

People's History of the I.E.

Interview Summary

Item Number: 2025.001.002

File Name: 2025.001.002_Transcript_OlaFaye_Stephens_Womens_History.m4a

Interviewee:

OlaFaye Stephens

Interviewer:

Cathy Gudis

Interview Date:

February 19, 2026

Interview Location:

Riverside, CA (by phone)

Interview Summary completed by:

Cathy Gudis, 2026

Description:

This oral history documents Ola Faye Washington Stephens' experiences with systemic racism in Riverside, California from 1960 onward. Despite being told California was a "land of milk and honey" without segregation, she encountered pervasive discrimination: realtors steered her family exclusively to the segregated East Side; her pharmacist husband faced customers refusing service from a Black professional; and she was denied restroom access while nine months pregnant. The interview reveals how segregation concentrated the Black population in overcrowded East Side neighborhoods, limiting housing and employment opportunities. She describes her fear for her children in terms of policing and racism, and how she sent them to a private Christian school; all of them went to historically Black colleges and did not return to Riverside, which she was glad for. Stephens describes her engagement in many community organizations for civil rights, ranging from the Urban League to the formation of The Group, which brought politicians and other people together to "talk about the real issues of Riverside."

Subject Topic:

- Business
- Community Life in Riverside
- Employment
- Family
- Eastside Black community
- Black women's sororities
- Racism
- Community organizing

Key Organizations:

- Inland Area Urban League
- Socialites
- Westside Action Group
- The Group

Spatial Coverage:

Spatial coverage refers to the geography covered by the interview. Add general locations (street names, cities, areas, etc.) and addresses – use newspaper searches & google searches to find addresses when possible (but note source). Orange Valley Lodge at 2931 12th St, Lincoln Park at 4261 Park Ave, Bordwell Park at 2008 Martin Luther King Blvd, and the historic downtown former YMCA building (now the Life Arts Center) at 3485 University Ave

Name of Site (if relevant)	General Location/Address
Orange Valley Masonic Lodge	2931 12th Street, Riverside, CA
Lincoln Park	4261 Park Avenue, Riverside, CA
Bordwell Park	2008 Martin Luther King Blvd, Riverside, CA
YMCA (now Life Arts Center)	3485 University Ave., Riverside, CA

Temporal Coverage: 1950s-2020s

Related Materials:

Women's history materials

Interview Index:

Media Format	Time (hh:mm:ss)	Topic Discussed	
Audio	00:00:00	Introduction, consent, interview date, and project overview	
Audio	00:02:45	Early life in Dallas; segregation; husband's employment challenges as pharmacist	
Audio	00:06:30	Move to Riverside 1960; housing discrimination; settlement on segregated East Side	
Audio	00:27:45	School desegregation; bussing resistance; children's private school education	
Audio	00:39:30	Children's education at Howard University; careers in engineering, medicine, cybersecurity	
Audio	01:11:30	Police violence; gang activity; targeting of Black youth after officer's death	
Audio	01:18:30	Husband's pharmacy career; banking discrimination; business ownership in Perris and LA	
Audio	01:28:30	Church involvement; Park Avenue and Second Baptist; community support systems	
Audio	01:48:30	Community organizing; police reform efforts; women leaders in activism	
Audio	02:18:45	Advice to next generation; emphasis on collective action over individual ego	

Full interview transcript can be found below

Catherine Gudis [00:00:08] Well, thank you so much, Ola Faye, for taking time to talk with me today about your life and memories of living in Riverside so we can learn more from you about the history of the region. And as I had mentioned, we're especially interested in talking to you because of your long experience living and working and participating in so many different social and community activities in the Inland Empire. And really grateful to you because I know as a history professor that when you tell the stories of your life, you contribute to the education of the younger generations. We'd like to read....

Ola Faye Stephens [00:00:55] They're being erased now.

Catherine Gudis [00:00:57] I know, that's what we've got to work on. We've got a work on saving it. So, I know that you already know this, but I'm gonna say it into the recording anyway that we'd like to record and make this interview available with your permission, so after the interview, we'll send you a copy of the audio and the transcript for you to review so that, you know, if you want to remove anything you can or even after. So, so I guess the first thing is just for me to ask you verbally now, if it's okay that I record this interview.

Ola Faye Stephens [00:01:36] Yes.

[00:01:37] Thank you, and I want to say that today is February 19th, 2026. My name is Cathy Gudis. I'm a professor of history at UC Riverside, documenting histories of the region, and I am

here today by telephone with Ola Fey Stevens doing an interview for a People's History of the Inland Empire that the city of Riverside hopes to also utilize for their women's history study. So, I just, would you mind please saying your full name on the tape, maybe also your maiden name?

Ola Faye Stephens [00:02:22] Ola Faye Washington Stephens S T E P H E N S.

Catherine Gudis [00:02:26] Great, and if you are willing to share it, your year of birth.

Ola Faye Stephens [00:02:32] December 24th, 1937.

Catherine Gudis [00:02:35] Ah, so you were a Christmas baby, yes, okay.

Ola Faye Stephens [00:02:40] Christmas Eve.

Catherine Gudis [00:02:41] Yes, that's amazing. Now, you've told me offline that you came to Riverside, I think, after you were married. Can you tell me where you grew up and how you came to Riverside?

Ola Faye Stephens [00:02:58] I grew up in Dallas, Texas, and I came to Riverside in 1959 because I grew up in a segregated era, and my husband was unable to be gainfully employed in his profession as a pharmacist in, uhm, any of the white drug stores and the few black drug stores that they had, they were filled up in Dallas. He wasn't able to get a job in Dallas.

Catherine Gudis [00:03:44] That's interesting.

Ola Faye Stephens [00:03:44] So, he had gotten literature while he was in school about going to California and what Walgreens was offering, so he felt that it would be best to come to go to California.

Catherine Gudis [00:04:10] And what year was that?

Ola Faye Stephens [00:04:13] 1959. We married in August of '59 and we came to California in 1959.

Catherine Gudis [00:04:22] And did you go straight to Riverside?

Ola Faye Stephens [00:04:25] We moved to Riverside in 1960 because the Texas board, the California board required more hours.

Catherine Gudis [00:04:43] Mmm.

Ola Faye Stephens [00:04:44] In Texas, so therefore he had to work as an intern, so to speak, until he received the California license, since California didn't reciprocate with anybody.

Catherine Gudis [00:04:59] Hmm, and, and did you do that in Los Angeles, in Riverside?

Ola Faye Stephens [00:05:04] He did it in Los Angeles.

Catherine Gudis [00:05:06] I see. Did you have relatives?

Ola Faye Stephens [00:05:08] By the time that he got the required hours, jobs that were available in LA had been filled. So, I was pregnant with my oldest son and due to have his birth at any time.

Catherine Gudis [00:05:29] Hmm.

Ola Faye Stephens [00:05:29] So, he was offered a position in Riverside, 60 miles east of LA, and that was Riverside, so that's how we ended up in Riverside.

Catherine Gudis [00:05:43] And what was the company?

Ola Faye Stephens [00:05:45] That was in 1960.

Catherine Gudis [00:05:48] 1960. And what part of Riverside did you settle in at that point?

Ola Faye Stephens [00:05:53] Well, we had no choice but to live on the East Side. While we were looking for places, realtors would only refer us to Mr. Streeter, who was a black realtor.

Catherine Gudis [00:06:10] And the realtors referred you. You didn't have connections already.

Ola Faye Stephens [00:06:15] Said Carl Streeter realtor.

Catherine Gudis [00:06:19] And can you tell me about those experiences with Mr. Streeter? Where did he show you around, and what were the options?

Ola Faye Stephens [00:06:29] Well as I tell you, we had no choice but to look on the East Side. It was across the track. It's where the black people were living. On the East Side.

Catherine Gudis [00:06:43] And so when you, so did you get a home? So your home was in East Side that Mr. Streeter helped you get at that point.

Ola Faye Stephens [00:06:51] Yes, it was on...Ottawa, right at Ottawa and University. We lived on Douglas

Catherine Gudis [00:07:06] I don't even, and how long did you live there?

Ola Faye Stephens [00:07:14] We lived there from 1960 until 1968, and they supposedly were building track homes for black people behind Bordwell Park on Kansas and Pennsylvania. So, when I first came to Riverside, he was living at the YMCA downtown on University because he was coming back and forth to LA.

Catherine Gudis [00:08:00] Mmm, I see.

Ola Faye Stephens [00:08:02] He rode the bus back and forth to LA until we were able to purchase a car.

Catherine Gudis [00:08:08] And was the YMCA segregated or integrated?

Ola Faye Stephens [00:08:15] It was segregated.

Catherine Gudis [00:08:17] And so, was there...

