

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Bev Johnson

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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>	Johnson, Beverly Elaine, 1953-
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Bev Johnson,
<b>Dates:</b>	April 25, 2014
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2014
<b>Physical Description:</b>	5 uncompressed MOV digital video files (2:21:29).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Radio talk show host Bev Johnson (1953 - ) is the longtime talk show host of "The Bev Johnson Show," which airs on Memphis, Tennessee's WDIA radio station. Johnson was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on April 25, 2014, in Memphis, Tennessee. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2014_081
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Radio talk show host Beverly Elaine Johnson was born on May 10, 1953 in Memphis, Tennessee to William Van and Julia Danner Johnson. She was raised in Ann Arbor, Michigan and attended public schools. Johnson received her B.A. degree in English literature from Rust College in Holly Springs, Mississippi, and her M.S. degree in educational media technology from Jackson State University. She also graduated from Southwest Tennessee Community College's Substance Abuse Program and The Drug Court Institute, and went on to intern with the Shelby County Drug Court.

Johnson's broadcast career began in Jackson, Mississippi in 1976. In 1983, she was hired at the WDIA radio station in Memphis, Tennessee. She has worked in a number of roles, including as disc jockey to public service director to news/community affairs director, programming assistant, marketing assistant, and talk show host. Johnson was appointed as anchor/talk show host for WDIA, and hosts "The Bev Johnson Show," which first aired in 1987. She is also co-owner of Heart 2 Heart Collaborations Counseling Services, and hosts a cable television show on Comcast Cable titled "Affairs of the Heart." In addition, she teaches at Southwest Tennessee Community College as an instructor of speech and fine arts and language and literature, and has taught radio broadcasting at Rust College for a number of years.

Johnson served on the boards of the Rock N Soul Museum, Memphis-area Planned Parenthood and the National Black Programmers Coalition. She has chaired the Memphis Branch of the NAACP's Radio-thon, and auctioneered for the Coalition of 100 Black Women Memphis Chapter's Annual Eligible Bachelor auction fundraiser, as well as WKNO's Action Auction. She is a charter member of Shelby County Alumnae Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority Incorporated, and was 2nd Vice President for two years. Johnson is also a member of Mt. Pisgah C.M.E. church.

Johnson received the UNCF Outstanding Alumnus Award in 1996. She was named the 1989, 1991, 1992 and 1996 News/Public Affairs Director of the Year by the National Black Programmers Coalition, and was a 1993, 1994 and

1995 nominee for The National Association of Broadcaster's Marconi Award, Personality of the Year. Johnson was also the 1996 Billboard Award Personality of the Year, and was honored by the Tennessee General Assembly's House of Representatives for her tenth and twentieth year hosting "The Bev Johnson Show" talk show. She was named the Memphis Music Commission's 2013 Emissaries of Memphis Music and received the Jus Blues Foundation 2013 Jack "The Rapper" Gibson Radio Pioneer Award.

Bev Johnson was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on April 25, 2014.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Bev Johnson was conducted by Larry Crowe on April 25, 2014, in Memphis, Tennessee, and was recorded on 5 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Radio talk show host Bev Johnson (1953 - ) is the longtime talk show host of "The Bev Johnson Show," which airs on Memphis, Tennessee's WDIA radio station.

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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:

Johnson, Beverly Elaine, 1953-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

### Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Johnson, Beverly Elaine, 1953---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:

Radio Talk Show Host

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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 Bev Johnson, April 25, 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).

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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 Bev Johnson, Section A2014\_081\_001\_001, TRT: 1:29:01 ?

Bev Johnson was born on May 10, 1953 in Memphis, Tennessee. Her mother, Julia Atlas Danner Johnson, was born on October 27, 1931 in Memphis, Tennessee to E.B. Danner, Jr. and Maybell Rodgers-Danner. Her father, E.B. Danner, Sr., was a C.M.E. minister. After Johnson's maternal grandparents divorced, her grandfather, who played jazz piano, left Memphis to work in the General Motors factory in Detroit, Michigan. Julia Johnson grew up in the Orange Mound neighborhood of Memphis, Tennessee and attended Melrose High School, LeMoyne-Owen College in Memphis, and graduated from Rust College in Holly Springs, Mississippi before working as an elementary school teacher. Johnson's father, William Van Johnson, was born on March 7, 1930 in Germantown, Tennessee to Catherine Einley-Johnson and Herbert Johnson, a C.M.E. minister. William Johnson also attended LeMoyne-Owen College and worked as a biology teacher in Memphis before becoming a house painter and moving to Ann Arbor, Michigan around 1959.

