

Obden:

We are recording. So today's date is April 4th, , 2021. My name is Obden Mondesir. , and, , if the other two folks who are on this recording could say their full names.

Amber:

I'm Amber Colon,

Renelda:

And I am Renelda Higgins Walker.

Obden:

. And, , we are collecting this oral history, , for the, the Pratt Institute, , in relation to, Preserving Activism within the gates of Pratt inside and out. And I'll let Amber take it from here and she can ask the first questions.

Amber:

When and where were you born? Can you just tell me a little bit about your family?

Renelda:

Sure. I was born in Tuskegee Institute, my parents were in a historically black college, which was very, very prestigious and in those days, my dad was in the first class of Black Marines allowed into the military. That was 1943. So he was a Montford Point Marine. He hated the Marines by the way at that time, but he became a commissioned officer after he left the Marines. I'm the oldest survivor of, I have four, I had four brothers, the first brother was born stillborn in Tuskegee. Then I was born and then I have four younger brothers. We lived in Louisville, Kentucky, and I sent you a picture of the house we lived in, we lived there in Louisville, Kentucky, and the reason my parents were from tiny towns, a tiny town in Kentucky, my dad, and my mother was from a tiny town in Tennessee.

Renelda:

They met in Louisville when, what happens is in those days, there were only a very few black colleges or high schools for black kids. So my father went to school, went to high school, was sent to high school at a boarding school, Lincoln Ridge, , which was near Louisville. And my mother after she finished high school, came to go to college, the Black municipal college, which was the predecessor, which was the black, University of Louisville at the time. I was born in 1950. So that was, you know, the fifties, early fifties. They came to Louisville too, and they stayed with family members as did almost all people from the south in those days, even in the fifties, the church that they belong to was the church that was my father's.

Renelda:

It was my mother's uncle's church, his mother's... it's a long story, his mothers, , her mother's sister's husband, right. That was his church. So everybody that I was around in the segregated south, were relatives, black folks lived together for safety, they lived in communities because there was hostility outside. But I didn't grow up, we didn't grow up among that hostility. We grew up because our family was very tight there were black businesses, actually I didn't even realize that we were segregated until I was older, much older. And we would just, you know, we were the, leave it to beaver family, except we

were black. You know, my mother was there, all the relatives were there, family was there, everything we did, we did with each other. And it was really an idyllic, now that I am old, now it was an ideal, you know, family.

Amber:

I know you kind of already touched on it, but can you just describe the house that you lived in?

Renelda:

Oh . It was the house that we bought when I was, I think I was three years old, 1953, it is a two story Victorian, stand-alone house, gorgeous. I sent you guys pictures and it was on a nice street, but all the houses looked stand-alone. We just lived around folks like us. So the neighbor across the street was the Black pediatrician. She was one of the first Black pediatricians, females, coming out of the Black, you know, traditional Black colleges that were available to us, the principal lived next to the pediatrician, and they lived directly across the street from us, the principal of the Black school.

Renelda:

And then there were teachers who lived all the way down to the school. So the school, I could look out of my bedroom window and see the white elementary school, which was a brick building, you know, sort of diagonal on another block. But then probably the smartest thing our parents did was to send us to the Black school, which was 10 blocks down the street on the same block, because that's where all of our, that's where the students, you know, who were Black, they went to the, to the, to the school. The teachers, you know, we pass their house, walking to school and we pass them coming back. So when I was older, if any of my brothers got into trouble, I knew about it before I got home, because, you know, word travels fast, especially that kind of news. , it was a , very, you know, there were a lot of kids on the block, our age, I think it was that block that had just turned. There were still several white families on that block. Only one white family stayed. , as long as I lived there and we still own the house, my brother's in the house now, but that one family lived right next to the railroad tracks in a stereotypical role, right. On the railroad track. So we pass their house everyday.

Amber:

What was your educational experience in Louisville?

Renelda:

Oh, well, I just said it, that Virginia Avenue school, , was the best thing, best decision, because, so I had friends who were my age and who also belonged to the church and who also, you know, were in some of the black Boy Scouts and the Girl Scouts and the Brownies, and, but they went to the white school and they had a totally different experience than we had. It was not, well, it was not warm and welcoming. , this was right after the Brown v. Board of Education. , that was in '56. And so when I went to elementary, I went into the first grade in 1956. So those kids that went to that white school where they must have gotten, they must've been met with some hostility, whereas at the Black school we went to, it was warm.

Renelda:

It was welcoming, we knew everybody, we had the families, you know, kind of knew everyone who was, it was idyllic, I'm telling you we had an excellent, we were able to, I think the classes were bigger, I think there were 30 kids in a classroom. , but in second grade we learned piano. We learn, we could choose

an interest. And the third grade we had art, we had, we went to the symphony orchestra twice every year, one year, , you know, the Louisville symphony allowed the, I guess everybody, all the elementary school kids, I don't really remember if they were Black or white or whatever. I just remember going and, and wanting to, I couldn't wait to get to the next, the next time that they were to allow us to come. So we were fully, versed in, , and all the, you know, the arts and cultural, well, that's not cultural, but in all of the music, dance, ballet, and we just, we just had, you know, we had everything.

Amber:I know that you mentioned you went to the University of Louisville for a little bit, and I was wondering what led you to go there.

Renelda:

So remember in the fifties from the forties through the early sixties, I would say, was a real civil rights movement going on. , and you probably didn't hear about it, but we were living it all the time. Those folks who grew up in the south were living it. So, , I think that was a time when there was nothing new for Easter. , one of the first civil rights things that we were involved with when it sort of was, , in parallel to the Montgomery, Alabama civil rights, you know, nothing, , you know, you don't use it. If you have to sit in the back of the bus, we're not going to use transit.

Renelda:

So if we can't try clothes on for Easter, and today is Easter, by the way, if we can't try on clothes at the department store, and that was the case, we're not going to buy clothes. And the only reason I remember that is because my mother had the Brownie program was the leader of the Brownie Scouts program and we were in the Brownies. So she read that there was going to, JC. Penney was going to have a fashion show for kids. All you have to do is come and it was going to be put on television. What they didn't realize was that this Black Brownie troop was going to show up. And so, you know, a few of us trying on clothes, we're going to be in this fashion show.

