

OAKLAND LIVING HISTORY PROGRAM INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

MB: Michelle Bates, Interviewer

TL: Toni Locke, Interviewee

MB: This tape is part of the MacArthur Corridor Project for the Oakland Living History Program. My name is Michelle Bates; I am a student interviewer in the Oral History class at Mills College. Today is November 12, 2003, and I am interviewing Toni Locke, in her home; it's 2:30 in the afternoon. [Tape stops]

This is Michelle from Mills College, beginning my interview with Toni Locke, and we're going to start out just talking a little bit about Toni's family, where she was born, that kind of thing. Toni, can you tell us a bit about yourself?

TL: Well, I expect that my existence in this world began with the meeting of my parents. They met in 1915 in Petersham, Massachusetts, where my father was a student at Harvard Forestry School and working with the director of that school at that time, whose name was Dick Fisher, and he had a sister named Eleanor Fisher. And he and his wife thought that this young student—my father—might like their sister. So they made a match. And in fact, it turned out to be a match.

I was born a year later; I was born in 1917, and my father, for a decade or more, was in the field of forestry, and a teacher of forestry at various colleges. And my mother had been a librarian; that was the work she was doing. She was working in the Brookline Public Library, Massachusetts. After her marriage, for the first year, she was in the home, and she had three children. I was the eldest; I had two brothers. We lived in college towns, because that was my father's work. I was born in the city of Boston, because the first year they were married and doing that, before my birth, they were sharing an apartment on Beacon Hill in Boston belonging to Dick Fisher and his wife. So I was born in Boston.

But thereafter we moved to Maine, where my father taught at Bates College, in their forestry department. And then, when I was four years old, he transferred to U Mass, and they rented a house in Amherst, and it's one of my earliest memories: I vaguely remember, there was a Model T Ford, and it was open, and we had a trailer behind. And I remember arriving at this place with my parents.

It was a wonderful time to grow up in. I had a great childhood. The house we rented was on a fairly long, steep hill. The town of Amherst is on a little hill, and just above the Connecticut Valley, which is a wonderfully rich, fertile oxbow in the Connecticut River that divides New Hampshire and Vermont; it goes down through western Massachusetts and through Connecticut to the Long Island Sound. So Amherst is on a little hill, and this hill went down past our house, and we used to walk to the top of it. And in the winter, it was closed off for coasting. And it was the most wonderful sledding for kids.

MB: That sounds great.

TL: Everybody in town sort of—oh, the little, younger people, and teenagers, too. I have many memories. I had a wonderful childhood. Through my grandparents on my father's side, my father got a gift that enabled him to make a down payment on a three-quarter acre lot, an old farmhouse, right in the middle of the town of Amherst. So that became an enclave, and it was a popular enclave for years, for all kinds of people, because of the way my parents were. They made a wonderful place.

MB: I was going to ask you, were they active in the community?

TL: Yes, yes they were. My father, with Amherst College faculty, founded a dramatic society that put on plays, and my father designed sets for these plays. And my father belonged to a discussion group among the U Mass faculty—what was it, Mass Aggie [Massachusetts Agricultural College] then—which discussed the affairs of the world. And very soon they found the public schools inadequate, so they founded a school, which took place in our big, old house in Amherst. Which was a huge, sixteen-room house divided into two parts, and most of the time the front part was either a school or a rental or an in-law, or something, and the back part was where we lived. My mother was mainly instrumental in getting the school started. She came from a family that [was] always professionally

engaged. Her mother was a painter, and was a very fine painter, and made some of the family money by doing cards for Prang Engraving Co. in Boston—well, never mind, it's too much. I'm telling you too much. [Laughs]

MB: You're doing fine

TL: I want to pare it down. They founded a school so that my brothers—my brother[s] Larry and David—went to school, and I did too, in this school for a couple of years. My mother was always active in the community. She actually took in—We were supposed to have an ideal home, which was a pain in the neck. Because my mother used to bring into the family troubled children, one at a time, that were recommended by a very fine clinic in Boston, the Thom Clinic. That did referrals for children that they thought needed to be taken from their homes and put somewhere. So we had a succession of children that were supposed to be having a lovely time, because they were with us. And I'm not sure that we always treated those children well, or that it was a good plan, or anything. But that was one of the ways we made an income, because my father's income from Mass Aggie was paltry. He made no money. I remember his income was \$2,700 a year.

MB: Wow. [TL laughs]

TL: We lived very happily, though, as children.

MB: Your mother was a librarian, so she was educated as well?

TL: She went to Smith College; she was very well read. She delighted us children by reading aloud to us all during our childhood; we each had a book. She read all the works of Dickens; she read Turgenev and Tolstoy, and many American writers. She was always reading out loud of the classics of English literature.

MB: How did that translate to how you did as a student?

TL: I always did well as a student. It was easy to do well, because I came from a kind of privileged—it didn't have to do with money, it had to do with family connections, the milieu, you know, the group of people that we kind of moved along in. Because my

parents were the kind of people that associated with—I mean, the people that would come to dinner—

My mother had tea every afternoon; it was one of her sort of old British, New England things to do. People used to come and they would have conversation, which was the kind of thing one did in those old days, in her family. And my father was a great—What they used to call themselves were “conversationalists.” Robert Frost came to tea, lots of interesting people came to tea, in my mother’s very simple little living room. She didn’t bake or cook, because she was brought up with various Irish women, girls who came in for five dollars a month to help her mother, while her mother was painting. My mother was a minimal cook, but she didn’t make fancy teas; she just had a pot of good tea, and maybe Oreo cookies or something.

MB: So traditional expectations of gender roles didn’t hold so much in your family. I mean, women were encouraged to go to school—

TL: In these groups, and among the friends of my parents, women were very professionally involved, very successful, on an even basis with men. And they were all people [of] quite considerable education and enterprise. They did things. Anyway, so that’s how I was brought up.

And I went to really good schools, because the school my mother founded after—She went to Smith College and took a graduate course in education to learn how to do this. She studied, and got some—I forget what she—But there weren’t so many demands made in those days, so many prerequisites for having a school, in the way of safety precautions, fire precautions, health precautions; it was easier to do.

MB: What were your education aspirations, or what did you dream of being as a child?

TL: Oh, God. I lived in a fantasy world, to a large extent. I absolutely loved horse stories and horses. I had a pony. I’m not sure; I think I dreamed of not growing up to be anybody’s mother or a girl; I grew up wanting to be a boy. It was a terrible shock when I discovered that I couldn’t do that. I think that had not so much to do with sexuality as with having to do with power and status. That’s what I think. Because I’m not a definitely—I think that

there was still a tremendous oppression of women by the fact that their status was so limited. And they'd only just got the vote; it had been a huge struggle to get the vote, and so on and so forth.

MB: So it wasn't that there was an egalitarian relationship.