Video Oral History Interview with Bev Johnson, Section A2014\_081\_001\_002, TRT: 2:28:21 ?

Bev Johnson grew up in Memphis, Tennessee and Ann Arbor, Michigan. She moved to Ann Arbor with her family around 1959 and stayed for a year before returning to Memphis with her mother after her parents' separation. Around 1963, Johnson and her family moved back to Ann Arbor, where she attended Tappan Junior High School and Ann Arbor Pioneer High School. In Ann Arbor, Johnson was exposed to cultural life surrounding the University of Michigan and wanted to become a Broadway actress. She also remembers the growing presence of African American actresses on TV, including HistoryMakers Diahann Carroll and Nichelle Nichols. Following the assassination of Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in 1968, Johnson's school began offering Negro History and increased the number of black teachers and counselors at the school. She graduated in 1970 and enrolled at Rust College in Holly Springs, Mississippi, where she studied English literature, performed in plays, and sang in the A'Cappella Choir.

Video Oral History Interview with Bev Johnson, Section A2014\_081\_001\_003, TRT: 3:28:47 ?

Bev Johnson attended Rust College in Holly Springs, Mississippi, where her mentors included Lassie Holmes and Fannie Lampley. During college, Johnson was also a cheerleader and performed in a band called "Trudy and the Soul Ultimates." Inspired by Carol Hall and HistoryMaker Carole Simpson, Johnson decided that she wanted to become a journalist. She received her B.A. degree in 1975 and became a substitute teacher at Booker T. Washington High School in Memphis, Tennessee until 1976, when she enrolled in the new Department of Mass Communications at Jackson State University in Jackson, Mississippi. In 1976, Johnson also began working at WJMI/WOKJ radio, first as a disc jockey and then as a news anchor. In 1978, she became the news director for WKXI radio in Jackson, Mississippi. Johnson received her M.S. degree in 1979. Johnson worked at WKXI until 1981, when she moved to Memphis, Tennessee to become a news anchor and public affairs host at WMQM and WLOK.

Video Oral History Interview with Bev Johnson, Section A2014\_081\_001\_004, TRT: 4:28:33 ?

Bev Johnson was hired at WWEE/WLVS radio in Memphis, Tennessee in 1982, a station with a predominately white audience that was owned by Sam Phillips. In September of 1983, Johnson left WWEE to become news anchor at WDIA in Memphis, a white-owned station with black programming. In 1987, Johnson started her talk show, "The Bev Johnson Show" under the urging of program director Bobby O'Jay; and, in 1990, she became news director for the station. Johnson was regularly joined on the show by psychologists Dr. Warren Harper and Dr. Dorothy Jeffries-Anderson, and the show became popular for opening

up discussions of sex, mental illness, domestic violence, and relationships in the African American community. Johnson describes her listeners as well as guests like David Ruffin and Eddy Kendricks. She also reflects on covering the election of black Memphis Mayor Dr. Willie Wilbert Harenton in 1991. In 2003, Johnson received her certification in substance abuse counseling from Southwest Tennessee Community College.

Video Oral History Interview with Bev Johnson, Section A2014\_081\_001\_005, TRT: 5:26:47 ?

Bev Johnson describes her work as a motivational speaker and a teacher at Southwest Tennessee Community College in Memphis, Tennessee and Rust College in Holly Springs, Mississippi. She also describes her “All White Soiree” parties and cruises, which she uses to raise funds for the community. Johnson shares the history of WDIA radio, which was bought by Clear Channel in 1997, and talks about the changing trends in radio ownership and disk jockeying. Since 1990, Johnson has hosted a local Comcast TV talk show in Memphis called “Affairs of the Heart.” Johnson talks about guests of her show, including Joy Deja King, Benjamin Crump, Ameena Matthews, and HistoryMaker Terry McMillan. Johnson has been honored repeatedly by the National Black Programmers Coalition and has been nominated for the Marconi Award in radio three times. She ends the interview by reflecting upon her legacy, her lack or regrets, her family, and how she would like to be remembered.