the surface of their stories in our interviews, but we hope that you, too, will be inspired by the stories of these wonderful members of our community.

We are most appreciative to the elders who were willing to share their experiences and knowledge with the teens this year. Their stories provide a bridge between the generations, and create common ground that helps to build a stronger community for us all. Young people today need more opportunities to work with elders because their stories teach us that peace is not randomly found. It is built through patience, caring about your community, and hard work. Many hopes, dreams, and challenges remain constant across generations, and knowing that others have faced similar obstacles and have overcome them gives power to youthful dreams and aspirations.

The teens who took part in producing these stories include: Livymer Caceres, Nanci Cardona, Katherine Colon, Rogenzo Cruickshank, Miranda Desir, Jasmine Dozier, Abdiel Fonseca, Jessica Harris, Shannon Hills, Farah Jeune, Marjourie Jimenez, Emilio Lajara, Ivan Richiez, Kristie Simono, Johniesha Smith, and Erys Valdez. We thank them for their respectful manner, lively energy, and curious questioning.

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We dedicate these stories in memory of Charles M. Holley (1937-2006), creator of *The Peace Drum Project* and Co-founder of Cooperative Artists Institute. He is greatly missed by the many teens, elders, and artists who knew and worked with him over the years.

Susan E. Porter, Director
Cooperative Artists Institute
www.tribal-rhythms.org

Izola Beatrice Price

Interviewed by Jessica Harris, Marjourie Jimenez & Emilio Lajara

My name is Izola Beatrice Price. I was named after my grandmother. A nickname? When I was small, I was called "Peanut." But when I got bigger, I thought that sounded kind of small, so I took my middle name, which is Beatrice, so everybody just called me "Bea." I was born on March 11, 1957 in Birmingham Alabama. I lived with my mother, one brother, and two sisters when I was young. Birmingham was all right. I also lived with my grandmother. I lived there until I was about 7 years old, then I came here to Boston. My mother was Corinne Peterson, she was a nurse, and my father, Willie Peterson, was a truck driver. My sisters Melvia and Corinne were in school. I hate to say this because I don't know too much about them at that time because I had a birth defect and was in the hospital a lot.

When I was growing up in Birmingham we lived with my grandmother, and she had seven kids herself. Then, she took in me and my sister Debra. We were close in age, she's 11 months older. I just had my birthday and she had hers too. I turned 52, and she turned 53. Anyhow, I used to call my grandmother "Mom." At that time, I didn't know that my real mom was my mom. So this person would show up with shoes or a dress and stuff like that. After a while, I don't know why, my family gradually told me "*That's not your mom, **that's** your mom.*" So anyway we went through the time of "*That's Mom.*"

When we lived in Birmingham, we lived in a house near the railroad tracks. My sister and I would hear the train coming and we'd try to run across. My sister would do it and she always stubbed her toe on the tracks. Sometimes we would stand on opposite sides of the tracks and look at each other until the train went by. It was

kind of crazy, I'm glad we never got hurt or anything, but we were kids.

What was the funniest thing that ever happened to me? Hmmm. Oh I know. Well, have you ever been down south? In the summertime— the doors have a screen, and we leave the doors open because it's hot. So, in Birmingham, we had a dog and this other dog — a bulldog — got in the house somehow and it was fighting with our dog. Me and my sister were little at the time, so we jumped up on the dresser. I don't even know how we jumped up there. So here we were up on the dresser hugging each other and screaming, "*Momma, momma, momma...*" My grandmother came running in with the hammer to fight those dogs. When I think back on this now I say, "Oh my goodness, my Grandma would fight two dogs." She kept that hammer for everything. With nine kids to take care of, she was something else!

When we moved to Boston, I lived right here in Jamaica Plain on Bickford Street. I lived here until my mother passed away, then I moved to New York at age 12 because my father was in New York. When I went to New York, I was in seventh grade for two months, then I was put in eighth grade. Then when I came back here to Boston I got kept back, but I didn't have to go to twelfth grade, so it all kind of evened out. When I got to Brighton High, I was in 11th grade, but they told me I had already taken a lot of classes and didn't need 12th grade. You know, you had to have so many points to graduate. Here you use to have 90 points to graduate high school. I just needed a few more points to graduate, so I went to summer school and got the rest of my points. Then I got my diploma in the mail! I got my diploma, but I didn't get the celebration. It's funny that the only time in my life I actually had a graduation celebration was from elementary school.

Yes, we had to do chores. When I was in elementary school, my job was just to take care of the bathroom, and we had to keep our rooms cleaned up. But in high

school, when I came home from school we might have to cook dinner. I'm talking about me and my sister now. We took turns doing stuff — housekeeping, or helping my younger brother Michael take a bath. No, I didn't have a job. I didn't actually start a job until I was 18, and that was a summer job.

Yes, I did like school. I had a teacher named Ms. Whelan in First Grade and I had a teacher named Miss Francis that I liked. I like them then, but now that I'm older, I probably wouldn't have liked them because they babied me. If I got into trouble trying to do things right, they kind of sheltered me so I didn't have a chance to learn how to do it. Making mistakes is how you learn things.

When I was little, I didn't have many friends. I hate to say this because it might sound sad, but I didn't. I use to play by myself. It might sound strange, but I use to like mud. I would take my socks off and my shoes off and pour water on the ground and squoosh my feet in the mud. I can't believe I did that because I can't stand it now! In our neighborhood on Bickford Street we used to play Double Dutch jump rope, kickball in the street, things like that.

When I got to middle school, I had one friend. She wasn't disabled or anything like that. I wasn't looking for disabled people. She was a person that you might come across sometime, she is still here in Boston. Yeah, she was a good friend. I didn't really have "best friends," I just had real good friends.