TL: Not exactly, and my mother always, for her personal reasons, put herself down, and exalted my father. These are the games that go on within families that are too complex to enter into your studies. [Laughs]

MB: So what were your decisions when you went to college? How did you decide to—

TL: Well, I had a hard time deciding. I had a boyfriend just before I—Let's see, at some point I was working as a camp counselor; I had a boyfriend who went to Black Mountain College in North Carolina, which was a very progressive, avant-garde college. And I had to decide whether to go there or whether to go in a conventional way to my mother's college. I don't know what made me, but something made me decide to go to my mother's college. When I went to Smith, I got a magnificent education. Because we had a college president who was superb, William Allen Neelson was his name, a man with a great sense of humor and a wonderful concept of how to conduct a college of the sort that Smith was.

And I was very gripped at that point by the Depression. The Depression began to affect our whole family, not because we were hungry. It was because people came to the door who were hungry. It was because people who work for a living, like one of the big industries in Massachusetts was the shoe industry, and the men who—mostly men—who worked in the industry were grievously exploited and underpaid. And there was a huge strike of shoe workers; that's one of my first contacts with the labor movement, and I think I was about ten. My family cared about social justice, always. So this was like a stream that flowed through the family.

MB: I can hear you had a very early introductions to these things.

TL: Yeah, it came early. And the story of my college life is a whole story in itself; you don't really want that whole story. Except that I became engaged in community work from that time on, because one of the first things that I—I joined a lot of things, because that was the way I'd always been, and my mother was like that. She was the president of the League of Women Voters in Amherst once, and so on. So I joined the Smith College Association for Christian Work, is what it was called. It did good works in the community; that was the way privileged colleges did. They took baskets out at Thanksgiving, and did things like that.

Well, I got involved in a battle over the way relief was being handed out to the textile workers in the valley, near where Smith is located, because the textile industry cleared out and moved their jobs to the South, to get cheap labor. And it left behind destitute families, because there wasn't—This was before the social institutions of the New Deal, before workman's compensation, before unemployment insurance. And people were not only hungry, but the relief that was handed out was handed out in a way that was demeaning. They had to report—I remember, we took part in this—they had to report before six a.m. and receive a bag of potatoes, a bag of flour. If you had the kind of turn of mind that I had—I became angry at the injustice of the world. And I had a great capacity to get stirred up by these things.

MB: *I can hear that!* [TL laughs] *What was your major? What did you graduate with?*

TL: I majored in music. And the reason I did is that I started to calculate, "Well how am I going to make my living?" Mostly in Smith, at least half of what was on everybody's mind was, "Who am I going to get for a husband?" If you married well, then you didn't have to worry about how you're going to make a living, because you're going to live off somebody. But I had this feeling that I—I wasn't even in the set that was just sure they were going to—

Smith was divided into—it had a small group of scholarship students; I was among them. It had a small group of people who lived in a cooperative house, where we did our own work, and I was among those. These students always had a sense of themselves as different from the rest of the student body that came from the big corporate families of the United States. It was a female place like Yale and Harvard.

MB: I was going to ask you if that was your first experience away from home?

TL: Well, I used to work in a camp in the summer as a camp counselor. I suppose that was away from home, but it's [a] kind of cared-for environment. I loved [it]—I had a wonderful experience as a camper and a counselor in the camp [in Maine] that I loved working for. I enjoyed that tremendously, and it was exhilarating. I had my first relations with the opposite sex, of various sorts, and I was just high as a kite while I was working there. I had a good time. Then let's see, you were asking me—what did you just ask me, Michelle? [Laughs]

MB: I lost my own train of thought, too.

TL: Oh, you asked me about my education, is that what it was? I decided to major in music because I wanted a way of earning a living. I had gone to the campus school, that's the lab school for Smith College Education Department, as a child, and I'd had wonderful music in that, then. And the same teacher that taught that music was a professor at Smith and teaching a two-year course in music education. So I could get that training and that preparation, and I thought, "Well I'll get that." Meanwhile I spent all of my time being a student radical. I mean, I was tremendously involved in what, in the '30s, was a national movement of students that focused around civil rights, war or peace, defeating Hitler. It was a movement that I was very caught up in.

So what happened once was that when I graduated from college, I had to choose between—I had two jobs. And I really was like the two colleges. One was to be a director of music at the Henry Street Settlement House in New York; that was a wonderful, old-fashioned, one of the products of the 19th century, like the Hull House in Chicago and the Elizabeth Peabody House in Boston. These were great places where the rich took care of the poor. And they developed good programs in various arts and cultural fields too. So that was one job. It wasn't director, I'm sure it was some small job—they didn't take people straight out of college. And the other job was to be an organizer for the American Student Union, which was the left-wing organization I had been working in. And I would have to raise my own salary. But the reason I chose it—I don't know if you want it all—

MB: Yes—we were headed towards your work experience anyhow.

TL: Yes, well a lot of this is just my inner path, because I had, in my senior year in college, already fallen in love with my future husband, who was at Harvard. And so I chose the job where I'd be in the same—I was chasing him; he was off; he was somebody else's, I don't know what he was doing. But I just had my eye on him. And I felt, "Well, if I'm in the same town, and doing the same work, maybe something will come of it."

MB: And it did!

TL: I was on the hunt. It did, it worked.

MB: So that was where you went to work.

TL: I went to work [for the American Student Union] in Cambridge, Massachusetts with a very good friend whom I still am in touch with. He married, I married, we had lives, we had kids, and we're both in our eighties, and I'm still—He may be dead right now, because he was really, really failing the last time I was in touch with him.

MB: So you ended up marrying him. The other.

TL: My husband, yeah, who was another guy altogether. The guy I was working with was—

MB: What's your husband's name?

TL: His name is Laurence Locke, and is actually—His family was a Jewish family, and he changed his name during college because his plan was to enter government service, and there was a tremendous amount of anti-Semitism in the U.S. government. And a lot of enterprising young Jewish professionals changed their names because they wanted to do government service; they were qualified to do government service, but they felt that their names would be against them. So he changed his name. So Locke – after John Locke, the English philosopher] is a synthetic name, which we both invented, because he was a philosophy major.

MB: *[Were] his parents here, in America?*

TL: His father came from Europe; his mother came from an older family that had been in this country two or three generations. His father came over on the boat, and never forgot it. [inaudible] didn't get along very well, but it all worked out finally, after a baby was born, and this and that and the other thing.

MB: *Your first child?*

TL: Yes. And my husband and I had a lot in common.

MB: *What year did you marry?*

TL: We married in 1939.

MB: *So that was quite a tumultuous time, too.*

TL: Yes it was, it was a very wild time. As a matter of fact, he went off to one convention and I went off to another. He worked on a coal boat; we were constantly doing these challenging, difficult things, and then coming back together. It was very hard. And he was in the Air Force, and I think I told you that part. I raised my children really living back home with my parents. And after the war, it was very hard to get a place to live. It took us a long, long time to find—Because there was [a] tremendous housing shortage after the war. During the war, we were deeply involved in the war effort, which we were committed to. Both of us.

