

'Oregon Experience' Explores Portland Civil Rights

By Lisa Loving
Of The Skanner News

This Tuesday, April 21, Oregon Public Broadcasting airs a new documentary on "Oregon Experience" called, "Portland Civil Rights: Lift Ev'ry Voice." The show, which starts at 8 p.m., delves into local African American history with a focus on social movements of the 1960s, 70s and early 80s.

Immediately following the film, the station hosts a live panel discussion in the television studio with community activists and city leaders speaking on civil rights in the 21st century.

Producers encourage the audience to share their thoughts on Twitter by post-

cal images, photographs, and archival film and Jeff thought we could combine their materials and expertise with our experience of producing television, and come up with some wonderful programming together — and he was right.

I was brought on to help bring that idea alive with colleagues Eric Cain and Kami Horton. Our vision early on was to tell engaging and thought-provoking stories about not only well known people and events in Oregon history, but also forgotten stories that, perhaps, weren't so well known.

To date we've done 45+ documentaries on a wide variety of topics; worked with historical societies, institutions and fantastic people from across the state;

a forerunner for the Portland Youth Philharmonic.

Beatrice Cannady is another favorite of mine.

TSN: As you look at the broad sweep of Oregon history, have you ever been surprised by what you've learned? Also, is there a common thread that you see running through all the Oregon histories you've researched?

Jelsing: I'm surprised constantly. A lot of the time, my colleagues and I start researching these shows with little or no knowledge about the subject matter we're tackling. And we do a lot of reading! So I'm constantly learning new things, which makes this job so interesting.

The shows are all so dif-



PHOTO BY CATHY CHENEY

Local civil rights leaders marched after a local security guard was choked to death by a Portland police officer. Rev. John Jackson, center, led the protest.

time to look at some of the more recent African American history in Portland and the ongoing struggles for human rights that took place here post World War II. After talking with local historians and community activists I was amazed and surprised at the stories they told.

If it weren't for their interest and willingness to help me understand some of the issues, I probably wouldn't have tackled such a complicated show. So I'd like to thank everyone involved and everyone who participated. I couldn't have done it without them.

TSN: When you interviewed this incredible roster of local leaders for this documentary, what did you

learn that you didn't already know?

Jelsing: I didn't live in Portland then so I was learning all the time. I learned how the African American community in the Albina district came to be and how it ceased to be. I learned that a chapter of the Black Panther party emerged here in the late 1960s and started social programs.

I had no idea there was a strong grassroots movement here in the late 1970s demanding equity in neighborhood schools and an end to the forced busing of Black children to white schools. I learned about early struggles against police harassment and brutality.

And most importantly I was introduced for the first

time to many incredible people — some no longer with us — who weren't afraid to put themselves on the front lines for social justice. Producing "Lift Ev'ry Voice" will always be one of the most humbling journeys I've ever embarked on.

TSN: Were there perspectives that you were not able to include? What ended up "on the cutting room floor?"

Jelsing: I was surprised at how much I was able to include in the show but, of course, a lot always hits the cutting room floor. Everyone in the show was so candid, passionate and thoughtful it

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ing comments and questions using the hashtag #ORCivilRights.

The Skanner News quizzed the show's Emmy Award-winning producer, Nadine Jelsing, about "Oregon Experience" and what she learned in producing the documentary.

The Skanner News: Nadine, you were one of the originators of 'Oregon Experience,' which is one of OPB television's most popular shows. What was your vision when you started on this program years ago?

Nadine Jelsing: It was 2006 when I first started working on the program. Actually the great vision for this show came from former station manager Jeff Douglas. He had the idea to do an Oregon history series and partner on it with the Oregon Historical Society. OHS is a treasure trove of histori-

and are heading into our tenth season this fall!

TSN: You have won four Emmys for your documentary work, which is an incredible achievement. Can you please just list some of your favorite episodes?

Jelsing: That's always a tough question but some of my favorite episodes include Hanford, a look at its place in history and the men and women who built it. The show about scientist and humanitarian Linus Pauling - I didn't know much about him at all when I started and found him fascinating.

I also love "Sagebrush Symphony" — the story of a young violinist who came to Burns, Oregon, with her husband in the early 1900s and started teaching music to the local children. The little orchestra she formed was

ferent but perhaps a common thread running through them is an Oregon pioneering spirit, determination and perseverance; and stories of courageous people willing to take a stand and make Oregon a better place to live.

TSN: Can you talk about the upcoming program, "Portland Civil Rights: Lift Ev'ry Voice?" What made you decide to tackle Civil Rights in our state?

Jelsing: Oregon Experience has done several shows tackling different stories in African American history, but we've focused more on the early part of the 20th century or the World War II years. The late Jon Tuttle produced the OPB classic "Local Color" in the early 1990s but again that show really focused on the first half of the 20th century.

I thought maybe it was

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