

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Roz Abrams

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Abrams, Roz
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Roz Abrams,
Dates:	March 17, 2014
Bulk Dates:	2014
Physical Description:	7 uncompressed MOV digital video files (3:19:19).
Abstract:	Broadcast journalist Roz Abrams (1948 -) was a pioneer in broadcast journalism and served as a news anchor for WABC-TV and WCBS-TV in New York City. Abrams was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on March 17, 2014, in New York, New York. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2014_044
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Broadcast journalist Roslyn Maria “Roz” Abrams was born on September 7, 1948 in Lansing, Michigan. She received her B.S. degree in sociology from Western Michigan University, and her M.S. degree in speech from the University of Michigan.

Abrams worked first as a reporter for WJIM in Lansing, Michigan, and then as an anchor and reporter for WSB-AM radio from 1975 to 1978. She went on to work as a news reporter/anchor at WXIA-TV in Atlanta, Georgia from 1978 to 1982, at CNN from 1982 to 1983, and at KRON-TV in San Francisco, California from 1983 to 1986. In 1986, Abrams joined WABC-TV in New York City, first as weekend anchor and general assignment reporter, and later as co-anchor of Eyewitness News at 5 p.m. She was the first African American female journalist to join WABC-TV, and the second anchorwoman of color in the New York City television market. While there, Abrams covered a number of major stories and events, including the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001; the blackout of 2003; the end of apartheid in South Africa; and the Chernobyl nuclear disaster. She left WABC-TV in 2003; and, in 2004, was hired by New York City’s WCBS-TV as the co-anchor of CBS2 News at 5 p.m. and 11 p.m. Abrams left WCBS-TV in 2006 and retired from journalism in 2010.

Abrams was the first African American vice president of the Atlanta Press Club. She has served on the editorial advisory board of “Making Waves,” a quarterly publication of American Women in Radio and Television. Abrams served as an advisory board member for the CUNY Graduate School of Journalism, where she also funds a scholarship program. In addition, she has served on the board of Women in Film and the New York City Police Athletic League, and as co-chair of New York Reads Together and CAUSE-NY.

Abrams received a New York Association of Black Journalists Award for the special "The Sounds of Harlem," and received the Ed Bradley Lifetime Achievement Award in 2008. She won a local Emmy in 2004 and a Gracie Award in 2006. She was also awarded an honorary doctorate of humane letters from the New York Institute of Technology, and has been named a news legend by the Friars Club. In 2013, Abrams received the Elinor

Guggenheimer Lifetime Achievement Award from New York Women's Agenda.

Abrams resides in Westchester County, New York. She has two grown daughters, Denise and Melissa, and four grandchildren.

Roz Abrams was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on March 17, 2014.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Roz Abrams was conducted by Julieanna L. Richardson on March 17, 2014, in New York, New York, and was recorded on 7 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Broadcast journalist Roz Abrams (1948 -) was a pioneer in broadcast journalism and served as a news anchor for WABC-TV and WCBS-TV in New York City.

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:

Abrams, Roz

Richardson, Julieanna L. (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

Abrams, Roz--Interviews

African Americans--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Broadcast Journalist

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 Roz Abrams, March 17, 2014. 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 Roz Abrams, Section A2014_044_001_001, TRT: 1:29:30 ?
Roz Abrams was born on September 7, 1948 in Lansing, Michigan to Esther

Caldwell and Herbert Abrams. Her mother was a dreamer with a high school education from an impoverished childhood. Abrams' maternal grandmother was a woman of Seminole Indian and German ancestry who lived next door to Malcolm Little and raised her children during the Great Depression. Abrams' father was raised by Pearl Davenport and Charles Duggans. The family fled north from New Orleans, Louisiana after he witnessed a murder as a child. Abrams' father had a fifth grade education and worked as a welder and a photographer. As a child, Abrams and her sister received piano, singing, dancing, and elocution lessons. Her parents divorced when she was ten years old due to her father's infidelity. The divorce had a lasting impact on Abrams who entered therapy as a young child. Abrams talks about the sights, sounds, and smells of her childhood in Lansing, Michigan. She also recalls her family's conversion to Catholicism and her grade school years.

Video Oral History Interview with Roz Abrams, Section A2014_044_001_002, TRT: 2:27:59 ?