Renelda:

And at the last minute they said, oh, we don't have enough time for you guys to do, you know, to go. , so we're so sorry about that. , but you can have the clothes, all you'd have to do is go home. So I think that was probably the start of that, Nothing New for Easter program. There's a civil rights program. And A.D. King was the brother of Martin King. He lived in Louisville also at the time. , so that was, , civil rights was always there. It was always in the back of, , of our parents' minds, anyway. , let's see, one of the things you guys are gonna have to make sure that I do is to stay on topic, because there are so many tangents that I can go to. , but we were talking about, so the civil rights movement, , and the question that you mentioned was something about getting to University Louisville.

Renelda:

. So, , when I was maybe 12 or 11, I was, , one of the art teachers in the elementary school. She, she was really a big shot in the art scene in Louisville. , she, she decided that she wanted, , some Black kids to go to the Speed Muse. They had, we had a drawing, they would teach us to draw. And that was, you know, I guess I think I was the youngest one, but she decided that I was going to be an artist for some reason, this Ms. Hutchinson was her name. And it's interesting, in Louisville, in, , Poughkeepsie, one of the ministers up here in Poughkeepsie, actually knows, or knew Ms. Hutchinson. And I, when I met him the one time I met him up here, we had this great discussion about how wonderful all of these people were to us as kids and they, they mentored us.

Renelda:

So I went to, let's see, it's over involved in civil rights. We were involved in, the open housing, marches when I was, I think it was '65 or '66. So we were always involved in that. But, , one of the, I think the pivotal part of University of Louisville, besides Mrs. Hutchinson, the art teacher for all of the kids and that, that I associated with, , there, there was a high school that needed to be desegregated. It was outside in an, in another area, , outside of the county, but the county, but the city of Louisville paid taxes. So my parents said, well, we pay taxes, we want our kid to go to this school that had a great arts program. And it was Atherton High School. So Atherton High School was an hour and a half away.

Renelda:

And I cried all the way the first week going to Atherton cause I wanted to go to another school, but Atherton had a Pratt advocate, , Mary Bernard was her name. She was an art teacher and she loved me. So I mean, just from the first look, because first of all, cause I can draw, but secondly because you know, there were just some kindred spirits. So she, Mary Bernard decided that I was going to go to Pratt. Ms. Hutchinson wanted to make sure that I was going to go to some art school. So when I graduated from there, I got a full scholarship because I was an honors student, but I got a full scholarship from the University of Louisville, and room and board. Pratt gave me mostly, , I think it was a partial scholarship. It was mostly paid for the school, but no room and board.

Renelda:

So that was a deal breaker. I had to go to where, where I could afford to go, which would have been, you know, fully paid. Also, I didn't go in art. It wasn't a major at University of Louisville, it was literature. So it was at University of Louisville that I went in '68, '68 or '67. So, , when I went to University of Louisville, there were very few Black students. There were still, there was the entire basketball team, most of the football team and a lot of the baseball teams. And every time I went to class, I'd have these guys around me, you know, just because I guess I would say I was Black as well. So, but the real issue was that we needed more Black students and Black teachers. , so one of the, one of the students that was there when I first came there, because I was one of the very few, I think there were three black kids in the, who were in the dormitories and I wanted to be in the dormitory.

Renelda:

So they were happy to have, you know, more Black kids in the dormitory. But, , some of these guys, , were the, there was medical students, there were law students at University of Louisville, it was a great, it is a great school still. , and then there were folks us in the arts department or in the, you know, the bachelors department. So we would have meetings, just... not meetings, they would just, we would get together on a regular basis and it became more and more regular, , with... it became regular because it was fun. And because one of the guys would come and had a subscription to the New York Times and we all wanted to know what's going on in the rest of the world. So it was just a natural communion with all of us to get together and to talk.

Renelda:

Well, one day we were looking at the New York Times, the front page of the New York Times had a picture of Columbia students, three Columbia students with berets and a rifle. I don't think it was an assault weapon at that time. I think it was just a rifle. And they had taken over the administration building and demanding Black students be brought into Columbia. Well, we looked at each other and there must've been about eight or nine of us. And we said, we could do that. And that's exactly what we

plan to do. So, and I think it was maybe a week and a half of planning and we did the same kind of thing. We didn't have weapons of any kind, but we did take over this one office, , with a really good administrator who said, let me just stay in there with you guys, make sure everything's , it'll keep you safe.

Renelda:

It'll keep, you know, everybody calm, that I'm in here. So, , long story short, we got arrested. The Columbia students did not, they negotiated, but I think I was the only girl that got arrested. Cause I got, I was separated from the guys. There were maybe about five or six of us altogether, but the headlines were that it was the Black Student Unions. That's what we wanted to do. So I lost my, I had my scholarship rescinded. This was the first or the second semester, , by the way. So, , I had, they took away my scholarship. So I had to remove myself from the, , you know, from school, my mother cried that day. She never got over that by the way. , while I was waiting for a, a reinstatement trial, because I knew a lot of the professors, they were really, , everybody was on our side essentially.

Renelda:

, and we knew each other somehow from before, before University of Louisville. So I knew that I would be reinstated. I wasn't worried. So I went to, I took a vacation, quote "vacation," and I went to Tuskegee to visit a person that I had met. , girlfriend, I had met at a camp that I had gone to in the, in the smers. It was a Quaker camp in Vermont. She just happened to be the daughter of the one pediatrician in Tuskegee who had been my pediatrician because I was born there seventeen years before, 18 years before. So I went to visit her and it just so happens I found a kindred spirit. , I had a great, great time with, , her name was Jane Campbell. Dr. Campbell was the, he's the famous, , the famous pediatrician. , so we had, I had a really great time, but, but I also met a kindred spirit who wanted to go to New York after he graduated from Tuskegee, he was about to graduate Tuskegee.

Renelda:

And so the rest was history because I was, that was my, going to Pratt was my place. That's what I had always wanted to do. That's what I, where I had my sights and we had a plan. He was a photographer. He wanted to be a photographer in New York city and he had contacts there. So we, we hooked up and the rest is history, never looked back by the way I got, probably before I even left Tuskegee, my, my scholarship was, , reinstated. The Black Student Union was formed. , they had wanted me to, you know, be an intern in the Black Student Union and in that process, but I just, I was on my way to Brooklyn.

Renelda:

So that's how I got, that's how I got to University of Louisville. And that's why, when I got to Pratt, you know, I was so focused on life at the time I had done, it's not that I had finished and we never finished our civil rights stuff. It's not that I didn't know about, you know, about the Panthers or the Puerto Rican Student Union. I really didn't. Don't remember the strike, the student strike. I do not remember. I remember that when I went to Brooklyn, here's another thing. , there's a lot of these little antidotes, I moved when I, when we got to Brooklyn, we had an apartment right at Fort Green Park, right on the park 194 Washington Park, three blocks, four blocks from Pratt. I mean, how good is that? , so, , it was a fabulous, Brooklyn was, was incredible. It was, it is still, New York is global. It is, , it's just, you know, it's culturally global. It's the, creativity's there, the energy's there. It was just the next step in where I want it to be. It's exactly where I wanted to be.