Ola Faye Stephens [00:08:18] I mean, they had a section where he had to stay.

Catherine Gudis [00:08:25] And was he, where was he employed when, you know, his first job?

Ola Faye Stephens [00:08:31] At Thrifty drugstore on the corner of University and right there on University and where the post office is essentially.

Catherine Gudis [00:08:45] Oh, downtown, in the downtown area.

Ola Faye Stephens [00:08:48] No, no, no. The one on Chicago. He was at University and Chicago.

Catherine Gudis [00:08:55] What was the name of it again?

Ola Faye Stephens [00:08:58] Thrifty Drug Store.

Catherine Gudis [00:08:59] Thrifty as in...

Ola Faye Stephens [00:08:59] T-H-R-I-F-T-Y, and they sold to what, RiteAid.

Catherine Gudis [00:09:05] Ah, and was he one of the, was he the...

Ola Faye Stephens [00:09:11] He was one of the first black retail pharmacists in Riverside.

Catherine Gudis [00:09:18] And he was serving a mixed clientele or was it primarily white?

Ola Faye Stephens [00:09:22] Yes, because he would have people, he would be in the pharmacy and he would have people to give him the prescription and said they wanted to see the pharmacist, even though it was written on his jacket.

Catherine Gudis [00:09:42] Oh, my gosh.

Ola Faye Stephens [00:09:44] And, ah, luckily, he was working with some good people who came to the rescue and said, if you want your prescription, you'll have to give it to him.

Catherine Gudis [00:10:00] He must have had some stories to tell.

Ola Faye Stephens [00:10:04] Yes he did.

Catherine Gudis [00:10:05] Do you remember any of them?

Ola Faye Stephens [00:10:09] Well, only the ones he would tell me about the people who didn't want him to fill their prescription.

Catherine Gudis [00:10:18] Hmm, and so they would actually go that far that they didn't want him to.

Ola Faye Stephens [00:10:23] Oh, yeah, they would come out and tell you...

Catherine Gudis [00:10:27] Yeah, part of what we're trying to...

Ola Faye Stephens [00:10:29] that "I don't believe you are a pharmacist," so, and he was a very quiet and nice guy and he would go along with the program, and then one day he was brave enough to say to them that, to one of them, that, "Uh, no, they just gave me these licenses to be giving them to me."

Catherine Gudis [00:10:53] Ha, ha, ha, ha!

Ola Faye Stephens [00:10:53] Ha, ha, ha, ha!

Catherine Gudis [00:10:56] Oh, that's excellent, yeah, yeah. Well, and also I bet that he could just point to it. It was probably on the wall. Oh, so, so when...

Ola Faye Stephens [00:11:07] That's just how silly things were.

Catherine Gudis [00:11:09] Yeah, yeah, and especially, you know, at that particular moment, you know, I've I've heard from a few other people about the real, realtors also. So, when you were directed to Mr. Streeter, did he, did he take you, were you looking for rentals or to own at that point?

Ola Faye Stephens [00:11:34] Well, he knew at the time that we would need it to rent.

Catherine Gudis [00:11:40] Mm-hmm.

Ola Faye Stephens [00:11:42] And so, we rented from, uh, 1960 until 1964 because we had saved enough money to buy a house, and we bought the one on Douglas.

Catherine Gudis [00:12:05] Ah, okay, so that's interesting.

Ola Faye Stephens [00:12:09] We had a hard time trying to, you know, even though he was a registered pharmacist and all this kind of stuff.

Catherine Gudis [00:12:18] And was...

Ola Faye Stephens [00:12:19] We have had problems trying to buy a house, you know.

Catherine Gudis [00:12:27] So, when you were shown properties, I know that by 1960, East Side was probably pretty crowded. What are your recollections of it?

Ola Faye Stephens [00:12:41] Blacks have never had a, they've always had a small percentage of Blacks in Riverside, and at the time that we got there in 1960, it was either 4% or 5% of the population, and the population at that time was 86,000 people when we moved to Riverside, and when we left, it had grown to 327,000.

Catherine Gudis [00:13:14] Hmm, and was, what was East Side like? Was it a, I know that there was a Black population, but there was, was there a Latino population or when you were there as well, or Asian?

Ola Faye Stephens [00:13:30] Not like it is now, I guess the Hispanic kids and things, once they finished high school they were going to the fields, I guess, to do the onions and picking and stuff like that, but they're going to college now. Educating themselves, so.

Catherine Gudis [00:14:01] So, when you were there first, before you moved to Douglas, you, so...

Ola Faye Stephens [00:14:09] I lived on Cridge. We rented a house on Cridge. C-R-I-D-G-E, off of, uh, off of, uh, Victoria.

Catherine Gudis [00:14:28] Mm-hmm. Mm-hm. And do you remember your neighbors from that time period?

Ola Faye Stephens [00:14:40] Yes, I remember some because we stayed there from 1960 into '64.

Catherine Gudis [00:14:53] And then you moved to Douglas?

Ola Faye Stephens [00:14:55] Yes.

Catherine Gudis [00:14:56] And was Douglas the, so you were there, you were on Douglas from '64 to '68 and then did you move to the tract homes that were built?

Ola Faye Stephens [00:15:06] Yes, uh-huh, to Carlton Place.

Catherine Gudis [00:15:09] Carlton Place, okay. And was that...

Ola Faye Stephens [00:15:12] C-A-R-L-T-O-N off of Kansas. We were in the housing track that was directly behind where Bordwell Park is today.

Catherine Gudis [00:15:24] And was that a development that...

Ola Faye Stephens [00:15:27] It was all Black.

[00:15:28] It was Black, no kidding. I did not know that, okay.

Ola Faye Stephens [00:15:32] Research the Press Enterprise, some of Dan Bernstein's articles. He wrote an article in 2007 about our neighborhood...

Catherine Gudis [00:15:46] Mm. Okay.

Ola Faye Stephens [00:15:48] because he didn't know about it either.

Catherine Gudis [00:15:50] Hmm. Was that, was it was Mr. Streeter involved in that development of the tract housing?

Ola Faye Stephens [00:16:00] Well, I couldn't tell you that.

Catherine Gudis [00:16:01] Oh, okay, just curious, because I did see an article about the construction of the track homes, but I hadn't realized that it was primarily Black.

Ola Faye Stephens [00:16:25] They said it was built for Black professionals. That's what I'd like for you to read that...

Catherine Gudis [00:16:28] Yeah.

Ola Faye Stephens [00:16:29] article by Dan Bernstein...

Catherine Gudis [00:16:31] Oh, I will definitely.

Ola Faye Stephens [00:16:33] because it was a very, very educated neighborhood, and most of the people, children went to college, graduated, and all of that.

Catherine Gudis [00:16:45] And so you had, tell me about the children that you, cause you mentioned you arrived when you were pregnant, so when were your children born?

Ola Faye Stephens [00:16:58] My oldest son was born October 1960, and, um, he was a chemical engineer for Procter & Gamble for 35 years, and he retired about six years ago, and he went into teaching. His love was teaching.

Catherine Gudis [00:17:26] Hmm.

Ola Faye Stephens [00:17:27] So, he's a teacher now, and my daughter was born in 1963. She's a pharmacist/anesthesiologist. And my youngest son is 55, and he's cyber security and a well planner where he controll oil wells on the computer.

Catherine Gudis [00:18:00] Oh, wow, that's interesting.

Ola Faye Stephens [00:18:05] Well, it's not my kids' success, but the majority of the people that live in my neighborhood, their kids work, too. That's why I kind of want you to...

Catherine Gudis [00:18:17] Yeah.

Ola Faye Stephens [00:18:17] Read that Bernstein article.

Catherine Gudis [00:18:20] Yeah. Do you and how long were you on Carlton Place?

Ola Faye Stephens [00:18:25] From 1968 to December 2021.

Catherine Gudis [00:18:29] Oh wow, okay. So, what are some of your first memories of being in Riverside?

Ola Faye Stephens [00:18:38] I cried for three months.

Catherine Gudis [00:18:42] Oh, that's sad. Why?

Ola Faye Stephens [00:18:46] Well, having come from Texas, I was disillusioned. We were told here before we left...

Catherine Gudis [00:18:57] Mm-hmm.

Ola Faye Stephens [00:18:59] you didn't have to worry about segregation and all that kind of stuff in California, and that it was a land of milk and honey, but when we got to California we would call about a rental and when we would get there they would tell us it was rented and all of that kind of ignorant stuff. And when I moved, when we went to Riverside to look for, you know, find out where Thrifty was located and all that kind of stuff, I wanted to use the restroom on University and Kansas, and I'm here, I'm nine months pregnant, and they wouldn't allow me to use the restroom, so I hated the place, I really did, I hated it. But anyway, I ended up enjoying it because it was a good place to raise my children.

