

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Tonya W. Bolden

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## Overview of the Collection

<b>Repository:</b>	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
<b>Creator:</b>	Bolden, Tonya
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Tonya W. Bolden,
<b>Dates:</b>	March 12, 2007
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2007
<b>Physical Description:</b>	5 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:27:49).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Author Tonya W. Bolden (1959 - ) wrote, edited, and published several books, including, "The Family Heirloom Cookbook," and, "33 Things Every Girl Should Know." Bolden was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on March 12, 2007, in New York, New York. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2007_085
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Author and publisher Tonya Wilyce Bolden was born on March 1, 1959, in New York City to Georgia Bolden, a homemaker, and Willie Bolden, a garment center shipping manager. Bolden grew up in Harlem in a musical family and loved to read; she attended Public M.E.S. 146, an elementary school in Manhattan, and then graduated from the Chapin School, a private secondary school, in Manhattan in 1976. Bolden attended Princeton University in New Jersey, and, in 1981, obtained her B.A. degree in Slavic languages and literature with a Russian focus. Bolden was also a University Scholar and received the Nicholas Bachko, Jr. Scholarship Prize.

Upon graduating from Princeton University, Bolden began working as a salesperson for Charles Alan, Incorporated, a dress manufacturer, while working towards her M.A. degree at Columbia University. In 1985, Bolden earned her degree in Slavic languages and literature, as well as a Certificate for Advanced Study of the Soviet Union from the Harriman Institute; after this she began working as an office coordinator for Raoulfilm, Inc., assisting in the research and development of various film and literary products. Bolden worked as an English instructor at Malcolm-King College and New Rochelle School of New Resources while serving as newsletter editor of the *HARKline*, a homeless shelter newsletter.

In 1990, Bolden wrote her first book, *The Family Heirloom Cookbook*. In 1992, Bolden co-authored a children's book entitled *Mama, I Want To Sing* along with Vy Higginsen, based on Higginsen's musical. Bolden continued publishing throughout the 1990s, releasing *Starting a Business from your Home*, *Mail-Order and Direct Response*, *The Book of African-American Women: 150 Crusaders, Creators, and Uplifters*, *And Not Afraid to Dare: The Stories of Ten African-American Women*, *American Patriots: The Story of Blacks in the Military from the Revolution to Desert Storm* and *The Champ*. Bolden became editor of the *Quarterly Black Review of Books* in 1994, and served as an editor for *33 Things Every Girl Should Know*, in 1998. Bolden's writing career became even more prolific in the following decade; a partial list of her works include:, *Our Souls: A Celebration of Black American Artists*, *Maritcha: A Nineteenth Century American Girl*, *MLK: Journey of a King*, *Take-Off: American All-Girl Bands During World War II*, and *George Washington Carver*, a book she authored in conjunction with an

exhibit about the famous African American inventor created by The Field Museum in Chicago.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Tonya W. Bolden was conducted by Shawn Wilson on March 12, 2007, in New York, New York, and was recorded on 5 Betacame SP videocassettes. Author Tonya W. Bolden (1959 - ) wrote, edited, and published several books, including, "The Family Heirloom Cookbook," and, "33 Things Every Girl Should Know."

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## 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®.

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## 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.

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## Controlled Access Terms

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

### Persons:

Bolden, Tonya

Wilson, Shawn (Interviewer)

Burghelea, Neculai (Videographer)

### Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Bolden, Tonya--Interviews

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African American authors--Interviews

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Women publishers--Interviews

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## Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

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The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

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## Occupations:

Author

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## HistoryMakers® Category:

MediaMakers

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## 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 Tonya W. Bolden, March 12, 2007. 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).

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## 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.

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## Detailed Description of the Collection

### Series I: Original Interview Footage

Video Oral History Interview with Tonya W. Bolden, Section A2007\_085\_001\_001, TRT: 0:29:23

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Tonya W. Bolden was born on March 1, 1959 in New York City to Georgia Howland Bolden and Willie Bolden. Bolden's maternal great-grandfather, London Smith, had fair skin, and shunned Bolden's grandmother, Eddie Smith Freeland, because of her darker complexion. In Greenwood, South Carolina, Bolden's maternal great-great-grandfather, George Freeland, was a cook at the Oregon Hotel; and his daughter, Mattie Freeland Howland, married Samuel Howland, and raised Bolden's mother. As an adult, Bolden's mother moved to New York City in search of better employment. There, she worked for a doctor as a housekeeper; and, at the United House of Prayer for All People, met Bolden's father, who grew up in Charlotte, North Carolina with his ten siblings. They married, and raised Bolden and her sister, Nelta Brunson Gallemore, in the Franklin Plaza Apartments in New York City. They often spent time with Bolden's paternal uncle's family, who lived in the neighboring apartment building.

