

METRO *life*

LIFE IN THE PORTLAND METROPOLITAN AREA

The Portland Observer

Keeping The Dream Alive

by Ruby Reuben

Portland's African American community can lay claim to some of the nation's most talented performing artists. The only problem is, very few are receiving their righteous dues. Yet, everyday, in some way, they keep delivering the goods. They give us music. They give us song. They give us dance. They give us joy. They give us magic. They make our soul dance with laughter. They are our cultural bearers and they enrich our lives everyday, in every way.

They are as diverse as the notes riding on a funky bass line in a 'shonuff', 'funky', James Brown song. From singing the blues to 'Do Woppin' about blue swede shoes; from the theater to the pulpit; from the schoolhouse to the concert stage, they are here among us. Very special people, they are.

They come to us with names like Thara Memory, Mel Brown, Brenda Phillips, Wanda Walden, Bruce Smith, Janice Scroggins, Linda Hornbuckle, U-Krew, Anthony Armstrong, Shelia Dale, Denise Williams, Louise Norris-Moaning, Shades of Color, House of Sound, One Stop Records, to name a precious few. Everyday, in every way, they take us on an enriching journey back into ourselves; back to the center spot of an ancient universe called earth. But more importantly, they refuse to allow us to forget who we are as we try to define what living in America really is.

And from among those cultural bearers steps Ruby Reuben, contemporary, African American female, Griot. The Director of **Sojourner Truth Theater**, she is fast becoming Oregon's most recognizable, traditional storyteller, in the African American, Oral Tradition.

Traditionally, African American Griots bore the responsibility of not only keeping the culture alive, but passing it on. The tradition continues. When we hear the sweet horn of Thara Memory, we are hearing music which has an ancient source that gives definition to our very soul. What makes them so special is, they only come in ones. There was and will be only one Miles Davis; one Nat King Cole; one B.B. King; one Big Mama Maybell; one Ma Rainey; one Bessie Smith.

In Portland's performing arts community, there is but one Ruby Reuben. However, from her oneness, we are graced with the presence of some of America's greatest, African American female freedom fighters: Rosa Parks, Sojourner Truth, Harriet Tubman and Billy Holiday. Through dramatic characterization, complete with era attire, they become the women to whom we are introduced. At any given time, they can make us laugh, cry, feel deep pain or just go numb from the impact of it all. That impact



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is often energized by the sounds of African-inspired drums, bells, the blues, scat-singing, the harmonica and other percussion instruments.

Ruby's journey began when she joined **The Sojourner Truth Theater Company** twelve years ago. Entering as a student-in-training, she soon assumed the position of Business Manager. "It was a hard job," she said. "In order to put on a public show, we had to use furniture from our homes as props. We had to finance

everything out of our own pockets. And since our training was so important, most of us put in triple time. The philosophy was, 'The things you learn about acting today, you will be expected to use onstage tomorrow.'"

"One of our main supporter's was Geneva's Lounge," she recalls. "Can you imagine performing cultural theater on the dance floor of one of the community's most

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THOUGHTS ON MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.

By Chris McCoy

(a student of Martin Luther King Elementary)

Martin Luther King believed in human relations. He wanted peace and love all over this nation. It took a long time for his word to be heard. Non violence was his word. Martin Luther King was a man of peace. He wanted the blacks to be released. Dr. King had high expectations. He wanted all kids to have an equal education. Martin Luther King was a great man. He made everybody understand that they could all live in the same land

GIVE ME YOUR YOUNG

Give me your young while their minds are still fresh, Give me your young who not concerned about their dress.

Give me your young who want to sharpen their minds, Give me your young who want to value their time.

Give me your young that no-one seems to care for, Give me your young who are quietly fading more and more.

Give me your young who in their dreams are reaching for the sky,

Give me your young who want their slice of the pie.

Give me your young facing the taunts and jeers of their peers,

Give me your young looking to succeed in their chosen careers.

Give me your young who have something to say,

Give me your young For tomorrow they have gone away.

by Observer Staff

Night Court And Day Care Offer Healthy Alternatives

The Moore Street Center has been very busy over the past few months strengthening its programs for young people.

North Portland males at high risk of becoming involved with gangs find a fun and healthy alternative through the center's Night Court, a weekly Friday-night basketball tournament. The event averages 20 to 30 players every Friday night. Having recently celebrated its first-year anniversary, Night Court has built ownership and confidence among the players and volunteers. In addition to basketball, participants will soon enjoy on-site seminars on topics ranging from AIDS awareness, self-esteem, motivation, drug and alcohol awareness, medical screening, and job training.

The Moore Street Center is also expanding its Child Care programs. Families can now enroll infants, toddlers, and school-age children in one of the center's two

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Photo taken by Heather Handley for The Salvation Army: Players involved in The Salvation Army's Night Court program listen to their coach Robert Richardson of Portland Youth redirection.