MB: *So he was in, fighting the war?*

TL: Yeah. He actually was in training, and he was held back, because they held back a lot of people who had been radicals in college. The Un-American Activities Committee or somebody. It may have saved his life. Who knows. But he was not home; he was in the Air Force, and he was in various parts of the country. We actually came out to Crestline, which is one of the places in Southern California that was just burnt out, and I spent a couple of months there while he was stationed at Victorville in the Air Force base there.

MB: *Is that your first experience in California then?*

TL: Yeah, I brought my baby, and we came across the country, took us five days by train.

MB: *Is that a son or a daughter?*

TL: That's my daughter Nancy. So that was my first experience of California.

MB: *Have you lived here since then? Or did you go back?*

TL: I visited it, maybe—no, I guess that's the only time I came, until I got the job at Holy Names College in 1976. The rest of my life was very far away.

MB: *Before we move on to Holy Names—How many children did you have?*

TL: I have three children.

MB: *And their names?*

TL: My daughter is Nancy, who's now sixty. And my next son is James, Jim. My son Jim has written this book. [Points to bookcase] And my son David has written all these books. [points again]

MB: *Wow. Here, want me to read the names of those?*

TL: You don't have to, no. They have very different fields. So I have three children and seven grandchildren, and one great-grandson. And all these children are really interesting children.

MB: *I bet they are!*

TL: This is a spectacular morning for me, because I was in touch with all three of my children at once, which is very rare at this point. I'm having a consultation with my son Jim,

who's a builder, and has a big property in Western Mass that's the base of his operation there. But he keeps bees. And I found a nest of bees down in my backyard, so I emailed him and said, "I need advice about bees." And so we're having this back and forth email, and then I was looking in my kitchen, and I found three little packages of spice that were left from the time my next son visited me and made—he's been the cook in his family all his life, and he made *dal*, you know, an Indian dinner for me. And I suddenly thought, "I'd like to use these spices." And I emailed him and said, "David, send me the recipe for *dal*." So then I got on a sort of chat room between him and his daughter. And then my daughter called from Chicago on her way to—well, anyhow, it's very stimulating for me—

MB: This is a good day.

TL: —to have all three of my children being within spiritual reach, all at once. I haven't quite got over the pleasure of it.

MB: Oh, that's a great day.

TL: It's nice.

MB: If you want to bring it back over to how you got to Holy Names, or how you came to this area. If you like, we could take a short break before that.

TL: It depends on you. I'm not tired—

MB: Okay, let's go!

TL: —because I love to talk.

MB: And you do a wonderful job of it. It's a pleasure listening to you. Okay, let's move on to—

TL: Let's skip thirty years! [Laughs]

MB: No, I really hate to do that, because what you have to say is just intriguing, very much so, but we had made an agreement to move along. ...

TL: All right, we're going to skip thirty years till I—

MB: Do you want to give us a short excerpt of thirty years?

TL: Of thirty years? No, I'll just tell you that a lot of it was very good, and a lot of it wasn't so good, and various problems arose, and during my mid-life crisis, which I had because I had a sudden hysterectomy, and I had my husband involved with some other women, and I had a dissatisfaction with the whole tenor of my life, and I just went off the rocker for a while. And then I had enough sense to just say to my husband, "We're not going to go on." I mean, he would be perfectly content to go on the way we were going, and I wasn't, and so I asked for a divorce, and we got a divorce.

MB: And when was that?

TL: In 1969. And after I had done it, I was horrified, because I didn't have any idea how I was going to make a life. And I was just lucky, as I think I told you before. In my search, which took me back to my mother's church and to a wonderful minister that I loved, and a parish that took care of me, and a choir that—I'd always done things with singing and music, and my father was a musician, and part of my whole heart life had to do with making music.

And so it was in that setting that I found the advice to go to a conference, which led me to the brilliant teachers that were representing the Hungarian science of teaching music in their schools. There was a program right near where I lived, where I was luckily accepted to a three-year training, with a stipend. So I could take care of myself for three years with the hope that I'd be able to earn a living afterwards. And the earning a living didn't work out too well, because of me, and because I was too old, and so on. I managed; I've always managed. But what happened was that I—My son David, my youngest son was nearly through college. He came back to the old home; we lived at that point in Weston Massachusetts, near Boston. And he came back and could use it as a home, but I'd rented it to a young Hungarian couple that were teaching the Kodaly work.

Anyway, that led me, eventually, through a long path, which you don't care about, to coming out here to work at Holy Names College. To teach a course in American folk music for the use of teachers who were teaching music through vocal music. Music through singing, which was the principle on which the Kodaly work is founded.

MB: And what was that experience like for you?

TL: Oh, I had a wonderful time. The whole thing was very, very stimulating, very interesting; it was challenging to learn, it was challenging to learn the language; it was challenging to be in a totally foreign country – Hungary -- for a whole year. It was like a break. It was as if I started—I was adolescent again, and I was starting my life again.

MB: So you actually went to a foreign—

TL: I spent a year in Hungary, living there, and I lived with someone who spoke no English. And Hungary was still a Communist country, which, because of all my left-wing politics didn't scare me, but some of my colleagues were scared to death and ran to the American Embassy and ate peanut butter and things that made them feel like they were in the United States! And I did not feel that I was scared, for any number of reasons, but I was scared in certain other ways. So this was a hard time, but a very challenging, fun time.

And then when I finally got the job out here, it turned out to be just perfect. Because I spent hours and hours doing relatively soothing work, which was just transcribing, choosing from various sources, very often books. I spent hours in the U.C. Berkeley library, and I went to the Oakland Public Library, and I transcribed and analyzed songs in such a way that they would be able to be used in a classroom. And it helped [that] the people I studied with did half the work, too, and my students. And we built an archive, which is now going to be part of a national archive that is being mounted by the Library of Congress. It turned out to be a good vein of ore. And I really loved the work, because I—well, they paid me a pittance. I lived in the dorms at Holy Names; the freshman class took me in hand, so I was sort of led through life again as if I were a freshman in college. It was fun, you know, to begin again.

MB: That's what it sounds like, a whole new beginning for you.

TL: I had a lot of unsolved problems in my first adolescence that I was able to somewhat solve in my second adolescence. I recommend two adolescences. [Laughs]

MB: Were you active in the community as well, and bringing some of your earlier experiences—

TL: I didn't do anything in the community for about eight years, much of anything. I volunteered to do some work for the American Farm Workers, because I had heard of them. And I knew they were fighting the fight of the underdog, and the underdog was the guy I was committed to, for reasons which I don't know, why I should have been so passionate about the underdog, but that was the way I was.

MB: And still are?

TL: Probably, only less so. I mean, I see it now as partly a psychological problem of mine, and not as a realistic stance in this world. You have to learn to understand your own peculiarities. [Laughs]

MB: When did you move to the—okay, you were in the dorms there.

