

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Elisabeth Omilami

Overview of the Collection

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| Repository: | The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com |
| Creator: | Omilami, Elisabeth, 1951- |
| Title: | The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Elisabeth Omilami, |
| Dates: | April 12, 2006 and April 13, 2006 |
| Bulk Dates: | 2006 |
| Physical Description: | 6 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:56:22). |
| Abstract: | Civil rights activist and film actress Elisabeth Omilami (1951 -) is CEO of Hosea Feed the Hungry and Homeless, founded by her father, Rev. Hosea Williams. Her acting credits include roles in the films 'Madea's Family Reunion' and 'Ray', and the television series 'In the Heat of the Night' and 'I'll Fly Away'. Omilami was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on April 12, 2006 and April 13, 2006, in Atlanta, Georgia and Lithonia, Georgia. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview. |
| Identification: | A2006_073 |
| Language: | The interview and records are in English. |

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Humanitarian and actress Elisabeth Omilami was born on February 18, 1951 in Atlanta, Georgia. At an early age, Omilami's parents taught her that people should be accountable for each other, for their environment and should fight for justice for all people. As a young girl, she accompanied her father, the noted civil rights leader Dr. Hosea Williams, on marches and movements across the South. During the height of the Civil Rights Movement, after having the distinction of being one of the youngest people arrested in the fight for civil rights, Omilami was sent to boarding school. She then attended Hampton University, where she received her B.A. degree in theater.

In 1970, during the time her father began his own humanitarian organization Hosea Feed, the Hungry and Homeless, Omilami founded The People's Survival Theater, one of Atlanta's earliest performing arts companies. She also created a summer arts camp that provided arts training for the economically challenged youth of Atlanta.

Under the leadership of Mrs. Omilami and her husband Afemo, Hosea Feed The Hungry and Homeless has expanded to a year round human services organization with programs that touch over 180,000 people annually. HFTH's "Homeless Prevention" program is an award winning initiative credited with helping place thousands of families in permanent housing. The organization's disaster relief activities have been commended by Georgia Governor Nathan Deal and reach far beyond Georgia into Alabama and Tennessee. HFTH operates the largest food bank in the region that supports families directly with nutritious emergency food.

The Omilamis, assisted by thousands of volunteers, host an annual Holiday Dinner Series on Thanksgiving and Christmas, Martin Luther King Jr.'s Birthday and Easter Sunday.

Omilami is also the author of several plays, one of which, *There is a River in My Soul*, toured in February, 2002. As an actress, Omilami has combined her art with her life. She also toured in the play, *The Life of a King*, which her mother, State Representative Jaunita T. Williams co-authored. Omilami has acted in numerous films, including

Runaway Jury, *Ray*, *Madea's Family Reunion* and *The Alter*, a film which showcases the plight of the homeless while portraying them as individuals deserving of dignity and respect.

Omilami has been seen in "The Blind Side" alongside actress Sandra Bullock, in the Lifetime TV special "Marry Me" and at the Alliance Theatre in Janice Shaffer's stage play "Broke".

Elisabeth Omilami is the wife of actor, Afemo Omilami, and has two children, Anodele and Tranita, and her granddaughter Kamaya. They live in Atlanta, Georgia.

Elisabeth Omilami was interviewed by *The HistoryMaker* on April 12, 2006.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Elisabeth Omilami was conducted by Shawn Wilson on April 12, 2006 and April 13, 2006, in Atlanta, Georgia and Lithonia, Georgia, and was recorded on 6 Betacame SP videocassettes. Civil rights activist and film actress Elisabeth Omilami (1951 -) is CEO of Hosea Feed the Hungry and Homeless, founded by her father, Rev. Hosea Williams. Her acting credits include roles in the films 'Madea's Family Reunion' and 'Ray', and the television series 'In the Heat of the Night' and 'I'll Fly Away'.

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:

Omilami, Elisabeth, 1951-

Wilson, Shawn (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews
Omilami, Elisabeth, 1951- --Interviews

African American actresses--Interviews

African American motion picture actors and actresses--Interviews

African American women executives--Georgia--Atlanta--Interviews

African American philanthropists--Georgia--Atlanta--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Civil Rights Activist

HistoryMakers® Category:

CivicMakers

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 Elisabeth Omilami, April 12, 2006 and April 13, 2006. 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 Elisabeth Omilami, Section A2006_073_001_001, TRT: 0:29:00
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Elisabeth Omilami was born on February 18, 1951 in Atlanta, Georgia to Hosea Williams and Juanita Terry Williams. Omilami talks about her maternal lineage of strong, entrepreneurial women, and her great-grandmother Virginia Terry, who was said to be of Cherokee descent. Her maternal grandmother, Elizabeth Terry, was a laundress for a wealthy family in Columbus, Georgia and also owned property. Omilami talks about her mother's childhood, her graduate education at Atlanta University in Atlanta, Georgia, her professorship at Savannah State College, and her death from TTP, a rare blood disease. Omilami's father was born into poverty near Attapulcus, Georgia and raised by an aunt because his parents were blind. He went on to become the first chemist hired by the U.S. government. Omilami also talks about the origin of her married name and her family's decision to enter the Civil Rights Movement.

