

Peace Drum Project
The Elder's Stories
2014

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Introduction

As we conclude our fourteenth year of *The Peace Drum Project* with these stories, it is always useful to remember why Cooperative Artists Institute (CAI) started this project back in 2000. It was created, in part, to address the fears that local elders had when encountering groups of young people on the streets or on the subway. Even though many elders have grandchildren and connect well with them, an encounter between elders and unfamiliar youth can sometimes be quite stressful for them. With their boisterous energy, baggy pants, hoodies, and penchant for moving in groups, teens can often feel quite intimidating to our older community members. CAI already worked with both teens and elders, and we believed that the power of the Arts combined with personal stories could bridge this divide between these two generations, so *The Peace Drum Project* was born.

Over the years, we have been truly gratified by how well this intergenerational conversation has worked. Hundreds of youth and elders have experienced a positive change in their lives. In evaluations each year, the teens themselves rank their time with the elders as one of their favorite activities of the project. Many teens have stayed in touch with the elders they interviewed, just as the elders have followed up on their teen partner's progress in school and in life. So, from our original goal, we know that we have created a powerful and lasting model for engaging young people with elders in a truly meaningful way. *The Peace Drum Project* helps to deepen the connections between youth and elders, and builds understanding and greater support for each group within the larger community.

As many of today's young people look forward to the future, they feel hope — but also anxiety about their ability to succeed, especially in these uncertain economic times. The whole landscape of jobs and meaningful work is in flux, so the career opportunities for young people today may be very different from what the elders

experienced in their early years. But, despite these changes, the lessons learned from the elder's experiences contain substantial wisdom, inspiration, and encouragement for having a happy, fulfilling life *even in difficult or uncertain times*. Some of the elders came from early lives of poverty and racial or other forms of discrimination, and yet they are full of humor, optimism, generosity, and spiritual grace. Many of them had hoped to go to college themselves, but were unable to because of economic constraints. Family came first, but neither responsibility nor hardship kept them from seeking their dreams.

The teens have learned, that nowadays these elders find happiness and security through ties to their families, friends, and — in some cases — their jobs and other activities in the community. This is a powerful message to young people who face unprecedented costs for getting an education today as well as the shifting sands of the meaningful work in the global marketplace. Life is never easy, but there are abundant rewards for hard work, civic engagement, caring relationships, flexibility, continuing education, and moving steadily forward towards your goals.

The resilience of the elders offers a road map for our teens who have this unique opportunity to connect with them, learn from their experiences, and honor their wisdom. In the words of Reginald L. Jackson, artist emeritus at AAMARP, *“My words of wisdom that I want to share with you are this: think about creating work that you truly love rather than looking for somebody else to provide it for you. Make a job rather than look for a job. That way you can get satisfaction, joy, and the resources you will need to survive.”* Charlene Badgett advises the teens to *“try to be as truthful as you can in everything you say and do.”* These words of wisdom and the elder's stories help the teens gain valuable insights that will serve them well all throughout their lives. Josephine Gaines has shown the teens by her example, what it means to live a truly generous life. And, every one of this year's stories will inspire all of us

with their spirit of adventure, their hard work and sacrifice, and their persistence in the face of great obstacles.

Sadly, we know that we have really only scratched the surface of each of these elder's stories in our interviews. But we are happy to have had the chance to meet them and learn about their lives. We hope that you, too, will be inspired by their stories. We are most appreciative to each of the elders who shared their experiences and knowledge with our teens this year. These stories provide a bridge between the generations, and create common ground that helps to build a stronger community for us all. Today's young people need more opportunities to work with elders because their stories teach us so much. Many hopes, dreams, and challenges remain constant across the generations, and knowing that others have faced similar obstacles and have overcome them gives power to youthful dreams and aspirations.

The teens who took part in producing these stories include: Rafael Baez, Laura Duran, Alizé Gilmore, Adrian Lombert, Tonicia Malley, Manuel Martinez, Michael Myers, Jenny Nguyen, Kimberly Romero, Nyah Romulus, and Marlisha Syverian. We thank them all for their respectful manner, lively energy, and curious questioning.

Special thanks to: Julia Martin and Cynthia Jimenez at Julia Martin House, and Aiesha Washington at ABCD for their help in recruiting wonderful elders. Thanks also to the Dudley Branch Library (BPL) for welcoming our exhibit of drums and circulating the stories in the community this year. Our special appreciation goes to Curtis Jones, CAI Director, and to Morgan Smith-Jones and Sierra Oliver for their volunteer support to make this year's project a success. And finally, a huge thank you to Gloretta Baynes of AAMARP Studios for her tremendous advocacy, time, and energy spent in support of the project this year.

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

Susan E. Porter & Prema Bangera

Co-Directors of The Peace Drum Project

Cooperative Artists Institute

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Adrien Francois Dorsinville

Interviewed by Adrian Lombert and Manuel Martinez

My name is Adrien Francis Dorsinville. My nickname is Dadi. My mother called me that because she came from Libya, an Arab country. Dadi is an Arabic name. I was born in Libya on September 16, 1961. I don't remember much about Libya, other than playing with international toys. When I was five years old, my mother and I moved to Haiti to live with my father. He was doing architecture in Haiti. I liked living in Haiti. It was nice and warm with palm trees. I grew up living in a neighborhood near wooden farm houses. I remember a lot about the old architecture of the homes and the way that the buildings were constructed. The houses were all painted white. I liked the old style of the homes.