Obden:

. And I kinda just wanted to follow up on that where, , it seems you had a lot of, I guess, what were your thoughts of New York and Brooklyn before even arriving there?

Renelda:

. So, because I had been involved in the Civil Rights Movement in Louisville, Kentucky, there was, and there were people who were being killed in Louisville. So there was a Quaker camp in Vermont that one year or two years, there was more than that, that they decided that they wanted to bring civil rights kids who were involved in the Civil Rights Movement to Vermont, to camp. That was right up my mother's alley. So when I was 11 or 12, I spent, I was put on a train, going to camp in Vermont. Now, mind you, at that time, when we traveled from one town to another, all of us traveled in one car, we went from family member to family member, spent the night, went to the next family members, spent the night, went to the next. So this was an uncharted territory for us, but I went to, , one, I loved camp because my mother's a country person.

Renelda:

she's from the country she's really, , her dad was a mountain man, according to all of them. So she was very into camping. So, , one year we had at this camp, I was the oldest. We had, , ad solution buys. We had Abernathy and Young, these are all civil rights leaders, kids. , they had me, they had, , AF and Desi Abdullah. I mean, it was just that time that, and this was in the sixties, in the sixties, I believe. So it was just a wonderful time. , and I, so that was my entree to the other part of the world or the Northeast. , I knew, well, Vermont was too cold, but I loved Vermont, but I loved the people. Most of them came from, you know, New York, that area around New York, Boston. , and that's where I knew that I wanted to go.

Renelda:

, , I knew I wanted to go to New York. I had an aunt who lived in Nyack. She actually lived in Brooklyn, but I didn't visit her in Brooklyn. I visited her when she was in Nyack, but I had cousins that lived on, , in the projects in the Bronx, 143rd and third avenue. , and to this day I work one block away from there, , right now, , anyway, so I went to visit them a couple of times, and that was my entree to, , New York and Brooklyn. There are two steps there. , when I went to the, to stay with my cousins in the Bronx, , the first place they took me was to Chinatown. And that was , we didn't have Chinatown in Louisville. . And this was , are you kidding me? This is, anybody can come!

Renelda:

It was , why go anywhere else? I grew up with stories from my mother. , she would go, she would spend time in a little place where my grandfather was born. , and this was an area of all Black farms. And she said she used to, she used to climb trees and she could see the mountains far, far away. And she also, she said she always wondered if she'd ever get a chance to visit those mountains, but, you know, Black folks, don't, aren't able to just go up and visit the mountains, but she was able to do that. So we always, she had, she had that curiosity. She gave us that curiosity and that wanderlust and that ability to just pick up and move when necessary, because she put all of us in the car in the middle of the night and drove to Tennessee.

Renelda:

We still have some of the farms that are out there that belong to the family. It was a, , it was the most beautiful place in the world. And it still is very beautiful, but anyway, so that's how I, when I got to

Brooklyn, I remember the drs at first, the first evening I was there, the drs, the bongos, the Puerto Ricans in Fort Greene park. That's what they did every night. And I would just sit on the stoop or hang out the window and look out. It was, was just wonderful. It's, it's New York is global, New York is creative. There's an energy level there. And Pratt is right in the middle of it.

Amber:

So I know you've had experience with urban renewal when you were in Louisville. And when you got to Brooklyn, did you notice a similar type of thing?

Renelda:

So urban renewal in Louisville was really, a removal. One of my earliest memories is in 1953. And that's another one of those pictures. It's a plastic container with little seeds. And it says little Africa, 1953. So I must've been two or going on three years old when my mother, I remember my mother holding me and she was walking around this place called little Africa. They were little homes. They were, you'd call them shanties, but they were people's homes. They were handmade. They were, in nice, neat little rows. Everyone had a flower garden. Everyone had a garden. I remember picket fences. And I remember my mother being totally emotional about it, she was picking flowers and the place was empty and this was urban renewal.

Renelda:

So what happened was these were people's homes that they had built themselves and urban renewal decided they were going to come and make all of these people move, and there was no other place for them to go, but to rent someplace. So that sanctity of the home was just pulled. The rug was pulled out from under them. , there were black businesses. Well, so the first thing I remember was mom taking, you know, what she did was she was going to take seeds and put them together and say, this was, these are the seeds from little Africa. And actually those are garlic seeds that I still have. I can't believe I still have them, but I have them. She made sure that I got them. , so that I remember, her emotion at that time. And then on the other side of town, it's more towards downtown cause Louisville was a big city, was a city.

Renelda:

My uncle, my dad's uncle lived in a shotgun house. , and it was on, , Walnut Street, which became Malcolm... no it became Martin Luther King Boulevard or Malcolm. No, it was MLK, I think. , but this was the business district where the businesses were, they were all, any kind of business you want. It was right here. We didn't have to go downtown. , my mother went downtown for Christmas, for Christmas trees and to the Haymarket. And that's, that was our one voyage outside of downtown, outside of the Black business district. So that nothing new for Easter we'd go to the tailor. And there were a couple of tailors on Walnut Street. , there was, , you know, you could buy fresh meat at the butcher on Walnut Street, , flowers on Walnut Street, everything you needed was there.

Renelda:

So urban renewal was when they tore down, they removed those businesses, almost all of them. They, the houses they left, most of the houses they left because they were shotgun houses except there was a very, , famous architect. , his name was, I forget the name, but he had a couple of really beautiful buildings that were Black and he was Black, , that were Black-owned. They left that really nice place. That's urban renewal. So what did they replace these things with? Projects. And so that to me is urban

renewal. They didn't create any homes for these people. They created a, you know, a just a place that they could be transient. There was no stability. , that to me is urban renewal. When you get to Brooklyn, the housing stock was fabulous. A brownstone. I mean, it was great Fort Greene projects, they didn't seem dangerous to me.

Renelda:

They were high. There were a whole lot of people there, and that's what I could see was urban renewal. I didn't see, I saw the projects as part of urban renewal, but it wasn't just Black folks. So it was Chinese had to live by themselves. You know, we lived in lots of different places, , and there is, there's no monolith. I don't know that the Caribbean Blacks lived one place and, you know, the Alabama Black people lived in another place. I do know that there were an awful lot of people from Alabama who lived in the Fort Greene projects. So I know my ex, , who became, he became an ex, but he also became a New York Times photographer, you know, he knew a lot of people in the Fort Greene projects. So, , it wasn't the same. It was not.

