

00:00:03.38

KATHLEEN ESMIOL: Uh oh red lights.

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TECHNICIAN: I got the back one. Do you have a second?

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VIDEOGRAPHER: Can you clap one time, right in front of your face?

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KATHLEEN ESMIOL: [Clap]

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VIDEOGRAPHER: Perfect.

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KATHLEEN ESMIOL: Again?

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VIDEOGRAPHER: No, that was it.

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INTERVIEWER: Kay, can you start off by stating and then spelling your first and last name as you'd like them appear in the documentary, and then whatever title you'd like us to use.

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KATHLEEN ESMIOL: Okay. My name is Kathleen Esmiol. K-A-T-H-L-E-E-N. E-S-M-I-O-L. And I am a retired teacher. I worked for District 20 for 25

years as an English teacher and teaching humanities and what was the other question?

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INTERVIEWER: I guess would we, in the purposes of this documentary, would we list you as author or historian?

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KATHLEEN ESMIOL: Oh, well, I'm an author essentially but I always think I'm someone who saves stories from history, a lifesaver for history.

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INTERVIEWER: Cool.

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KATHLEEN ESMIOL: Is that going to, you're not going to use that, right?

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INTERVIEWER: No, no we're just trying to get an idea for how you want your name to appear.

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KATHLEEN ESMIOL: Good. Okay.

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INTERVIEWER: Kind of wrap our heads around it. Okay great. So we want to start off by just painting general portrait of Fannie Mae, no pun intended, since her portrait is literally behind you, but in terms of her personality.

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Okay, so let the interview begin. Can you give us a description of Fannie Mae Duncan? Her general personality, demeanor, appearance. Who did she walk into the room as?

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KATHLEEN ESMIOL: Fannie Mae Duncan. How in the world do you describe Fannie Mae Duncan? She was flamboyant. She was good natured. She had a great sense of humor. She was statuesque. She was 5 foot 7, but she always had on very high heels so she was much taller than that when she looked down upon you.

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She could be officious because she was an in charge person but she could laugh at the drop of a hat if something funny happened and she can laugh at herself.

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She was a wonderful human being who never forgot her roots. She had great empathy for the downtrodden and maybe if she had the opportunity, she tried to change that for them. She wanted always to make sure that every child got a chance in life.

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But when she walked into a room you could hear people whisper, "Fannie Mae Duncan is here, Fannie Mae Duncan is here. It's Fannie Mae." Wonderful person.

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INTERVIEWER: Wonderful. And you can just talk to me. So let's rewind back in time to Alabama before Fannie Mae was born. What was the life of her grandparents and her parents in Alabama?

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KATHLEEN ESMIOL: Well Alabama as you can imagine that long ago the turn of the century was very different than it is now. And she actually didn't know her grandparents. They didn't live to know her. She only knew them by stories, the Agrarian Society and the family worked extremely hard.

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Young women were married by 14, usually maybe sooner. But in the case of her mother, the mother's family was the Brinson family. And her mother's mother died in childbirth. She gave birth to three; her mother's mother died in childbirth leaving Cake, was the name given to the oldest daughter, a nickname I assume.

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And then of course, Fannie Mae's mother, Mattie and a little brother. Just to give you an idea of life at the time, they, as I said were living in an agrarian culture still so they were out picking cotton in the fields and they were--

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INTERVIEWER: Thanks, guys. Wonderful. So let's just rewind a little bit, so we're talking about Alabama and Fannie Mae's grandparents.

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KATHLEEN ESMIOL: Fannie Mae's mother was a Brinson and her mother had three children, Cake, the oldest daughter, then Mattie was in the middle and the little brother. Unfortunately, because they were orphaned with the mother's death, the sister, who would have been an aunt, Aunt Georgia, took charge of the children.

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They were out in the fields one day picking cotton when suddenly a car full of white men pulled up, snatched the little boy from the field, never to be seen again. So like many people from that era and that culture, the life was difficult, shall we say.

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The father's family, we know a little bit about, not the grandparents but there were 11 children. There were seven boys and four girls. There is very little record of girls because they didn't pay much attention in history to recording their histories or who they were; only the boys because of work and they were the laborers and the boys were very, very close.

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Fannie Mae's father was Herbert Bragg and the boys were an interesting group in terms of their names. There was Early, Prince Albert, Felix whom they called Uncle Honey, Jesse, James and Sully. That group of boys were like a band of brothers very, very close and so they were fairly successful.

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Herbert the oldest, married Fannie Mae's mother, Mattie, when they were just youngsters; she was only fourteen. He was maybe six years older. At any rate they were successful in what they were doing. Fannie Mae of course was the granddaughter of slaves and so life at that time, was a transitional period that was rather intense.

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INTERVIEWER:

Very well said. Yeah, and so anything else you want to say to set the scene for and perhaps it will come up when we're talking about the differences between. So essentially when and how did the family relocate from Alabama. So they were in Alabama. What was the motivation for leaving Alabama?

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Well probably the family would have remained in Alabama indefinitely as most did but a tragedy occurred. It was a very serious racial incident. A little boy who was a part of the extended family, he was only four years old, got into an argument with a little white girl, who of course was not exactly a playmate but because his parents served her family, they played together, preschool, that was accepted in those days.

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There was an argument over a toy that actually ironically belonged to the little boy, but when he slapped her to get it back, that was the end of his life for him. He was brutally murdered and it was to teach a lesson, to make a point. Respect was based on fear in those days.

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The brothers, the five oldest, were resigned to leaving immediately. Herbert, being the oldest was the first. They went as far as they could go, went up to Ohio, I believe it was, but Herbert went to Oklahoma and found a tenant farming situation.

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And so he brought his family with him. There were three children at the time. Francis the oldest, Vernon and Johnny. And the hope was that they would have a chance in life because it was very clear that in Alabama they were not going to have that opportunity. Oklahoma offered hope.

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INTERVIEWER:

And then can you insert Fannie Mae into this timeline, so [inaudible 00:14:26.26] later.

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KATHLEEN ESMIOL:

All right. Once they arrived in Oklahoma, Fannie Mae was born shortly thereafter on the Fifth of July. She missed the Fourth of July by one day, which she let everybody know and it was 1918 at that time.

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And of course she was the first of the children not to be born in the south. She didn't have the imprint of the South. The fear that they experienced, the history that they knew, which had many tragedies, you know, that were a part of their family's background.

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And so she was from the very beginning, outspoken, gregarious, inventive, a mischief maker. Someone that had to be watched at all times. She had a wonderful life as far as she was concerned in Oklahoma because she decided early on she was not going to be a little cotton picker.

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And so the parents took the two older children Vernon and Frances to the field. And that left Fannie Mae, in her opinion, in charge of the other children because two more then were born. And that was her little sister, Selena, who she dearly loved and her brother, named Herbert, after his father.

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It was kind of a foreshadowing about who she was going to become because as she would get bored, she had great ideas, great inventions. One time she decided that she would fly them all to a friend's house. She'd never been in an airplane but had heard about them and so she, in her mind, devised what she thought an airplane was.

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Took an old baby carriage that was broken, but she could seat people in, had her brother, Johnny, get big cans that he could put kerosene or coal oil or something flammable in and she had all the children dressed in their Sunday finery.