African American authors--Interviews.

Women publishers--Interviews.

Video Oral History Interview with Tonya W. Bolden, Section A2007\_085\_001\_002, TRT: 0:29:59  
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Tonya W. Bolden grew up in New York City's East Harlem community, and often attended festivals held by the neighborhood's African American, Puerto Rican and Italian residents. Bolden began her education at New York City's M.E.S. 146, where her teachers were all white. Her mother, homemaker Georgia Howland Bolden, was attentive to Bolden's education, and sheltered her from racial discrimination. Bolden was interested in literature from an early age, and read 'Curious George' by H. A. Rey and Margret Rey, 'Madeline' by Ludwig Bemelmans and 'The Borrowers' by Mary Norton. With her mother's encouragement, she went on to attend high school at the elite, all-white Chapin School. There, she played on the volleyball team, and read the works of William Faulkner, Theodore Dreiser and Mark Twain. From her maternal uncle, O'Dell Howland, Bolden learned about black authors like Langston Hughes, Phillis Wheatley, and Paul Laurence Dunbar. Upon graduating, she enrolled at Princeton University in Princeton, New Jersey.

Video Oral History Interview with Tonya W. Bolden, Section A2007\_085\_001\_003, TRT: 0:29:15  
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Tonya W. Bolden graduated from New York City's Chapin School in 1976; and, with her family's encouragement, enrolled at Princeton University. There, she studied Slavic languages under Professor Ellen Chances, and read 'Dead Souls' by Nikolai Gogol as well as the works of Fyodor Dostoyevsky. Later, Bolden visited the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic to improve her language skills. While in college, Bolden also advocated for divestment from South Africa, and studied African American history under James R. Scobie and Adrienne Kennedy. After completing a series of drama classes, she took a yearlong sabbatical to intern at The Westside Theatre in New York City, while also working as a clerk at a garment center. Upon graduating in 1981, Bolden returned to New York City, and considered working for the United Nations, but ultimately joined screenwriters James Goldman and Barbara Goldman at Raoulfilm, Inc. She went on to study at Columbia University, and published her first piece in Black Enterprise in 1983.

Video Oral History Interview with Tonya W. Bolden, Section A2007\_085\_001\_004, TRT: 0:30:04  
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Tonya W. Bolden published book reviews in the New York Amsterdam News,

The New York Times and Essence magazine during the 1980s. With the help of her agent, Marie Brown, Bolden also initiated a working relationship with Spelman College President Johnnetta B. Cole. Bolden's authorial career began in 1990 with the publication of 'The Family Heirloom Cookbook.' She went on to write 'Mama, I want to Sing,' based on Vy Higginsen's musical; and edited the anthologies 'And Not Afraid to Dare,' 'The Book of African American Women' and 'Strong Men Keep Coming,' which highlighted black men like attorney Charles Hamilton Houston, and actor Paul Robeson's father, William Drew Robeson, II. Bolden published '33 Things Every Girl Should Know' in 1998, 'Rock of Ages: A Tribute to the Black Church' in 2001 and 'Maritcha: A Nineteenth Century American Girl' in 2005. She describes her admiration of black writers Zora Neale Hurston, Toni Morrison and James Baldwin, as well as Russian authors like Anton Chekhov.

Video Oral History Interview with Tonya W. Bolden, Section A2007\_085\_001\_005, TRT: 0:29:08  
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Tonya W. Bolden authored numerous fiction and nonfiction books during her career as an author. She also worked with African American entertainers like Mother Love, Chaka Khan and Eartha Kitt on their respective autobiographies, and befriended writers Herb Boyd, Elza Dinwiddie-Boyd and Walter Dean Myers. Bolden won the Coretta Scott King Award and the James Madison Award for her novel, 'Maritcha: A Nineteenth Century American Girl,' which was based on the memoirs of Maritcha Rimond Lyons, an African American girl born free in the days of slavery. Bolden shares her plans to write a screenplay, as well as a book about Alexander Pushkin, a 19th century Russian writer with African heritage. She also talks about her travels in Russia, where she met Russian journalist Yelena Khanga. Bolden reflects upon her life, career and how she would like to be remembered, and then concludes the interview by narrating her photographs.