The scariest thing when I was young was that we had a fire in our house when I was about 15. We lost mostly everything. My Dad worked a lot, so there wasn't a money problem. We ended up getting this and that afterwards.

When I was in high school I was — now they would probably call me "a nerd" unless they got a new name for it. I was someone who reads books and studies and

all that. So I stayed in New York until I was 18. I was still in school because I'm disabled, so they took it kind of slow on my schooling, but, that was okay. When I was your age I was at the parties and stuff. People were just hanging out together — I was in Queens, Long Island at that time. They mostly just hung out. You'd get together and go to somebody's house or just hang around with them. No, I never had a curfew. My parents never had to because I knew when to go in. Now I have my own kids. I don't have no special time, they just know when to come in, too. When they were younger, I used to be outside with them, and when I came in, they came in with me.

So, I went out with friends and didn't have any restrictions. I didn't have to sneak out because I just went out. Even if I didn't come back until three o'clock in the morning! Did I ever get in trouble with my parents? Well, when I was younger, my mother had a thing about "*don't make a mistake.*" Every time I did something I thought it was a mistake. She didn't like that word "mistake." As I grow older myself I've learned that it's all right to make a mistake because you learn from them. But my mother didn't like me to make mistakes.

When I was 17, I guess I was wild! I went out to night parties and stuff like that. I was in New York then, and in New York people just passed out cards randomly that said there was going to be a party at such and such a person's house. And it would give the time and place. They would just stand out on the street and pass them out, so you got everybody coming to somebody's house! I did a lot of that, and I went to Coney Island. I was trying to learn how to go places by myself, to learn the train. I would go shopping or something like that. I didn't do much of nothing, really because I was a kind of shy person. These last few years I broke out of my shyness. If somebody looked at me kind of weird, well, I might ask them a question: "*Why are you looking at me?*" But, I'd be nice about it.

When I got out of high school I was a homemaking health aide. I wanted to do nursing, but because of my disability, I couldn't. In nursing, the way they took blood pressure then, you had to put the thing in your ears, and I only have one working ear. So I couldn't do it. But I did do hotel work in the laundry department. I did jobs that didn't require me to listen because of my problem with hearing.

Actually I just wanted to get out of my Dad's house and live on my own, but I didn't have no thought about how to do it! So when I got out of high school my life did change quite a bit. About a year or two after that, I met "*the boyfriend*." Then about a year after that there was the baby, so that changed things a lot. My husband is Curtis Price Sr. We are still together and it's been thirty years. Our children are: David, Jonathan, Curtis Jr., Ebony, and Chevonne Price.

I always wanted to take care of people, that's why I was interested in nursing. The best job I ever had? I liked the Park Plaza Hotel because I worked independently with a lot of other people, and I made some great friends. You make your own money. All of those were good things. Now I do a lot of community work like being in different programs that deal with asthma and those issues. Every time there's something new to learn, I'll get into it.

Who I admire? My sister won't believe this, but I have another sister, a younger sister. And, I admire her because whatever she wants to do, she just goes for it and it happens. Right out of high school she got her learner's permit and her license. She's working three jobs. I don't know how much she sees her three kids, but she's working enough for both of us. And, the most important thing I learned in my life was trying to keep peace. I learned that from my father's aunt. She was like a mother figure for me because my mother died when I was so young.

In the 1960's I was back and forth into the hospital, so I don't have too many

memories from then. I had some reconstructive surgeries, so they tried to make my eyes both the same size because one was bigger than the other. I guess I didn't notice much that was going on at that time other than my trips to the hospital.

My biggest adventure was representing Boston for early intervention programs at a conference. It's a program for parents of children that are born early, so they need help to catch up or get ahead. They sent me to Pensacola, Florida for this event. I flew down, stayed in the Hyatt Hotel, and had all of my transportation and food covered. So the only thing I had to do was be a member of the panel and talk about whatever the subject was, then the rest of the time was ours. So that was fun.

Nope, I don't drive a car. I get around on the bus or the train or whatever.

When I was younger, I wanted to drive a car. Then once, a doctor asked me if I drive, and I said, "*no.*" Then he said, "*You know what, I suggest that you don't drive because we don't want you to have a seizure behind the wheel.*"

My favorite kind of music is Gospel. My favorite song would be "Don't Give Up" Yes, I play a tambourine in church, but that's about it. I love turquoise— that's my favorite color. I think I only own one thing that's not turquoise. And, I love the Health Channel. I've always been interested in anything that has to do with health. I like all kinds of sports — especially volleyball. I don't know if I could still do it, but I used to be able to jump. And, I like the summer because I don't like cold.

The happiest moment for me? Well, I'm a church-going person. I like going to church and singing the songs, and I praise. So, if you understand, you just feel that your worries are gone away. And, you just sing the songs and praise God. It makes me happy. What was the greatest accomplishment so far in my life? Well, I have a certificate. I went to Northeastern and I got two awards for my work with children.

I think the hardest thing in my life was losing my Mom. I had to grow up fast. You don't know really how to take care of yourself. And even though we went to live with my Dad, it's not the same as your Mom. When she's gone, that hurts because she's not coming back. If you have a disagreement with your Mom, sit down and talk about it. And if you still think she's wrong, wait a while before you talk about it again. Eventually, things will come around. So love your Mom now and appreciate her.

The best advice I could give you is what I just told you. Love your Mom. That, and take one day at a time. My young son said to me, "*You said tomorrow's not promised to you.*" Then he said, "*Saying tomorrow's not promised to you sounds paranoid.*" But I said, "*No, it means that you should stop saying I'll do it 'tomorrow, and do something today. Because tomorrow may not come.*"