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And she had Johnny dip a flaming rag into, I guess, what she considered the engines. It was really quite brilliant. Fortunately, since mother was coming home from the fields to fix lunch for the whole family, she saw this conflagration over the hill and went running to her children who were still dressed in their finery and smoky circumstances, but planning to take off.

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And Fannie Mae was, of course, admonished. She became a great problem solver, primarily because that was just one of her many escapades and her problem solving skills were as a result of trying to get out of trouble most of the time.

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She was also a great little mathematician. She understood numbers and subtraction, addition and what have you from the time she was very young, because the family had a roadside fruit and vegetable stand. Cotton was their major, their major crop but fruit and vegetable, now that was an actual business, as far as she could tell

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And because she understood math, her father let her make change and she could see a hint of the business world and how it operated. They were usually in a shady spot, you know, kind of near the apple orchard, and so it wasn't like being out in the hot sun with snakes and what have you. It was there in the shade.

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Getting money that could later be used for treats and what have you. And that was her introduction to the business world. So her mother and her father could kind of see where she was headed. Ultimately there were seven children and Fannie Mae was smack dab in the middle as the fourth. But she was definitely the leader of the pack.

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INTERVIEWER:

Amazing. Is there anything else you want to say about what it meant for Fannie Mae being the first of her family born outside of the South? What kind of life did that differentiate from her and her older siblings?

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KATHLEEN ESMIOL:

Okay. Fannie Mae, being born in Oklahoma, as I said, didn't have that imprint of the South on her. And from the very beginning she was free spirit and she saw all kinds of possibilities. Her main problem of course was her imagination and getting in trouble. But her older brothers and her younger brothers and her sisters all really kind of gravitated to her leadership.

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And so from the very beginning, even though she did go to segregated country schools and the white kids and the black kids when they passed each other would throw rocks and you know threaten and do things that all kids do regardless of the culture or race. She didn't feel the threat that her older brothers and sisters really had internalized.

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She always felt that whatever she could get away with, she was going to try, if her goal or her vision of whatever she was trying to accomplish was that important to her. So from the very beginning she was more confident, she was more independent, she felt empowered. And her father was constantly helping her in terms of focusing her, giving her structure and guidance.

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For instance, when she first went to school she had already figured out the alphabet. She just didn't know it in order and she really saw no reason as long as you knew all those letters why you had to say them in a specific order. And it was a major problem of course for the teacher who was trying to explain to Fannie Mae. No they were not going to learn her order of the alphabet.

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So her father sat her down and spent a great deal of time explaining that to her. She had advantages just naturally because she was so curious, so bright, that to cope with her as a child her parents really did interact with her a lot and it had everything to do, I think, with the fact that she was born in Oklahoma and that was her start in life.

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INTERVIEWER:

Beautiful. And that's a good segue into tragedy striking when Fannie is 8 years old and tells the story of her father passing away at that time in her life.

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KATHLEEN ESMIOL: As you can probably appreciate, Fannie Mae's father was her champion. He spent a lot of time with her. A lot of it to discipline her probably. But she felt very valued. And so when tragedy struck, at least for a while, it changed her personality.

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Her father was very successful as a tenant farmer; even bought a piano. He bought a new car and one day when he was out on the road returning from getting just the staples that he needed from the general store in Luther, which was where Fannie was born, Luther, Oklahoma.

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A storm came up and the roads were very slick and he lost control of the car. Had a one car accident and was badly cut to the point that he was bleeding out on the side of the road. A good Samaritan came along and not knowing what to do, smeared axle grease into the wound, which of course stemmed the bleeding, saved his life but only momentarily of course because without adequate medical attention in that era, gangrene set in.

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And father, Herbert, who the children called Papa was frantic. He was disabled of course and dying and the boys were far too young to be able to run the entire farm without a grown man. But he lived long enough to get the apple crop in and try to at least assume he was going to be able to provide something for the family because he knew death was imminent.

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He did indeed die Thanksgiving of 1926, leaving mama with a brand new six month old. Okay he died--

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VIDEOGRAPHER: Start that again.

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KATHLEEN ESMIOL: Tragically, Herbert died at Thanksgiving in 1926, leaving mama, Mattie with seven children because she had given--. Tragically, Herbert died at Thanksgiving in 1926 leaving Mama Mattie with seven children because she had given birth in May to the youngest child, Cornelius.

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It was a desperate situation, but fortunately the family stepped in. The brothers came to assist, Uncle Early being the primary one since he was just a few years younger than Herbert and they were able to move the family out of the house. But of course there was no--

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INTERVIEWER: We're talking about Early taking care of the family.

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KATHLEEN ESMIOL: Oh, Early, okay.

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INTERVIEWER: We have not gotten to relocation, but you're kind of leading up to it.

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KATHLEEN ESMIOL: Yeah.

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INTERVIEWER: So Herbert's family was able to kind of, his brother [inaudible 00:26:31:25].

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KATHLEEN ESMIOL: Fortunately, Uncle Early, who was just a few years younger than his brother, Herbert, was able to distribute the family because a mother with seven children, no one could house the whole brood. Fannie Mae was separated from all of them. She went with a cousin, Ever Roper, and she was in Arcadia which they called Arcady.

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But the other children, the three oldest, Vernon and Frances and Johnny had to drop out of school. So they stayed with mama because it was their job to, Francis to become a maid and the boys to become common laborers. Thinking how young they were, just very, very young teenagers; they had to support the family.

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The other family members, especially Uncle Early and his wife, Middy, were able to help in many ways but basically speaking, the family was broken up into many parts. But Fannie Mae separated

all by herself so she was very, very despondent during this era. Finally, Uncle Early was able to get them into a very small cottage, but squeeze them all in there in Guthrie where he lived.

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It's a bigger city with more opportunities and family was rejoined. Fannie Mae coming to be with the family again and the school was very good there because it was a bigger city. And when she went to school, of course, everything was very different. She wasn't the confident person she had been.

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Her life had changed dramatically. She was alone. No father, no friends, older children working, even her mother worked outside of the home, for a family that would have been considered affluent in those days because they had a white housekeeper for the children. And Fannie Mae's mother was essentially a maid, cooking and cleaning.

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So it was a desperate time, for about seven years. Probably Fannie Mae wouldn't have recovered except that she had a country schoolteacher named Fannie Mae Hamline who could see that she had talent and potential, even though she's very withdrawn and what saved her was a spelling bee contest.

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Fannie Mae Hamline found out that not only was she an excellent mathematician but she was top speller and once Fannie Mae was

on a stage down in Oklahoma City, and that spelling contest and winning it, with the spotlight on her, she was back to the old Fannie Mae.

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It was a transitional period, though. The family was not doing well financially. So about that time, fortunately, the cavalry came to the rescue in the name of Aunt Fang Harris. She was Early's wife's sister and she could see that the family was not making progress and so she had a suggestion. She lived in Manitou Springs as it turned out.

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INTERVIEWER:

Great. So, yeah, we can take it back to Aunt Fang--

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KATHLEEN ESMIOL:

Aunt Fang lived in Manitou Springs, as I said and she and her husband, Dan Harris, had a very, very good jobs. She worked as a maid in cleaning banks and her husband also had a good job and so she had the idea of having the oldest child, Frances, go back to Manitou Springs with her and get a good job, one that paid well.

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It was very, very difficult for the whole family because as you can imagine they were a very tight knit family. But Mama Mattie let her go. And this was where the story changed totally. They left Alabama, which would have created one set of circumstances in terms of how their lives turned out.