Roz Abrams' father worked as a welder and a photographer to fund his children's activities. Abrams participated in beauty pageants along with singing, dancing, and swimming lessons. Her mother saved money to take her children to plays and to dine in Detroit, Michigan. Abrams describes holiday gatherings and growing up with a beautiful sister. During her senior year at J.W. Sexton High School in 1966, Abrams was rejected from every college she applied to. In response, her mother petitioned the dean of Western Michigan University to grant Abrams admission. In college, Abrams pledged Delta Sigma Theta Sorority and majored in sociology and speech. After graduating in 1970, she enrolled in the drama program at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor. Abrams describes the early years of her journalism career, moving from WJIM TV in Lansing to WSB Radio and WXIA TV in Atlanta, Georgia. African American journalists at the time included HistoryMakers Jocelyn Dorsey, Monica Kaufman, Xernona Clayton, and Belva Davis.

Video Oral History Interview with Roz Abrams, Section A2014_044_001_003, TRT: 3:28:52 ?

Roz Abrams talks about her marriage to Kenneth Showers, a former basketball player who wanted to be a positive role model for Latino and black men. Throughout their marriage, Showers moved with Abrams from Atlanta to San Francisco and then to New York City as her career continued to grow. The two separated after Showers took ill and returned to his hometown in Florida, but they maintained a good relationship. In Atlanta, Abrams worked at WSB Radio from 1975 to 1978 before transitioning to television at WXIA TV from 1978 to 1982 at the behest of HistoryMaker Monica Kaufman. In 1982, Abrams started working at CNN, where she was mentored by Bob Cain before moving to KRON TV in San Francisco, California in 1983. While Abrams was in Atlanta, there were many other black anchors in the city, but national trends have seen a decline in blacks in the media. Abrams also talks about making mistakes on air, the late Atlanta Mayor Maynard Jackson, and working with anchor agents.

Video Oral History Interview with Roz Abrams, Section A2014_044_001_004, TRT: 4:31:44 ?

Roz Abrams was stationed at KRON TV in San Francisco, California from 1983 to 1986. During that period, she worked on the 5 and 11 o'clock news alongside co-anchors Bob Jimenez and Jim Paymar. Also at the station was HistoryMaker Belva Davis who Abrams credits for paving the way for black anchors in the San Francisco Bay Area. At KRON, Abrams covered topics like the AIDS epidemic in the United States and local community organizations. She and her husband, Kenneth Showers, adopted two biological sisters, Denise and Melissa. Abrams was recruited to WABC TV in New York City by Dennis Swanson in 1987. Relocating her family to New York while transitioning to a new job proved

challenging. Abrams arrived at WABC two months before Oprah Winfrey arrived for the national launch of “The Oprah Winfrey Show.” She worked as a weekend anchor and later as co-anchor of Eyewitness News at 5 p.m. Other contemporaries at WABC included Melva Tolliver, Bill Beutel, and Roger Grimsby.

Video Oral History Interview with Roz Abrams, Section A2014_044_001_005, TRT: 5:29:31 ?

Roz Abrams recalls her years at WABC TV in New York City from 1986 to 2003. She served as a weekend anchor with John Marler before joining Ernie Anastos as co-anchor of the 5 o’clock news. While at WABC, Abrams worked under news director Kenny Plotnik. Abrams describes beauty standards imposed on anchorwomen and her relationship with Roger Grimsby. During her career, Abrams tried to incorporate the voices of women in news stories through sound bites. She covered a myriad of news stories including 9/11, the tenth anniversary of the Chernobyl disaster, and the 1991 Haitian coup d’état. Abrams talks about the lasting impact of seeing crime and disaster scenes. Although she did not care to report on crime or school board meetings, she enjoyed feature stories, some of which were covered in “New York Views.” She also talks about her mentor, Chickie Bucco, and the backlash from the black community after she set up HistoryMaker David Dinkins with a gotcha question during New York City’s 1989 mayoral debate.

Video Oral History Interview with Roz Abrams, Section A2014_044_001_006, TRT: 6:37:10 ?

Roz Abrams talks about HistoryMaker David Dinkins’ tenure as the Mayor of New York City and how the Northeast’s blackout in 2003 brought a sense of interconnectedness to the communities throughout New York City. During his lifetime, Abrams’ father, Herbert Abrams, worked to teach himself beyond his fifth grade education and also to research his family history. Abrams left WABC TV in 2003 in search of something new and joined WCBS TV in 2004 as the co-anchor of CBS2 News. The combination of the financial crisis and a change of management led to Abrams’ release in 2006. Abrams talks about life after her career in broadcast journalism and what she hopes to accomplish as a retiree. She also talks about the dissolution of her marriage and concludes the interview by reflecting on her legacy, how she would like to be remembered, and her hopes and concerns for the African American community.

Video Oral History Interview with Roz Abrams, Section A2014_044_001_007, TRT: 7:14:33 ?

Roz Abrams narrates her photographs.