Catherine Gudis [00:20:05] Yeah.

Ola Faye Stephens [00:20:08] And so, I got to like it because I knew, that I didn't really leave that in Texas. I found it in California, but we had been raised to deal with certain things.

Catherine Gudis [00:20:29] So, the downtown businesses then did not cater to everyone.

Ola Faye Stephens [00:20:37] The Black businesses were on Park Avenue between University and 14th Street.

Catherine Gudis [00:20:49] Can you tell me about some of those that you frequented?

Ola Faye Stephens [00:20:54] Well, I wasn't financially able to frequent the places, but that's where we got our hair done. My husband got his hair cut. If we wanted to buy records, we had records. They had restaurants and stuff like that.

Catherine Gudis [00:21:21] Um, what was your husband's name? I didn't ask. I'm sorry.

Ola Faye Stephens [00:21:24] His name is Aldin, A-L-D-I-N.

Catherine Gudis [00:21:29] And neither of you had any relatives already in California or did you have some in LA?

Ola Faye Stephens [00:21:34] I had an aunt in Los Angeles because when we first came to California, we stayed with her until he got his hours and passed the board and moved to Riverside. But we were blessed there because he didn't necessarily want to stay with anybody, but he couldn't afford it to not stay, so when we got to the point where he could pay rent to somebody, the real rent, then we moved. We found an apartment, and we were there, I guess,

about a month and somebody broke into his place and stole everything that we had. TV they weren't...

Catherine Gudis [00:22:33] Oh, my gosh, your first household, and it's stolen.

Ola Faye Stephens [00:22:38] It was terrible, terrible.

Catherine Gudis [00:22:39] Wow. So, and that was while you were still in LA, that first month?

Ola Faye Stephens [00:22:45] Yes. uh-huh.

Catherine Gudis [00:22:46] Yeah, yeah. Do you remember where you were living then?

Ola Faye Stephens [00:22:51] Uh, it was on Adams, and I forget the name of the street.

Catherine Gudis [00:22:58] Yeah. Yeah.

Ola Faye Stephens [00:23:02] It'll come to me.

Catherine Gudis [00:23:02] Yeah, no, I was just, I was, I, I was just uh, yeah, sorry.

Ola Faye Stephens [00:23:06] Because I didn't stay there long because God was good and we were able to move to Riverside.

Catherine Gudis [00:23:15] So, how did you end up sort of meeting people and finding other families?

Ola Faye Stephens [00:23:24] Well, after my children became a certain age and I was in a position to join clubs and, and that's when I became involved because I had always been involved in a lot of things, been raised here in Texas to be able to brighten the corner where I was, so that meant getting involved civically, politically, in every other kind of way. That's how I would get the information that I would need to do what I needed to do.

Catherine Gudis [00:24:16] And what were some of those groups and issues that you were involved in?

Ola Faye Stephens [00:24:23] Well, I think the first thing that got involved with was the Inland Area Urban League, and my tier was the executive director at the time. That was in the '70s.

Catherine Gudis [00:24:42] And what were some of the issues that you were facing and working with at that point?

Ola Faye Stephens [00:24:47] Well, unemployment, educating the community on what was available, getting our kids involved in, not mine, but getting kids involved in job training and connecting with business people who could assist the kids, you know. The Urban League paid half and the employer paid the other half and that type thing. Teach him how to interview and stuff like that.

Catherine Gudis [00:25:28] And was that focused in East Side or was it in different areas?

Ola Faye Stephens [00:25:32] Well, Urban League is nationwide, and I don't know if you ever heard of Vernon Jordan, but he was the national Executive Director of the Urban League.

Catherine Gudis [00:25:45] What was his name?

Ola Faye Stephens [00:25:47] Vernon Jordan.

Catherine Gudis [00:25:49] Ah, yes, okay, of course. And then who did you mention was the Inland Empire director?

Ola Faye Stephens [00:25:57] That was Michael Teer

Catherine Gudis [00:25:59] T-I-E-R?

Ola Faye Stephens [00:26:01] No, T-E-E R.

Catherine Gudis [00:26:06] And was he a resident of Riverside or San Bernardino or elsewhere?

Ola Faye Stephens [00:26:09] I think he was out of Chicago, but he was, when they needed an executive director, he applied for the job in Riverside. He was working in LA at the time with the Urban League.

Catherine Gudis [00:26:23] Mm-hmm.

Ola Faye Stephens [00:26:25] So, he became the president of the one in Riverside.

Catherine Gudis [00:26:31] Now, your kids...

Ola Faye Stephens [00:26:32] Then I...

Ola Faye Stephens [00:26:33] Mm-hmm, sorry.

Ola Faye Stephens [00:26:33] Hmm?

Catherine Gudis [00:26:34] No, go ahead. That's okay.

Ola Faye Stephens [00:26:35] Now what about my kids?

Catherine Gudis [00:26:36] No, I was going to say that if your kids were born in the '60s, then were you, what were their first schools that they went to and were you involved in some of the, you know, desegregation efforts?

Ola Faye Stephens [00:26:52] In a sense since I lived across the way from Emerson. I lived on Douglas Avenue, and at the time that's when they wanted to bus our kids out of the neighborhood, and out of these 16 parents that were involved, I was the only one that my child was not bussed. And I was kind of active as far as I didn't want to see him have to go across town when he could walk to school.

Catherine Gudis [00:27:46] Right, and so he was entering school after the 1965 actions to begin bussing or was it during that same time?

Ola Faye Stephens [00:27:59] It had to have been the same time.

Catherine Gudis [00:28:02] And so, was Emerson at the time that you, that he was set to go there, was it primarily kids from East Side, or was it...

Ola Faye Stephens [00:28:15] Oh, no, no, no, no no. Emerson had a program that they were teaching, I guess, the kids to read in kindergarten or something, so I had someone who was working for the Riverside Unified School District, and they let me know that kids was coming from Arlington and places like that to take my child's seat, so that's why I, I wanted to make sure that he had the same opportunities of the kids.

Catherine Gudis [00:28:51] I see, I see. And so, so, was, so was Emerson was sort of mixed racially when you were there?

Ola Faye Stephens [00:29:01] Yeah, yeah, you know, it wasn't, like I say, it wasn't a lot of Blacks.

Catherine Gudis [00:29:08] Right, rights, uhm, because I, I guess was that Irving School that was primarily...

Ola Faye Stephens [00:29:12] Irving was burned down [Lowell School was burned down].

Catherine Gudis [00:29:15] Ah, okay.

Ola Faye Stephens [00:29:15] That was the one that was at 14th and Victoria that is now Lincoln School. [Lowell School was at 4341 Victoria Avenue at the corner of Cridge Street.]

Catherine Gudis [00:29:25] And so, when kids in the neighborhood, like say on your block, were going to school, the kids of professional families in your neighborhood, they were supposed to go to Emerson, but all but your son were bused to other locations.

Ola Faye Stephens [00:29:41] No, he wasn't going to be bused if they weren't going to reciprocate and bus the other kids from because, you know, my thing was if I thought he could learn something just by sitting next to somebody, I probably wouldn't have put up a fuss.

Catherine Gudis [00:30:01] But you had to put up a fuss because he was going to be bused? Is that what it was?

Ola Faye Stephens [00:30:05] Yes, uh-huh.

Catherine Gudis [00:30:07] I see. I see, and and so the other kids, though, the, uhm, like were bused?

Ola Faye Stephens [00:30:13] They were bused.

Catherine Gudis [00:30:13] Oh, wow, and so how were, I mean, so, was, uhm, what do you know what the experiences were of the kids bused versus your kids at Emerson?

Ola Faye Stephens [00:30:28] Well, they were, they use the word term "bullying" now, but riding the busses and, you know, talked about they shouldn't be in their school and all this kind of stuff.

Catherine Gudis [00:30:44] Oh, I see.

Ola Faye Stephens [00:30:46] Mm-hmm.

Catherine Gudis [00:30:47] And so did you become involved?

Ola Faye Stephens [00:30:53] My kids, after that happened, then I started getting notes and calls that my son was a disciplinary problem, which I knew was a lie. So, I took him out, and he went to Riverside Christian Day that was out on the freeway on the 91. I mean on the 60, but that school is torn down now.

Catherine Gudis [00:31:27] Mm-hmm. I see. Yeah.

Ola Faye Stephens [00:31:29] Because I didn't want him to be misused because of me.

Catherine Gudis [00:31:37] Mmm, I see.

Ola Faye Stephens [00:31:38] And I knew how bright he was.

Catherine Gudis [00:31:41] Mm-hmm.