Amber:

All right. , so do you remember how you got involved with the Black Student Union at Pratt?

Renelda:

Well, I got, , because I was Black, I would certainly be a part of the student union, but now I had a little one and that, my daughter was born in 1970, so I didn't stay on campus. I was a parent first and a student next, and then I became a student first and then parenting, you know, but at this point it was, , I knew that there was a Black Student Union. I was friends with everybody, and not only Blacks, but also, , a lot of Puerto Ricans because I had cousins who were, , my, I had an uncle, my mother's uncle who fought in the Spanish-American war, stayed in Puerto Rico, had a family, same last name. And they came over about the time that I came, , to Brooklyn to school.

Renelda:

So my mother made it a point to come up and reacquaint the family, you know? And so that was the Puerto Rican, , student union. I, but the music, the art, the, , it was, it was all a whirlwind. It was, I don't remember that a lot. I don't remember. I, because I was a student second, and then I had, , I had my son when I was, , he was born in '72. So I'm trying to remember what, you know, how that went, because when he was born, he was very much a part of my projects.

Renelda:

And then we did a lot of stuff. There was a lot of stuff to do outside of Pratt. So we weren't just students.

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Amber:

. Do you remember what the dynamic was in the BSU?

Renelda:

No, not really. I think you mentioned something about, was there cultural nationalism? Well, , but I don't think for me it wasn't, , it, , there, there is a cultural, just the fact that we had it means that it's, you know, it's acknowledged. , we are different and we're proud of the differences. It doesn't make us



different. It just makes us proud. You know, it just makes us different. So I think, , we're Black American. I think that was the first time I had really met a lot of Caribbean Americans, Africans. , we did a lot of travel in the seventies, so, you know, I, I did a lot of traveling to Africa.

Renelda:

, where else did I? I did Africa. I went to Senegal, Ghana, Côte d'Ivoire, Togo. , but Pratt had a great, , Southern France program. It was probably one of the most substantial for me because I went twice. I went to everyone I could go to, Sal Westrich was was the teacher. He was a history teacher. And I had refused to take history, art history, because they didn't teach any African history. Or there was one paragraph in the entire book. We had one book, that thick, and probably one paragraph and one picture of African art. And what they were showing was I believe it was Picasso and his take on African art, which was not history to me. So, you know, the France program was wonderful. And I still am in touch with people from that program.

Renelda:

I went back with friends to that area about five years ago, five, eight years ago. And you know, someone called my name when I walked through this village, they only speak French. I speak very little French, only what I learned there, but they remembered me. And that was very touching. Very, very, . And it wasn't just that one family, it was a lot of the families, because this was the first time that, that one village had seen such a diverse group of folks, of people too. So that diversity really, , I that's what I loved about Pratt.

Obden:

And this is when you, when you went back to, , Senegal?

Renelda:

No, I went back to the south of France, the south of France, the south of France program, that Pratt was sponsoring. And I just wanted to shout out to Sal Westrich, cause he's still around. He's just not at Pratt, but he's still around. And we are still together. We heard from a Dutch artist that had spent a couple of months with us in the program. He was on Facebook trying to get in touch with us. And he was mentioning people by name too. So it was always pretty, , pretty, , important. And I hope that Pratt still has those kinds of programs. I really do. It was just marvelous.

Renelda:

I'm just looking at notes that I was, I, I enjoyed doing the notes, but, , . .

Amber:

So do you remember any involvement with the Black Panthers, either through the BSU or just in your experience?

Renelda:

No. It was just, it would just be that I would know people by the way they dressed, you know, remember art is, is for me, art was solitary. The inspiration is you need people, you need energy, but once you start creating the work, it's really solitary work, you really have to delve internally. I had mine, , during my teenage years actually marching, actually being arrested for civil rights kinds of things, going to the

University of Louisville. So I came with that. That was part of what I came with. , and it would be there and it's still there with me as my, my family they'll tell you. So I still have those, those kinds of instincts, but I don't remember a lot of them. My thing was my family and the projects.

Amber:

When you were in the BSU, was there ever any involvement from students of other universities, maybe Columbia, NYU, other Brooklyn schools?

Renelda:

Again, I'm going to say that it's not that I wasn't involved. They knew who I was. I knew who they were and if they ever asked me to do anything, I would certainly have done it. Cause we did art shows at the University of Louisville before I left, we did, , a lot of different cultural kinds of things with, you know, talking drs and all kinds of stuff at University of Louisville. But you got, you know, that stuff came, you had it in Brooklyn, they had it. We were just, we didn't know who had what and most of us had not been to Brooklyn or to New York city. We were, you know, we were from our surroundings. And SDS, I only heard about SDS on TV.

Amber:

. Well, so I actually made a timeline recently of BSU-related events and almost everything kind of took place around 1968, 1972. , so do you remember anything BSU-related in your later years at Pratt?

Renelda:

I remember...the individual... I can't remember her name. The Horace Williams name is familiar to me. I don't, I don't remember exactly, , very much about him anyway, but this person, I just see her face and she has a nice round face and a big moon smile and she had a gallery, , in lower Manhattan. And so I remember those kinds of, , interactions. , you know, she had a lot as a Black artists, a lot of artists who showed at her gallery. And I think she actually was working at Pratt first and then did the gallery, , some of those individuals too, I remember.

Renelda:

And I don't know if these folks were actually Black Student Union or not, because I didn't consider myself a member of the Black Student Union. I'm a member cause I'm Black. , but I wasn't active in it. And, , I would obviously support anything and everything that they would do. But my focus at this point was on my work, on my artwork, on school and my family. , but that was, , let's see, what was I going to say? Oh, we had a, they had a curating class that some of my friends, a couple of friends, took and they worked on the Brooklyn Muse's children's museum and that was the first group of curators who were Black, , you know, going and doing and working on a real museum.

Renelda:

And that same group, I don't know how many, but I know two of the people, because I, you know, I went, , worked in Washington, DC at the African Art muse, which is on Pennsylvania Avenue. And then they went on, Claudine Brown, went on to work at the Smithsonian. The, the Black Smithsonian, the one that looks the ship, the slave ship. We kept in touch forever. And then probably the last year I hadn't talked to her. I knew that she was working on this big project. And I went to, , when I was, I was invited to the opening, and there were a lot of different openings by the way, but I was invited to a couple of openings. And the first one I went to, , the guy, Lonnie Bunch, was talking about, you know, he made his speech

and then he started talking about Claudine Brown and I knew she had passed because he's talking to a national audience and he's mentioning this Pratt student.