TL: There was a couple years when I was still helping to take care of my father. I had a housekeeper, my mother died in seventy—gosh, can I remember? Seventy-three. I used to spend half the year in the town of Amherst, where my father was still living, when he was in his—ninety-three, ninety-four. And there was a housekeeper. But I used to stay there to keep him company. And then I'd come out here for six months. That happened for a year and a half. And then he died, and as a result of his death I had enough money to make a down payment on a house, which I thought was good, because I had made up my mind by then—I wanted to be far away, and start a new life. That was what I was doing. So I got as far away from Boston as I could, and started a new life. And I bought this house.

MB: Did you know people in the area?

TL: No.

MB: *What made you pick—?*

TL: Holy Names was the only place in the country where I could get a job in this field. And I started working just in Boston, I started transcribing songs for them, and recording—I didn't have to be here to do that work. But then a new faculty person came into the program here, who said, "You can't do this, Sister Mary Alice [Hein]. You've got to have a course in folk music, and you've got to get Toni to come out here and teach it."

MB: *And what was the year you bought this house?*

TL: I bought this in '78.

MB: *What was the neighborhood like?*

TL: The neighborhood was blue-collar. Most of the people who owned homes here have now left or died. My next-door neighbor was a carpenter. He lost his wife—I remember his cat loved—used to live over here. He had a little cat and a little dog; he had another wife. We lived side by side comfortably. It was a blue-collar, simple, poor, relatively poor neighborhood. But not a bad neighborhood, you know. And the woodworking shop for Bret Harte School is right across the street. This house was built by—

There's a successful farmer that owned a forty-acre farm in this territory, and they had divided up at one point when they—Keyline Development came through here. They divided up part of their farm into lots for their sons. And this is for one of the Parrot—their names were Parrot—they were French. They came here to do the laundry work when the French came, the time of the Gold Rush, to do bakeries and laundries for the Gold Rush, and they came and they became farmers. Anyhow, this was one of their sons, whose house I bought. It had only had one intervening owner. It was built in 1924, and it had somebody for two or three years before I bought it, but that's all. The neighborhood had gone from farming to developments along the [inaudible]; transportation and developers came in, built these houses which were not designed by architects but

designed by journeymen carpenters who had a good traditional design sense. And they're all over the place here.

MB: So how did we move from Holy Names and buying your home in Oakland, to the MacArthur Metro?

TL: I had a real crisis in my life when I left my—I was fired from Holy Names. Not fired, but everything fell apart there, financially. And they couldn't keep me. Let's see, what happened? I was going to be able to live on social security, and I've always had a small alimony from my ex-husband; he's quite a successful and wealthy enough man. And actually, very nicely in the last couple of years, he sent me—showering me with money. I don't know how to live; he doubled my income without my—He's very nostalgic, and nice, and we have a nice relationship.

Anyway, I could live without a job, but I couldn't live mentally without a job. So I got a volunteer job at the National Maritime Museum in San Francisco. And that took me about three years of volunteer work, only part time. But I also had [a] tremendous amount of spare time and energy, so I just joined the MacArthur Coalition, because I knew—it was easy, if you wanted to find out what was going on in the neighborhood, I could find that out, and that was when Miriam was doing this wonderful organizing job.

MB: That's Miriam Hurley?

TL: Yeah.

MB: MacArthur Coalition—what did they do? What were they?

TL: Well, it would be wonderful to let Miriam tell you; she'd tell you better than I. The Coalition was dedicated to tak[ing] the community out of blight and dirt and depression into a nice, livable, friendly place for everybody. And it was committed to incorporating all the diversity that existed, not selecting in and out of groups but incorporating everybody. Activities were designed that would draw people together. And the big thing that drew most people together of all was just fighting blight, in the form of these wonderful cleanup parties, where we'd clean the streets, and began to engage city

agencies in this fighting blight thing. Which was, at this point in history, new, but now it's just standard procedure in cities. And cities do it.

MB: What year—I'm sorry—was about this?

TL: In '83 is when I went to the National Maritime Museum job, and I don't remember exactly when I started with the Coalition, but it would have been in the '80s. And I can probably find that out. But I started with the Metro in 1989, or '90. Right around there. Because the Coalition was really interested in the Metro, and the Metro that existed then was writing up what the Coalition was doing, and taking—it'll turn out if we look at the photos.

MB: Yeah, we'll do that.

So the founders of the Metro were Don Kinkead and Janet Calkins. So when you came over to the Metro, were they still part of the [paper]?

TL: I just briefly went to meetings on upper High Street when they were still the owners, and when there was a discussion about selling or not selling—There were also discussions about articles that could or could not be written, and that's when I did some writing. But it was just the transitional moment. Then when they had two editors for a couple—I can't put exact numerical times into this, but the very beginning, there was a lot of transitional insecurity in the future of the Metro.

*And then when Miriam [Hurley] —I just will never forget it—that Miriam and I went to the—Mayor [Eliju] Harris had a great big party for Oakland, at the Oakland Zoo. I don't know who he invited, everybody in Oakland, or what. And Miriam took me, and we walked around and around and around the Zoo, and she worked on me to be the editor of the *MacArthur Metro*. And actually, we met Don Kinkead on that walk. It was destined, she would tell you.*

MB: It was fate!

TL: Yes!

MB: *Talk to me again about why the change of hands of the Metro, or what happened to—*

TL: First of all, they weren't able to make a financial success of it. They were getting ready to do something like sell it. Then Janet [Calkins], for various personal reasons, moved to New Jersey. And she tried to keep control of the paper for quite a while. But she couldn't.

MB: *You said she's a Mills alum?*

TL: Yeah, she's a Mills journalism graduate. And I don't know—it'd be fun to just try on Google and see if we could get her. [Laughs] You could try that.

MB: *I'll try that. So you came from [the] MacArthur Coalition to—*

TL: As a total greenhorn—

MB: *[inaudible]*

TL: Yes. And the thing that I was going to use was not journalism of any sort, since I knew nothing about it, but I have all—I haven't told you, but all my whole life I've always been the president of something, or organizing something. So I got familiar, and I organized chapters of the student organization that I was working for. I'm amazed at how some of the people whom I watch now know many more things than I do about how to do organizational work. But I knew something. I guess what I knew was to get a group of people in, and get them clear in a consensus about an idea of what they wanted to do, and then divide up the job, and then keep everyone—I have a sense of group work of some sort.

MB: *Who owns the paper now?*

TL: It is a non-profit, and it is in the hands of a board. The non-profit on the board idea came about halfway along, because I thought that the paper was needed to be a board, and if we were going to get contributions enough to really have some stability, we had to be a non-profit. I don't remember if it was my idea, or how the idea came up, but it became clear

in my head, and therefore it got carried out. We had a very good lawyer who was just a volunteer writer, but then he became—I guess through him—Well, we decided. What I did was I picked a representative group of five people who were community leaders, like [inaudible], invited them to lunch here. And I said, “How would you like to be a board of directors for the *MacArthur Metro*? And they all said yes. [Laughs]

MB: We'll be able to get those names?

TL: Yeah, if you want them.

MB: So they said yes, and you went from there.