Ola Faye Stephens [00:31:42] And if you have people who you raise your hand and they don't call on you, you know, it can affect kids, and I didn't want that to happen to mine.

Catherine Gudis [00:31:54] Mm-hmm. Yeah. So, did your other children join him at Riverside Christian Day School?

Ola Faye Stephens [00:32:01] They did, and they went to private school until my oldest son got ready to go to high school, and I wanted him to, we were in Poly District [Riverside Polytechnic High School].

Catherine Gudis [00:32:18] Mm-hmm.

Ola Faye Stephens [00:32:19] But I got an inter-district pass for him to go to North because he needed to be around kids that looked like him.

Catherine Gudis [00:32:27] Mm, and Poly at that point didn't.

Ola Faye Stephens [00:32:34] I didn't want to have to go through at Poly what I went through at Emerson.

Catherine Gudis [00:32:40] Yeash, yeah, and how were his experiences at North? Was he involved in different groups?

Ola Faye Stephens [00:32:44] Oh, it was great. He participated in everything. He was academically smart, and he was a great football player, but we knew that he wasn't going to the NFL [unintelligible]...

Catherine Gudis [00:33:05] Mm-hmm

Ola Faye Stephens [00:33:06] at that time, so he had to stick to his academics.

Catherine Gudis [00:33:12] Yeah, yeah.

[00:33:13] So, he went to Howard University in DC and got his chemical engineering degree. And he was a walk-on football player his freshman year, but he realized that he never would make it as a pro, so he focused on his studies.

Catherine Gudis [00:33:40] Oh, good for him. What's his name?

Ola Faye Stephens [00:33:43] Marcus, Marcus, M-A-R-C-U-S.

Catherine Gudis [00:33:47] And does he live in Texas now, or where is he? Did you say?

Ola Faye Stephens [00:33:51] No, he's in Georgia.

Catherine Gudis [00:33:52] Oh, he's in Georgia.

Ola Faye Stephens [00:33:54] Mm-hmm.

Catherine Gudis [00:33:56] And then your other kids also went to historically Black colleges, is that right?

Ola Faye Stephens [00:34:00] They went to Howard.

Catherine Gudis [00:34:02] They all went to Howard?

Ola Faye Stephens [00:34:04] Uh, yes.

Catherine Gudis [00:34:06] Yeah, that's amazing.

Ola Faye Stephens [00:34:07] My daughter finished their school of pharmacy and their school of medicine, and my youngest son, we had to bring him home after his third year because D.C. was too much for him, and he was wasting our money.

Catherine Gudis [00:34:23] Oh, what's he going out too much?

Ola Faye Stephens [00:34:26] So, he D.C. was, well coming from a little place like Riverside...

Catherine Gudis [00:34:30] Yeah, yeah.

Ola Faye Stephens [00:34:31] And he just cut loose on these pretty Ethiopian girls and messing up.

Catherine Gudis [00:34:40] Oh, yeah.

Ola Faye Stephens [00:34:42] Taking people to dinner and buying flowers and all that, So, anyway, when my daughter graduated med school, I told him he had to leave D.C. because he was the smartest one we had academically, but he didn't apply himself like the others did.

Catherine Gudis [00:35:04] So, where did he finish up?

Ola Faye Stephens [00:35:06] He finished at LeTourneau University and here in Houston got his master's at LeTourneau.

Catherine Gudis [00:35:14] I see. Okay. Yeah. Yeah, but not more, yes, so people, yeah, he still went on for his graduate degree. That's, that's amazing.

Ola Faye Stephens [00:35:23] Right, Right, uh-huh.

Catherine Gudis [00:35:23] Yeah, did any of the kids stay and go or go back to Riverside?

Ola Faye Stephens [00:35:28] Oh no, no, once they finished high school, they never returned to Riverside other than to visit.

Catherine Gudis [00:35:35] Mm-hmm, mm-hmm, and did you want them to?

Ola Faye Stephens [00:35:38] None of those, the majority of those kids who lived in the neighborhood, once they went off to school, they never really came back to live in Riverside.

Catherine Gudis [00:35:50] Why do you...

Ola Faye Stephens [00:35:51] One of the young men, Orlando Taylor, he stayed because he worked for years over at UCR.

Catherine Gudis [00:36:03] What did he do at UCR, do you know?

Ola Faye Stephens [00:36:07] Uhm, he worked with students, but he passed away in '22, so I'm not sure.

Catherine Gudis [00:36:20] Yeah.

Ola Faye Stephens [00:36:21] But his sister, Jackie's still there in Texas, I mean in California.

Catherine Gudis [00:36:34] Why?

Ola Faye Stephens [00:36:34] Anyway, most of those kids didn't ever come back. I mean, what were they gonna come back to? They weren't gonna be employed or anything like that in Riverside. So, you know, why come back?

Catherine Gudis [00:36:49] And is that because of racism or job opportunities?

Ola Faye Stephens [00:36:52] Of course, it was. Of course, it was.

Catherine Gudis [00:36:56] So, now when I, when I...

Ola Faye Stephens [00:37:00] You would seldom see Blacks in City Hall past the fourth floor.

Catherine Gudis [00:37:09] Now, you were active in different campaigns. So, you were, you were in the Urban League and were, in terms of the focus on the Urban league and unemployment issues and education, what kinds of headway did you see made in Riverside given the discrimination and lack of political representation?

Ola Faye Stephens [00:37:38] Well, as time went on, you would see the young people employed at certain places. But even today in 2026, I'm sure it's still not a lot. Uhm, I saw some improvement. I know one of mine, one of my son, the oldest boy, when they put an application in, when they first built MacDonalds on University, and they wouldn't even give him an application. You know, you, as time went on and some of the I don't know what to call them, but some of the people who had a bad attitude toward our kids, you know, God took them on home, and some of the younger people came in and were in positions to help our kids get into certain things and to do certain things.

Catherine Gudis [00:39:10] Now, I've read about the ways that East Side began to become quite crowded in the 1960s and into the 1970s because segregation had kept so many people all in that neighborhood. What were some of the issues that you recall or groups that were working to expand housing? Do you know?

Ola Faye Stephens [00:39:40] What were some of the causes?

Catherine Gudis [00:39:42] No, basically, I had read about some urban renewal plans for East Side and other kinds of struggles for housing, and I just wondered if you had any stories or knew of...

Ola Faye Stephens [00:39:59] That's because they wouldn't be allowed, they weren't allowed to live in different neighborhoods, even if you were financially able. The relatives, you know, they would do everything they could to steer you to the East Side, so that's why it became so crowded. And then, I guess, when and kids would grow up, they would leave Riverside and really never come back. Then the Hispanic start moving in, and I think it's majority Hispanic now, I understand.

Catherine Gudis [00:40:45] And when you were on Cridge, the community...

Ola Faye Stephens [00:40:51] That was all Black.

Catherine Gudis [00:40:52] All Black. And then when you left, when did you start to see changes in your neighborhood since you were there until 2021?

Ola Faye Stephens [00:41:04] Well, my neighborhood used to be the most beautiful neighborhood in Riverside, and then it started declining because original owners were dying

and the children weren't coming back to live, so they, you know, were selling the properties and things. Now, as far as the year, I can't really pinpoint when it really started.

Catherine Gudis [00:41:33] Can you tell me about some of the other groups that you were involved in? Like for instance, I noticed that you...

Ola Faye Stephens [00:41:38] Well, I was involved in a group called the socialLites in San Bernardino. I really was kind of more active over in San Bernadino than I was in Riverside. The Silhouettes, they were a group of women who felt like we needed to do something for our young men, so we started something like the Botelian [spelling?], which...

Catherine Gudis [00:42:14] Hmm.

Ola Faye Stephens [00:42:15] The girls were the debutantes, you know, where the girls had the debutantes. We were working with young men and grooming them for the real world, giving scholarships and stuff like that. So, it's about, it's still going on very strong, over in San Bernardino.

Catherine Gudis [00:42:44] And it's called the Silhouettes?

Ola Faye Stephens [00:42:47] No, no, the, uh, socialize, socialized, s-o-c-i-a-l-l i t e s.

Catherine Gudis [00:42:57] I see, mm-hmm.

Ola Faye Stephens [00:42:59] socialLites.

Catherine Gudis [00:42:59] And that was, yeah, I see. And so that was organized so that it was like a parallel to the women's...

Ola Faye Stephens [00:43:06] The debutantes.

Catherine Gudis [00:43:06] Gotcha.

Ola Faye Stephens [00:43:11] with the girls coming out, being introduced to the real world.

Catherine Gudis [00:43:13] Mm-hmm. And you mentioned that you were more active in San Bernardino. Why in San Bernadino as opposed to Riverside? Were there more groups?