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Oklahoma. They lived through the dust bowl, they lived through the Depression, a difficult time and without a father, almost impossible. But hope was on the way because once Frances was in Colorado Springs, actually living in Manitou Springs, rent free, with Aunt Fang and Uncle Dan, she was able to earn quite a bit.

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She worked at Bingo Jack's, which was a bingo parlor in Manitou Springs and then she got a great job that lasted for several decades. She worked for R. P. Aldridge, who was a mercantile store owner and this gave her the opportunity to send money home to mom and the children. Over a period of two years she didn't spend one cent on herself.

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At the end of two years, mama had enough money that the family could afford to take the trip all the way from Guthrie. At that point with a trip on the horizon, things were really looking up, everybody was very, very excited.

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Uncle Early volunteered his truck and his son, Linwood Bragg, to drive the family all the way from Guthrie, where they were living, to Colorado Springs, Colorado. It was a long trip, and of course no place to stay along the way for a mother with an additional person, because actually additional two people, because Vernon had married a 14-year-old at a very young age, Ezzie and they had a little boy.

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So the truck was packed, not just with their belongings, but with kids leaning out every window and at the back of the truck. There were no interstates at the time and so they were on country roads and really having a difficult time making it because there was no place where they could be served along the way. It was a very difficult trip.

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But at long last they could see the mountains of Colorado and eventually Pike's Peak, fearful, the children were, that those mountains were going to fall on them, because--. The children, of course, were fearful, looking at the mountains; they've never seen them before and didn't understand exactly where--

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VIDEOGRAPHER: I'm going to have you clap one more time.

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KATHLEEN ESMIOL: Okay. [Clap]

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VIDEOGRAPHER: [Inaudible 00:25:13.4].

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KATHLEEN ESMIOL: Well, you can imagine, seeing the gigantic mountains. They'd never seen anything like that before in their lives. They were afraid they'd fall down on them. And of course they were screaming.

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But once they got closer to the city and saw the trolley cars and saw the gigantic buildings, the big hotel that looked like a castle to them, and all the people everywhere, and all the trading that was going on, and there were people with horses everywhere. They were so excited, but most especially Fannie Mae. She found out she was no country girl at heart. The city was definitely for her.

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INTERVIEWER:

Amazing. So, what did she spend her first summer doing in Colorado Springs. And then you could go into what her middle and high school years looked like as well.

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KATHLEEN ESMIOL:

Okay. All right. Fannie Mae wanted to get a job, of course, right away; it was summer and of course the kids knew they were going to all have to work.

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Vernon of course immediately began very involved with work as a laborer which was very hard. But he also had another job, which I'll tell you about in a moment. Fannie Mae got a job that was hardly glamorous and it certainly did not foretell how she would look in the future.

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She was up to her elbows and grease and suds scrubbing pots and pans at a barbecue joint and then once she got cleaned up, she went

downhill because this was up on High Street where she was staying, again with Aunt Fang like her sister had, and Uncle Dan and she worked at the spa. She handed out soap and towels and things to people who had tuberculosis and who had come to Manitou to be at the spa to try to find their health again because the climate really was conducive to at least improving their health, not necessarily being cured.

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For fun, this was rather interesting what the kids devised; Vernon had a job at night where he cleaned up a place called Hiawatha Gardens. It was a dance hall. And what they figured out was when he pulled a flatbed truck up by the windows so that the kids could look in, they could watch all the beautiful white ladies and white men. The women in long skirts and the men dressed up I suppose in Western style dancing.

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And for Fannie Mae, it was the most exciting thing in the world. Of course, they were dancing out on the flatbed truck and enjoying it themselves, very imaginative and inventive. They didn't feel poor. They were dirt poor but they knew how to enjoy life fully. They had a perspective at a very young age.

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After that summer, of course, it was time to go to school. And so Fannie Mae was to be enrolled in what was North Junior High at the time. It's now North Middle School. And the younger ones were going to be going to Garfield and so they had enrolled them

in Garfield first and then Fannie Mae and her mother went to North Middle School, where Fannie Mae made the mistake of answering that she was in the seventh grade because she had just completed the seventh grade.

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So that's where she was put, the seventh grade; something that was learned later to be untrue, much to mama's dismay that her daughter had now been in the first part of the seventh grade two times. But nevertheless Fannie Mae adjusted very quickly. She became a social butterfly once she learned how not to talk like a country girl.

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And she was even chosen for a part in a play. But interestingly enough the play was way ahead of its time; it dealt with racial issues. And one of the boys there at the school was the son of Charles Bank, who was an activist for civil rights way before his time.

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And so the son told her she shouldn't be in that play because it's, they'll stereotype you and we don't believe in that, which was her first really experience with the concept of racism. It wasn't anything she'd ever thought about. She never considered herself anything but Fannie Mae Duncan. And she maintained that attitude the rest of her life; served her well.

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At any rate she was very successful as a student. She was a top student all the time that she was in school so that by the time she got to Colorado Springs High School, which is now Palmer, named after the general who was the founder of the city, she was well established as a person. She had jobs after school, so maintaining her average was a challenge. She waitressed at a restaurant run by the Wallace's on Colorado Avenue in a building she would later incidentally own.

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And she learned a lot because she watched, not only how the restaurant was operated by the Wallace's but the empathy that they showed to hoboes who came by. Nobody went away hungry, whether they could pay or not. All these lessons she cataloged in her own mind. All these lessons she catalogued in her own mind and of course it was of great use to her later in her life.

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Fannie Mae had many dreams from the very, very beginning, of course. She really wanted to be a nurse. She wanted to go back to what she called Langston College. It's actually Langston University and she wanted to be a nurse so that other people faced with tragedies like they had when her father was critically injured, would not have that experience and she could help. At heart, she was always a problem solver, good natured.

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She had a very big heart and she always wanted to help people. And she saw that as her role in life. As it happened, though, when

she was in school, she did very well, of course, being an integrated school because having a Quaker General fighting for the union with his black soldiers following him here, from the very beginning, the schools were integrated; all cultures worked together. The black community was very, very successful.

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And so the jobs that she took reflected the community in an interesting way. For instance, in addition to working at the restaurant, she was offered the opportunity to work for a very affluent Russian Count Benjamin Lufkoski. He had even been in the Russian army and is somewhat a legend here in the city. He was not an immigrant in the true sense in that he did not marry an immigrant and he was affluent, and where he lived was quite remarkable.

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When Fannie Mae was there for the first time she saw crystal chandeliers, she saw a grand piano because Mrs. Lufkoski was trained as a concert pianist. She saw velvet curtains, cornices, things that she didn't even know what they were to begin with.

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So sterling, not silver but sterling silver candelabra, china, crystal and marble topped tables, which she thought they were ridiculous, because they were cold and she could not see how you could keep food warm on a marble topped table.

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However, she cataloged all that, too, and realized, "I think I'd like to live like this." But she wasn't selfish; she wanted to make sure that her family did, too. Again in high school she was a social--. Again, Fannie Mae was quite the social butterfly; she belonged to many clubs.

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She did study, though, regularly usually with her white friends on the north end. She didn't discriminate. She was happy to be the treasurer of her class and was the treasurer of most organizations that she was part of, which was no surprise to anybody, because she was very organized. But she was popular, really beloved and quite the character. Everybody knew who she was.