TL: And the board is still there; it's still growing. We had a board meeting last night. It's important, because their maintenance of the status for contribution purposes, and for the legality of our 501c3 is important, and it's important that you have an overseeing body, which if the staff falls apart—I mean, if I drop dead and other people drop out and it's suddenly—there's a hope that the paper could continue. But basically now that the paper's based on the enthusiasm of the people who participate in it. It's a project; it's not a church, it's not a regular institution, it's like a wonderful project that people have liked.

MB: How has the mission of the MacArthur Metro changed from when it was a money-making attempt—when they were trying to make it a money-making venture, as opposed to now, that it's a non-profit?

TL: Well, I would say that there hasn't been too much change, because what they were doing, when they started, was to take in advertising from local advertisers and to stabilize the paper on the basis of support of advertisers, and then to write about what was going on in the neighborhood. I think the only way it's changed is that we decided that if we set up a system of a reader ownership of the paper, it would bring us another element of income. It doesn't turn out to be a huge element, but it's a very important [psychological]—
[End of side A]

TL: —didn't have time to change very much. The whole period with Janet was very brief. If you ever get a hold of her, she can tell you, but I don't remember. Maybe Don

remembers, and he's local. I would say that the paper just about fell apart, and we didn't have money to pay the printer, and it was a crisis. And that was when we sat down—as a matter of fact, I don't know whether Miriam will remember it this way, but I remember that everybody gave up on the paper except me. This is how I remember it.

The point at which everyone was saying, “Look, we can't do this, [the] paper isn't going to work,” I had a wonderful talk with Dan Soria, who was the printer. He was a printer, and had been in the printing business all his life, a union printer. He was running a little shop out in Pleasanton, which is where I used to drive once a month, and for a while Miriam and I both drove out; we used to have breakfast some place out there. Our negative was produced there too, and it was a whole lot of schlepping that I did by car. Including picking up the finished printing and bringing it back in the back of a station wagon, which I was driving then for this purpose. Dan said to me—we were talking about missing an issue, or putting out fewer issues, and Dan said, “You must never miss an issue!” [TL and MB laugh] And he sort of talked me into a kind of state of mind; I really liked Dan so much. He liked Miriam very much; she'll remember that. Because she and I used to go out there together.

So I just decided to try to save the paper. And we just put out an issue [in February 1992] saying, “Hey, this paper's going under unless you guys come forward and help.” And people just came forward.

MB: And that's not the only time that the paper ran into a potential demise.

TL: We weren't going to be killed by these lawsuits, as long as we could get a good civil liberties lawyer who'd defend us. And also, we could never believe that these jerks could put us out of business. [Laughs]

MB: Talk to me again about the lawsuit.

TL: The first lawsuit [for libel] arose out of our mentioning—I'd have to get the copy for you, but I haven't done it—the article that was written. I believe it was written by a very difficult, angry, sort of a firebrand of a[n] activist who ran a frame shop down here on

MacArthur Boulevard. I used to work with him. Because I've always had an ability to catch something that's in me and in them. But still not becomes a firebrand.

MB: Was this the gentleman—was he attached with the MacArthur Watch? Or was this [a] different lawsuit?

TL: The first lawsuit was by a so-called minister with fifteen children who we referred to in an article in our paper that now we would not print. We would be careful, because we learned a lot about libel laws in the course of being—

MB: That was Dean Marshall's article.

TL: That was Dean Marshall's article, and Dean Marshall was the angry man down there. Whose chief love in life was reenacting war games of the Civil War, you know, going and dressing up like the Confederate soldiers and stuff. [Laughs] But he also was fighting against the Hillcrest Motel influences in the neighborhood. We had things in common. He stirred up a lot of news, and we were a newspaper. And so we got through that libel suit.

And the second one was in connection with another phase of Oakland neighborhood history; I don't know whether you'd want—

MB: Is that the one that Michael Broad was involved with?

TL: Mike was involved in both of them.

MB: And the civil rights gentleman was Mark Goldowitz from the First Amendment Project.

TL: But the big case was the one that was brought against us by James Singh, who owns the auto repair on the corner of Loma Vista and MacArthur. He simply insisted on trying this case, and he finally just couldn't manage to get a Supreme Court hearing. And he's still paying—Mark's collection system is still collecting money from him. Because he owes a fortune. And of course we gave a donation to Mark out of the small surplus we had. I mean, we gave him a couple thousand dollars, or something like that. But he must have

incurred [more than \$150,000 worth of legal fees¹] —Well, he's got *pro bono* as part of his *raison d'être*. That's what handling slap suits and doing what he does is financed out of civil liberties funds that he gets from various sources. But he's a wonderful lawyer.

MB: I'm going to ask you some questions in regards to the MacArthur Metro, and I want your opinion on some of these questions. How does the paper impact the community? In what ways does the press help to promote community solidarity?

*TL: First of all, it tells the readership—which is only a proportion of the community—that there is a stable, ongoing set of organizations who have programs where they can go with their grievances or their wishes to be with others. So this readership knows that there is a High Street Neighborhood Alliance, a Leona Heights Improvement Association, Redwood Heights, Dimond Improvement, and whatever may be in Laurel. People know that these organizations are there. They also know when these organizations achieve some kind of victory on behalf of the neighborhood, something that improves the neighborhood. They know, of course, that there are merchants locally; they get to know what you can buy and what you can do in your neighborhood, where you can eat, where you can buy your groceries, where your neighborhood resources are in the economy. And that's good for small business. And small businesses are just a basic part of the *MacArthur Metro*.*

MB: How would you define your readership?

*TL: Well, as far as I know, since we carefully restrict ourselves—We very carefully distribute just in one area, we carefully take all our volunteers from one area, and we carefully write the news of one area—I suppose you could say the demographics of Laurel, Dimond, High, the Mills area, and a little bit up into the hills. And it's a demographics in which there's an increasingly large Asian population; there is a sizeable African American population. It's still a white-collar, white population, mostly. We've reached out toward the Latino community, but decided that they are very cohesive in their strength in the lower Fruitvale area, and that the *Metro* can't do justice. We used to do a Cinco de Mayo article, and we used to try to incorporate elements of what's going on there. But too much*

¹ Toni Locke's revision, September 2005

is going on there. And we just decided [we] couldn't do it, in our space. So it wasn't a case of prejudice or anything, it was just selection based upon pragmatic factors.

MB: I recall reading—I don't think I have it with me—there was an article that you actually had written. I remember the first word was “Olé!” [TL laughs] And it was in regard s[if it was addressed] to, I think, toward the Latino community.

TL: Something that was going on in the Lower Fruitvale area. So I don't know exactly who reads the paper, but my guess is that you just have to say, “Well, who lives in these areas,” and the proportion of people—I don't know, exactly. It'd be interesting—We know the names and addresses, but we don't know much more about a lot of them.

MB: Do you feel that your paper reflects the orientation of the community?

TL: It's very successful in the sense that every issue gets taken up. We get constant new volunteer forces in the paper. We're now getting quoted, and lots of people request space in the paper that we can't accommodate.