Ola Faye Stephens [00:43:22] No, it's just that they were, the San Bernardino group was more active and more of activists than Riverside people seem to have been kind of complacent.

Catherine Gudis [00:43:38] Hmm.

Ola Faye Stephens [00:43:40] They didn't want to rock a boat, so to speak. In San Bernardino, it was just the opposite. The guys over there, a group called the Wag. It was for men, but knowing a lot of them, different things happened over in San Bernardin where women could be involved.

Catherine Gudis [00:44:05] What was the name of the men's group?

Ola Faye Stephens [00:44:09] Wig. W-A-G. Westside Action Group.

Catherine Gudis [00:44:12] Ah, yes. Okay. Okay, yes, gotcha.

Ola Faye Stephens [00:44:16] Yes, they're active in San Bernardino politically and educationally and everything else.

Catherine Gudis [00:44:25] Mm-hmm. And so were there other groups? Were women part of that?

Ola Faye Stephens [00:44:32] They are and it is now, but during my time they weren't.

Catherine Gudis [00:44:37] Yeah, and what other groups were you active in that, you know, had more opportunity?

Ola Faye Stephens [00:44:44] In Riverside, I was a member of the Silhouettes, which is an auxiliary of the Kappa Alpha Psi fraternity, incorporated. My husband, you become a Silhouettes if your husband is a Kappa.

Catherine Gudis [00:45:03] I see. I see, okay. And what were some of the things that the Silhouettes took on in terms of work?

Ola Faye Stephens [00:45:09] Well, we more or less assist them in their functions. They have the Black and White. They have a whole lot of different things, like every year they go and the Silhouettes go and put flags and things on the veteran cemetery...

Catherine Gudis [00:45:37] Mm-hmm.

Ola Faye Stephens [00:45:37] On Veterans Day, we give Christmas gifts and baskets to homeless children and stuff like that, you know, it's more or less an auxillary of the men and whatever they're involved in, they ask us for assistance. And then I was involved with the groups, with The Group that met Thursdays at different places, but then they started meeting at, like I said, different places, but we've never had, The Group has never had a home.

Catherine Gudis [00:46:25] Oh, I see.

Ola Faye Stephens [00:46:25] But it involved, I'm sure you know about it, it involves, you know, the politicians, the mayors, council people, and stuff like that coming together to discuss real issues of Riverside.

Catherine Gudis [00:46:46] And was this also a way to kind of endorse politicians that were...

Ola Faye Stephens [00:46:56] No, no. we didn't endorse, but they had a platform where they could come, the politicians could come and give their spiels of, whatever.

Catherine Gudis [00:47:14] I see, yeah.

Ola Faye Stephens [00:47:15] But no, The Group does not endorse.

Catherine Gudis [00:47:21] And I did notice that you were very active in terms of some campaigns later on. Can you tell me about...

Ola Faye Stephens [00:47:32] As individuals, we could support anybody we wanted to, as individuals, but not as a group.

Catherine Gudis [00:47:41] Well, can you tell me a little bit about the, you know, the push for more politicians that were representing equal rights or civil rights or even women's rights?

Ola Faye Stephens [00:48:04] They all said they would, until they got elected.

Catherine Gudis [00:48:09] That's right.

Ola Faye Stephens [00:48:09] That's why I was hesitant.

Catherine Gudis [00:48:11] Yes! I get that. Yeah, yeah. Yeah. I know that Jack, Jack, that your name was on some of Jack Clark's campaign advertisements that were in the Press Enterprise.

Ola Faye Stephens [00:48:27] Yeah, I would support a person like Jack because I knew his dad real well, and I watched Jack grow up.

Catherine Gudis [00:48:35] Hmm.

Ola Faye Stephens [00:48:38] And if anybody was for the right, he was.

Catherine Gudis [00:48:41] Mm-hmm. And we're there, and I'm taking it that at that point, there was still, and from what I can see..

Ola Faye Stephens [00:48:51] You don't have to tiptoe around, just ask what you really want to say.

Catherine Gudis [00:48:55] You know, I find it shocking that there were so few African Americans in city government.

Ola Faye Stephens [00:49:05] That's right.

Catherine Gudis [00:49:06] And when, so, okay. So, the larger picture is also that what East Side becomes known for by the '80s is gang activity. Even before then is, you know, youth being targeted by police in a lot of ways, and I wonder if there are incidents that you can share with me that might sort of help illuminate what was going on in terms of...

Ola Faye Stephens [00:49:41] I have to, if I be honest, I would be a nervous wreck when my children came back to visit. I could not go to sleep until they came in at night because not what I was fearing that they were doing or would do is just that being out a certain time at night in Riverside and how the cops could do. So, I was happy when they would leave and go back home.

Catherine Gudis [00:50:22] Mm-hmm, and yet they were going to Texas [overtalk].

Ola Faye Stephens [00:50:26] And then I could get some sleep.

Catherine Gudis [00:50:26] And yet they were going to Texas. Was Texas better?

Ola Faye Stephens [00:50:31] Well, you, you, no..

Catherine Gudis [00:50:32] Or D.C. rather, yeah.

Ola Faye Stephens [00:50:36] My kids were on the East Coast. Yeah. That's that's where they really grew up.

Catherine Gudis [00:50:41] Mm-hmm.

Ola Faye Stephens [00:50:43] Because they don't, the only thing they knew about Texas is what I would bring them here when during the summer, you know, that type of thing, but they had no clue.

Catherine Gudis [00:50:55] Hmm.

Ola Faye Stephens [00:50:56] Because when Marcus first went to Howard, the first one went to Howard, and we, well, not the first time, but his sophomore year, we let him take a car back, and he and his friend was gonna drive. I said, "Oh no, that would never happen because you're gonna have to go through states that is not too favorable to you," so anyway, Hello?

Catherine Gudis [00:51:31] Yes, I'm still here.

Ola Faye Stephens [00:51:32] Okay, so anyway, my husband had to drive with him because I couldn't handle it.

Catherine Gudis [00:51:40] Mmm. And so, if you were seeing them on the East Coast, then you had, that it was different in Riverside, right?

Ola Faye Stephens [00:51:55] Uh huh, it sure was.

Catherine Gudis [00:51:56] And how come? What was going on in Riverside?

Ola Faye Stephens [00:52:01] Well, you would have to ask the people who didn't want to see Blacks...

Catherine Gudis [00:52:05] Mm-hmm.

Ola Faye Stephens [00:52:06] do anything. You'd have to talk to them.

Catherine Gudis [00:52:12] And did your husband...

Ola Faye Stephens [00:52:13] Because you educated your children and you know, you taught them manners and all the stuff like that, but they still weren't accepted as people capable of doing anything constructive.

Catherine Gudis [00:52:31] When your husband was in practice, did he stay at Thrifty or Rite Aid through his career, or what kind of mobility did he have? Or what kind of mobility did he have?

Ola Faye Stephens [00:52:41] No, no, no. We were able to, we saved, he worked, and got paid every two weeks, and we lived off of one check and put the other in the bank 'til, when the opportunity came to be able to open our own store, and that's what we did.

Catherine Gudis [00:53:03] What was the store?

Ola Faye Stephens [00:53:07] It was a pharmacist out in Perris.

Catherine Gudis [00:53:10] Oh.

Ola Faye Stephens [00:53:11] In the Pierce Valley Medical Center. It was built and owned by Dr. Armin J. Altemus.

Catherine Gudis [00:53:21] Dr. Armin J. Altemus.

Ola Faye Stephens [00:53:25] I mean, Armin J. Altemus. And he, the other doctors were Dr. Charles Gordon and then Dr. Dawkins.

Catherine Gudis [00:53:42] And were these African-American gentlemen?

Ola Faye Stephens [00:53:45] Yes, they were.

Catherine Gudis [00:53:48] Was Dr. Gordon from Riverside?

Ola Faye Stephens [00:53:53] We couldn't even borrow money from the bank. We owned our own house, had good credit, but we still couldn't get any money. We had to prove that we

didn't need any money, and at the beginning, we couldn't prove that because we didn't need the money.

Catherine Gudis [00:54:14] Mm-hmm. Yeah, and what why Perris? Was it just an opportunity or was it better there than in Riverside?

Ola Faye Stephens [00:54:21] That's where Dr. Altemus was living at the time.

Catherine Gudis [00:54:27] Mm-hmm.

Ola Faye Stephens [00:54:28] And he bought some land and put up the medical center. And then he asked Al if he wanted to put in a pharmacy.

Catherine Gudis [00:54:41] I see.

Ola Faye Stephens [00:54:43] That's why we went to Perris.

Catherine Gudis [00:54:45] I see, okay. And was Perris, was that area at that time primarily people of color or was it Black, white? What was it?

