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Portland Clowns Without Borders benefit supports humanitarian outreach in Haiti

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40
years of
community service

'City of Roses'

Committed to Cultural Diversity

A Grandmother's Heartache:

Woeful of separation, and lost cultural ties

BY JAKE THOMAS
THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Whenever Carolynn Smith has a birthday party for her grandchildren C'Lynn or Kofi, she makes sure there is a cake, and her table is spread with their favorite foods like greens, chicken and potatoes.

The only thing missing is her grandchildren.

For nearly half a decade, Smith has been in a struggle with the Oregon Department of Human Services to gain custody of her two grandchildren, after Kofi tested positive for cocaine while living with her daughter.

"My babies are coming home," said Smith, who seems as sure of this as she is the sun will rise tomorrow.

Smith hates having Kofi and C'Lynn separated from her five other adopted grandchildren. But she's also uncomfortable with her grandchildren being raised by a white couple in Wilsonville, whom she says refuse to grant her visitation. Smith worries that the children won't have any connection to their heritage or history.

As the nation becomes more racially diverse and complex and more couples look overseas for children needing homes, the type of situation that Smith grapples with is bound to take on an increased salience. In a state like Oregon that is overwhelmingly white, but has a disproportionate number of minorities in foster care, the topic will almost certainly grip policy makers and families alike.

Transracial adoption in the U.S. has always been tangled, and contradictory. Since whites have long held a patrimonial role over blacks many, like Smith, bristle at the idea of her children being taken from her and given to a white couple.

"It's slavery," said Smith.

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PHOTO BY MARK WASHINGTON/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Carolynn Smith, outside the northeast Portland offices of the Oregon Department of Human services, holds pictures of the grandchildren she lost custody of to the state after a protracted struggle.

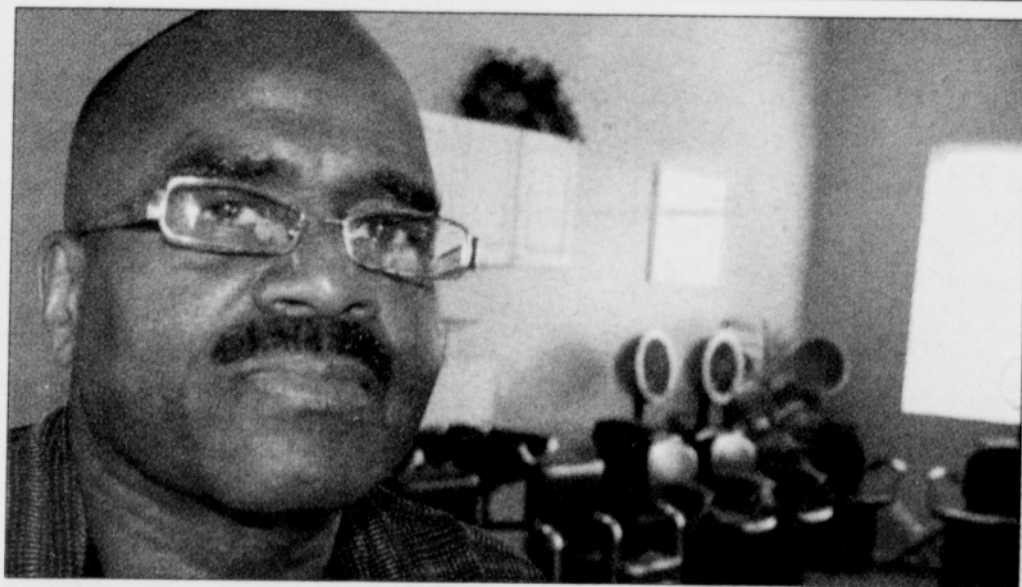


PHOTO BY MARK WASHINGTON/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Sherman Jackson welcomes customers to his Platinum Fade Salon at the corner of Northeast Alberta Street and Ninth Avenue. Jackson was able to break the chains of drug addiction and crime, scrimping and saving for years to get back into business.

Entrepreneur Stays with Dream

Troubled past gives way to persistence

After spending 14 years behind bars, Sherman Jackson learned to be patient.

As the former owner and operator of SJ's International House of Billiards and SJ's House of Style on Northeast Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard and Fremont Street, Jackson was known to flaunt flashy cars and love the entrapments of wealth. But he didn't like waiting, which got him involved in drug trafficking and money laundering that scored him quick cash and a trip to prison.

Today, Jackson has slowly climbed his way back

to the top with persistence, patience, and a rock-solid knowledge of how to handle a pair of shears.

A barber by training, Jackson scrimped and saved at low-wage jobs so he could open his northeast Portland hair cutting shop: Platinum Fade Salon.

"The money is slower, but life is better," he said.

Just off Alberta Street, at 5010 N.E. Ninth Ave., the shop sees a steady stream of customers trickle in and out looking to get their hair cuts. The room is clean and sleek. The brown walls, which are lined with several awards, look freshly painted.

"I stayed with my dream," said Jackson.

But getting back to where he is now wasn't easy.

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