MB: Is there a regular group that you expect [for] that space, or has that changed?

TL: It's really pretty regular, because it's not possible to put out a volunteer paper unless you know—First of all, we don't accept press releases. We don't accept material that we don't choose. People are always wanting to put in services that will flood different streams of information in, and we always say no, because we're too small. We only have 8,000 words of text. And we make a religious manner out of keeping the proportion of text to advertising. We could probably change it, and be more like the *Tribune*, or something.

MB: That's how you differ from a daily paper.

TL: Yeah, because we strictly keep—I forget what it is, the percentage; isn't that funny, now. I have to go back to cite the right figures; I don't remember things in terms of figures well. But we have a standard amount, large amount of text in relation to the advertising. And we keep it that way.

MB: So what is the relationship between the Metro and the local organizations?

TL: Well, it depends. Some of them use the *Metro*, and it's important to them. And others, I don't think it matters that much to them. I would say that Dimond Improvement uses the *Metro* and writes for the *Metro*. And High Street also, and the Laurel, the business people. We almost always get a submission from Maureen Dorsey of the Merchants' Association. Whenever Lease Wong, who runs the toy store, gets the dragon boat volunteers together to race in the dragon boat races, I get photos from Lease. If I don't remember—we just remember, I know—There are personal relationships, really, that keep the paper's content what it is.

MB: In what ways [has] publishing been used as a problem-solving strategy for the community, and if you could discuss any particular successes or failures over the years? One of the things I was thinking—I know how Dennis's [Evanosky], the Shenanigans section—

TL: For years and years, we get involved in things, and exactly how to weigh the amount of input that this paper puts—I would say that for years and years, we've written about the issues connected with the Hillcrest Motel. Whether it would have happened slower or faster if the paper hadn't existed, I'm not sure; but I think probably the paper, constantly keeping the issues before the public eye, hastened the process a little. I mean, a newspaper writes about things that people do. And we don't do things.

But we can encourage. We try to pick the things that we see moving forward in a strong, positive way and likely to succeed. If there's a total dead-end cause that you don't think you can ever do anything about, and you can't write an upbeat article, and you can't say, "How can you change this? How can you improve it? How can you make something happen?" Almost all our articles we try to have say, "There's something you can do about this. There's some way it could be made better." And that's a mission kind of thing.

MB: You think in that way, the paper serves to reinforce expected social norms? Or roles?

TL: I think it tries to counteract a lot of accepted social norms, when they're of a certain sort. We try to counteract all the prejudices that spring up with age, [one] demographic group against another, by reflecting the lives, the common humanity existing within each. And we try to do that by choosing an article, but there's a whole variable in [it]. If you keep in close contact with people, then you're likely to be able, and you have an idea of balance. That's why it's nice to have a geographical area that you know. I mean, I really know this area very well, and the rest of the staff gets to know it. And you try to keep a balance. And we don't suddenly have three issues that talk about nothing but potholes [laughs]—you know.

So I would say it's being in touch with what's going on, and having the luck. It's really luck. I mean, you could write about a hundred other things, and we write about—But it's what people in the staff care about. And people write about what they're interested in. So we're just lucky to have a varied staff; we have—

MB: That was what I [was going to] ask.

TL: Yeah, we have a varied staff. Let's see: well, we have three African American[s]. We have Asian American people writing for us; [we have] Wang. We don't have many. We have had, in the past.

But I don't know; I don't know whether it's the actual background of an individual, it's the interests, and the way an individual functions, that makes them alert to and sensitive to the community they live in. And you don't have to be a member of a Buddhist sect to write about a Buddhist sect. Meredith Florian, who has been doing some of our main writing lately, is a—I don't know what her background is, but I'd say sort of a middle-class intellectual background—but her job is as a night nurse in the Tenderloin, in San Francisco. She has a whole way of being in the world that makes her aware of certain kinds of things.

MB: Is there a social issue that maybe the paper has sort of taken up as their own, and really sought to make progress on?

TL: We were very interested in supporting the American Indian Charter School; we thought that was a good idea. We in general try to support the public schools, because I'd say we believe in public education, and public libraries. And everybody on our staff is sort of unanimous that we don't have—We have one conservative Republican writer, who supports George Bush, who supports the military, whatever they do, whose high point in his own life was his military experience. And he's a regular writer for the *Metro*. But he's about the only one of them who thinks like that.

MB: *His name?*

TL: His name is Gordon Lavery. He's a very sweet, wonderfully kind, nice man, with these views. [Laughs] He was out helping to run the recall of the governor, and things like that.

MB: *Has he been writing for the paper for quite a while?*

TL: He and I began with the *Metro* at the same time. We used to meet with Suzan Lorrain in a house down on Suter Street. Gordon and I got to know each other then. He was much more military then; he's much more outnumbered now. Probably because I don't attract that type of thinking! [Laughs] And people can't get along very well in the *Metro* if they can't get along with me at all; if they don't like me at all, then they generally quit. But I haven't had—I've had some people quit, but it wasn't over politics, I don't think.

MB: *Talk to me about the Indian Charter School you mentioned.*

TL: There's a group living in this neighborhood—I don't remember how I got connected with them. They tried to start a charter school, and they had tremendous battles within their community, and they came to the *Metro*. I mentioned this to you before, and I forgot how it all happened, and I would have to do research. I don't have it in my head. But I know that now, they feel as if the paper was their friend, and we have a very good relationship. And that really helps. Two of our staff volunteer in other schools as teachers; that helps us. One person in Redwood Heights, and I volunteer at the Sequoia School. The staff, all of them, have connections with their community.

MB: We spoke with the MacArthur Coalition, which was instrumental in getting you involved with the paper. I was wondering if you might discuss your experience with different organizations like the MacArthur Coalition, maybe some of the organizational leaders. And some input on maybe what determines which organizations last, and which do not?

*TL: That's a very good question. I've seen the Dimond Improvement Association go through at least three major phases, and I've been a member of that organization ever since I lived here, because the Dimond Library is my library, the DIA meets there, and it was a very well-established—I met the president when we were originally fighting against the Hillcrest Motel. And she is a professor of philosophy at U.C. Berkeley, and I liked her; she was one of our first board members of the *Metro*, because I knew her. These are the connections you make. And partly, I suppose I make the connections because—I can connect with her. I come from the same—not exactly the same—She comes from upstate New York. She's a wonderful person. And she would know a lot about history too, if anybody wants to—I think I must have given her name to Nancy [MacKay, coordinator of the Oakland Living History Program at Mills College.]*

MB: Her name again?

TL: Janet Broughton is her name. I joined the DIA and saw the DIA in its days when it had an impossibly stuffy, reactionary, difficult bunch of old men running it, from the days when it was a protectionist organization, exclusionary one. And I saw it have quite a lot of strength; it was a period when Janet was the president, and it was well run. It was the major place where the city council rep would come to make his pronouncements; he used it as a platform. And Dick Spees was a supporter of the organization, gave it prominence, gave it status. He was the city council member then. And they conducted regular pleas to the city about how traffic was being handled, how parking was being handled, how trash cleanup, safety in the park, all the things that people organize around.