Ola Faye Stephens [00:54:55] Oh, no. It was mixed.

Catherine Gudis [00:54:59] Mm-hmm. Mm-hm. Mm.

Ola Faye Stephens [00:55:01] It's mixed.

Catherine Gudis [00:55:03] And do you remember what year did you open the store and how long was he and you there?

Ola Faye Stephens [00:55:08] We opened the store in 1964.

Catherine Gudis [00:55:14] Oh.

Ola Faye Stephens [00:55:20] No, wait a minute. It was 1960.... Maybe it was just before we moved to Carlton Place.

Catherine Gudis [00:55:33] Oh, okay. Yeah, so early on. Yeah.

Ola Faye Stephens [00:55:36] That was in 1968. It had to have been around 1968.

Catherine Gudis [00:55:42] Yeah.

Ola Faye Stephens [00:55:42] And we were there to 1978.

Catherine Gudis [00:55:48] And then where did he go?

Ola Faye Stephens [00:55:50] To LA. Oh, he was tired of working by himself, so he and three of his, two of his schoolmates open the store in LA.

Catherine Gudis [00:56:04] And where was that located? What neighborhood roughly?

Ola Faye Stephens [00:56:10] It was on, uh... Western.

Catherine Gudis [00:56:20] What was it called?

Catherine Gudis [00:56:23] There's Perris Valley Medical Pharmacy.

Catherine Gudis [00:56:26] Oh, I'm sorry. What was it? It was called...

Ola Faye Stephens [00:56:28] I mean uh...

Catherine Gudis [00:56:29] Perris Valley Medical Center in Perris.

Ola Faye Stephens [00:56:32] Pierce Valley Medical Pharmacy in Perris, that was the first one. And then the Ross Medical Pharmacy in LA on Western.

Catherine Gudis [00:56:44] Ross Medical Pharmacy, okay. And was that, I mean, the commute must've been challenging, but was it, the practice was, flourished there?

Ola Faye Stephens [00:56:59] We were able to educate three children.

Catherine Gudis [00:57:06] You know, so in a way, it sounds like, I mean, I know a lot of the, you know, generation now also, you know has to move to get more opportunities. So, was that move partly because that was more opportunity in LA than in Riverside or Perris area or the Valley?

Ola Faye Stephens [00:57:27] Well, like I said, he was tired of working by himself. And I worked with him for 13 years, but when my daughter started high school, I felt I needed to go home.

Catherine Gudis [00:57:41] Mm-hmm, yeah. And when she started high school, did you, it wasn't, you know, it sounds like you were very, you kept sort of a tight control on the kids, right?

Ola Faye Stephens [00:57:59] Well, I wasn't going to move to LA because I didn't like that arena in LA.

Catherine Gudis [00:58:06] Mm-hmm

Ola Faye Stephens [00:58:06] It was much more quieter in Riverside and I wanted to stay there with, you know, raise the kids in Riverside.

Catherine Gudis [00:58:16] Right, and were you involved in any churches or, you know, religious organizations?

Ola Faye Stephens [00:58:21] I belong to, I went to Park Avenue Baptist Church until 1991, and then I went to Second Baptist Church. Park Avenue is on Pennsylvania Avenue and Second Baptist is at 9th and University [Park Avenue].

Catherine Gudis [00:58:50] Yeah, both are very historic. They were the first churches, right?

Ola Faye Stephens [00:58:55] Mm-hmm.

Catherine Gudis [00:58:56] Yeah, that's that's amazing and...

Ola Faye Stephens [00:58:58] Yes, Second Baptist broke off from First Baptist Church downtown.

Catherine Gudis [00:59:06] Like in the 19th century, right?

Ola Faye Stephens [00:59:09] It was a long time ago. Yeah!

Catherine Gudis [00:59:12] That's really amazing. And in terms of your church activities, do you remember Park Avenue Baptist had the same pastor for a long time, right?

Ola Faye Stephens [00:59:23] Yeah, it's L.B. Moss.

Catherine Gudis [00:59:24] L.B. Moss. Yeah. What was he like? I've seen his name listed. I've heard a few stories from people, but you know he...

Ola Faye Stephens [00:59:33] When his wife, when he died, his wife said that's why they didn't have anything, because he gave everything away to his parishioners.

Catherine Gudis [00:59:43] Oh, wow.

Ola Faye Stephens [00:59:45] He's a very nice man.

Catherine Gudis [00:59:48] And what, in what ways was the church involved in, you know, sort of supporting people financially Or giving, you know, offering other opportunities to, you know, to, to create a haven.

Ola Faye Stephens [01:00:04] The churches have always been an excellent support system for young people, at least the churches I went to. They focused on the welfare and the well-being of young people, and whatever their need was, the church tried to fulfill it.

Catherine Gudis [01:00:33] Did your kids participate in youth groups there? Was that a source of social activity for them?

Ola Faye Stephens [01:00:39] Yes, that's that's how they were still have some lifelong friends from friends that they met in church when they were young.

Catherine Gudis [01:00:49] Mmm, yeah, yeah.

Ola Faye Stephens [01:00:51] Mmm-hmm.

Catherine Gudis [01:00:53] And were there, was the church a place of organizing for some of the other, like, Urban League activities that you did or other, you know, political or?

Ola Faye Stephens [01:01:04] No, for some reason churches in Riverside wasn't like that. Now if you ask me about the churches in Texas on the East Coast, I would say yes.

Catherine Gudis [01:01:20] Interesting. What, uhm, what, what do you account, what what do you...

Ola Faye Stephens [01:01:22] I had to get accustomed, when I moved to Riverside, I had to get accustomed to how people were, and then the more I thought about it, I came from a segregated place where we did everything for us, you know, all our businesses, whatever we went to, you, know, was Black owned, and people had a different attitude of that and say it. When I got to Riverside, it was kind of indifferent, you know. They thought that the other people's ice was colder than theirs was.

Catherine Gudis [01:02:13] Oh, hmm. So you, so people were frequenting, uhm, a wider range. They weren't focused on, like, say the Park Avenue shops. They were going all over where they were allowed.

Ola Faye Stephens [01:02:25] When, when they could, when they could.

Catherine Gudis [01:02:28] Yeah, yeah, so that's that's interesting. What were some of, who were some of the other people that you were involved in doing some of the, you know, community work, say, you mentioned Urban League.

Ola Faye Stephens [01:02:44] Those are the people that I worked with.

Catherine Gudis [01:02:46] Yeah.

Ola Faye Stephens [01:02:47] Oh, I was, at one time, I was a member of the Eastern Star, which is a certain organization.

Catherine Gudis [01:02:59] And did that meet? Yeah, sorry, go ahead.

Ola Faye Stephens [01:03:03] They met at Lincoln Park. They fed the hungry. They were community-oriented, all that stuff like that. A lot of these groups kind of bump heads, you know, do the same.

Catherine Gudis [01:03:26] And Eastern Star, is that, that was that a?

Catherine Gudis [01:03:29] That's a paternal organization.

Catherine Gudis [01:03:31] And did you meet also at the Masonic Lodge there?

Ola Faye Stephens [01:03:37] Yes!

Catherine Gudis [01:03:37] Do you remember what that space was like? Yeah, in other words, I've seen photos from a long time ago from the '20s.

Ola Faye Stephens [01:03:50] It's just, it's just a plain old building.

Catherine Gudis [01:03:53] Mm-hmm. And was there a second floor where the events would take place or was everything on one floor?

Ola Faye Stephens [01:04:01] Everything took place on one floor when I was involved.

Catherine Gudis [01:04:05] No kidding, okay, gotcha.

Ola Faye Stephens [01:04:06] I've never known it to be a two-story.

Catherine Gudis [01:04:09] Okay, so everything is in that space. Interesting, yeah. I don't know where I got the idea that it was separate space because, yeah. Were there shops when you were in Riverside?

Ola Faye Stephens [01:04:20] That's what I'm saying.

Catherine Gudis [01:04:22] So that hall, that building, that's still there.

Ola Faye Stephens [01:04:26] Yes, it's still there. It should be historical. It is.

Catherine Gudis [01:04:29] It is, yeah, it was landmarked, yeah. But when you were going there, was it only the lodge for community meetings or was it a store also on the front?

Ola Faye Stephens [01:04:43] I know there was a record store on the Park Avenue side, and I'm not sure what it, I don't know what it was, no, it might have been a store, directly next to the Lodge, but I knew it was a little record store there.

Catherine Gudis [01:05:06] Yeah, yeah, and so, the Eastern Star, was that, that was a mixture of like, did you bring younger women into that group? Was it mixed age or?

Ola Faye Stephens [01:05:20] Yeah, it was because I was one of the younger ones when I was participating, but they met on Thursdays, and I was sick of wearing white when I was going into the pharmacy.