Renelda:

We were, we were very tight. Our oldest kids were the same age, went to the same schools. , , so that was not a way to find, to lose a friend, but it was, you know, it was, , that's how I found out she had passed. , so we're all over the place. , I just don't know where we are now. You know, I guess most of us, most people have the same issue after 50 years. .

Amber:

. I know you said that you weren't super involved with BSU events, but do you happen to remember any events? , for example, there was a BSU proposal for a smer community program in the seventies.

Renelda:

I, you know, I do kind of remember that. , and I think they did have a program and if it wasn't sanctioned by the school, I think that they had the program anyway, because I know the Panther program in the Bronx was about the same time, because, so I work at Lincoln hospital in the Bronx.

Renelda:

And so that was the hospital, a brand new facility, a brand new building that the city fathers or mothers or whoever, sat on and wouldn't open it until the Panthers and the Young Lords got together and, , started to, you know, they started advocating, now that was in '71, I think. So that's, I remember more of the, the Young Lords and that program. And, and when I went to work for, I worked in hospitals for a long time, but when I went to work for Lincoln, , I knew that history, the history of Young Lords, and that was because of the people there must have been a relationship between the Brooklyn and the Bronx. It's the same people, Puerto Rican, Black and Puerto Rican. So.

Amber:

, and do you happen to know the name of that program? The black Panther program.

Renelda:

Did it have an acronym?

Amber:

I'm not sure.

Renelda:

. I'm not sure either. I do know. I kinda think that there was a program that would have been a smaller program, and it was a good concept because the same thing was done in the Bronx about the same time.

Amber:

. And also, what kind of work were you doing in the hospitals?

Renelda:

Well, so I started out with freelance, well, my ex and I freelanced for a long time, maybe about 10 years. , he actually went to work for the New York Times. That was the dream job. That was the dream job. He was very happy. Everybody was happy for him. , and he retired after 40 years at the, you know, not too long ago, but, , now why did I say that, , you asked, what did you just ask me?

Amber:

Just , what type of work were you doing?

Renelda:

Oh the hospital! Why did, how did I get to the hospitals? Thank you. So we freelanced and because I also wrote, , I could freelance at specific jobs. I started at the NAACP by the way, in public affairs. And what I did was, , the Crisis magazine and then I did public affairs. Then I went from there. , the, one of the hospitals in the eighties, , was a Black hospital. What they wanted was they needed somebody to do management control. I didn't realize it at the time, but I found out that it was crisis management. They needed someone to come in and do positive stories, link media to positive stories. And that was North General Hospital. It was a hospital that was founded. It was actually the hospital for joint diseases. And in the middle of the night one night, all of the, the new equipment, the doctors, a lot of the nurses moved into a new building and left an old building with staff.

Renelda:

And so, , this was in, this was also in the late seventies. So when they start, I think it was the late seventies. So a group got together and said, well, we can run a hospital for Black folks. You know, just because it changes, the clientele had changed, , the joint diseases, and they decided to go downtown. So we, , a group decided to, you know, get all the skills together and they needed a public relations person. And I said, I could do that, which was really doing press releases. It was also doing marketing. It was doing all the things that a hospital really needed to do. And I had a lot of energy and confidence. And I just went from North General into Harlem Hospital. Then I went to Cberland.

Renelda:

I went to, , I was at Metropolitan for a little bit. I went to the mayor's office in the middle of that. , and then, , back to Harlem Hospital and then in 2004, to Lincoln. So the thing is, that's interesting is that a hospital needs everything that a little city needs, every skill. And, , I use my art all the time, you know? I'm also the longest public affairs person in the New York City health and hospitals, I'm sure I know that for a fact. So it's really, , it's been a pleasure to work in hospitals. , that's how I got there.

Amber:

Right. I know we touched on this a little bit already, but can you just tell me anything you remember about the Puerto Rican Student Union? There's not a lot of documentation on it in our archives.

Renelda:

I guess my favorite, , Puerto Rican Student Union story was, there were a group of vets who were members of that. And one of them told me about the Southern France program. And so that's dear to my heart. He just recently died this year. But we were very close throughout the Southern France program and throughout the rest of... we've just been close. Just that I know that there were several veterans and, , I think anytime [ ] was playing, we go and listen, we'd go together as a group.

Amber:

All right. do you remember anything about PICCED? That's P I C C E D, the Pratt Center of Community and Environmental Development?

Renelda:

, I remember seeing the name. I do not because I was, , my major was design and illustration. , but that doesn't preclude that I wouldn't be interested in environment. , and it's, it's interesting because I, I didn't know exactly what that meant, but my stepson, he's really kind of quiet. And after he graduated from Marist, he graduated pre-med, he decided he was going to go into architecture to become an architect at Pratt. He just wanted to go to Pratt. I don't know where he got that from, but, you know, you just don't know. The house that I bought up here in Poughkeepsie, it was such a pretty little house. It was, it's a serious kid house, but it was so cute and manicured, and it was this, it was a Pratt student who had bought the house 40 years earlier and fixed it up. And I'm forever saying, you know, I don't really ask, but it just kind of creeps up that art, the art part of you, , you gravitate towards, I guess, things, other people who have similar tastes, I guess.

Obden:

I just briefly wanted to ask in regards to your stepson, when did he decide to start attending Pratt?

Renelda:

Well, we don't know, after he graduated, he made it all through med school and then suddenly he said, , now I'm going to become an architect, but the thing is from medical school, and then he became an architect and he now works at, he's been working at the wildlife conservatory as an architect. That's the Bronx Zoo. Who knew you know, it's just , how did I get from Pratt to a hospital?

Amber:

Do you still have any contact with anybody from Pratt or anyone from the BSU or anything?

Renelda:

I have contacts with, matter of fact, probably be going down to Cape May in a couple of, probably a couple of weeks to a family that we were in France together. . I still know, I think I would know what other people are doing. Pat Cummings, I did run into, gosh, I can't remember the names of a couple, two guys, the first couple of guys or two guys that I had ever met.