African American actresses--Interviews.

African American motion picture actors and actresses--Interviews.

African American women executives--Georgia--Atlanta--Interviews.

African American philanthropists--Georgia--Atlanta--Interviews.

Video Oral History Interview with Elisabeth Omilami, Section A2006_073_001_002, TRT: 0:28:31
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Elisabeth Omilami father, Hosea Williams earned a Purple Heart for his service in the U.S. Army during World War II. He then studied chemistry at Morris Brown College in Atlanta, Georgia before marrying Juanita Terry Williams around 1949. Omilami talks about her siblings and her early memories of childhood in an upper middle class neighborhood in Savannah, Georgia where she attended St. Benedict Catholic School. In the early 1960s, racial discrimination at an ice cream parlor in Savannah catapulted her family into the Civil Rights Movement. Her parents resigned from their jobs and her father became an organizer in Savannah. Omilami talks about her own involvement in the Civil Rights Movement as a child and her memories of the Selma to Montgomery March in 1965. She also describes her father's role in the Movement and Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s influence on her father. Omilami's childhood activism ended when her parents sent her to boarding school at Boggs Academy in Keysville, Georgia.

Video Oral History Interview with Elisabeth Omilami, Section A2006_073_001_003, TRT: 0:28:40
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Elisabeth Omilami's father, Hosea Williams, organized black voters through Chatham County Crusade for Voters after leaving the NAACP. Omilami participated in the Civil Rights Movement until her parents sent her to Boggs

Academy in Keysville, Florida in 1965. In 1968, Omilami was chosen to integrate Wasatch Academy in Mount Pleasant, Utah by her father and the SCLC. She remembers the impact of Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King's assassination while she was a student at Wasatch. Omilami also talks about in-fighting among Movement leaders in the aftermath of the assassination and her father's conspiracy theory about the event. In 1970, her parents were appointed SCLC ambassadors to Africa where they conducted a seventeen-country tour. Omilami enrolled at the Hampton Institute in Hampton, Virginia in 1969 where she dedicated herself to acting under the direction of HistoryMaker Marjorie Moon. Omilami reflects on her father's political career and the children of other Civil Rights Movement leaders.

Video Oral History Interview with Elisabeth Omilami, Section A2006_073_001_004, TRT: 0:30:20
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Elisabeth Omilami was trained in Stanislavsky's system by HistoryMaker Marjorie Moon as a theater major at Hampton Institute in Hampton, Virginia. After graduating from Hampton Institute in 1973, she established the SCLC People's Survival Theater with her father, Hosea Williams. The theater was housed at David T. Howard High School in Atlanta, Georgia. In 1971, Omilami's father founded Hosea Feed the Hungry and Homeless, to feed homeless men around the city. In Atlanta, Omilami she worked on her father's political campaigns, and met her husband, Afemo Omilami while acting in a play; the two married in the mid-1970s and moved to New York City where Omilami worked for Rosetta LeNoire, Frank Silvera, and HistoryMakers Woodie King, Jr. and Melvin Van Peebles. Throughout the 1970s, the civil rights activism of Omilami's father centered on voter and worker rights. He also ran his own business, Southeastern Chemical Manufacturing and Distributing Company. Omilami also talks about the Atlanta child murders.

Video Oral History Interview with Elisabeth Omilami, Section A2006_073_002_005, TRT: 0:28:40
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Elisabeth Omilami became an arts administrator in New York City after her husband, Afemo Omilami began studying at New York University. In New York, Omilami worked for Rosetta LeNoire and HistoryMakers Woodie King, Jr. and Melvin Van Peebles. She describes her experience as Van Peebles personal assistant, Van Peebles' Broadway Show, "Waltz of the Stork," and his son, HistoryMaker Mario Van Peebles. After giving birth to her son and daughter, Omilami returned to Atlanta, Georgia and participated in the Forsyth County Civil Rights March led by her father, Hosea Williams in 1987. The demonstrators were attacked by the Ku Klux Klan and the march was covered by Oprah Winfrey on "The Oprah Show." Omilami explains why her father campaigned for Ronald Reagan, his value for voting, his Christian faith, and his ordination by Ralph Abernathy. She also talks about her acting career in Atlanta, her adult relationship with her parents, and her play, "There Is A River In My Soul."

Video Oral History Interview with Elisabeth Omilami, Section A2006_073_002_006, TRT: 0:31:11
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Elisabeth Omilami talks about her religious background and her Christian faith. Through Abundant Life Church, Omilami conducted missionary work in different countries including Kenya, Uganda, and Jamaica. After Omilami's father, Hosea Williams passed away in 2000, she took over his organization, Hosea Feed the Hungry and Homeless with her husband, Afemo Omilami. Under her leadership, the organization raised money for the education of an indigenous people group in the Philippines. Omilami describes her father's view

of her acting career as well as his view of the Christian church. She also talks about her parents' marriage as well as her own marriage. Omilami reflects upon her ordination process, her preaching style, and sermon preparation technique. She emphasizes the importance of leading a passionate life and the ongoing fight for freedom. Omilami's acting credits include, "Ray," "Glory Road," "Medea's Family Reunion," and "The List." She concludes the interview by narrating her personal photographs.