Catherine Gudis [01:05:39] Yeah, right, yeah. And when you were working with them, so I didn't realize that they were involved in that kind of work, like feeding homeless folks. Yeah, that's amazing.

Ola Faye Stephens [01:05:55] They still do up at the Lodge.

Catherine Gudis [01:05:55] Is that right?

Ola Faye Stephens [01:06:00] At least they were the last time I talked to them about it?

Catherine Gudis [01:06:03] Yeah.

Ola Faye Stephens [01:06:04] The guy who was feeding on Sundays had his leg amputated, so I'm not sure if they're still doing it, but yeah, they feed every week, at least they were.

Catherine Gudis [01:06:21] Were there other places where women's groups met or were active? Because you mentioned the...

Ola Faye Stephens [01:06:33] Well, you know, you always had the sororities. You know, that's women's, the sororities of the women's group.

Catherine Gudis [01:06:43] Right.

Ola Faye Stephens [01:06:44] They are there, the AKAs, the [unintelligible], the Sigmas, the, it's about four or five different groups.

Catherine Gudis [01:06:55] And where did they meet?

Ola Faye Stephens [01:06:56] And they all meet once a month.

Catherine Gudis [01:07:01] And is there a place that was sort of a center point for those sororities?

Ola Faye Stephens [01:07:08] I'm not sure because I'm not one of them.

Catherine Gudis [01:07:11] Mm-hmm. I see. Yeah

Ola Faye Stephens [01:07:14] I don't know if they if they have a central location or, you know, they're probably too big to meet at people's homes, so they must have central...

Catherine Gudis [01:07:25] Yeah.

Ola Faye Stephens [01:07:28] because I know the Kappas meet down at the lodge building across from the courthouse.

Catherine Gudis [01:07:35] Uh, huh. Yeah. Can I bring you back to a time period that I've read about, which is before the murder of Tyisha Miller? And there was an ambush, right, that was at a home, that's at least what the journalists called it, by Bordwell Park, when police were called to a property and then they were attacked. And in the aftermath, what I've read, is that the black community in particular was really targeted by police. Do you recall that moment in the '80s? [<https://www.pressenterprise.com/2011/04/02/40-years-on-police-pay-homage/>]

Ola Faye Stephens [01:08:22] I'm just trying to remember that incident. I don't recall that incident when they shot up a house.

Catherine Gudis [01:08:32] Well, it was more that a couple of officers were called to a house where there was reported trouble and when they got there, they were shot, and the people were never who shot those officers...

Ola Faye Stephens [01:08:49] Are you talking about the officers that was killed over near Bordwell?

Catherine Gudis [01:08:53] Yes, exactly, exactly.

Ola Faye Stephens [01:08:59] I remember that because they were stopping any and everybody that was of color. Yeah, I remember that...

Catherine Gudis [01:09:13] So at that point...

Ola Faye Stephens [01:09:14] because I was living on Carlton Place at the time, I believe. And that was across, almost in front of Emerson School, if I can remember.

Catherine Gudis [01:09:32] When so, so my understanding was that, you know, there was a lot of targeting of people.

Ola Faye Stephens [01:09:42] I had some young men I had taken under my wing that lived on Kansas and 14th and they stopped all of them because, I guess, they were anxious to find out who killed the police officer. Yeah, I remember that.

Catherine Gudis [01:10:12] And do you remember other police activities that, or any groups that formed to try to find other solutions or to, you know, work with those policemen to sort of alter their behavior? Do you remember any groups at the time?

Ola Faye Stephens [01:10:37] Oh, they had a think tank that worked with the police, that was run by, well, it wasn't run by but she was a member of it, Woody Rucker Hughes.

Catherine Gudis [01:10:57] Ah, yes, rest in peace, yeah.

Ola Faye Stephens [01:11:01] It was called the...

Catherine Gudis [01:11:04] Okay, I'll look for that, yeah. Uh, and that, uh, because I know that you, you became involved around the time of, uh Tyisha Miller with other organizations. Is that right? Can you tell me more about that?

Ola Faye Stephens [01:11:22] Oh, I was nvolved long before that.

Catherine Gudis [01:11:23] Yeah, tell me tell me more about some of that.

Ola Faye Stephens [01:11:25] I never really, I never really, um. March to anything like that.

Catherine Gudis [01:11:37] But, so what, tell me more about the ways you were active because I, you know, marching is one thing but there's so much, you now, more that's around that. What were some of the activities?

Ola Faye Stephens [01:11:50] But I wasn't in that group.

Catherine Gudis [01:11:58] What were the, was the Urban League or other groups you were involved in? Were they involved in those issues around policing?

Ola Faye Stephens [01:12:10] I don't want to lie on anybody, but it was on everybody's mind.

Catherine Gudis [01:12:16] Mm-hmm.

Ola Faye Stephens [01:12:16] Mm-hmm. Right. And it was talked about.

Catherine Gudis [01:12:26] And was the group formed? Can you tell me about the group?

Ola Faye Stephens [01:12:32] The leadership was, it was the minister, it was Taisha's cousin or uncle, one of the butlers. I think that was the leadership of that. And then Cheryl and Hardy Brown were focused on it too. They had the black boys. Yes, you can. But me personally, no.

Catherine Gudis [01:13:08] And can you tell me a little bit about the group?

Ola Faye Stephens [01:13:15] T capital G what is it I have Oh, you need to.

Catherine Gudis [01:13:22] I will. I didn't know that it was open to all.

Ola Faye Stephens [01:13:26] Well, yeah, that's that's the point. I was telling you that it's it's some of everyone that goes

Catherine Gudis [01:13:34] Yopes.

Ola Faye Stephens [01:13:36] Politicians, members of organizations, members of, uh... Some of the, what is it, the Navy unions and stuff like that.

Catherine Gudis [01:13:56] Like that.

Ola Faye Stephens [01:13:57] It's a mixture of everybody. You could probably really get you some good information attending one of those meetings.

Catherine Gudis [01:14:05] I will. How did it form?

Ola Faye Stephens [01:14:10] Trying to trying to bring people together that could make policy or being concerned with African-American problems in Riverside. But it became much more than that because when I left, it was a very integrated group of people.

Catherine Gudis [01:14:40] And when did it start and how?

Ola Faye Stephens [01:14:46] But like I said, it started then because we were having problems in Riverside. With the kids, not being able to get jobs. Police, dealing with police and stuff like that.

And it had to be a solution to all of that. So the way you solve a problem is that you bring everybody to the table. And that's how they'd get started.

Catherine Gudis [01:15:19] I see, and was it in the 1990s? Do you remember or was, you know, is there a timeframe when you started?

Catherine Gudis [01:15:28] Yeah

Ola Faye Stephens [01:15:38] Yeah, this has been so long.

Catherine Gudis [01:15:40] Oh, yeah, I can probably find that out by searching.

Ola Faye Stephens [01:15:45] I've got a lot of information out in my garage in boxes.

Catherine Gudis [01:15:49] Oh my gosh. Yeah. Happens when you pack up a whole house, huh?

Ola Faye Stephens [01:15:55] Yeah. Yeah, talk to Rose. I will.

Catherine Gudis [01:15:57] I will. I will and it was women who began, you began with Rose and a few other women, is that right?

Ola Faye Stephens [01:16:05] Rose Mays, Rose Oliver, Katie Green, we had a few men.

Catherine Gudis [01:16:21] And did you meet in different locations?

Ola Faye Stephens [01:16:24] Yes.

Catherine Gudis [01:16:26] And was there one sort of hub that you frequently held either events or meetings or organizing?

Ola Faye Stephens [01:16:41] Well, we, um... We would meet sometimes at Graham's Barbecue.

Catherine Gudis [01:16:50] Where was that?

Ola Faye Stephens [01:16:52] It's down time on across from the adjacent to the convention center.

Catherine Gudis [01:17:02] And, you know, when you...

Ola Faye Stephens [01:17:03] We would go there and have breakfast, so that's how all of that got started down there.

Catherine Gudis [01:17:12] I see, I see. Okay. And when you

Ola Faye Stephens [01:17:16] Rose May, Rose Oliver would, you know, have, we'd go to her house sometimes.

Catherine Gudis [01:17:23] And was she in, she was in Riverside downtown, Eastside?

Ola Faye Stephens [01:17:29] Rose, I mean, Rose Oliver was. Yeah. It was Riverside, Ms. Riverside.

Catherine Gudis [01:17:37] Was Riverside. What was her, what's her background? I know she's no longer with us. Has she passed?

Ola Faye Stephens [01:17:46] No, she passed away. She had a stroke in 2007.