Renelda:

They were, so they were great, great illustrators. And they were actually making a living doing illustration together while we were all students. So they were my, you know, my inspiration. I know we can do it. I know it. I know we can do it. I know I can do it. I know I can, but I, I, , I saw something... How did this happen? I, I don't know, I was just afraid for them. And one of my friends had been to Brazil and he had met one of the two of them. So I knew one of the two had passed. , but I was able to see him because he lives near me up here, he has studio. But it had come from another friend, not connected to Pratt, who was in Brazil who met him and said, oh , this guy went to Pratt and he knows you.

Renelda:

So that's, that's how I, . Good people. There's also, , , one of the teachers, I shouldn't even mention the name, but I, I don't, I don't know the name to mention, but I'd love to know which of the teachers it was because I remember, , one of our teachers saying that they owned a, , a house on the river and it's outside, it's in Rifton. And I have, I know the person who owns that house now, but I just remember it was an old mill. And it's, that's exactly what this is. And it was a Pratt teacher that bought the property. , and I remember when I was told that, , I said, oh, it clicked immediately. So it was all of these, these little, if you live long enough, these, these things happen. You know, they sort of dovetail back in, but I love those kinds of stories. And, but that's how I get disoriented too. Cause I'll zero in on that thing and forget where I'm supposed to be, so.

Obden:

And then, , a question I wanted to follow up on was, you mentioned that you lived off campus when, or I guess correct me if I'm wrong, but when you moved to Pratt, you lived off campus initially?

Renelda:

Yes. 194 Washington Park, right across from Fort Greene park. And you look out, there's an old brownstone, they're gorgeous, they're large. And at that time they were inexpensive at that time. They were not expensive at all.

Obden:

I mean, do you mind mentioning how much rent was?

Renelda:

, , it was, , we had two floors and you had to walk up to the stoop and then go up to one floor and it was \$250 a month. That's what I said (laughs). That's exactly what I said. That's how much it cost. But let me also say that two doors down there lived the president of Ford Foundation, Franklin, I think his name was Franklin Thomas. So he lived in that same block at the same time. And they were, you know, . It was just, it was, , it was eclectic, there were all kinds of folks on that block. There was a CIA person right next to us. He was married to a Japanese woman and he was really high in CIA. And then there was a, there was a family, a couple with a great dane that lived on the other side of us. And then there was a house that had some, I think there was section eight, but they were a great family. There were, really. A lot of kids and they would come and play. Cause I was accustomed to having kids in the house and they would love to come and play with us. .

Obden:

Oh, sorry. Go ahead.

Amber:

Oh, just really quickly; since you mentioned the Ford foundation, do you remember anything else about that by any chance?

Renelda:

Sure. what?

Amber:

I don't know a lot about it. I've just, I've seen the name in some of my research.

Renelda:

The Ford Foundation?

Amber:

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Renelda:

. So, just so happened that my, you know, my ex was always trying to get grant money. So he was always, it's very convenient because the president lives right down the street and he knew us, and he knew that I was a Pratt student, I think, so that was, I don't know. I, I don't think he ever got a grant from the Ford Foundation, but what did happen was, the cousin that I stayed with, who lived on third avenue and hundred 43rd street in the Bronx, when he got married, he married the secretary to Franklin. It's a small world. We didn't know it. I didn't know it at the time, but I think they must've gotten married in the late seventies. And so Nancy had been with him, with the Ford Foundation for all that time. So, So that's my Ford Foundation story besides the fact that my ex was, was always trying to get grant money from everybody.

Renelda:

And I, if it's, I believe the grant, the Ford Foundation was giving, well, Franklin, he was, he was Black. So I'm sure that he was funding Black projects. My ex, Chester Higgins, he actually was doing books. And the first book he did was, Black Woman. So he was in Tuskegee doing that book. He did that, the last, that his last semester of Tuskegee, he was doing that book.

Obden:

. And then, I guess one thing I did want to ask about was, you mentioned that you did illustrations for, Crisis magazine.

Renelda:

, I was the art director there

Obden:

And, I know that Joan, did you know Joan Maynard?

Renelda:

Hmm. I know the name.

Obden:

Oh, Just because she was, one of the first directors of the Weeksville Heritage Center and, she was also an illustrator there. So I was wondering if there was a connection.

Renelda:

No. , no, maybe, but I just, again, I wasn't student focused. I was, , I was, I was really into the city, the New York. I was a kid in a candy store. . .

Obden:

. I mean, and, and, you know, since you're looking at your notes, was there anything that you wanted to discuss that we haven't touched upon yet?

Renelda:

I'm not sure because most of the stuff, you know, about Brooklyn, my heart starts tingling, you know, because it was such a great time in my life. , everything was new to me. , and everything just sort of fell into place and I was never happier. And there was a lot to do, you know, it's the world is your oyster kind of thing. Maybe it was my age or maybe cause when I was at Pratt, I was a little bit older than a lot of the, than the, you know, the freshmen class and the thing is, because there were no classes that really I could... , there had to be, cause I had photography classes. I'm sure I was able to transfer some, , some classes, some credits, but I was literally starting over.

Renelda:

So I was a little bit, maybe a year older than everybody else. . That's what it seems to me. And then when I was at Pratt the last few years, my preceptor was Romare Bearden. So he was a great family friend. One of the things we did when we first got to, first of all, if you have two people coming from far away and leaving home and everything that's safe behind and working towards one thing, we did things, , that were kind of unconventional, but they were so successful. And that was , when we first got there, we said, who would we to meet? And so in terms of the art world, so Bearden, Florian, Jenkins, there was a Tom, Tom White, I think that's his name, Tom White. There were illustrators that I just really wanted to meet. You know what you did? We picked up the phone and they answered and they had invited us to their house. That's how it was cool. Yep.

Amber:

, and I'm just, I'm remembering when we talked on the phone the first time, you mentioned how, when you got to Pratt you, or maybe not you, but you knew people who had to take remedial classes, is that right?

Renelda:

Oh, they ased that everybody that came had to take remedial classes. Yes.

Renelda:

I believe there was some program that sort of gave money and probably required for you to do that. , , there was that. I thought that was kind of why, I mean, that, wasn't part of my, that wasn't part of anything that I knew about or would have even thought about because I mean, I graduated at top of the class. I had a full scholarship. And they could see that. , but I dunno, it was, it was, I wasn't focused on it. And probably if it was , was that, , I think I had a Pell grant as well. And it may have been the Pell grant that required that. I'm not sure. To asse that every Black person, every minority person needed remedial classes was, , I had, no, I couldn't fathom it.

Amber:



Because was it primarily Black and other minority students who had to take the classes?