And then the organization—it fell apart, for a while. And until some of the old people, who were damaging and tearing the organization to pieces, left, it couldn't have a revival. But now suddenly, because of a certain pure luck of combination of human beings—you couldn't figure out in a month of Sundays why they got together, or why it happened—it's having a resurgence of life.

And the MacArthur Coalition was succeeded by something called the Laurel Community Action Project, which had a great heyday under the leadership of a very strong woman, who moved out of the area.

MB: Do you recall her name?

TL: Yes; I'll think of it in just a minute². A wonderful—red hair—it'll come to me—Talk about other things and it'll come, because I'm asking myself to remember her name. It's ridiculous that I can't. I have photographs of her; I know her. Anyway, she's gone. They had succeeding people; the succeeding people got too busy, didn't have a clear vision, ran into a whole lot of difficulties in the Laurel about organizing that I mentioned before. It all fell apart; they don't meet, they don't exist as far as I can see at all. And the Laurel [has] a whole bunch of interesting things going on. The bookstore that Luann Stauss runs is like a whole community center. Lease Wong and her toy store is another whole community center. It's a lively place.

MB: So what would you think is the glue—community organization, whether it's a voluntary association or whatever—that would hold one together?

TL: Well, they probably would need one or two or three issues, which they could get a consensus, to get excited about. And then organize with projects that are connected. [It] would have to be an issue where you could succeed. You pick something, you make a strategy, and you win it. And there isn't a common thought.

MB: Let's see if you can respond to this statement: "Community development corporations first appeared as an outgrowth of the Civil Rights movement. Proponents claim that CDCs promote community empowerment through the successful application of business skills tempered with social awareness. Critics claim that CDCs are not really bottom-up organizations, and that by focusing too much on bricks and mortar, they've abandoned the social aspects of the neighborhood". Are you familiar with the community development corporations they're talking about? They contain elements of both community organizing and economic and physical developments, I think.

² Ruth Malone. Toni Locke revision, 2005.

TL: Who set them up, and who supports them? Where do they come from?

MB: *That's one of the things I was seeing if you would respond to. Some of the arguments about that is that it's the outside people coming in, and that—*

TL: A lot of the things that are happening in the community are just that. We have an article coming up in the *Metro* about youth grants. With a youth grant, the people that started the tennis program at Mills College that brings kids who wouldn't get tennis otherwise into the game, are doing a wonderful thing. That's from the outside. The process is one that I haven't really looked into too much. I don't know that this control of that money, because I believe that—I don't know how these grants stipulate the way they're going to be used, but there must be a lot. The Annie E. Casey Foundation came into the Fruitvale area, produced the money that enabled them to start a newspaper. This is one of the ways this society works, and I'd say use every tool in your arsenal to make things that help people, because we have so many people that desperately need help. They're not getting a good education in schools. We have a horrible situation for the poor people of this country. For a majority in Oakland—I don't know the percent, maybe one-third of the population are poor. Have inadequate resources in terms of health and education, and everything else.

MB: *How do you feel urbanism has affected the Laurel District, in particular?*

TL: The Laurel is picking up, so far, because the more the small businesses, the more foot traffic, the more institutions that are socially healthy, like World Ground Café, which brings people together in a very positive, human setting, and the bookstore, and Laurel Hardware, and probably a big grocery store like Albertsons, and certainly a grocery store like Farmer Joe's, these are all very flourishing, basic institutions to a city. So urbanism in the sense of a small business neighborhood—it's what Oakland is good at, and what Oakland needs to do more of. And that's what Jerry Brown is not doing.

MB: *Do you feel gentrification's been an issue?*

TL: Well, of course, it's lovely. I'm totally the beneficiary of gentrification. Partly I'm slightly gentrifying in my area, compared to the people that lived here before, although

they were lovely people. But the people that have moved in here, five or six or seven homes, all bought their homes at between \$350,000 and \$400,000. I bought mine at \$63,000. And they are fixing them up, and people that have made it in the world and are feeling comfortable and happy can keep their—I've had people move into this house next door; we had a black family that moved in, but they didn't last more than a year or so when they couldn't make their payments, and moved out. So it's easier to live in a gentrified neighborhood. And I'm not going to suddenly go out and say, "I don't want to be gentrified!" I love it!

MB: Do you feel there's been a decline in the sense of community in the Laurel District?

TL: Oh, no, it's increased.

MB: Over this time frame that you've been in the area, was there a trend where it was declining and is now picking up, or do you find it's been improving each year as it goes on?

TL: Well, I suppose I so much believed in promoting this process that I may have felt that it was going on all the time. [Laughs] I mean, I felt ever since I came here that we're making a lot of headway in friendly relations between groups and people. And because I'm in the paper, which is dedicated to that, I see the best of it always happening. If it isn't happening, I don't know; somebody else [has to] come and look around. I have illusions.

MB: Do you see an increase in formal neighboring, just as much as relations between businesses downtown?

TL: Ever since I've been here, I've been through three different phases of organizing home alerts. And they're organized, and people all get together. This neighborhood was tremendously organized by me, and a couple of other neighbors in '83, because our single family zoning was broken and a developer bought the old basic farm, the Parrot farm that was over there on the other side of the creek, and proposed to put in fifteen units and a fifteen-car garage and a main entrance down here next to my property. And I got on the warpath and everybody in this whole block, and Florida Street, we spent three years

going to the—This is how I learned about the city, actually. This is really how I learned; not through the *MacArthur Metro*. I forgot. This was the first thing I got involved in; it was just personal. Because if they did this, my whole property was not worth anything to me.

MB: So this was the first thing that got your hands dirty down here.

TL: Absolutely, I forgot. I was totally self-centered. And I've got [a] tremendous file, because I had a friend who was a piano tuner who lived on the corner of Madeline and Maple. Susan Graham, she was a wonderful person. I had more fun working with her. And many of the other people who lived in this area, I'm still in touch with some of them. We made a case for ourselves, and it involved everything: going to creek protection, learning about our creek; having the birdwatchers report about the bird population here; having traffic studies of our traffic. And we went down to the Public Planning Commission over and over again as a delegation to speak. And we finally got a compromise solution. We didn't win outright, but we got the whole thing scaled back, the driveway and this strip of land that I'd simply loved was in perpetuity declared as not to be used and to be landscaped.

MB: So it was a partial victory.

TL: Yeah, from my point of view, I won everything.

MB: That's what first got you going.

TL: Yeah, absolutely. I forgot that.

MB: Just a couple more questions. What would you say is the biggest change, both in the area, over the years, and also within the paper?

TL: Well, the paper has changed in technology a lot. Because it's much easier to produce, maybe we have more volunteer input, because of the computer and digital photography.

MB: That's right, you were saying you used to have to hand-put—

TL: People would put it in my mailbox and would be just written out. And then I would type it up on my old typewriter, and we'd go through all these stages before we got to the printer. And now all of the technical part is easier. The contact between each other is easier.

