

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Sheryl Riley Gripper

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Gripper, Sheryl
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Sheryl Riley Gripper,
Dates:	December 19, 2005
Bulk Dates:	2005
Physical Description:	6 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:46:11).
Abstract:	Broadcast executive Sheryl Riley Gripper (1951 -) founded the Black Women Film Preservation and is Vice President of Community Relations at WXIA-Channel 11 (CBS affiliate in Atlanta, Georgia). Gripper was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on December 19, 2005, in Atlanta, Georgia. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2005_266
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Sheryl Riley Gripper is the founder of the Black Women Film Preservation Project and is Vice President of Community Relations at WXIA-TV, Channel 11, an NBC affiliate in Atlanta, Georgia. Originally from Waco, Texas, Gripper was born on December 16, 1951, the first of two children born to Samuel L. and Dolores Posey Harris, Jr., Spelman and Morehouse College graduates. Gripper attended J.H. Hines Elementary School in Waco where her maternal grandmother was one of her teachers and later became her principal. Gripper graduated from A.J. Moore High School two years ahead of her class and entered her mother's alma mater, Spelman College, where she obtained her B.A. degree in english. She took enough courses for a minor in journalism.

A successful internship at a major Houston, Texas newspaper, while still a student at Spelman College, played a major part in Gripper's decision to choose journalism over a career in music. As a contralto singer, she aspired to grace the stage of the Metropolitan Opera. This internship set the stage for her to become the Manager of Promotions at WETV, Channel 30 and WABE-FM, a position that she held from 1975 to 1981. In 1977, she earned her M.A. degree in education from Georgia State University, and in 2000, she was awarded her M.A. degree in film. Gripper founded the Black Women Film Preservation Project in 1997. This organization hosts an annual awards/scholarship luncheon, which highlights the career of women who have made significant contributions to the industry and the annual "Black Women in Film Festival" in Atlanta.

Gripper is the recipient of four Emmy Awards, one for the *11 Alive Community Service Awards*, an awards show that has honored volunteers for thirty-one years. She also created *The Bronze Jubilee Awards*, a program that honored Black culture while at WETV and WABE. As Vice President of Community Relations at WXIA-TV, she serves as the executive producer for the *11 Alive Community Service Awards*. Gripper has been with Channel 11 since 1981.

Gripper is married to Jeffery Gripper, Atlanta's first world karate champion, and is the mother of three sons,

Edward Riley, Jr., Jeffery Gripper, Jr., and Ellis Gripper. She is also a member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. and is the corporate campaign cabinet of the United Negro College Fund.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Sheryl Riley Gripper was conducted by Evelyn Pounds on December 19, 2005, in Atlanta, Georgia, and was recorded on 6 Betacame SP videocassettes. Broadcast executive Sheryl Riley Gripper (1951 -) founded the Black Women Film Preservation and is Vice President of Community Relations at WXIA-Channel 11 (CBS affiliate in Atlanta, Georgia).

Restrictions

Restrictions on Access

Restrictions may be applied on a case-by-case basis at the discretion of The HistoryMakers®.

Restrictions on Use

All use of materials and use credits must be pre-approved by The HistoryMakers®. Appropriate credit must be given. Copyright is held by The HistoryMakers®.

Related Material

Information about the administrative functions involved in scheduling, researching, and producing the interview, as well as correspondence with the interview subject is stored electronically both on The HistoryMakers® server and in two databases maintained by The HistoryMakers®, though this information is not included in this finding aid.

Controlled Access Terms

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

Persons:

Gripper, Sheryl

Pounds, Evelyn (Interviewer)

Jackson, Adrian (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Gripper, Sheryl--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Broadcast Executive

HistoryMakers® Category:

MediaMakers

Administrative Information

Custodial History

Interview footage was recorded by The HistoryMakers®. All rights to the interview have been transferred to The HistoryMakers® by the interview subject through a signed interview release form. Signed interview release forms have been deposited with Jenner & Block, LLP, Chicago.

Preferred Citation

The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Sheryl Riley Gripper, December 19, 2005. The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection, 1900 S. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.

Processing Information

This interview collection was processed and encoded on 5/30/2023 by The HistoryMakers® staff. The finding aid was created adhering to the following standards: DACS, AACR2, and the Oral History Cataloging Manual (Matters 1995).

Other Finding Aid

A Microsoft Access contact database and a FileMaker Pro tracking database, both maintained by The HistoryMakers®, keep track of the administrative functions involved in scheduling, researching, and producing the interview.

Detailed Description of the Collection

Series I: Original Interview Footage

Video Oral History Interview with Sheryl Riley Gripper, Section A2005_266_001_001, TRT: 0:30:20 ?