Renelda:

I have no clue. I believe it was because it was for minority students. . And I don't know that it said that it was for minority students anywhere. I don't know that I read that, but all of us who had it were all minorities and I can almost assure that all of those Black Student Unions, a lot of them had the Pell grants, the vets did. I know, I know they had, , I was thinking of... Well guess I know, I know it's after one hour and I already have my glass of water, my sip of water, but I just don't know if there's... if there's anything else, I guess I could write to you or, you know, or whatever. , but I just think that, , a school, a place , that school, Pratt, it was just special and I think it makes a difference.

Renelda:

It makes, it made all the difference in the world to some of us, you know, I think people, if, if you get there and you're entrenched in it, you'll never forget it because there's something about art that just takes you on another whole journey and, , a lot of different types of art. , you know, some I think are wonderful and some I think are not wonderful at all. You know, there's a lot of, , objectivity, or subjectivity, that goes on when it comes to the art field. But at that time, the art field itself was, , I mean, I could draw. Nowadays kids don't draw. They don't have to.

Renelda:

. I mean, you know, we got trained for those kinds of things. And I could find somebody that I felt that was me, and I hope that there's still people, you know, at Pratt today, there's still those folks that want to be in a cocoon somewhere. They'll have that, that safety net. I always had a safety net when I was Kentucky. Once you get to Brooklyn and you're out, you're out on your own, even, even, you know, with those guys, they grow up in Brooklyn, or who grew up in the city of New York, cause my kids grew up in the city of New York. , I think that I had a superior education. , I think I, you know, I know that there are some schools in New York that are specialty schools and that are fabulous, but overall I don't think our school system is great. It's good. , and it certainly doesn't breed confidence our Black schools did in the south.

Renelda:

, and there are attempts to, you know, to have all kids.. anyway, I'm a proponent of schooling, , on a small scale, on a local scale because every kid, especially after this pandemic, we're going to have to catch up. We have to play catch up. And I think catching up is teaching kids, music, teaching them art, teaching them creativity, teaching them how to go internally, you know, and it's not about being outside, I mean, it is about the outside world, but knowing yourself, that's important as well.

Obden:

, I do have a question in regards to what I'm hearing, it sounds really interesting, especially I wanted to ask about the education, your children received while living in Brooklyn. And, , we've reached an hour about 10 minutes ago. , so I guess could we take a two minute break so I can, I've been drinking a lot of water, , and , we can just follow up on that. So I'll be right back.

Renelda:

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New Speaker:

[ ] there was an Alexander's, there was all of these other, all of these old, I don't know if Sears did it, but they may have, but I just know JC Penney, because my mother was so outraged. She, she wasn't outraged. She knew it was probably going to happen, but she was pushing the envelope. , and my mother often pushed the envelope. She had us in, , plays. , we have children's actors theater and we appeared in a couple of those plays. I, you know, and there hadn't been Black kids in the actors theater before. So, I mean, this was another one of her pushing the envelopes, but they did it, they should own it, I mean, it's, it's over. They understood. They understand now that there's money to be made. Everybody can, you know, can try on their clothes.

Renelda:

But the downside of that though, was that the Black business district that was dismantled, there had been tailors and we would go to those tailors or we would sew our own clothes. And so she also made sure that I knew how to sew I hate sewing. I don't it, I hate sewing, but still, I, I know how to do it if I had to. So, , you know, the sad part was that all those tailors were kind of out of business until, well especially when JC Penney started allowing the, , you know, folks to, to, , try on clothes. And they did afterwards. So, , I don't, I don't care if you put JC Penney in it. .

Obden:

I guess one thing I did want clarification on was, , you mentioned that you were , your mom led and you were a member of the Brownies?

Renelda:

, my mother had the Brownies and she did from brownies all the way through the, , senior Scouts. So I was in Girl Scouts for 10 years and my mother was the, was the scout leader. I mean, that, that was how tight the community was. There was always something for kids to do. Always. She was also the den mother, , for my brothers, I have four brothers and, you know, and she was the den mother and she was also very involved in that as well. But, you know, that's what she did. She did have one job one time and it was in Cassius Clay's uncles, , barbershop, because she cut every, she cut my brother's hair and my dad's hair. So she was there for a hot minute. I remember that, that was her soiree out of the home, her work outside of the home, but she came right back to the home

Obden:

. And I guess, , one thing I did want to follow up on was , , you know, you mentioned that you had a son and a daughter and, , I guess , you know, around the time that you arrive to Brooklyn there was the Ocean Hill-Brownsville strike. , and I guess the question I ask, is , , because you mentioned you're a proponent of teaching within the community, could you describe what it was having your kids attend school while living in Brooklyn?

Renelda:

So we moved out of Brooklyn in '77 and we moved to Roosevelt Island.

Obden:

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Renelda:

That's local schooling because the island, they went to school, they went to the , I guess Nataki was , first, first, second, first grade, first or second grade. So she went to the island schools up until sixth grade, both of them. And then they went out, so they got really good, , great quality, small schools, small classrooms, , in the Roosevelt Island schools. And then they went to the big hongous schools and that's where, that's where they started falling off.

Renelda:

Not with, they never fell off with art, with creativity, never, but I'm just saying, just in terms of literature or music, or, you know, art, theory, there was, you know, there was no real excitement for education we had in Kentucky. And remember we would, our classes would go to the symphony. , we went camping, we went walking in the parks, you know, we did things as classrooms. And I think in New York, the theory is every, you know, when you walk to school you're, you know, you're, you're living history of something, but it's deeper than that. I guess another thing I remember hearing about after they had left school was they have these, , walking tours. And I think it only happened in the eighties, maybe. Walking tours to see how many gargoyles were, , you know, were within a one mile area or, , Central Park had edible tours.

Renelda:

You know, they go, they take you and show you things that you can eat that's in central park. And then they say you can't eat them, but it was still that or go bird watching. So, I mean, those kinds of things were never a part of the education up here. And then there was, you know, the teachers, the teachers weren't invested they were in the Black schools. The, I mean, I say, again, walking down that street, you walked by the third grade teacher, lived there. I had my one teacher, I had for four years, for three years; fourth grade, fifth grade and sixth grade. Oh. So I sent a third picture. Did you get a copy of the pictures that I sent? I don't think so. Cause I didn't have your email, but I sent Amber pictures. So there's, , Amber there's, , the third picture is of a lot of, , buttons.