MB: *Has the quality of the paper improved with technology as well?*

TL: I think so. I think the paper has improved. I'd have to have somebody who is able to take an objective look, or even time to do it myself. I'm totally on this—like you're in a treadmill—and I'm never able to go back, I'm always going forward. [Laughs] I'm like a squirrel in a cage. I think the writing has improved. I learned a lot about writing from working with Anne Fox, who was a very good teacher of how to do journalistic style. We have another copyeditor who's a retired English professor from Mills.

MB: *What's the name?*

TL: Her name is Roussel Sargent, and she taught Shakespeare courses, and was, I think, at Mills for about twenty-five years until she retired. We do a lot of whipping material into shape. She probably treated her students more kindly than we treat our writers, because we have to make things fit, and be sharp, and be readable in columns—a lot of things that you don't look for in an English theme.

MB: *Sounds like your relationship with the writers is what makes the paper more interesting.*

TL: All these personal relationships is why I like to be in the paper, and Roussel and Ann and I have been doing this for ages. I now have someone who is my associate, and [will], I hope, become the editor. Her name is Sheila D'Amico. She's a very interesting woman. Done a million things in her life. She's been a preacher, she's a lawyer, she teaches political science part-time at Laney College; she's a grandmother, but I guess Sheila can't be more than—she isn't sixty, she's probably about fifty-five. All these relationships are really interesting to me. I really like people.

MB: *And how about change in the community?*

TL: Oh, okay. Change in the community. Well, I believe that the demographics have changed. First of all, there's a large new Asian population, which is important to the area. And there is gentrification: a lot of homes have been bought up. The people that live on my corner here are a young couple who work for Pixar, and I think the reason they bought that house is because it was such a good price. And it's an interesting piece of architecture. But people like that that make really very good incomes—and they both work—There are a lot of professional people larded all through this area.

MB: How has the Asian population impacted the neighborhood?

TL: Well, we've elected an Asian American city council member with the support of the voters. She has a strong support from these voters. And bases herself among them very consciously; it's a mission she's on. I think she's going to be the first Chinese American governor. [Laughs] Very ambitious woman. Tremendous worker.

MB: This will be one of our final questions. If you could wave a wand and make any change possible, what would be the first thing you would change?

TL: In the whole world? [Laughs]

MB: Well, you can tell me that, and also in this [area].

TL: In my family, in Oakland?

MB: Tell me in the world, and then tell me in Oakland.

TL: In the world?

MB: That's a big one.

TL: If I had a wand, I would wish for the human race that they could move through the stages toward a more enlightened self-rule, faster. So they wouldn't have to perhaps destroy the planet before they get there. But just move faster, because—

MB: *Get there, already.*

TL: Like the whole Muslim world is in a time warp. And this Western world is—I'd like to see the things that have to happen if you're going to make the planet a decent, livable place, happen more easily and faster. It's a totally hopeless, idle wish. [Laughs] But it would be my wish.

MB: *How about for the area?*

TL: For the area, I don't know. I find it hard. We have a fairy godmother in our area. Her name is Karen Lassen; we had a picture of her on the front of the *Metro* with a little wand. She is a therapist, and she has a group of friends, ten women or so, and they have a fund. And they look around, and when they see something that really needs help, they give a donation. They really helped—

MB: *How long [have] they been in the area?*

TL: I only heard about them a couple of years ago. They gave money to a project on Coolidge Avenue which was started by a group of grandmothers who got together because their grandbabies were scholarship people in a very, very good childcare center here on Brookdale and Coolidge. And the parents were all either in jail or on drugs and unable to take care of the children, and the grandmothers were stepping in. [Phone rings] And out of this came a project of a little park, and [phone rings] and then a rental—whoever this is isn't very keen, right? [Tape stops]

—gave money to that project, the grandmother's project to take care of the kids. They pick things that they—I don't know what I would do.

MB: *I guess another way of asking it is, what would you see as a major social problems in [the area]?*

TL: In this area?

MB: *Yeah.*

TL: Well, they're not much different from the whole city. American cities are in crisis because of the budget deficit, the trillions that are going to be loaded onto the next generation. They're in crisis because funding mechanisms starve social institutions. They're in crisis because social institutions have been allowed to dissipate.

MB: I know for instance in the daily press, almost every day almost, unfortunately you can pick up the paper and have another homicide in the City of Oakland.

TL: This has to do with race relations, and poverty. And the fact that the war against drugs was directed against the African American people living in the cities, which then criminalized the only economy that uneducated, poor black families depended on. So it just threw a whole generation of young men into prison, and rotated them back out into the community, and we all reap the whirlwind. [Phone beeps] I will hang up, he tells me to!

MB: Can you think of anything that you want to discuss that we may have missed? An important question I may not have asked?

TL: It really depends on what you want to say in the end. I mean, I've been talking about things which really aren't in your—they're social philosophy and politics, and they're not—I mean, I don't know whether you want—If it's oral history—I'm not sure what you need.

MB: Tell me what you were thinking, when I talked about oral history; what were you expecting to be talking about?

TL: I really didn't know. I'm only acquainted with these things when—The guy who interviewed me from the Air Force about making guns during World War II. He had a very limited desire to find out things, and when he came to the end of what he wanted to know, he just quit. I didn't ramble on when I was talking with him! But with you, it's fun; you press my buttons and I ramble.

MB: That's what oral history is about; we get our historical moments and truth by listening to you talk about your life.

TL: The big thing that is interesting, though, is if you want facts that can be put in a longitudinal history, that's one thing; and then if you want the kind of personal things, which are—it's very complex. I focus a lot on myself, but you might talk with someone else who would be much less self—I never think about myself as being self-centered, but obviously I am. You'd get somebody who would tell you, "Well, on such-and-such a day, this happened, and then on this day, that happened." They'd tell you facts.

MB: That's sort of my responsibility; that's my end of the deal. I research to the extent that is necessary. Your part in it is just simply telling me your life, and telling me your experiences, which is just what you did, beautifully. I just wanted to give an opportunity, if there was something you may have wanted to talk about that I may have missed.

TL: Well, I don't think that in this history—I certainly wouldn't have missed this for the world, because getting to know the kinds of people and the nature of this neighborhood has just been absolutely a tremendous learning experience for me. It's tremendously different from living in a New England town. It's tremendously different from living in an academic environment. It gives you confidence in the human race; it's really wonderful.

MB: You mentioned somebody's name, that you hoped that she was the next editor. What advice would you give her on taking on that position?

TL: Sheila is going to have to figure out—She already says, "We're going to need a bunch of people to do what Toni has done." And she's already got someone that she's trying to get to help her. She ran a shelter for battered women in Vermont; she has a legal practice; she has a whole lot of achievements and styles of life. And she's simply going to have to see if her personality and style of life melds into running a neighborhood newspaper. And the way she's trying to find out is by getting into it. [End of side B]