

Jackie Winters: Meeting new challenges

By Larry Baker

"For above all, in behalf of an ailing world which sorely need our defiance, may we, as Blacks or women, never accept the nation of our place." (Lorraine Hansberry - Black Women in White America)

Jackie Winters can still tell you about those days during the 50s, when she and her children had lived in those half torn-down, raggedy, cold water, one bedroom flats. She can still tell you how she and her children had to make a game out of getting up on those cold, chilly winter mornings, with a rolled-up newspaper and a broom, they flush cockroaches out from behind an old broken-down gas stove, so she could cook breakfast. But the main story of Jackie Winters was how she, a Black woman, could refuse to let herself and her children remain on that down and out road of life; how her love for helping other people gain Jackie Winter's fame and fortune in helping her go from rags to riches.

Born in Topeka, Kansas during the depression of 1936, Jackie Winters was the youngest of six children born to Kathleen and Forrest Jackson. The Jackson family was very religious, with a southern Baptist background. Mrs. Jackson taught her family to be very thankful and generous with what the family had and on many occasions invited large groups of servicemen to their Thanksgiving and Christmas tables during World War II.

The Jackson family was drawn to Oregon when the shipyards were booming, and lived in Vanport until the flood in 1948.

As a youth, Jackie attended Boise and Holiday grade schools, and Jefferson High School. Many of her schoolmates are leading citizens in the Black community today: Bobbie Nunn, Blake Eliot and Caley Cook. But Jackie credits a Black instructor named Mr. Ford, who produced school plays, with teaching her the basics of acting and dancing and how to overcome any setbacks in life which she might face as a Black woman who had the ability to perform.

At that time, it was only normal for many young, Black girls to want to grow up and become nurses or teachers, thinking these would be the only professions open to them as adults. But, there was something in Jackie's dreams that wanted to call for more. But, even as an honor student, falling in love and getting married stopped Jackie, short of finishing high school. She met and married a young serviceman named Bill McClean and moved to New York where he was stationed. She loved being a mother and homemaker. She gave birth to four children (all boys) before her husband was called for overseas duty in England. Jackie and the children remained in New York where she eventually acquired a job as a typist in a mail order house to

make ends meet.

"New York gave me a sense of knowing how a city can decay, and the lack of family support for the poor," Jackie recalls. "It became a struggle for survival with my little family, where beans and cornbread became a reality."

The following years in New York, from 1957 through 1960, were stormy years for Jackie, including her marriage which eventually ended in a divorce. She returned to Portland where her parents played a great role in her life.

She went back to work for Oregon Medical School as a clerk-typist, and by 1963 had worked herself up to a supervisory position. In some manner this occupation wasn't exactly what she wanted because she was a "peoples person."

In 1966, when the Model Cities Program was created, she saw her chance to do just that, help people.

She attributes a lot of her early days of learning to people in the Black community, such people as Hazel Hays, Tom Vickers, Al Baptist and Rev. John Jackson. She was instrumental in assisting the planning and developing of child care centers.

"I remember my New York days, how such a need for good child care centers would have been a first priority while I looked for a decent job, if there had been one," Jackie said.

In 1968, Jackie met and married Ted Winters, who was an assistant to the Governor's first Ombudsman, Mark Haggerty. Ted Winters also had known rough times in his own life as he had just been released from the Oregon State Penitentiary, from serving a life sentence.

"Ted placed no restrictions or roles on me. It's a sharing relationship and he encourages me to reach out for whatever height in life I could obtain," she further explained.

For a short time Jackie worked for the State Office of Equal Opportunity, before transferring into the State Childrens Services Division as a coordinator. Ted became Oregon's Ombudsman (Governor's) and they bought their first home in Salem in 1971.

One would think that success had fulfilled the life of Jackie Winters, but no, not quite. Ted retired from state government and went into private business in 1975 which eventually became very successful. Jackie continued with C.S.D., but began to expand her horizons into volunteering helping to create Salem's first branch of the NAACP shortly after becoming its president. She and Ted spent many evenings with different prison projects and organizations which volunteered their assistance.

Both volunteered themselves with United Way, Salem City Council and other community projects. Jackie was chosen the "Outstanding Citizen" for the city of Salem in 1977. One of Jackie's children

became a musician with Oregon's nationally known group named "Pleasure."

When Senator Victor Atiyeh was elected governor of Oregon in 1978, he was well acquainted with the ability Jackie Winters had in serving people in Oregon, and offered her the office of State Ombudsman; yes, the same job her husband had once held. As Ombudsman, Jackie became nationally known in "Who's Who's in Black America."

Last month Jackie Winters resigned the office of Governor's State Ombudsman in order to seek new challenges, and to help her husband's business, Majac Institute, a vocational school to upgrade people's learning ability.)

On January 23, 1981, a group of prisoners at the Oregon State Penitentiary will host a "Jackie Winters Night" which will involve the governor and other state officials from throughout the state. If the question is asked, "Why at the State Penitentiary?" Jackie Winters will tell you, "Why not? People are people, whoever they are, and wherever they are."

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AOBA calls leadership meeting

The third Call-to-Action Leadership Conference, sponsored by the Oregon Assembly for Black Affairs, will be held on January 31st at the Chumaree Rodeway Inn in Salem.

Among the topics to be discussed are the Black Commission, reapportionment, the legislative process.

Among the participants are Secretary of State Norma Paulus, Senate President Fred Heard, Speaker of the House Hardy Myers.

Governor Atiyeh will speak at the recognition luncheon at 11:45 a.m.

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