Renelda:

They're civil rights buttons that I got, I collect buttons, I got lots and lots of buttons. I couldn't find the Nothing New for Easter buttons. I know it's there. I just have to keep looking for it. But, , there's a little teeny weeny button in the one that's green, I think. And it says Virginia Avenue School, 100 book club. So in the fourth grade, we would get these buttons, 25 book club, 50 book club, 75 book club, 100 book club. So I got to 100 book club. There were no book clubs. , and what you had to do was, there was a , extra curricular for fourth, fifth and sixth grade. Maybe it was earlier, maybe it started at third grade. , but you'd have to either write or talk about every book that you read. And that was, you know, there were all of these kinds of activities. , we also had a, I remember we had a sale, an art sale. For a dollar you could get a print of, , I remember getting a Renoir print and a , what is the guy who did the Tahiti women? I still have them by the way. Come on...Gauguin!

Renelda:

, Gauguin. Yep. So, I mean, and this was, this was in the first, second and third grade. So I mean, these folks, , the teachers were well, they knew that it was a dying breed. I think this was a very important, , statement that they were making about how important it is, , to have these Black teachers to look over these Black kids. And I'm not trying to be separatist at all. This is, , really just looking over and, and , I

stand by that. , nobody's gonna love your kids your people do, we do. . , well we were talking about something else and I did want to say something about whatever we were talking about before.

Obden:

I mean, , before we briefly talked about, , your move to Roosevelt Island. And then, , before that there was a discussion about, , the jobs that your mother had.

Renelda:

. Well, it's not that important. I guess if I can't bring it up. But Roosevelt Island was a really good, , you know, a local embracing society. We formed, we formed something called the melanin society when we were on Roosevelt Island. That's, you know, it's the Black Student Union. I think these were just, , parents, most of them, single parents with Black kids, some of them white with Black kids, you know, it was, it was a, a really great mosh, mixed mixture of kids. And they all grew up together. We all grew up together. We were still growing.

Obden:

And, , what led you to move to choose Roosevelt Island?

Renelda:

, well, first we were renting, renting to buy, you know, it's we were students, I was a student and he was freelancing. So we were just renting to, to purchase. And when the time came, I think it was '76. I had just, I was getting ready to graduate. , we didn't even think about asking our parents for money. I mean, it was after now, I go, d, that's mine. So that, that brownstone sold for \$40,000 in 1976, and I'm, I'm, I'm kicking myself today. Everybody's got one of those stories. And then the next door neighbor sold his place for a million right afterwards, you know, it was, it was, but our family has always been homeowners. We've always been landowners. So my, we have, my dad's people in the 1850 census. They were farmers on the farm.

Renelda:

They owned their own farm. , my great grandmother, grandparents on my, on my mother's side, the great grandparents and the, and I don't know when he was born, but we have, , he was a trapper and he had lots of farmland and he divided his farmland among his sons and daughters. , and so they all had land. And then my grandparents on my mother's side, they owned, , they started out in a log cabin, but my grandmother, , she negotiated the purchase of, I guess it was the white doctor's house, which is on a hill in Cleveland, Tennessee, but on her side of the family, they're from Pulaski, Tennessee and my grandmother on my mother's side, her grandfather, my great-grandfather, was a stone mason who did a lot of the building of Pulaski, Tennessee.

Renelda:

And so this is interesting because he was the landowner. He owned property outside in Abernathy Hill, in Pulaski, Tennessee, but he also built, he had a business, Joan Smith and sons, big stone, you still see that around Pulaski. So he had, he built a house in, , from 1870 to 1890. So my grandmother was born in this house, which sits at the top of a hill, overlooking the town of Pulaski, Tennessee. Now, mind you, Pulaski, Tennessee's the home of the KKK. At the bottom of Madison street, which is where this house lives, is a, the business district starts. And there's a single story brick building with a plaque on it that has now been

turned backwards. So you can't read it, but when it was forward, it read "in this building started the Klan" and whatever the name of that clan was there.

Renelda:

So it's well-known, but if you look at the house that was built, it's magnificent. It has a veranda, it has four bedrooms. It has, and it's still there still. It's still standing there. So that's land ownership. , on my father's side, the same thing, you know, we come from people who own their homes. So my mother was so, , emotionally attached to this Little Africa that they were tearing down because of urban renewal. To me, that's the story. So we come from, you know, who doesn't have a home? Home is something that everybody should have. Air, something, everyone should have. Water, everyone should have it. Safety, everyone should have it. ,

Obden:

. a sense of security or , you know, ontological security. .

Renelda:

So if you're worrying about where you're going to sleep at night, you're not going to be worrying about, or thinking about, how beautiful that music is. That's being sold over here, or how lovely this floral arrangement is. And that's why I thought it was really, I still think about this, the fact that there were flower gardens in everybody's little, little house or a flower garden in the front.

Obden:

And then I guess, , the last question I ask to, , you know, round up this discussion about your experience with Pratt and in general is , , I guess, how do you hope for Pratt to continue, , the work that it does as an institution considering that, , you, you really, , enjoyed the level of diversity that existed and the experiences that you had at the Institute when you were there.

Renelda:

Well, they did something, right. Because it still, it seems , I mean, and I'm not sure what they're doing. , I'm just recently getting emails about Pratt. The other thing is, I was probably not paying attention part of this time. , but when I walked into Pratt, well, first of all, it was placed in my head that that's where I needed to be. And it was placed in my head by people who cared about me and who made sure that I'd be ready when I got there. So that's, that's the kind of mentorship and, , education I think that we need to prepare all of our children for, not just me and Pratt, but everybody. And we need to start thinking a new way because of COVID. And because everybody, all of these kids, especially kids, my grandkids age, he just turned nine yesterday.

Renelda:

And so he's been here every other week, for one week, and he gets to run around outside. Cause he doesn't, he lives in Brooklyn, , with his mom and he lives here with his dad. , and that's been wonderful except they don't have the kind of educational focus that needs to be, we gotta, we gotta make up that. And so it may very well be that Pratt is going to be having those, you know, can be thinking about that now because the creativity, the energy level, the focus, you know, just things that I learned in drawing or in trying to get everything right. And figure drawing. , I think you need, every kid needs it, doesn't have to be drawing necessarily. It could be music, it could be anything. , but I think a teacher could probably harness that better than somebody who's trained to do that, you know, can harness that more than

anybody. I just think that schools need to be more that, Pratt, because it's inspirational, it's focused. And I think that it has, it now has more of a community focus, maybe. I, I don't know if it has more community focus, but at that time it seemed to have a community focus. It's just that I wasn't in that community-focused group. I was now in my art focus.

Obden:

. , well I'm gonna stop the recording. Wait, I'm gonna pause it.