Growing up in Haiti, I lived with my mother, Fernand, and my father, Adrien. I have one younger sister named May. I also lived with my grandfather, Lell. It was nice living with him because he would tell us stories about his life or tell us things that would make us laugh. It was a good size for a family.

The wisdom that I learned from my parents was how to work, to persevere, and to pursue an education. When I was younger, I went to school at home. My mother ran an elementary school called Le Petit Poucet, which means "small child." I went there until 2nd grade. There were about twelve kids in that school. I was friends with a boy named Luisnel, who was very funny. It was great to go to school at home because it was right there! It was good to learn from a parent. My mother taught me how to stay motivated and be creative.

In later years, I walked and took the bus to school. When I would come home from elementary school, I would wash up, eat food, and do my homework. I didn't have

any chores so I could just play. My best friend and my girlfriend at that time was Madeline. For fun I used to paint, run, and play soccer. I would use finger-paint or watercolor paints.

The scariest thing that ever happened to me when I was young was that I fell down from a tree. I was about eight years old and I was with my friends. When I fell, they were laughing at me. I wasn't happy about that, but I didn't get too hurt. I only hurt my stomach. Now it seems funny.

In middle school, I used to paint at home and do collage with my friends. My friend Patrice and I used to set up painting projects called Paint By Numbers. We loved those. They came in a set with bottles of paint and canvases with numbers on them. We matched the paint numbers to the numbers on the canvas to finish each painting.

By the time I became a teenager, I had some chores at home. I had to clean the windows and sweep. That is about it. I didn't have to work outside of the house. My parents had rules about when I had to be home. If I did get in trouble — like if I broke something or made too much noise — I would be scolded.

I went to Anglade High School. I liked many of my classes. I enjoyed drafting, art, and Spanish classes. I played soccer and volleyball. I also liked my teachers. If I had any conflicts, it was because I disagreed on viewpoints. My favorite teacher was my English teacher. Her name was Ms. Dagobert. She was very exciting and helpful. She made the class interesting.

When I was a teenager, I loved to go to the beach, go to the club, and go to my friend's house. I think these are the things most people like. The funniest times in my life were times that I spent at the youth theater. We created an improv theater at my

friend Luisnel's house. We would make up scenarios together. I would joke and make funny faces. It was a great time.

One adventure that I had in my teenage years was mountain climbing with my friends and family. We brought food like sandwiches and colas. We would do some sightseeing. We could see the houses from the mountain where we were.

My most vivid memories of the 1970s and 1980s time period are American music. Michael Jackson, and other kinds of pop music, disco, and jazz. Music was my hero when I was a teenager. Toussaint Louverture was one of my favorites. Bob Marley too. I admired Toussaint Louverture because their music saved people. It saved Black people.

I have a guitar at my house that I found in Dorchester recently. It was in the trash but there were still strings attached to it. Maybe I will learn to play it someday.

In my teenage years I would do art with other people, like my friends. I did a lot of painting. I learned a lot about creativity and creative skills. My dream when I was younger was to become an architect. I remember I helped a professional designer with creating a book of architecture. That was fantastic! Learning about the gingerbread architecture of Haiti really influenced me to learn architecture.

Right after high school I traveled to the United States. I wanted to come to a big country with big opportunities. So I came to Boston because I had family here. I lived with my aunt in Roslindale, MA. Since I didn't know any English, I went for another year of high school to learn the language. I also worked at a bank, where I cleaned the floors and desks and vacuumed the carpets. Working was helping me to communicate. It wasn't difficult learning a second language. I was only eighteen.

I also worked in Building 19 in Norwood, MA. It was a bargain store, where they sold clothes, paint, and other things. It was hard, but a good job. Sometimes we had to stock products by moving them from a truck to the floor. That was a tough day! Then at other times I would wear a tie and be a salesman on the floor. I'd ask, "Are you interested in buying something? Can I help you?" I was learning to be professional, learning to sell products, learning a new language. It was great.

The biggest adventure that I have had so far in my life is living in different cities and attending college. It was a thrill. I moved to Minnesota to study at the University of Minnesota. At first, I studied architecture. Then I switched to art and sculpture. During college, I had a group of five friends that I was close with. I used to work with my friend Chad on many projects. We did woodwork in the art studio. It was really fun and interesting.

After school, I worked in libraries and had different jobs. I stayed in Minnesota for a while because I like the area. I enjoyed going by the lake. I had many friends and girlfriends. I was with my girlfriend Carla for three and a half years. I used to live with her. She was a big part of my life. She was a very kind and loving person. We traveled together to a lot of different places like Niagara Falls, Long Lake, and others. I loved going to museums and art galleries, and I loved going to the Guthrie Theater. We saw the show "Frank Gehry — The Architect." It was a wonderful time. Then, in 1987, I left Minnesota. The weather was so harsh there in the wintertime. I came back to Boston because it is a beautiful city.

The hardest thing that I had to overcome in my life was having no money. I overcame this through work. Some of my good jobs were selling paint in Building 19, selling clothes at Marshall's, and working at the ABCD preschool. I enjoyed communication, relating to people, and getting paid.

The happiest moments of my life were having my children and getting to see them. Art classes also make me happy now. My greatest accomplishment so far in life has been working on my architecture and construction projects. I've been planning out houses for twenty-three years. I draw out the blueprints. It feels great to plan a home on paper and see it built. If I imagine my inner home it is a space of art, creativity, and religion.

The most important thing that I learned from my family was to have good working habits. They taught me how to keep a job and be successful. My best advice to you is to travel, help others, collaborate with people, and be successful.