Catherine Gudis [01:17:51] Ow!

Ola Faye Stephens [01:17:53] So after the stroke, she was... Unavailable. She's the cause of a lot of stuff that went on in Riverside. She worked for RRP. And she knew a lot of people. She threw a lot of fundraisers for different politicians and stuff like that. She got, she was instrumental in introducing a lot of the blacks to people that could help them, and she took Rose Mays under her wing. But she doesn't get to criticize

Catherine Gudis [01:18:54] Oh yeah, well I would definitely like to look into that a little more to put that into the women's report for sure. And so she was doing so through her position, working for Art Pick, and then on his own, on her own? Yes. Okay, yeah I'll look into that and talk to Rose Mays too. Because I know I'm taking a lot of your time here. It's wearing on. Well, I was curious about the ways that in talking about black women's organizing and meetings in Riverside to be able to mention people who have made a difference over time. And especially in that period. Before, you know, the year 2000. Because we, I just don't have as much sort of recorded because it's longer ago. Are there other people?

Ola Faye Stephens [01:20:03] Well, I didn't make the footprints that a lot of people made. I was a support system. Because a lot of times my ideas didn't necessarily gel with somebody else, but if they had a good plan, I would be very supportive of that and do what I could in order to make it become a reality. I've always wanted to stay in the background.

Catherine Gudis [01:20:42] Oh, that's interesting. Why is that, do you think?

Ola Faye Stephens [01:20:49] Why? Yeah, because I figured I could be more effective. I didn't owe anybody.

Catherine Gudis [01:20:55] Anything

Ola Faye Stephens [01:20:57] I could say what I needed to say, do what I need to do.

Catherine Gudis [01:21:04] And who were some of the people, other people, to whom you were a support sister? Or system.

Ola Faye Stephens [01:21:18] I'm sure you've interviewed Jennifer Blakely before she died.

Catherine Gudis [01:21:24] I did not, I talked to her, but I did record an interview. Luckily, there is one that I've been able to locate. So what was her role, Jennifer Blakely?

Ola Faye Stephens [01:21:41] Jennifer was vice mayor over in Fontana and then she became president of the group.

Catherine Gudis [01:21:53] Mmm.

Ola Faye Stephens [01:21:56] And I worked with William Amina Carter.

Catherine Gudis [01:22:01] I

Ola Faye Stephens [01:22:03] San Bernardino.

Catherine Gudis [01:22:05] Yeah.

Ola Faye Stephens [01:22:07] And I do know her because, yeah.

Catherine Gudis [01:22:10] Right, yeah

Ola Faye Stephens [01:22:11] I'm lying, she became a similar woman.

Catherine Gudis [01:22:14] Right.

Ola Faye Stephens [01:22:15] I worked with her on the campaign and her husband and I were real good friends.

Catherine Gudis [01:22:22] Oh. Yeah, she, I got to know her because my students, my students and I are helping with her project, the collecting black world history.

Ola Faye Stephens [01:22:37] Okay, you were part of that? Because she had told me about how people from UCR would come over to the place, to her house, and they heard different artifacts and things.

Catherine Gudis [01:22:50] Yeah, and also we

Ola Faye Stephens [01:22:51] Next time I talk to her, I'll let her know.

Catherine Gudis [01:22:53] Yeah, we spent, um, a long time with the, uh, oral histories that, um... Her husband... Ratibu. Yes, Ratibuu.

Ola Faye Stephens [01:23:03] Yeah, they have a lot.

Catherine Gudis [01:23:06] Okay, so I know his voice really well because I transcribed a lot of his interviews so that we could make them available at San Bernardino. And then my students have been writing, you know, papers and doing other work. It's an amazing collection. And so we have been trying to, so for instance, to make sure that the oral histories with other, you know, as we're doing them more recently, to make that they join her collection, you know so that people can find things in one place. Yeah. Yeah. Right. That makes sense. Yeah. Yeah. Okay. So you were, you were friends with her husband. That's amazing. Yeah

Ola Faye Stephens [01:24:00] We were, we talked to each other six o'clock in the morning, and either he called or I called him to deal with the real issues.

Catherine Gudis [01:24:09] Yeah, that's pretty early to deal.

Ola Faye Stephens [01:24:13] Yeah, but he got a girl and I did too.

Catherine Gudis [01:24:17] That's really amazing. Well, so you mentioned Jennifer Blakely. Are there other people who you might mention to me so I can try and do a little more work researching and reading about them?

Ola Faye Stephens [01:24:32] I tell you what, I can't really think offhand because most of these people are deceased.

Catherine Gudis [01:24:39] Yeah.

Ola Faye Stephens [01:24:41] Are physically unable to participate in an interview. I mean, the old guard, that's what I'm thinking about. That's what, I assume, that what you want.

Catherine Gudis [01:24:55] Um, yeah, I, um, and I, I can look for other material, um about them if they're not able, uh, to, to talk. If, yeah. So if you think of people's names, I can, or groups, I I can look them up.

Ola Faye Stephens [01:25:09] Be a name.

Catherine Gudis [01:25:11] Yeah, that would be amazing. The other question I forgot to ask you is, were you involved in the NAACP over the years in Riverside?

Ola Faye Stephens [01:25:23] As a support system, I was a card-carrying member, but not actively involved.

Catherine Gudis [01:25:35] Yeah, yeah, I was lucky to meet Woody Rucker-Hughes before she passed, so I had a few years. Yeah, wonderful.

Ola Faye Stephens [01:25:45] Support her. Amir Moore, I think, was the president before her.

Catherine Gudis [01:25:52] Mm-hmm. Yeah.

Ola Faye Stephens [01:25:53] But I didn't necessarily go to meetings because, you know, with three kids, you have to pick your fights.

Catherine Gudis [01:26:05] Yep, I, yes, I totally get that. You know, I have kept you for a really long time and I apologize for that, but I'm- That's okay, because-

Ola Faye Stephens [01:26:13] I didn't know how long it would be but I didn't schedule anything because I have a friend who wanted to take me to lunch but I said no I won't have time.

Catherine Gudis [01:26:27] Oh, well I hope you did get to eat though.

Ola Faye Stephens [01:26:30] Oh, I'm Leo. Okay, good.

Catherine Gudis [01:26:32] Yeah, can I just have one couple of things here that I wonder, like, looking back over, especially your time in Riverside, if you were going to give some advice to the next generation, and I know you have because you've worked with people, but, you know, for instance, my students, what would you want to say? What kind of advice might you offer words.

Ola Faye Stephens [01:27:03] During the time that I came through and was active in Riverside, it was more about we.

Catherine Gudis [01:27:13] Mmm.

Ola Faye Stephens [01:27:15] It seems to be about I now. And I would like to see the next generation or the generation we are dealing with now. Themselves and look at the whole picture. They are very fortunate, but there are a lot of people out there, young people, who have nothing to pull from, but they could pull from them. And my advice would be to be concerned with other people. Take it, leave your ego at the door, and go and start working.

Catherine Gudis [01:28:00] That's amazing, yeah. I really appreciate those words. They're fantastic. And.

Ola Faye Stephens [01:28:08] No, because that's the era I came up in.

Catherine Gudis [01:28:12] Nah.

Ola Faye Stephens [01:28:12] In Texas, it's about we, W-E, and not I. And if you can remember that, then you could help make the world be a better place.

Catherine Gudis [01:28:31] That's a great message. Thank you so much. Are there, yeah, I really appreciate it. And I don't know if there are other things you might wanna share either now or let me know later.

Ola Faye Stephens [01:28:50] Like what?

Catherine Gudis [01:28:51] I think, you know, it's.

Ola Faye Stephens [01:28:56] This is something you want me to answer, just put it in a text and I'll do my best to answer.

Catherine Gudis [01:29:02] I'll do that. I will. Yeah.

Ola Faye Stephens [01:29:06] And you have to be open and honest with me, that's what I can deal with.

Catherine Gudis [01:29:09] Okay, great. That's great. I appreciate that and I'll go over what you've shared with me so I can look a little more and write to you with other questions that might come up.

Ola Faye Stephens [01:29:23] Okay

Catherine Gudis [01:29:24] Yeah, that would be great.

Ola Faye Stephens [01:29:25] And when I come to Riverside, I'll certainly look you up.

Catherine Gudis [01:29:29] That would be fantastic. I'd like to meet you in real life. Okay, well, so I'll I'll write to you in the meantime and get back to you with this transcript as well

Ola Faye Stephens [01:29:45] Alright then, and it was nice talking with you.

Catherine Gudis [01:29:47] Great to talk to you, thank you so much, really appreciate it.

Ola Faye Stephens [01:29:50] It is.

Catherine Gudis [01:29:51] Okay, take good care. Okay, bye.