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About that time, she also became a budding basketball player. The Hunter family, who owned Hunter Mortuary, Sam Hunter and his wife, they sponsored basketball teams outside of school for both boys and girls and Fannie Mae was a great player and her beautiful little sister, Selena, by the time she followed Fannie Mae, was also.

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Fannie Mae was happy to be heading toward her goal of leaving for college and becoming a nurse. But in the meantime she took part in every activity she could get her hands on. She wanted to be cultured so she belonged to some of the clubs where that was the goal to better yourself.

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About the time that she was really enjoying being a top basketball player, an older young man joined the crowd watching the basketball games and he seemed to be showing up pretty often; like every one of her games. His name was Ed Duncan. As it turned out, his brother, who was on the boys' basketball team introduced Ed finally to Fannie Mae. Fannie Mae didn't know that Ed was really scouting the crowd for a wife.

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He was at least six or seven years older than Fannie Mae and he was established. He had a job down at the Broadmoor working for Mrs. D. Arthur Jones as a general handyman and as her chauffeur and really trusted. Ed works down at the Broadmoor for Mrs. D. Arthur Jones who was Broadmoor socialite and he was her handyman and general chauffeur.

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And actually whatever she needed, you know, he was a go-for essentially for whatever Mrs. D. Arthur Jones asked. But she very much trusted him and valued him. He also later worked for the railroad. But that connection with Mrs. D. Arthur Jones is the one that was highly significant in Fannie Mae's story.

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Fannie Mae realized that Ed was serious about her. She even accepted a ring, which she kept under a rug because she didn't want to tell mama about the circumstances. And she kept putting him off, you know, because after all he's paying a lot of attention

and he had one vital possession that was very important. A car so she kept the relationship going.

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She graduated from Colorado Springs High School, the first in her family to graduate from high school in 1938, with the intention of now that she realized she didn't have the money to go to college, nobody had told her that was part of the deal, it wasn't just good grades. She went to work and was disgusted to find that with a high school diploma she could not get a job any better than the ones she had already had. So she worked again as a domestic or a maid.

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Ed in the meantime pointed out to her that if she would just marry him they would have two incomes to put away to save for college. And she finally gave in on October 9, 1939 and married Ed Duncan and became Fannie Mae Duncan.

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INTERVIEWER: Just got married to Ed [inaudible conversations 00:48:13.16]

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KATHLEEN ESMIOL: Should I go ahead and put in about Selena at that point became pregnant and ended up out in--

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INTERVIEWER: Was that when it was? At that time.

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KATHLEEN ESMIOL: Yeah.

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INTERVIEWER: Okay. Oh my goodness I didn't realize it was so early on.

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KATHLEEN ESMIOL: Oh yeah.

00:48:28:07

INTERVIEWER: Yeah, we could mention that now.

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KATHLEEN ESMIOL: All right I'll try to do it fast. Edit this because I wasn't planning, but I need to put her in, because she is so important.

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INTERVIEWER: Yeah.

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KATHLEEN ESMIOL: Ironically Fannie Mae and Ed moved to Corona Street, just not the Victorian mansion that we're currently sitting here in. It was a small, one of the small cottages, because Fannie Mae could walk to the job; another one as a domestic. But this time it was for the District Attorney. So now she had two mentors on her side who saw her as very bright and very principled and trustworthy. And later on in her life, that made a big difference, because they spoke up for her.

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The reason of course that she had to walk was because they only had one car and Ed had to go all the way down to the Broadmoor. Meanwhile, Fannie Mae's sister had become pregnant with a traveling pianist and she had the child. His name was Les, like his father Les Franklin and mama nicknamed him Syl because his middle name was Sylvester. So the family always called him Syl.

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At any rate when her sister went out to Hollywood, it looked like maybe things were going to work out very well because they did marry and actually Selena was discovered. She was a waitress at the time, but it was one of those Los Angeles nightclubs where someone, probably Muddy Waters, heard her singing, you know just kind of to herself off to the side, as she was the waitress, and asked her if she could sing and found out the girl had a voice and she was a looker. Absolutely a beautiful, beautiful woman. And so she not only sang for him--

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INTERVIEWER:

So, yeah, picking up from--

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KATHLEEN ESMIOL:

And so after she had established herself, Lionel Hampton learned about Selena and he asked her to be his vocalist, her big chance in life. Unfortunately, there was drug use in Hollywood at that time and it was no place for a little boy like her son. And so Fannie Mae went out to L.A. at Selena's request and brought the child home with her, at which point she decided that he needed to be

introduced to the business world. But I'm getting ahead of myself here.

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What actually happened before all of that is that Fannie Mae did not want to remain at the Fords because it was a difficult circumstance because of District Attorney Ford's wife. And so she got another job down, in the Broadmoor. This was with Caroline Jackson and she knew about that because of course Caroline Jackson was almost a neighbor to Mrs. D. Arthur Jones.

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That went well for a time period in that there were just two young daughters, really not that much younger than Fannie Mae actually. And it was a nice job, but when they were headed for Chicago and moving, Fannie Mae realized she was going to have to look elsewhere and she did not want to be another person's maid.

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About that time the whole world was engulfed with war and another turning point in life especially for Fannie Mae. When Pearl Harbor hit, the south end of town, that area that had been deeded by General Palmer for a base, Camp Carson, was overflowing with soldiers coming in. Many black soldiers; the black community had been very small up until that point.

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And so they needed housing. They needed separate facilities because the military was segregated at that point. And what Fannie

Mae found out through the grapevine, which was more powerful in those days than the Internet, was that there was a job opening at the--. What Fannie Mae found out at that point was that there was a job opening down at Camp Carson at the Haven Club, which was a facility for the black soldiers.

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So she went down, determined to get the job, not just looking for it and talked the manager into taking her to manage the soda fountain there. It was a point where she learned a very harsh life lesson and that was all those young men full of life and excitement and vitality that she served Banana Splits with a smile, didn't all come back and many who did, did not come back the person they had been.

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She developed tremendous sympathy for the military and for people who were willing to give their life in service to their country. She did very, very well. She made a lot of money for the military as she put it, when she heard another tip that interested her even more because this time, now that she had experience, not just as a domestic or a maid, but as a manager with a nameplate.

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At this point she got another hot tip and that was that there was a job opening downtown and now she had experience, not just as a domestic or maid but as a manager of the soda fountain. A manager with a nameplate. So the only problem she could see was in this

case, because she would be running a concession, she was going to have to have a business license.

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The job that she wanted was a real step up. There was a USO servicemen's center, which was across the street from what had been Wallace's Cafe where she had worked on Colorado Avenue, so she's very familiar with the area and she had a following. All these soldiers that she had come to love.

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And so she realized she had to get that business license, and she's 26 years old. So she found out City Manager was the person that she had to confront, or ask, and she went daily because in the beginning, Earl Mosley, who was the City Manager, took one look at her, 26-year-old, a woman, and black at that and decided she did not have the credentials to run a U.S.O. concession.

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He turned her down repeatedly. But she was far more persistent than he was patient. And so he gave in, thinking okay, it'll just be a trial run. She'll make it a couple weeks, maybe a month at best, and then I'll be through with her.

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However, that is not the way the story turned out, which will not surprise you at all. Because she talked Ed into giving up his job. He was now working at a really good job with a pension at the railroad.

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But Fannie Mae didn't cook and this was a little cafe with a snack bar that would seat probably a couple dozen people, maybe as many as 40 or 50 and she needed a cook that she didn't have to pay. And so she talked him into quitting his job. He did point out that the college education fund was still there but she was into bigger things and they were going to actually operate this concession. They didn't own the building but all the profits would be theirs.

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Immediate success. Because even though the city's schools were integrated from the very beginning and have never changed to this day, the city was not. The KKK had made inroads in the state's capitol and in the city, too. Not in the schools.

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But after General Palmer's death, it was possible for that to happen. And whereas, all cultures had gotten along quite well, the city was neither segregated or integrated really. It was just various cultures interacting in business and in ways that were mutually supportive.

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The city itself was segregated by understanding, shall we say. Restaurants did not serve blacks. If you were black, you walked to the back of the restaurant to do your job. If you wanted to be served by the restaurant, it was the beginning of takeout food and it was no compliment. Blacks had to go to the back of the restaurant to get food.

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And so Fannie Mae instead, the blacks could come in the front door. So not only did all the soldiers who loved her and she had quite a following among them anyway, came right straight to this little cafe and snack bar.

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The blacks in the city who worked downtown had a place they could go and sit down, be treated with respect and dignity and be welcome. Big success. You might think that that is the end of the story but another tragedy happened at this point.

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Fannie Mae became pregnant and she had a little girl, Yvonne. At this point tragedy struck again. Fannie Mae gave birth to a beautiful little girl. At this point Fannie Mae became pregnant. And it would have been a beautiful story to tell, but tragically, her baby girl, Yvonne Delores, died at birth. Fannie Mae, of course, was bereft but she handled stress very differently than most people.

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She immersed herself with more visions, more ideas, more work. And at this point, another opportunity emerged that totally distracted her from this terrible loss that she was feeling. Through the grapevine again, she learned that Lon and Alice Douglass, who lived in Denver, were putting up a building for sale. A building that they had owned for quite some time.

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They were distant relatives of Frederick Douglass, incidentally and the building was the very one where she had worked; two storey building. It had a huge wooden floor upstairs that had been used sometimes for a skating rink. An itinerate black minister, Father Divine, had held services there. It had many uses and it had many possibilities. Fannie Mae had her eye on that building. She told her husband, Ed, about her idea and of course he was thinking okay, cafe and bar downstairs; she was thinking nightclub upstairs.

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Well. There was a hitch of course. They didn't have enough money. They had saved a lot of money because they lived very frugally and they were very disciplined with their banking and their balance in their bank account. But they did not have enough totally for this building. And when Ed pointed that out to Fannie Mae, of course, she had already come up with an answer.

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She suggested that they go down and ask Mrs. D. Arthur Jones and the Broadmoor for the money they needed, which we're talking about \$3,000 and in today's dollars, that was a lot of money and they were asking a white Broadmoor socialite. Ed, of course, reared like a horse and was just appalled at the very idea. But Fannie Mae was very persuasive and just generally never took no for an answer. So they headed down and Fannie Mae planned how she was going to approach Mrs. D. Arthur Jones on the way down there.

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She's a quick thinker and she was able to present a business plan that made enough sense to Mrs. D. Arthur Jones, who also was still very fond of Ed because he was a loyal, conscientious, good man. And those qualities were very endearing to her. He would have dropped whatever he was doing to help Mrs. D. Arthur Jones at any time.

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So she decided to help them, went to the bank, First National right away. Let Jasper Ackerman, who was vice president at the time know that she needed \$3,000 dollars on the spot and that money was transferred and that deal was made. Fannie Mae and Ed now owned a building.

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They opened a cafe and bar, Duncan's Cafe and Bar, across the street from the U.S.O. Servicemen's Center. So for a while they were, you know, opening and working on one building and one business while trying to finish up with the other. But they made it.

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Now alcohol had been introduced to the picture; something Fannie Mae knew nothing about. And there are many humorous stories about her learning curve as men tried to explain to her about all the different beverages you needed. She didn't see why you didn't need just one form of beer and one form of alcohol. But she became very proficient. She's very organized and she was very observant in life about everything.

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She asked questions and she, it didn't matter who she asked, as far as she was concerned, if they had an answer. If it was a white businessman, she asked him and so she asked suppliers and she developed a relationship with white businessmen and suppliers in the community from the very beginning.

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Ed at this point, of course, because they still had a following, so unlike a lot of new businesses, they had customers right away and they were very successful from the very beginning. Mama now, of course helped with cooking, not on the spot, but catering more or less. And of course Ed was still cooking. Fannie Mae was running the show.

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On weekends they would go up to Denver's Five Points, which is often called the Harlem of the West. And there were very established and polished businesses there. One nightclub in particular, the Rossonian, was the place to be seen, in a Cadillac, if you had one.

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Ed took Fannie Mae, you know, just as a break from all their hard work. Because they literally worked seven days a week when it came right down to it. Ed thought they were sitting there relaxing and enjoying the entertainment, not realizing that Fannie Mae was sitting there sizing up the place, how it operated, the patterns that

the waitresses made as they walked through this little club, the way the singers and the vocalists presented themselves.

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She again, cataloged every memory and when she was ready and had all her plans organized including snagging the top waitress Joyce Peterson from the Rossonian to help her, because Joyce was in an interracial marriage, and Fannie Mae's idea appealed to Joyce. Fannie Mae let Ed know and also the Rossonian, who were about to lose one of the mainstays of their business.

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At any rate it all kind of began, the idea with a lounge upstairs in that area with just her brother playing with the trio. But slowly Fannie Mae bought the marble counter where people if they were black had never been permitted to sit, when that 10 cent store was being renovated. And she purchased pianos.

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But when the public, other than the blacks in the community, found out about what was happening was when she bought a sign some 20 to 30 feet, flamingo pink neon, that announced Cotton Club and that there would be two shows nightly and there would be dining and there would be dancing. Now the White population was quite amazed about what was going on and Fannie Mae was on to the success that she achieved as a female black nightclub owner.

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INTERVIEWER: So basically we can start by saying, what was the Cotton Club, just to kind of set the scene for everybody.

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KATHLEEN ESMIOL: Okay. The Cotton Club was an amazing place in that Fannie Mae, of course, had connections in Denver, where they booked the big names. And she realized that if, when they booked them in Denver, they could probably get anybody if she could offer a second gig down here. Very few places in the interior of America other than on the coast had a state where there were two major opportunities.

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And so she began going up every time there was a booking session, she booked entertainment, too. But not just anybody. She booked what became a music hall of fame.

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If you came to the Cotton Club and you'd been in New York and you were going to stay at the Antlers, for whatever business reason you had come here, all you had to do was walk out the door and down the street about a block on West Colorado Avenue, number 25 and you could see Louis Armstrong, Count Basie, Duke Ellington, Etta Jones, Lionel Hampton, she could get anytime because of Selena and every major name in the business, including all the like boy bands of the day who introduced dance moves that made them very, very popular and changed the culture.

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Soon whites, because these were black entertainers and they were not welcome in this unusually semi segregated society. They were not welcome to entertain at the Antlers, or the Broadmoor, or the major facilities. So if you wanted to see these amazing talents, the Cotton Club was the only place in town to do that.

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It wasn't long before Dad Bruce who was the law in these here parts, he was the Police Chief was notified by businessmen who were seeing their profits kind of level off and dip that Fannie Mae was welcoming white people into her Cotton Club and that, of course, had never been done by anyone.

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She was the first person, a black woman, amidst all these white business owners, who did accept her, incidentally, because she was in all the business organizations; again, often the Treasurer. and she was busy with March of Dimes and doing philanthropic things and getting all these white businessmen to join her. So she had become a very important person even in the business world.

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She was just Fannie Mae. She wasn't black or white. She was Fannie Mae. Well the complaints kept piling up and so Dad Bruce, as he was called, the Chief of Police, called her in and said he heard she was mixing colors and she couldn't be doing that. It was quite a session because she spoke up immediately; something he was not considered appropriate, and he'd never really had that experience, because he's a pretty tough guy.

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But she made intelligent arguments. She was educated and she had been a top student and she explained to him, "Look, whites know their constitutional rights. If I refuse them entry into my club are you going to back me up?"

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Well he was furious at this point because she'd out, in terms of a thinking match here, she'd won the chess match. And he angrily told her, "Yes he most certainly would. Serve only blacks, keep it black." Well she was not only angry as all get out, she stormed out.

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And by the time she got back to the club, everybody there was on fire with the news. The Chief of Police has been calling over and over and over again. You got to get him back. Well the phone rang again and it was the Chief of Police and he said, "Look. You're right. I can't afford that. I can't be doing that. You check them for age, just like you said, just check them for age. Not check them for color, and as long as they're old enough they can be there."

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Well it was a huge victory. The first truly integrated major business in Colorado Springs because of Fannie Mae Duncan, without any hostility whatsoever. Just an understanding that if you're educated, which she was, and you know what you're talking about and you're on the right side, ultimately you will succeed, which she did. All

the soldiers coming in, because a lot of the whites that were coming in were soldiers and they were coming--

01:14:28:16

MULTIPLE: [Inaudible conversations 01:14:28:16]

01:14:42:09

KATHLEEN ESMIOL: Now with Chief Bruce really backing Fannie Mae and the two of them developing an interesting alliance, he could see clearly that she was an important figure in the community, because she was principled, she followed the law. She stood up for the rights of all people. And so this alliance lasted for a very long time and had a great deal to do with the era of Colorado Springs history that was far less violent than the civil rights era across the rest of the United States.

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It's an amazing story that only happened here. A black female nightclub owner and a police chief working together to make it work. Because now whites could come in and they weren't sure whether that was possible, only the soldiers who came in and were always welcome, especially those who had brides of other cultures that they'd married during the war. And of course those roots were not really welcome in most places.

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The businesses were going well and Fannie Mae wanted to make sure that everybody understood, "Yes come in. You're welcome." So she had her husband initially pencil a sign.

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VIDEOGRAPHER: All right, one more time. Clap for me.

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KATHLEEN ESMIOL: Of course now things were going really, really well at the Cotton Club. It's what Fannie Mae had always dreamed of, having everybody, regardless of culture or race or any difference that most people used to not get along with each other, giving them an opportunity to enjoy each other.

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She was an amazing human being in that she was always looking for the best in people and encouraging them to do the same thing. She wanted to make sure that everybody understood that they could come in now, that there were no barriers whatsoever. Initially she had her husband pencil a sign that said, "Everybody welcome."

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But ultimately, because he was a graphic artist, he had worked for the city in that way, he created a sign, a big enough one. Eventually Ed was able to create a much more professional look created sign that said "Everybody Welcome" and they spotlighted it, so you couldn't miss it.

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It was in the cafe downstairs because of course the Cotton Club was upstairs under an awning that you went up to reach the floor.

And people were coming in, in a very relaxed mood, realizing, you know, they didn't have to worry about anything.

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With a sign out on West Colorado Avenue that said, "Everybody Welcome." They realized the doors were open and they didn't have to worry about anything, except age, which was fun for the Colorado College students who were trying to get in there. I was told that they often would try to sneak in and get to the bathroom and wait to see where Fannie Mae was so that they could avoid her and then maybe slip into the crowd. It never worked. At any rate.

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The soldiers of course had a place where they could be comfortable bringing in their wives from other cultures, people of every persuasion were there. It was a wonderful place, a hopping place, but Fannie Mae didn't stop there.

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The [inaudible 01:20:39:12] Printing Press Company, which was next door, the building was next door, decided to move and that gave her another opportunity to serve the public actually, to serve the community and to operate other businesses, more or less like concessions, like she had done with the U.S.O.

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So she had a barber shop and there was a beauty shop. Then they added a record shop and a gift shop. There was a pool hall. And in the back, because teenagers, black teenagers, did not have a place

to go to really enjoy themselves and be entertained but without alcohol. She opened the Cherry Pit Barbecue. Of course, a lot of adults went, too because of good food. But she hired Jimmy Jewels and the Diamonds, a group that was out of Louisiana that planned to be there just for a gig and stayed probably about a decade, for quite a long time.

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It was all a very, very big success and things were going extremely well. She had maybe the first mall in the city. Certainly blacks were welcome to shop at any time. She really had it open seven days a week. So people who had been inconvenienced really most of their life for the first time had opportunity, were treated with respect and dignity, and they were acknowledged as residents of the city.

01:22:10:03

INTERVIEWER: And why did Fannie Mae purchase this mansion? [Inaudible 01:22:12.10].

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KATHLEEN ESMIOL: Okay. All right.

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INTERVIEWER: You could start off maybe by saying, "This [inaudible 01:22:17:01] mansion where we are now, or lead off with something [inaudible 01:22:20:28].

01:22:30:09

KATHLEEN ESMIOL: Okay. Well you may wonder about the picture behind me, Fannie Mae of course. As of this moment I am sitting in her mansion. Forty-four rooms, if you count the enclosed porches, 8,000 square feet, two stories high, grounds so to speak that mama filled with flowers and gardens and vegetables. Well there's a story behind this house. Want to hear it?

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Fannie Mae realized that her entertainers, who are doing a show in the wee hours of the morning, were having to drive all the way back to Denver. A very dangerous situation actually and they were still just really hyped up from the show they had just given. And she was very concerned about their welfare.

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The city still had the major hotels sticking to their segregated ideas and not welcoming famous people now famous entertainers. So through the grapevine, she heard that a mansion that had been owned by Dr. Hart, he had built it actually at the turn of the century, the last century the 1800s, it was about 1895 or so, that it was going to be torn down.

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Now it wasn't up for sale, it was going to be torn down, totally razed to the ground. And the building itself had somewhat of a history because during the flu epidemic in the early 1900s, when people were dying and the hospitals were so overflowing with patients that there wasn't room enough in the hospitals even for the

patients. Dr. Hart turned his home into a veritable hospital and cared for patients there.

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So that story really appealed to her and she realized that she could have this mansion, if she could move it, if they'd let her buy it. She would be able to turn it into a facility for people there wasn't a place for, either.

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INTERVIEWER:

She enjoyed the story of Hart Mansion and she knows it as place [inaudible 01:25:50.19]

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KATHLEEN ESMIOL:

When Fannie Mae approached her mentor for such issues, the Chief of Police, she asked if it was possible how would she go about it, et cetera, and she was able to actually convince him that she can move the house. She had property; she was able to buy property on Corona, which had been a vacant lot for quite a long time and he agreed. He told her the licenses that she needed and all.

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So she followed his instructions and the house had to be cut into three pieces. It ended up on Nevada Avenue, one of the main thoroughfares into Colorado Springs, for quite a long time because Chief Bruce had neglected to tell her there was one additional license she needed and that was actually to move it.

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So the foundation was sitting here waiting for the house and ultimately it did get here even though it was only a couple of blocks away. It waited on Nevada Avenue. So everybody knew about Fannie Mae's mansion long before she moved into it.

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But once it was established, the entertainers now had really luxurious accommodations, with crystal chandeliers and woodwork across the ceiling that European artisans had created. It was a wonderful place but they also had mama's down-home cooking. You couldn't beat the collard greens and all of the good food that mama produced.

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And so they were delighted to be here. As a matter of fact, not only all the black entertainers, but many dignitaries stayed here. One being Medgar Evers. He was invited in 1963, I believe it was, to speak at the Air Force Academy to the black cadets and he stayed an extra day just for mama's collard greens. Tragically, when he returned home because of his activism and high profile in society, he was murdered.

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It was a terribly distressing situation for Fannie Mae because we lost many people. We lost Dr. Martin Luther King. In addition to Medgar and we lost President Kennedy, who she had seen at the Air Force Academy at a graduation. Fannie was so distraught about

these deaths that she and her pool hall manager, Al [inaudible 01:28:08:15] decided they had to do something about it.

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They began the 400 Club not only to serve the public, but also to bring dignity and respect for the black community who still were not permitted to go into the Broadmoor or Antlers. They were highly successful with food pantries and collecting food for the indigent and clothing and what have you.

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Fannie Mae even let the homeless people sleep in the bottom of the building that housed the Cotton Club and ultimately civil rights became a reality. But she was the forerunner of, at least in our community, of serving the community's actual needs. The needs of the indigent and the poor.

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They were extremely successful and you would think that life would have evened out for them. But unlike Fannie Mae, Ed had handled the stress of really being on the job 24 hours a day, seven days a week. If there was some emergency, you know he was the handyman who took care of everything, and because of the easy access to alcohol, he had become very, very alcoholic.

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Fannie Mae tried many ways of helping him, one by actually creating more work and trying to start another facility in Manitou Springs, but that fell through and she lost money on that. But it

didn't matter because she lost Ed. He died of alcohol in January of 1955. Again life changed dramatically for her.

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The civil rights movement, the very thing that you know her life had been about, to welcome all people and have them all mixing

and together and enjoying one another was the source of the decline of the club, because other people, you know, businessmen and businesses accepted all cultures.

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And during this decline, the city decided that the area where she had her club really was becoming seedy. And they didn't want people coming into the city with the Antlers and all the important businessmen and the money coming into the city getting the wrong impression.

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So by 1975, eminent domain was the decision by the city to get rid of the club and tear down the buildings in that area. And Fannie Mae lost her ability to earn at that level, to pay for a mansion this size and things were very bleak for her.

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Her nephew, who by this time. By this time, it was clear that something had to be done. And so Les Franklin, Syl, her nephew was very successful. He had graduated from college. He had graduated from Colorado Springs High School, like she had first, as a top football player. He had been in the military. He came back and was successful out in Hollywood because he'd known everybody there since he was a little boy. And ultimately he became one of the vice presidents of IBM.

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So he had the wherewithal to help. He was living in Connecticut. So he came down and by this time, Fannie Mae had lost her sister, Selena, who had become a beloved singer at the Cotton Club and they'd spent wonderful years together. And she lost her brothers. Ultimately, she lost her mother. It was just a bleak time.

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The highlight in this point in her life was that a little girl appeared down at an orphanage in Pueblo. Her name was Renee and she actually was a biracial child. Fannie Mae's brother, Cornelius, her youngest brother and a white woman from Wyoming. That marriage was not permitted by the woman's father but she refused to give up. Well the last part is the only thing we want to make sure we get that right at the very end, because that I know you'll use.

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The woman, as a mother, refused to give up the child. At least not about the child. And so she was placed in an orphanage down in Pueblo knowing that eventually the grapevine would get back to Fannie Mae, which it did. And Fannie Mae went down and retrieved a beautiful, beautiful little girl named Renee. Renee lived in this mansion in the beginning as a little girl and was well cared for.

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But ultimately when the mansion was sold, Syl also had to make sure that everything in it was auctioned off. And Renee and Fannie Mae went to live with Syl, his wife and two children, two boys, up in Connecticut. Of course leaving Colorado and all that she had

built and known was so heartbreaking for Fannie Mae; it was a tremendous struggle for her. But Renee was the light in her life. Beautiful little, very smart little girl.

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And then the tide turned once again because Governor Romer decided that Syl would be the perfect person to run the Job Corps in his cabinet here in the state of Colorado. So with bells on, Fannie Mae returned with her little girl Renee. They lived in Denver and Fannie Mae, the first thing she did, she was on a telethon for the United Negro College Fund. She was very actively involved in Denver to the point that she could and she gave her talent and her services and organizational skills to Excelsior, a school for troubled girls.

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She operated and maintained a clothing closet for the girls and she was just considered an old grandma to these girls. They had no idea who was in their presence until a few years later when a teacher named Kathleen Esmiol was looking for a charismatic character upon whom to base a play. I found a documentary by Steve Antonuccio, about Fannie Mae Duncan living in Denver who had had a Cotton Club in Colorado Springs.

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The perfect match; kids with an aging woman whose story deserved to be put on the stage. The kids interviewed her over a period of time. And the play was presented for the first time at Eagleview Middle School where the students attended and for the

first time ever, the purpose of the play was revealed to the public. It was so that young people, who were minority students, had all the leading roles in a play. It was a beautiful collaboration between an aging woman and young kids realizing that they were making life better for somebody else; something she'd done her entire life, of course.

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Fannie Mae lived to be recognized in many ways. The Smithsonian had a traveling exhibit with her memorabilia; the memorabilia was from the Cotton Club days and that was very exciting to her. That it would be in history and remembered. She also was recognized by Businesswomen's Organization in Denver.

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There was a retrospective at the Carnegie Library which Steve Antonucci, the very videographer who produced the little film that introduced me to Fannie Mae in the first place, that the Pikes Peak Library District had presented to the public. He set it up so that Lou Tilley, who took pictures of Fannie Mae in her heyday about 1955, right here in this mansion with crystal chandeliers and all the accoutrements of the day, was able to, for one more time, for one last hurrah, recognize Fannie Mae and also Lou Tilley.

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That happened around I think it was earlier in 19, no, let's see, it would have been earlier in 2005 because by September 13th of 2005, Fannie Mae died. Ironically, Lou Tilley died exactly one month later.

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The kids who were in the play, of course, deeply impacted by the loss of two such special people. They weren't just stories in a history book, they were real. Following her death there have been accolades of her accomplishments. She was recognized first of all at a symposium.

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Fannie Mae was recognized first of all at the Pikes Peak Library District's History Symposium. Following that the publication of her memoir was presented in 2013. It was a collaboration between Fannie Mae and me over the 12-year period of our friendship. Following that, she was recognized and inducted posthumously into the Colorado Women's Hall of Fame, a singular honor.

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But the big surprise is what is about to happen. Students long ago in 1993 when the first play about Fannie Mae was produced said, "You know we ought to have a statue of Fannie Mae. Well, that's quite an undertaking and it takes a lot of foreshadowing, shall we say, to be able to inform the public of why such a major endeavor is worthy of a person. But the city of Colorado Springs now is working toward that goal.

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We have a world class sculptor. Her name is Lori Kiplinger Pandey and something about Lori, who is white, it's quite remarkable, we didn't know we hired her on her incredible talent. But we learned

that her family, her ancestors in Virginia, during that era of the Civil War, were arrested and jailed for their work with the Underground Railroad. Some things are meant to be.

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The statue will be placed in front of the Pikes Peak Center for the Performing Arts which is very close to where the Cotton Club was torn down in 1975. And it's fitting, a fitting tribute for her.

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The reason it's being placed there is because of the proximity to the Cotton Club, the site of the Cotton Club but it's more than that. She earned her place in history. Fannie Mae was the catalyst for the peaceful integration of Colorado Springs during the very volatile, volatile civil rights movement.

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During that time in other cities, there was violence and there was bloodshed and there were flaming Molotov cocktails being thrown in the streets and through windows. But here in Colorado Springs, Fannie Mae was serving chilled cocktails to people of every ethnicity who would come in because of their mutual love of the arts and sit side by side to enjoy the evening.

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She was a major conduit in the development of the music industry and also the support of the emerging black musicians of the day. She was an example to everyone because she was generous. She

was kind. She was philanthropic. She was entrepreneurial. She wanted every child to have their chance in life.

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And to that her last days she pursued all of those goals. When the statue of Fannie Mae Duncan goes up in 2019, it will become one of a group of statues across America of very famous people in history. According to a Smithsonian article that was published many years ago, about 2011 I think, and has been reprinted, there are 5,193 some odd statues and public art of historic people. Of 5,193 - 394 are women.

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In Colorado Springs, we will be recognizing a black woman, the first local woman in the city to be recognized for all her accomplishments. Colorado Springs will be in the spotlight for what most people do not know is so remarkable about the city which is our history and arts.

01:43:41.02

INTERVIEWER:

I just want to ask you, what, you know, you were such good friends with Fannie Mae for such number of years as you're working on the book together. What kind of friend was she?

01:43:53.04

KATHLEEN ESMIOL:

Oh she was a loyal friend, very loyal friend. She would dress for everything and I said [inaudible 01:43:59:15]. I hate that that happened. I'm so sorry.

01:44:05:18

INTERVIEWER: But you corrected it.

01:44:06:28

KATHLEEN ESMIOL: Yeah I know. But. Anyway she would dress in a hat, gloves. I'm not kidding you. High heels, everything. But I'd come home from teaching school all day and with twelve hundred kids, I was exhausted. So I would be barefooted, in a bathrobe, at my computer, you know typing. I finally one day asked her, Fannie Mae, me look a bit ridiculous here. You don't have to always dress up. She said I always dress for important occasions, Kay. And of course then she laughed hysterically.

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She had a great sense of humor and she could just vacillate between being very serious or you know laughing. She could laugh at herself. She reorganized my house every day that I was gone. You know sometimes she'd be there for two weeks because she lived in Denver so you know I couldn't drive back and forth.

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So she'd be there bored to death while I was at school teaching. I come home to a house I didn't recognize. Everything squared off, like a restaurant, whereas I like things random, as you can probably tell. And she never forgot any kindness. The thing that I know personally and I know you do, too, for a lot of things we've talked about is the hardest thing about not having enough money is you can't be gracious.

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And that is really difficult when you have a big heart. And so you know that's what I saw in her. You know she wanted to give me things or do things. And I said, Fannie Mae, you know, this is your turn. I'll have my turn.

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It was intense, intense friendship. I was afraid I wouldn't make it through the end because I am so adamant that this is going to happen. I have people that I don't know because my phone number or my email, everything, has been all over the paper, so I don't even know who's writing me most of the time.

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But I write long things back and I explained to one lady that I had heard her name so I knew she was affluent. Many people are not. I don't know. I knew she was. So I wrote back that she wanted to know how we were doing. And I explained well, we're close to 59,000 now so we're signing a contract on the 12th and it's a 100,000 we have to have, and actually more because of installation and you know there are a lot of accoutrements there you have to do.

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But the piece of art is \$100,000 piece of art. And it will be a major piece of art in America, because you've seen Lori's work. There's no doubt that it will be. And I told her what I was excited about that I knew Fannie Mae would be happy about is I have money from North Middle School and El Pumar and the whole idea is for

this to be owned by the people. That's why I was determined we would have an artist's contract because that's the way it should be.

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It takes so much work to keep fighting people, which they forget quickly and then the precedent is set and everything works out, which is you know somebody just has to slog through and not give up. But that is why I'm doing it because that's what she did. She slogged through and did not give up and she looked great doing it and she lived in a fascinating place doing it.

01:47:41.01

But she was an amazing human being because she could have done everything for herself. She could have been wealthy and never lost the mansion. You know she could have had all this money for herself.

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She did not do that. She chose to always serve other people. And there was jealousy, there's no doubt, because it's hard for people to understand someone like Fannie Mae. You know? It seemed like she had it all. That's why I wanted her whole story to be told. So they could see, the kids for instance up at the school Excelsior. The girls came in and they're on a closed campus; they can't leave because there are reasons they're there. It's not by choice and they knew that these kids, not even professionals, were coming in to do a play.

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And they did not want to come but they were required to be there. Fannie Mae was all dressed up with a corsage and she had her hat, her gloves, her heels; appropriately dressed for theater. Even if they were kids and my kids looked out at these teenagers, you know slinking in like I don't want to be here.

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And they said Miss E, this is not going to go well. These kids, we can tell, do not want to be here. And I said, "Give it your best. Just focus on Fannie. She's right in the front row." She had an orchid on they had given her. I said, "Just, you know, let her be your focus."

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Well the play began and the kids were not even really quiet. Not even really a polite audience, but my students, which was a second cast because we did it in several places over a two-year period, gave it their all. You know pretty soon kids were crying. These tough girls in the audience were crying.

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And at the end of the show, they realize this woman they thought was just a grandma, you know, some innocuous grandma, running a clothing closet for them, for which they paid little attention and probably did not thank her, was somebody and she had lived a challenging and difficult life. That orchid corsage got smashed by girl after girl, you know, as they came over to hug her and thank her.

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I only wish that everybody could have experiences like that so they would really value life, because when you see something like that, you realize a lot of people are missing out on what life is all about.

01:50:18:28

INTERVIEWER: Thank you, Kay.

01:50:19:14

KATHLEEN ESMIOL: You're welcome. You know the hard thing is that she's, you know, she couldn't possibly live this long to see everything, you know.

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INTERVIEWER: Yeah. Yeah.

01:50:34.07

KATHLEEN ESMIOL: And my message to young people, because I thought I lived my life full out, you know I did. I mean I tried, but there's so much more you can do if you are really paying attention. And your life is so much richer, regardless of your income, if you are alert to who people are. And you try to get more involved to the point that you don't know just what they look like, but you know who is in there, who is in there, which includes the two of you, definitely.

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Because I know Kate pretty much, and I haven't known her that long but you can get to know somebody really well, if you spend a long period of time, even on one day, and you are willing to reveal enough of your own heart, you know, for them to share theirs with you. I'm sorry, you're going to have so much editing to do.

01:51:32:07

INTERVIEWER: Oh no, I'm looking forward to it.

01:51:33:07

KATHLEEN ESMIOL: I wish there was some way to change that [inaudible 01:51:35:16].
That's going to drive me nuts.

[End of transcript 01:29:38.0]