Sheryl Riley Gripper was born on December 16, 1951 to Dolores Posey Harris and Samuel Harris, Jr. in Waco, Texas. Her maternal great-grandfather worked at a hotel in Dallas while his family lived in Waxahachie. Her maternal

grandmother graduated from Bishop College in Marshall, where she met Gripper's grandfather, a football player. She became the first black president of the Waco Classroom Teachers Association and one of the first black principals in Waco's elementary schools, while he taught math and coached football. Gripper's mother was born in Silsbee, Texas and grew up in Waco, where she graduated from A.J. Moore High School. Gripper's father was born in Birmingham, Alabama where his father was a coal miner and an electrician, and his mother, a Tuskegee graduate, was an Avon representative. While attending Morehouse College, he met Gripper's mother, who was at Spelman College. He served in the U.S. military and was an accountant. Gripper describes Morehouse College's Miss Maroon and White tradition.

Video Oral History Interview with Sheryl Riley Gripper, Section A2005_266_001_002, TRT: 0:30:30 ?

Sheryl Riley Gripper's earliest memory is of wearing an all-blue Easter outfit that her mother, a librarian and a seamstress, sewed for her. Gripper grew up in a majority-white neighborhood in South Waco, Texas. She recalls accompanying her maternal grandmother on outings to funerals and nursing homes, and visiting her father at his Gulf service station. Gripper attended J.H. Hines Elementary School, where her grandmother taught third grade. In addition to teaching, her grandmother was a founding member of the South Tenth Street Community Club, an African American women's group. Gripper remembers the group's elaborate weekly dinners. At New Hope Baptist Church in Waco, Gripper participated in the youth choir, and was playmates with the daughter of the choir director, Vivienne Malone-Mayes. Gripper also remembers visiting her paternal grandparents in Ensley, Birmingham, Alabama's black community, and her mother's Christmas traditions. As a child, Gripper aspired to write for television, especially soap operas.

Video Oral History Interview with Sheryl Riley Gripper, Section A2005_266_001_003, TRT: 0:30:40 ?

Sheryl Riley Gripper was a featured soloist in New Hope Baptist Church's youth choir, directed by Vivienne Malone-Mayes. Encouraged by her mother and maternal grandmother, she took piano and violin lessons throughout her childhood. In Waco, Texas, she attended J.H. Hines Elementary School and Wiley Junior High School, where she played clarinet and saxophone in the school band. After reading about, and being compared to, Marian Anderson, Gripper considered a career as a contralto, but she pursued writing instead. At A.J. Moore High School, Gripper wrote for the school newspaper. For a journalism competition sponsored by Baylor University, she wrote about a long-time Moore High football fan. While majoring in English at Spelman College, she was also accepted into Clark College's journalism program, where she was mentored by Alan Bussell. During college, she interned for The Houston Post and wrote for the Atlanta Daily World. She also pledged Spelman's first Delta Sigma Theta Sorority chapter.

Video Oral History Interview with Sheryl Riley Gripper, Section A2005_266_001_004, TRT: 0:29:28 ?

Sheryl Riley Gripper canvassed for Maynard Jackson's U.S. Senate campaign while attending Spelman College in Atlanta, Georgia. As an aspiring newspaper reporter, Gripper interned at The Houston Post. She recalls The Post's decision not to print the Pentagon Papers. After she graduated, Gripper struggled to find employment as a black female journalist in Atlanta. She then joined HistoryMaker Alexis Herman's Black Women Employment Program, through which she became a secretary at WETV, Atlanta's public broadcasting station,

before being promoted as a writer. With her colleagues at WETV, Gripper developed the Bronze Jubilee Awards to honor African Americans' contributions in the arts. In 1981, she became executive producer for WXIA-TV, Atlanta's NBC affiliate, before being named the station's first black and first female vice president of community relations. She also established the Black Women Film Preservation Project in 1997 to bring recognition to African American women in the film industry.

Video Oral History Interview with Sheryl Riley Gripper, Section A2005_266_001_005, TRT: 0:20:51 ?

Sheryl Riley Gripper met her second husband, Jeffery Gripper, Sr., while working on a film about an All-American football family for WXIA-TV in Atlanta in 1982. They have two sons, Jeffery Gripper, Jr. and Ellis Gripper, in addition to Gripper's oldest son, Edward Riley, Jr., from her first marriage. She describes her film about the Negro League, which features an appearance by Red Moore; her wedding, which was held at HistoryMakers Hank and Billye Aaron's home; and her husband's career as Atlanta's first world karate champion. Gripper is the founder of the Black Women Film Preservation Project, whose first honoree was TV executive HistoryMaker Jennifer Lawson in 2001. Gripper talks about her spirituality, reflects upon her life and legacy, and shares advice for aspiring journalists. She describes her hopes for the African American community and how she would like to be remembered.

Video Oral History Interview with Sheryl Riley Gripper, Section A2005_266_001_006, TRT: 0:24:22 ?

Sheryl Riley Gripper narrates her photographs.

Video Oral History Interview with Sheryl Riley Gripper, Section A2005_266_Gripper_Sheryl_06_MED_001, TRT: