



FOSTER: Bobbie Dore Foster
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Session 1
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JD: Today is August 29, 2017, and this is the first interview with Bobbie Dore Foster for the Oregon Historical Society oral history project. My name is Janice Dilg, the oral historian doing the interview. And we are in the offices of The Skanner Media. Did I get that right? Tell me.

FOSTER: The newspaper. *Skanner* newspaper? Or News Group.

JD: News Group, thank you. I knew that didn't quite sound right.

So to kind of start us off, I know you have done some earlier oral histories on your early life, but maybe just give us a brief background of who you are, and when you were born, and where.

FOSTER: I was born in Abbeville, Louisiana, a small town in Vermilion Parish, southwest Louisiana. I was born on November 28, 1938 into the household of my parents, of course—my mother, Mary Ann Fontenette Dore and my father Morris Dore. And I was the firstborn.

JD: Can you tell just a little about the town, the size of it? Give us a little sense of it.

FOSTER: Very small town. Everybody knew everybody. Black people kind of lived in certain areas, although there were some white people mixed in in the areas. But in our town everything was separate. The churches were separate; the schools were separate. So, I went to a Black school—a school where all of the teachers were African American, and the students. And a lot of people were related to each other. The Black Catholics kind of had their group, and the Baptists had their group. And they kind of stayed in those groups, although they knew each other, and they communicated with each other. They knew each other. Some were even family members. I would say when I was growing up there were probably about five thousand people in my town. Is that good enough?

JD: Mm-hmmm.

In reading some other articles about you, or listening to an earlier oral history that was done with you, I know that education was important. And I think sometimes education comes formalized, in a school or a college, and sometimes it comes through life experience or perhaps on a job. Maybe just talk a little, first broadly, about why education is important to you.

FOSTER: Education was always strongly emphasized in my family and in all of the Black families that I knew because even though my grandparents were not in slavery times, they knew about it, and they knew how they had been kept from getting an education. And so it was very important to them because they saw it as a way out of the small lives that they were living, which was whatever kind of seasonal work there was. And then, for the women, it was if they could maybe take care of somebody's children or clean someone's home. And so they just really emphasized, study hard, learn, and grow,

and you will be able to have a better life than we have. All of the parents wanted their children to have a better life and be able to have a profession. So, I grew up with that.

The teachers were very motivated to help us learn because they knew how important an education was. They had gone to college; they had gotten their degrees. And the only jobs, of course, they had would be to be a teacher. And so they wanted us to have bigger and better lives and careers. So they really were very interested in us as individuals and in making sure that we had the learning that we needed to have.

That was just in the atmosphere. I mean, we knew it. You went to school; the teachers were in charge; the teachers called your parents if you misbehaved; you got your homework done. Back then we had to carry our books to school and study and then take them back the next day, and that was how it was done. But parents made sure that homework was done. There was no “ifs, ands, or buts” about it. It was just what you had to do and what you were expected to do. And if you didn’t do it, then that was reflected in your grades. Your parents were very disappointed, and you might have some penalties imposed upon you for that. [*BF & JD chuckle*]

[*Brief discussion about microphone position*]

JD: As you were speaking, I was thinking that the Supreme Court *Brown v. Board of Education* decision came down when you were in high school, perhaps? [*pause*] And just, if you have any recollections of conversations in your community or in your family about what people thought that was going to mean.

FOSTER: No. I do not recall people talking about that very much—a little concern I heard from teachers, who were saying that they would be discriminated against and that they would not be given jobs in the schools if there was desegregation. It was just something that nobody—I mean, the white people didn’t want it, and Black people wanted better text books and better facilities for their children, but it would be at a price.

I hadn't really thought about that until I heard someone say, well, you know, so-and-so probably wouldn't have a job. But it was not something that was like it was the topic of the day that everybody was talking about. It was just this kind of underlying kind of thing.

JD: Mm-hmmm. And any thoughts about how that decision has played out in our educational system between then and now?

FOSTER: Well, I just think that the idea that a Black child is going to have a better education by sitting next to a white child in a school, I think, has been debunked. I think that it has to do with the teachers; it has to do with the facilities; it has to do with the curriculum. It has to do with a lot of things. So, in those times, in my school, we had the throw-away books from the white schools. When we walked to my school we passed the big, huge white school with the big football fields and baseball fields and school bands and all kinds of things like that. So we knew that we were being deprived, that we just didn't have the things that those kids had—and that it would be good for us to be able to have access to that. So there was resentment. We felt resentment about that. Sometimes we would walk by, and the band would be practicing for a football game, and we couldn't do anything like that.

The high school I went to was an elementary school up until eighth grade, and then the high school, but everything was right there on the same grounds. When I was in seventh grade was when I transferred from the Catholic school over to the public school, and there was a band that was formed, and we had instruments and uniforms. And so we had a band director that come from Florida A&M University, and we had instruments, and that was a big deal. It really helped a lot of kids get through high school. There were a lot of young people—mostly boys, in my school anyway—that were not that motivated to study and to get through school. But, if they could play an instrument and be in the band—we had a concert band, a marching band—then they were motivated to get their lessons done because you couldn't be in the band unless you had a certain grade-point

average. So that helped a lot. But it wasn't an imminent thing; that this is going to happen next year or something like that. I think it was just in the air, but nothing happening so much.

JD: Mm-hmm. And did you have favorite subjects in school? Things that you really loved?

FOSTER: Yes, I did. Early on, in Catholic school, reading became my love. I just loved reading. There was a teacher there who would—we had a small library with not very many books—but my teacher could get books from the downtown library sent to our library. So I was able to read a lot of books when I was at that school. We also had plays every year, in a small, small school, so I was, of course, in the plays. That motivated me. I just always was very curious about the world and wanted to learn more about it. I was fascinated by the characters in the books I read. I received a lot of encouragement. That helped as well.

And then in high school, English was probably my favorite subject. I was not that good in math. And [*chuckling*] I was not that great in chemistry either. But I had a really good science teacher, biology teacher, and I learned the basics, I'm sure. But I could see early on algebra was just so hard for me. Geometry was hard for me. But I managed; I managed okay.

JD: I believe that I am remembering correctly that you did receive a scholarship that you were unable to take advantage of. Maybe you could talk about that a little bit—how you kept figuring out ways to keep furthering your education throughout your adult life.

FOSTER: Yes, well, when I graduated from high school as valedictorian, I had a scholarship to go to college. I could have gone to the University of Southwestern Louisiana or Grambling [State University] or Southern University. I had gone to Southern. I

had never been to Grambling. A lot of other people in my town went to Grambling and so I knew of it, and I knew about Southern because we would go to band contests at Southern University, so I related to that campus more. So I decided that I would probably go there and major in English and minor in music.

But, I was diagnosed with TB at that time. My mother had been ill and died from the disease. And so we all, of course, had positive test results. So they told me I had to go to a hospital in a town nearby and be treated. And so I did, and they told me in about three months or so I would be back, but it ended up being many more months than that.

For some reason, by the time I got back home I didn't think that I would be able to use the scholarship. I think also it had to do with my dad and whatever kind of work he was doing at the time. There was probably not the money to be able to do it. I think it was a combination of those two things. So, I didn't go straight on to college.

It wasn't until after I got married and moved to the Northwest—my husband, who had his bachelor's, was going to go to grad school at University of Oregon. I started thinking about, well, when am I ever going to be able to go to college and get an education that I really wanted? That wasn't happening. I had children. And then we finally moved, in 1965, to Astoria because my husband had a job with Job Corps at that time. And there was [*chuckling*] Clatsop Community College in Astoria. I had a friend, whose husband was also working at the Job Corps, and she had two toddlers, and she was taking classes there during the day. She asked me to take care of her children while she was taking the classes. So it occurred to me that I might be able to take an evening class.

I decided to do that. I took an anthropology class. That sort of helped me a little bit, because, you know, in Astoria it rains all of the time, and it can get to be very depressing, and especially when you are tied to the house with the children and all. So a little bit of that.

And then we ended up in Seattle, and I took a class or two at the University of Washington in literature. You know, along the way I took courses. I took courses at the Seattle campus for Western Washington University. Some of those were business

classes, and I think Ethics, and some things like that. A lot of them ended up not being transferrable to the University of Portland, where I ended up. So that is how I did it.

JD: It is interesting that [*unidentifiable background noise*] interest remained, you know. Having three children, being married, that takes up a little bit of time.

FOSTER: Yes. [*chuckles*]

JD: The fact that you were inkling out some time along the way, I guess, makes it seem that was important that you kept going.

FOSTER: Yes. Yes. I never gave up my hope of going to college and getting a degree. I just couldn't see how it was going to happen. As years went by there were more responsibilities, the kids in school, and so on and so forth. It became a lack in my life, this hole that I wanted to fill. Because I had always loved taking classes, and that was when I was happiest was when I was in the classroom. [*both chuckle*]

JD: You finally landed back in Portland. You had lived in Portland for a short while early on in the mid-to-late '60s.

FOSTER: Right. Lived in Portland and then lived in Vancouver for two or three years as well before leaving. Yes.

JD: So, when you are coming back to Portland, Portland State University was a much smaller institution at that point. This would have been the mid-70s. Do I have those dates correct?

FOSTER: Let's see. We came to Portland in—well, Seattle was '78. Would you refresh my mind in what you were just asking?

JD: About coming back to Portland and starting courses at Portland State University.

FOSTER: Okay. Yes. That was many years later. That was after my marriage was ended, and I had met Bernie, and he was saying that he was going to start a paper, a newspaper. He was working for *The Facts* newspaper in Seattle. When I came down here to work on the paper that is when I went to Portland State.

JD: Okay. You started taking journalism courses, but I think, perhaps, your interest in journalism may have been sparked at a much earlier age. Maybe you could just talk about sort of, some of the newspapers—I even read one place that you had taken an aptitude test that said you had a talent for newspaper reporting.

FOSTER: Yeah, that was so surprising. Well, you know, growing up we had *The Pittsburg Courier* that was delivered all throughout the United States—an African American newspaper. And there was *Our World Magazine*, in which you could see some of the celebrities, Black celebrities in those. And then when I would go to visit my Aunt Savannah in New Orleans, *The Times-Picayune*, she insisted that I read the paper and be able to tell her something about what I had read. It was kind of strange, then, that that was something that she came up with, but she said, “You should always know what is going on in the place that you are in.” And so, that was kind of on my radar, about being informed about current events. It was really more that, than necessarily being a journalist or anything like that. I was a very curious person, and that is the first thing that you have to be to be a journalist, in my opinion.

Let's see. There were the newspapers that we read, the papers at my aunt's house, and then, years and years later, before I went to work at the University of

Washington, there were tests that one could take to determine your aptitude for different fields and different subjects or different areas of study. And that is when I took this test that said that a lot of people who were in journalism were interested in some of the same things that I was interested in. It was very, very surprising to me because it wasn't anything that I was aspiring to. It was writing. Writing is what appealed to me, not necessarily journalism.

But, anyway, that was kind of interesting, when I got that information. And then I met Bernie, who was working for the newspaper, and I got interested in some of the things that they were covering—some of the issues, primarily education issues. You had to pass a levy in order to fund education, and so it got to be a big community effort as well as the administrators and teachers were also very much involved in promoting the levy and working for the passage of the levies. So that was, it was kind of like, okay, now I see how the media plays a role here. And the newspapers in particular play a role in what the voters think and what they will do, what they feel about issues because they are looking at the newspapers and reading these articles about why we need a levy, and why it is important that you would vote for one, and so on.

And so, it gave me a little broader idea of the influence of the newspapers and in particular of a Black newspaper. Because there were a lot of schools that were fifty percent African American students or more, and they were trying to work on their behalf in getting the levies passed and doing what they could to make sure that they got the funding and the things they needed in order to have the schools function properly.

JD: I think you mentioned, in passing, that the Black newspaper up there was *The Facts*.

FOSTER: Yes.

JD: And that Bernie was working for the newspaper at that time. Can you talk a little bit more about *The Facts*, and maybe how it compared with *The Pittsburg Courier* or some of those earlier newspapers? *The Skanner* has worked for many years to provide a perspective that you thought was missing in other newspapers. Up in Seattle there was at least *The Seattle Times* and maybe if you recognize some differences in the importance *The Facts* had?

FOSTER: *The Facts* covered issues that the dailies did not. It was a social outlet as well, because they published obituaries, anniversaries, other things that were happening people's lives. So the life of the community was reflected in the newspaper. It wasn't so much the hard news. It was just more of just kind of a showplace or a place where people could feel validated and where their lives mattered, whereas in the white press the only time that you would see anything about a Black person was if they were going to jail or had done something that was against the law.

The *Pittsburg Courier* was different, very different from *The Facts*, because during those times the *Pittsburg Courier* had journalists all over. I mean, they had journalists in Europe; they had journalists here. They were covering the news of the day. And they had columnists, and they had opinion, and all of that—editorials and so on. So there was a very big difference. But it was still important for the Black community to have that outlet.

JD: Maybe you could talk a little bit about meeting Bernie and hearing about his plans for starting a paper and how you got involved in all of that.

FOSTER: Well, you know, everybody kind of thinks that they can do things. I mean, people have dreams, and they want to make them come true in many different ways. The person who Bernie worked for, Fitzgerald Beaver, was kind of like a father figure to him. He taught him a lot of things. He tried him out in several different areas of the paper and found out that he was good in sales. So he did advertising. He also had someone from

The Seattle Times that took Bernie through the ranks and showed him the ropes and how to do things so he got the benefit of that as well.

But then Bernie had this idea that he wanted to start his own newspaper, but he didn't want to go up against his mentor. So that was one of the reasons why he started looking at another place to start a paper and decided on Portland. I mean, [*chuckling*] he just decided that he could do that without any testing of the waters—just on his own vision of what he wanted to do. And so he came down here [*chuckles*] and started a newspaper, as strange as that sounds! That is what he really did. He just did his one-man show kind of thing, you know? He had an advertiser, Nordstrom, was the main one at that time. He hired a couple of people, and away they went. And the paper was going just like that.

JD: [*chuckles*] Talk a little bit about where along the way you came into the picture as coming to work for *The Skanner*.

FOSTER: Okay. Well, we talked about it, and we talked about the name of the paper and came up with the name of the paper.

JD: Which I think you were very involved in.

FOSTER: Yes. Well, Bernie, when he was in the air force, one of the things that he had to do was guard the planes. They had the radar going, the scanners. He sort of wanted to call it *The Scanner*, but there was a labor publication called *The Scanner* already, so we just decided to put a K in there and make it different in that way. And so then they had to do the graphics, so he found someone to design the first, well, as you can see it is, that style, it was Old English, I guess. Anyway, got that done. And then I decided to come down and work with him with the paper. And we did. I can't think of the name of this person now, her husband had worked at *The Oregonian*—anyway, she was

helping to do the paper and writing some articles. I just kind of found a little spot and started doing whatever I could do. I mean, that is kind of how it went. I just did whatever needed to be done—so, billing and receivables, and collections, and you know, whatever ideas I had about distribution, stories. Everything was done the old-fashioned way back then. You were editing right on the copy. Cut and paste was the way that we composed the paper.

JD: Maybe for people who do not know that time period, can you elaborate a little on copy and cut and paste? *[laughs]* The process?

FOSTER: Oh, yes. Well, there was this contraption—it wasn't a contraption, it was a machine—called the *Justewriter* *[JD laughs]* that you typed on, and you got these long pieces of paper that had copy on it, and then you had to assemble it on the boards and determine how it would be laid out on a page. And then you had to cut out the articles and paste them on this board. It was *[laughs]* so time consuming! Oh yes. It was really hard work. People would be there at all hours getting the paper out trying to meet the deadline, but you know, we did progress as time went by, and we were able to expand operations to make a little bit of money, and as we did we tried to become more in keeping with the times as far as technology was concerned.

JD: Talk a little bit about where the office was at that point. Just describe, I don't really know how many staff were there at that point, or how the paper got distributed.

FOSTER: We were on what was then Union Avenue. It was just a small office on the main level, street level, but we were able to move upstairs, where there was more room. So then we had one other person in advertising. We had Bernie's brother, who did the layout and also distribution. We had the person who put out the copy. We had probably one writer and me, and that was it. It was a very, very small operation.

We did [*laughs*] the best that we could, you know? Tried to find little stores and outlets that would take the paper and distribute it. We got the attention of people. People started to read the paper, trying to find out who Bernie was, and what was this about? When we first got there, Bernie said, people said he would probably last three months. [*chuckles*] And so, six months came, and he was still there. And they were, “Oh, maybe he is going to stick around.” But we, yeah, we endured. It was very difficult, especially in the early ‘80s, when the economy was in such bad shape and everyone in Oregon was struggling so desperately. Those were very lean times.

JD: And do you know what it was that you and Bernie and the staff did that kept it going through those lean times?

FOSTER: Just plugging ahead—just saying that we have to get some advertising in here, and we have to get a paper out every week. And so, how are we going to do that? Just racking our brains about which businesses might be wanting to do advertising. And also just trying to collect everything that was due.

Yes, it was quite a challenge. I think one of the things was the minority business, well, not minority business, but contractors and companies that had government contracts, there were stipulations that they were supposed to involve minorities. And that was just something in the contract they didn’t pay any attention to. But, because we knew that it was there, and Bernie in particular paid a lot of attention to that, then we could say to them, you are required to advertise with minority media. So that was an education process, and Bernie primarily handled the business side, and so that was his big challenge, was to get people on board with thinking in those terms. And I think that is one of those things that got us through.

JD: So, during this time you said you started out just doing whatever needed to be done. But it seems like you started to have sort of a more formalized position over the

years. Maybe you could talk a little about your progression, or maybe there is still an element of doing what needs to be done, even today?

FOSTER: Even today, when you have a small newspaper, a Black-owned newspaper—we can all talk about this. You do whatever needs to be done. That was always one of the selling points when I interviewed people was that, if you go to a daily, you are going to have this one, narrow assignment that this is what you are going to do. And you don't get to know a lot about everything else. But when you are at a weekly, you know everybody. You know what they do. You know how everything runs. You get a chance to try your hand in many different ways. You can do features. You can do a news story. You can take a photograph. So, it was an education. Because kids, most young people out of college, journalism school in particular, they want to be at a daily, naturally, because they can make a good salary there, and that is what they aspire to. However, there are not enough positions to take care of all of the grads so they have to start somewhere. I always tell them, if you can get into a weekly that is a good place to start.

As far as my duties are concerned, everything just sort of evolved. It is almost as if, when I am not doing the same things that I did before, thank God, because I was doing accounts receivables and payables—and that was very, very hard work. It was a nose-to-the-grindstone sort of thing, pretty much. You know, getting there, eight in the morning, put your head up at noon and go and get some nourishment, if you could. Then back to the grindstone. Then, Oh my gosh, it is five, six o'clock. Time to go. It was day after day like that. It was just very intense.

But yes, I hired reporters, edited their work—just you know, ordering supplies, managing the business. It was just a flow of responsibilities. We hired a bookkeeper. *[laughs]* Yay! *[JD chuckles]* We had been very, very fortunate to have excellent bookkeepers. And this was a young lady. She did a great job for us.

And as I said, Bernie hired another ad person, a salesperson. And I just worked with the writers, and you know, a lot of work in helping to design the paper. Until we

actually got a person who was trained in layout and design, we just kind of muddled our way through. Bernie, being a very visual person and having worked at a paper before, you know, he pretty much knew what he wanted and where he wanted photos and the layout and stuff. So that was never something that I had to do in total. It was more positioning stories, that part of the layout, or of the business. So yeah, I was just a little bit of everything as time went by. And then as we got more people and better equipment, then I stayed more in doing the editorial side, hiring and doing all of that.

JD: And you have spoken about the role of Black newspapers in minority communities, and *The Skanner* certainly had a mission; they have a mission statement to this day that you work from. Maybe talk a little bit about how that played out in the stories you covered and how you positioned the paper in the community, or how the community influenced the paper.

FOSTER: Well, getting the mission—John Russwurm and Samuel Cornish, who started *Freedom's Journal*, talked about, “Too long have others spoken for us, and it is time for us to tell our own story. Henceforth no one can speak for us but us.” This was in 1827. That was sort of the unwritten mission. No one can tell our story as well as we can tell our story. I have often used that with writers as well. This is a perspective that people want to hear. This is a perspective that people want to read. Now, you know, how are we going to do that?

That is how we went for years, with that in mind. How do we serve the community? What stories do we think they need to hear, or do they want to hear, or do they want to read? How do we do that for them?

But it was not until 1989, I think it was, around in there, when we started talking about opening *The Seattle Skanner*. And we then had business . Together with the business coaches, that is one of the first things that we did. We have to sit down, and we have to come up with a mission statement.

So at that time, I am not sure how many people we had working for us—[*thinking out loud*] we had two people in advertising, and then we had the layout and distribution, and then we had Bernie, there was me, there was a bookkeeper—maybe eight or nine people or so. We were all involved in this process. It took us almost a whole day. Everybody was talking about what was important to them about the paper and what did they see people wanting, needing, expecting from us and so on and so forth. So we finally came up with, “Challenging people to shape a better future now.” That kind of was like the little zinger thing. It was a moment that everybody said, “Yeah, that’s it.”

So the business coaches printed it out immediately and gave it to everybody. And we said, “Alright, how are we going to carry this mission out?”

We want stories that engage people. We want stories that motivate people to do something and not to read it and put it down and say, “That’s interesting. Hopefully somebody will do something about it.” No. It’s more like, “What? Oh my gosh! I need to do something about this.” And so that is where we were coming from.

That worked. People really noticed what we were doing. They called us up and gave us story ideas. We just see ourselves as a part of the community and really serving the community, serving the needs of the community. So we want them to tell us what that is. What are the things? What is happening that you think shouldn’t be happening? Or that is happening that is a good thing that you want more people to know about? We just kept at that.

I found it was very, very helpful to staff to work with the coaches because the coaches would then meet with them separately and have them come up with priorities for themselves and check back, and how were they reaching those. And also, for me, in interviewing people, it was always a good tool in: How do you see yourself as a reporter working out of this vision? What does this mean to you? How would you look at a story, or how would you decide which stories to do if you were coming out of this mission?

So it has been really, really helpful to keep us on track. And it was true what Karen Carnahan and Marsia Gunter, who were the owners of Continuous Breakthruz, our

business coaches, always talked about—if you have a breakdown, go back to your mission because something is not being done that is a part of your mission. It has been very, very helpful to me over the years to have that as a guideline. It always brings people back into focus. I have been very, very grateful that we have done that. They still are our coaches to this day. They keep us focused on the future, and where we are going, and how we are getting there. Are we meeting the needs of the people in the community? As technology changes, what are the things that we need to change? What are we doing about that?

And Bernie, of course—Bernie is very interested in the technology part of the business. That is not my area. [*laughs and taps table*] So, I am the one that you may have to have pity on because [*JD chuckles*] I am not leading that charge. I am trying to keep up. I am open to keeping up. There is just something about it, that it is just not as easy for me as it is for a lot of other people. I know when there is a story that needs to be tweeted, that needs to be on our Facebook page. I understand the feedback that we get, and we need it, and why we need it. I understand all of the benefits of it. It is just that the ins and outs of it. Bernie likes all of the technological aspects of it. I don't.

But anyway, we are there. We are doing it. Luckily we have had reporters who have been on top of that, which all reporters have to be now. They have to do so many more things than they used to because one story has to have many lives. Even some stories have to be retweeted. That is a tricky word. They are doing that. I am very grateful for that.

Like I said, having the mission—it also connects us with our advertisers as well because they see this is who we are. This is what we are doing. We really are serving the community. That is another word, community, that if I interview someone and they don't use that word, they are probably not going to get hired because that is so integral to who we are and what we are. If you don't have an idea about the community that we are serving, then how are you going to know what stories to do or how to write something that is going to appeal to our audience? Now, we have a very mixed audience. We have

African Americans; we have everybody. Everybody who lives in Portland, we want them to read the paper. Of course they all don't, but that is our goal. They want to look at *The Skanner* and see something they are not going to see anywhere else. That is the thing that we have that keeps us, keeps that niche for us.

It is interesting when you see the journalists and where they are coming from as far as what they think a weekly is supposed to do. And how they do or do not see themselves as a part of the community. Because we have people that come from, back from the East Coast, from California, from other places. They didn't grow up here, or they grew up here, maybe, and then left and came back. But they understand what community is. If you understand that concept, it goes anywhere you go.

JD: Mm-hmm.

FOSTER: But if you don't, it is a real lack. So that has been something—we really appreciate the support that we get from our community. We wouldn't be where we are without them. So we take that very seriously. We do not take that for granted at all.

JD: And how would you define your community?

FOSTER: Well, our community, in Portland we think of our community as the geographical area that had supported so many Black families in the past, and so they were the people you saw on the streets. They were the people in the stores and in the cafes, restaurants and places where the distribution was. They were the people we were serving. They still are, except that we are serving a much broader audience. We always have, but we see it now more. We hear from them more. It is everybody. It is the Portland community. You know, it is the Portland-Vancouver community. These are the people whose interests we are serving.

It makes it very tricky, though, when you are trying to cover stories and there is something that is on a national level that we want to treat in a local way. There is something locally that might have implications for a wider area or region or something like that. So yeah, I think Portland sees itself as a community. The City of Portland is a community. And so that is who we are serving, the interests of all of the people. It is this identity of, [*pauses to find the correct words*] the cohesive identity of everybody. So really our audience is everybody.

Bernie would probably say [*laughs*] our audience is the whole world because we have people all over the world that are coming to our website, you know, making comments or talking about different stories and different things. So it has just expanded. The concept has really expanded. Gentrification, well, so there are all of these new families, white, primarily, families or just young adults, professionals—how do we reach them? We want to reach them. They are a part of the community too. [*horn honks on the street*] So that is how we think about it.

JD: Have answers developed for you yet about this new physical community around where the paper's offices are located?

FOSTER: Say that again.

JD: You were talking earlier, *The Skanner's* offices have always been located within the Black community.

FOSTER: Right.

JD Even though you are serving that community and the broader Portland community. And as you noted with gentrification, there has been some shifts. Your physical offices are still located in the traditionally Black neighborhoods—

FOSTER: Yes.

JD: But as you also note, with technology—

FOSTER: You are everywhere.

JD: You are everywhere. So, how are you coming to grips, I guess, with those changing dynamics and how they intersect?

FOSTER: That is a good question. We are kind of in the middle of that. One thing that brought it to light last year was the bike paths and the people who are biking to work and back and the people who were driving and the people who live in the area and all of a sudden, you know, Williams Avenue and Vancouver Avenue, we lost the lanes, and now we have the bike lanes, and now traffic is backed up to the Interstate Bridge. The African American people in the community felt like they had been overlooked, that they had been taken for granted, that they had been disrespected, because they were not in that conversation. And driving the conversation were the people who were biking to work and who wanted these things to happen. But the other people who were affected by it did not have a voice. So we interviewed both sides and we did several stories on that and what needed to happen to try to make that work. And then we also had the [*amused*] biking people were talking about how the people driving automobiles were being disrespectful and then the people driving automobiles were talking about the biking people were not obeying rules of the road, and they were also very discourteous to the drivers. [*laughs*]

So, that was a real polarizing thing. But in the end, it is all about dialog. It is all about inclusiveness and decisions that are being made. Unfortunately, a lot of people were not involved in whatever rules and regulations the city made about how someone

could put up a high rise and only put enough parking for a third of the people that were going to be in the units. So, we have the congestion on the residential streets now. There is not enough parking space for the people who are living in the high rises. The people who, the contractors, I guess, were told, these are all people who are going to be taking the MAX, the bus, and biking to work so they don't need parking spots. They won't have automobiles. [*taps the table*] That is not the case.

Anyway, so people are very upset about that. Not just in Northeast Portland. They are upset about it all over Portland because gentrification has happened all over.

But yes, it is difficult, and it requires a lot of conversation. There is a program, I guess you could call it, a project, called Race Talks over at the Kennedy Center [McMenamins Kennedy School], and I think that is one of the things that sort of facilitates younger people, or not necessarily just younger people, but people moving into the area—because they are not just all young families—and how do we address concerns on both sides? So it is an ongoing balancing act, I think.

JD: Williams Avenue was actually the topic of last month's Race Talks. [*chuckles*] I was in attendance.

FOSTER: There was good attendance for that, I am sure.

JD: It was packed. Well, and I think, not only the technology, but you just kind of said in passing about the consultants that you hired, "Oh, that was about the time that we expanded to Seattle." I wanted you to talk a little bit about how that decision was made and why that was important and how that changed your work.

FOSTER: Well, it was important. People in Seattle kept saying, "Why don't you have a paper here? Why don't you have a paper here? We need a newspaper here. We need a paper that is covering the news." So finally we decided, let's try doing that. And we had

offices in downtown Seattle. And you know, it was going back and forth. I had to try to stay on top of what was happening in Seattle and what was happening in Portland. It got to be very complicated. One of the things that was always tricky were street names and place names [*laughs*] because you know, everybody has similar names for high schools, and there are similar names for streets and things like that. Oh my gosh! The names of people! Anyway, it was very, very challenging. But we did it, and we did it successfully, I think. We got good distribution. We got advertising. We got buy in from the community. It was just very difficult to do two newspapers.

If we were doing a paper in another town like in Salem or Eugene, it wouldn't have been as difficult. But when you have different elections and people who are running for offices, and I mean, just so many things to think about and to cover. It was very challenging.

JD: And did you have a whole separate staff up there? Were you and Bernie going back and forth, it sounds like?

FOSTER: We were going back and forth. We had an office manager; we had a writer, this freelance writer—we went through different iterations. So we had somebody who was there, then we had someone who just filed their stories and sent them in. Everything was done here as far as layout and all of that. But we had the office there that, if somebody wanted to interview someone, you know, they could go there and do that. The mail and all of that stuff needed to be taken care of. So yes, we did that.

JD: And 1990, I believe, was when you first opened the paper there. It is still going, correct?

FOSTER: It is still going. It is going more online than ever before. But we are doing more of a regional paper in that we are covering Seattle and Portland in one edition. So that is how we are handling it now.

JD: Okay. And 1990, that is long before massive internet use, or the types of technological applications that you were just referencing a few moments ago.

FOSTER: Yes.

JD: So it was a bit of needing to be in two physical places at maybe the same time.

FOSTER: Yes.

JD: You have touched on editorial content, and I think you even talked about interviewing people. What was your hands-on role? How were you and Bernie, or the staff, deciding what would be the content? What were the important stories? What should you be editorializing about?

FOSTER: Well, we have staff meetings on Monday mornings, and writers can present their ideas about what they think the stories they are going to write—or the stories that they are thinking about. We can talk a little bit about what is happening, what the current events are, but primarily the stories sort of present themselves. You know, if there is a police issue, there usually always is, but I mean in particular, something really dramatic, where they—I remember they killed someone or when they threw the dead possums on the café steps long years ago. Or profiling, any number of things like that.

It is the things that are on the radar. I mean, you pretty much hear them, or people call you about them. People, if they call you, a lot of times it is more about maybe a personal story, which would be more appropriate for *The Oregonian* to do an

investigative piece about, but not for us because we don't have the staff to necessarily do those types of stories.

It is just issues that come up. Education, you know, was one of the big issues. In the '80s, gangs were a big issue in the '80s. We did a lot of coverage on that. We did a lot of coverage on back when the busing situation was coming on. The Black United Front was having meetings and confronting school officials about busing or not busing or what it did to kids and how disruptive it was for them. That the curriculum was not correct; it did not reflect any diversity. A lot of the, there are actions and conversations going on in the community, and if you are kind of plugged into that, these issues rise to the surface and you say, okay, that is a story that we need to do.

I always wanted us to have a balance of hard news and some kind of a feature that was a positive thing. So we did a lot of health issues. We did a lot of community organizations kinds of articles—what this group is doing to help people, what that group is doing to help people. The Urban League, NAACP, the Rosemary Anderson [High] School. I am trying to think. We had, well, just whatever the current events were in the community, or in the city. If there was something coming up with the city council meeting that we thought we needed to take care of, or if there was something with the school board meeting that was coming up that we thought we needed to cover, something the county is doing, these kind of always came to surface. We kind of know which stories we can handle and which ones we can't—or else we just say, this is a story, and what are the elements of this story? What is happening with this particular thing that the city council talked about? Or what is happening with this particular thing that the community is telling us about? And it is all reflected with a state agency or it is a state agency that is being accused of not doing their job. Or it is a county agency—this is a story that we need to do.

JD: You mentioned things like policing, profiling. I am not quite sure how you said it, but that it is ongoing. You are very aware both as a citizen as well as an editor of a

newspaper some of these issues tend to be ongoing. How do you handle that as far as, whether it is personally or editorially, issues that you might have been writing in the pages of *The Skanner* in the 1980s and the mid-2000s, 2015, or something?

FOSTER: Yes, yes. It is just the way things are. History repeats itself. You think you have got one thing handled, and another aspect of that issue arises. For an example, let's say busing. Well, okay, bus the kids so that they can get a better education, but then a few years later you are thinking, well, these kids are being expelled. They have white teachers that don't understand them. The white teachers don't know how to relate to African American males, so they just send them to detention. This is disrupting families and so on—the effects of busing.

So that will come in later. The fact that we are now getting back to predominately Black schools, so we are getting this Black-white situation in education that we had before. So it is just more of when you do stories, you just have to educate people, you have to give them a context. I mean, people know it, but a lot of times if you read something it is good to be reminded—this is the way it was; this is the way it is now. What is different now, and what was different then, and how are we trying to handle that?

I am very discouraged that we seem to be going backwards in race relations in this country, that the KKK and all the hate groups are now emboldened. They are out there saying that we just want what is best for our country. We really represent what is best about our country, and so on and so forth—all of the rhetoric that they have. It is very disheartening. But at the same time, we as African Americans, and we as people, can't just say we don't know what to do about that. We can't do anything about that. We have to be vigilant, and we have to figure out what it is we can do. It may just be a small thing, a small part of the whole piece, but it is something. And I think everybody needs to do something that reflects their values and what they think is right and what this country stands for and they need to stand up for it and be accountable.

So in this business we look at the history, and we say, oh my gosh, this is happening all over again. We just can't be discouraged. We can temporarily, maybe, have to sit back and collect ourselves, but in the end we have to forge ahead. It is all about the future. It is all about what we are doing now is going to affect our future for years to come. Our children, they are going to be affected by the world that they are growing into. We want it to be as fair to them and as open to them as it is to everyone. So, you just have to pick up your armor and forge ahead. That is what I think.

I think that you just cannot afford, *we* cannot afford, the luxury of not continuing to work in the struggle. There is just really no choice, because if you are not doing anything about it, you are a part of the problem. Therefore you have to be a part of the solution by finding a way that you can help make a difference, in whatever way that is. It is not going to be the same for everyone because there is just no one thing that you can do that is going to change the way things are right now. It is multifaceted issues, and it is going to take a lot of different people and points of view and ways of doing things to get things resolved.

JD: You mentioned the NAACP and the Urban League, which were organizations that grew out of the earlier period of the Civil Rights Movement but are still very much going concerns. I think the Portland branch of the NAACP is the oldest west of the Mississippi. But there are also newer groups, like Black Lives Matter. How have you been covering those changes of when people are sometimes impatient with certain styles or approaches, or maybe an organization arises that meets the times, I am not sure—and how *The Skanner* has been, or you, have been figuring out those new organizations.

FOSTER: Well, there are seasoned people from the movements of the past, the Civil Rights Movements, that are I think working with young people—not just Black Lives Matter, but there are other groups; I don't know their names, but there are other groups also—and they are educating them about ways of being influential in what it is that they

are seeking to do. So in Ferguson, for instance, they talked about being elected to office. You need to be registered to vote. You need to have a vote. That is your voice. That carries a lot more weight than just going in the streets and protesting, which you still need to do, but that is not enough. So if you really want to see different faces on the city council, then you have to start organizing to elect someone that is going to represent your views. I think that there has been a lot of partnership going on with some of the people who have looked at the newer groups and seen that maybe they need a little help just being disruptive and confrontational alone, that is not going to necessarily change things. It maybe will have people talking about it for a while, but then, people end up doing nothing.

I have a lot of admiration for the young people who are standing up and who are trying to make things different and better. In the Civil Rights Movement, it was the young people. It was the college students. They were the ones who decided that—because their parents were afraid—their parents were going to lose their jobs if they spoke out, if they got in the streets and demonstrated, so it was up to them. And they took great risks for their lives, but they just felt like it was so important they had to do something. And they did.

I encourage the young people to be involved politically, and I was very happy to see the NAACP sort of shifting gears and coming up more to the times of what is needed now. They are having listening meetings all over the United States now to find out what people want, where they are, and what needs to be done. I think that is excellent. It is really important to listen to what people have to say and what is really concerning them so that when you are out there addressing those issues you have their support as well as you know that you are going in the right direction because this is what you know the issues to be. So, I am encouraged by the old and the new.

JD: One topic that we really haven't touched on yet is women in the media. I know that you have had some role models and have probably served as a role model yourself

for a younger generation. You have been quoted in some earlier articles about women not being taken seriously both behind the scenes, and who is on the front page. Maybe talk a little about how you developed those views and where that has gone in your years to date at *The Skanner* or in the media.

FOSTER: Women have made a lot of strides in the media, but there is a lot of discrimination against women in the media. It has been talked about lately with people in the media who have been harassed, have had inappropriate comments made about them. It seems like that is just acceptable to men. A lot of men are just fine. They don't see how that is demeaning to women. We have had a lot of discussions lately about how women, no matter what positions they are in, they can still be subjected to inappropriate treatment, inappropriate comments about them. This is something that men are doing to women, and I don't know what it is going to take to get it to stop. I know there have been a lot of lawsuits that have been successful, and I guess we are going to have to have more. But it is widespread.

When you were asking that question, the first thing that came to my mind was, in Rotary. I was recruited into Rotary; I am in a Rotary club. I was the first woman president, I think it was, of that club, which that was a really good place for the club to be in. I noticed immediately that there is [*finding the right words*] I don't want to say a pecking order, but you sort of have to prove yourself. It is all about what power you have. Everybody is kind of jostling for their niche or their power position in the group, and they can just dismiss women. And I am not saying Rotary Club of Albina did that, but I noticed in Rotary, visiting other clubs and some people visiting our clubs and some people in the club, you were just not regarded on the same level as the other men—not necessarily taken as seriously. I found myself [*chuckling*] finding ways to let them know that I belonged at the table alongside them. And I resented that I had to do that because it was not something that I was used to. I thought, okay, that is how men play the game. Okay, so, this is a game that I have to play now that I am around a lot of men.

Anyway, yes. Women have a lot of obstacles to overcome, but I am happy to say that women are achieving all over the place in every level, in every field that you can think of. Role models in the business, interestingly enough, my role models in the business have primarily been publishers—shouldn't be a surprise, I guess. Mildred Brown was one of the women. The main thing about her that inspired me was she, [*laughing*] at seventeen, volunteered to do a newsletter for the NAACP in Omaha, Nebraska, and out of that she decided that she could have her own newspaper. [*hand clap*] And she did! And she said, "Oh, I always liked my front page to be just nice and fresh," you know. She's talking about her paper. And Mildred was quite a character. She always had a fresh corsage of flowers, and so wherever she traveled, in United States or abroad, she brought her flowers, and they would refrigerate them for her. And she always had these beautiful flowers.

JD: It sounds like you met her. Or attended conferences where she was speaking, or—?

FOSTER: Yes, yes. I did.

JD: Maybe just mention what newspaper she started and a little bit more about that.

FOSTER: All I can say was *The Omaha Star*. I can't say a whole lot more about it, but everybody remembers Mildred because she was a person you just wouldn't forget, but also I just admired her for having the guts to just go out there and start her newspaper. Most women who are now publishers have inherited the business, either their husband died or their father died. And so I was thinking of some of those people. Well, some of the people that I consider to be really strong women publishers—Dorothy Leavell of *The Chicago Crusader*. She is now the president of the National Newspaper Publishers Association. Her husband died, and she took over the paper when he died. She was

really young. She is a very outspoken, courageous person. She will not be overlooked. She will not be dismissed. She will be heard and seen. So, she has always been way up front. I admire that about her and about the fact that she takes her newspaper—well, we all take our newspapers really seriously but I would call her a newspaper person through and through. I guess to be a publisher, when you have to provide the leadership and the energy for your company, you find more people who have those characteristics.

Another person who inherited the paper was Karen Richards from *The Houston Forward Times* and also Rachel Reeves of *The Miami Times*. Actually Rachel's father is, I don't know, maybe ninety-five by now? He has turned everything over to her. She is not in good health right now, so her son really is running the paper. She grew up in the business, and she was a very much a take-charge person. She worked with all of her staff and just was very self-confident about what she was doing.

Some younger women now are coming up in the ranks. Denise Rolark Barnes is publisher of *The Washington Informer*. Her father, Calvin Rolark, was a publisher of the paper. We knew him way back when we first started *The Skanner*. I think he came here and gave a little talk for our fifth anniversary of *The Skanner*, or something. He was quite a character. And he told us about Denise when she was growing up, and how he had her interviewing people when she was eight or nine years old. All of this stuff. She just grew up in that. And her mother was a city council member, I believe it was, in DC. So she grew up in that element. She is doing a remarkable job with her paper. And now she has a son who is in the business.

Then there is Chida Warren in *San Diego Voice and Viewpoint*. Her mother and father ran the paper. Her mother died. Her father is an attorney. He also has a church, so he has a really full schedule, and she just got thrust right into running the paper. She really didn't want to do it. She has two small children, but she is doing it. And she says it is a really tough job. It is.

Oh! Sonny Messiah also, of *The Houston Defender*. Sonny Messiah-Jiles, she was on our website because of the Houston floods that are going on. She was rescued from

her home. I don't know what the circumstances are for her paper, and if she is going to be able to put it out, or what. And also the *Forward Times*, I am not quite sure what is happening with them. We are trying to find out more about that.

But yes, very strong women who will go up against anyone on any issue. They are just not afraid to speak their minds, say what they have to say, take a position on issues. They are very inspirational people for me.

JD: Have you been aware of some local women that were involved in Black newspapers? I am thinking of Beatrice Morrow Cannady—not running a paper or editing a paper—but someone like Kathryn [Hall] Bogle, are names that people might recognize. Were you aware of them?

FOSTER: Oh yes, of course. Kathryn Bogle, actually, did a column in *The Skanner*.

JD: I didn't know that.

FOSTER: Yes. She did a column in *The Skanner*, and, of course, everybody in town knew her. She had to go through a lot of racism in her journey in journalism, but she was not deterred. She was really interested in social issues and society issues and society news, and things like that—artistic things. Those are things that she wrote about in the paper. Yeah, she was a real trouper. I had a lot of respect for Kathryn in what she had to endure during her lifetime.

JD: As you were talking about all of the women who were running newspapers, it struck me that there is a very vibrant Black-owned newspaper—business is still quite strong around the country.

FOSTER: Yes.

JD: Perhaps more than I might have realized.

FOSTER: Yes, yes. Definitely. They are in all the major cities—*The Indianapolis Recorder*, in Detroit, the *Afro-American* in Baltimore, *The Caribbean* [*Carib ?*] *News* in New York, I mean, there are just so many different ones all over the country. That is very heartening, and it is also good that we can get together and support each other.

JD: I know in looking through you and Bernie's materials there is a minority publishers newspapers organization. Maybe talk a little bit about how you do all provide support for each other.

FOSTER: Well, NNPA [National Newspaper Publishers Association] is pretty much in the forefront of the Black newspapers in the country. There are a couple hundred publishers. Black newspapers are primarily weeklies. They meet several times a year. One of the meetings is in January, where there are workshops. They bring in people to talk about technology, talk about the innovations in the industry, about advertising online—all of the things that publishers need to know and be on top of.

One interesting thing that we had one year was at Howard University—some of the scientists who have contributed to drone technology. There were children from schools that were there, and there was the robotics team from Spellman [the SpelBots]. Spellman is a Black women's college in Atlanta. Their team had placed, I think, third nationally. They were there with their robots. And the children who were there were, I would say, third or fourth grade, fourth or fifth grade, something like that; the uninhibited age, where they just leave their seats and go run up to the front and volunteer for everything that you ask them a question about. It was really neat seeing that.

Anyway, the scientists showed them how the drones worked and they got to show them how it goes up the wall. One scientist told them the story about how this drone, if

you were in a car or van or something and you are driving, they could put the drone there and then follow you, and when you got to a building, it would follow you into the building. And when you got into a room, it would be on the wall recording everything. *[laughs]* He said, “Oh, but this is top secret. This is not for the average person!” And so on and so forth. The kids loved it. And they got to try them out. So that was something that National Newspaper Publishers had something to do with the planning of, just make sure that we were on board with what is happening with that. So there were all kinds of other things that we do.

In March, we have an enshrinement of a deceased newspaper publisher at the archives at Howard University, and we meet with some of the Congressional people—members of the Congressional Black Caucus, or someone from the administration; at least in prior years was someone from the administration. And so it is a very supportive group. We learn a lot about what is happening in the industry, and then we support each other in what we are doing.

JD: It is an interesting balance. Because there is lots to do to keep up with the business side and mentor each other and advance, as well as all of the things that you have been talking about so far—the news, the community.

FOSTER: Yeah. That is right. And also, as I said, advertising is the lifeblood of any newspaper, and if you don't have it, you will not be in business. So, how do you do that online, and how you monetize things online, that is kind of an ongoing conversation, but we get a lot of experts. They come in.

We also have a particular interest in sickle cell anemia, and we always have someone who is an expert in that area that comes in, and they give us the latest information on that and what is happening medically and what new things that they are doing or trying to do. Also HIV/AIDS was another one. So health issues, education issues. There is a lot of emphasis on the testing in the schools and, you know, all the ways that

things are changing with charter schools and with homeschooling—charter schools, testing. How do you get Black parents more involved in the education of their children? How do you show them how they have to have a voice and how to make their voice heard? There are some organizations that are working on those things, and then they, in turn, keep us abreast of it so that these are also issues that we can do stories about.

JD: You know, I think that you have talked about this a couple of times, this interesting dynamic between *The Skanner* as an instrument that can disseminate the news, but it is also very much, it seems like you are describing a two-way street, where you welcoming and benefitting from feedback that you get from the community about what you should be covering. Has that always been the case? And how have you, not to be punny, fostered [*BF laughs*] that relationship over the years?

FOSTER: Yes, it is just a matter of being in the community. It is a matter of being connected to the community. If you are there, you are going to some of the meetings, you are talking to people who are involved then you have a little bit of a pulse. You kind of read what that is, what is happening. I mean, in the schools, the school district will make a recommendation for something, and then you can then kind of say: now how is that going to play out? Let's just watch this and see. Let's target these schools and see how this is going to be working for them. And then go ahead and talk to those people. Most of the people in the community, or in Portland, know Bernie. They don't know me as much as they know him because I am in here doing the [*chuckles*] the story assignments and editing this that and the other and whatever you do, but I have all of the things that I do, and Bernie is out in the community more, which is fine because people know him, and they come to him and they tell him what the story idea is or what is happening or things that need to be addressed. It is an ongoing process.

JD: In addition to the weekly editions that you put out, and you still are doing a printed edition as well as the online version, I know that *The Skanner* has published annual issues that have a specific focus. Maybe you could talk a little bit about how those came about and why they continue to be important and therefore why *The Skanner* publishes them.

FOSTER: Minority Business Enterprise comes to mind because, as I said, we had such a difficult time bringing people on board with the fact that we are a legitimate business and that we have advertising and that is a good investment for you to make it to the community. So we decided to do a special issue to highlight minority-owned businesses, to show that they are there, they are successful, what it is that they are doing. We have continued that over the years.

We also do an education issue. It's education—I don't even have to explain that. It is self-explanatory. Everybody is interested in so many aspects of education, so we decided that would be something that people would be interested in.

The one that we do on careers, it has been one that each year we try to focus on a different aspect of careers. So we have done science, and we have done education, and we have done musicians and the history of music. We have done a lot of different topics. Now we are still doing careers. I think we are more in the science and technology era, so that is what we are reflecting more. And that is actually a very rich area because there are so many aspects to science and medicine and technology. We are trying to educate people about where the jobs are going, what kind of qualifications you have to have for those jobs, what kind of education, where do you go to get that, what kind of assistance there might be in those various categories.

We, of course, do the Martin Luther King issue every year, and that of course came from Dr. King and his fight for equal rights for everyone, not just Black people, but for everyone. So that has been one that has resonated a lot. We do that every year in January. Next year it is actually going to be on his birth date. It is also a great opportunity

for people in the community to come together. We have every aspect of the community—the judges, the police officers, the educators, the politicians, the Urban League. Every facet is represented there, and it is a really great time for people to touch base with each other. One of the visions that Dr. King had was of a Beloved Community, which would be of all of these different elements of the community coming together as one. And we think that the breakfast provides a way for people to do that, and I think that is a way that it has taken on a life of its own. People just expect that it is going to be there, and we are going to do it, and that they are going to be there. So that has been a sustaining feature of the breakfast. It has really buoyed us along the way to keep doing it.

JD: I don't have any more questions for you today, but if there are things that have come up as you have been talking that you want to make sure we record, we certainly can do that.

FOSTER: There is nothing that I can think about at the moment. I think as I reflect about the day there might be something that I would think of for next time.

JD: Okay.

FOSTER: But right now, I think I have done [*chuckles*] as much as I can do.

JD: That is great. Thank you so much.

FOSTER: You are welcome.

[End of Session 1]

Session 2
2017 September 12

JD: Today is September 12, 2017. This is the second interview with Bobbie Dore Foster for the Oregon Historical Society oral history project. We are at The Skanner News Group offices on North Killingsworth in Portland, Oregon, and my name is Janice Dilg, the oral historian.

Welcome back.

FOSTER: Thank you.

JD: We talked a lot about the workings of the newspaper, and we'll talk some more about that today, but also somewhere along the line The Skanner Foundation was begun, which has done a lot of interesting projects and work. I thought perhaps we could start with talking about how you decided to create a foundation and what you have done with it.

FOSTER: The foundation was pretty much Bernie's project. He decided that it would be a good idea. It was one way that we saw to further the education of deserving students—so scholarships. And we invited our advertisers and sponsors to participate in that. It is primarily used for scholarships, student scholarships. Occasionally we will grant an award or make a donation to a project that is involved in education, and not necessarily as we think about education of higher ed or that aspect of it, but where people are learning something. For instance, the Black midwives who are helping mothers learn different skills for caring for children, nursing and how important that is, and other health aspects for mothers, that was one of the things that we gave a small grant to. I think there have been a few others. It is always some specific project that has to do with education.

So that is primarily what the foundation has done. It has been in existence for about twenty-four years. By the end of next month, or at the end of this year, we will have given about six hundred thousand dollars in scholarships and primarily to graduating seniors. They are usually presented at our annual Martin Luther King, Jr. Breakfast.

JD: Can you talk a little bit about why scholarships, why those were important, and what an applicant needs to provide in order to be considered, or become a recipient?

FOSTER: Yes. We ask the recipients to fill out a questionnaire, and it has to do with the school that they are attending, the college that they would like to attend or that they plan on attending, what they want to major in. And of course we get their grades, GPA and all of that from the registrar at the school. Then they are required to have two letters of recommendation from staff at the school. And then they are asked to write an essay. So, it is usually something about themselves, what they hope to achieve in life, or some obstacles, like encountering racism in their lives. So they fill that out, and then we select them based on their need, the perceived need as well as their grades. We just factor in various aspects of the application.

And we have had very able students, students who have been accepted to major universities. Also, they get to know the sponsor of their scholarship. The companies that provide the scholarships renew them for four years. It is not always the same student, because for various reasons it doesn't necessarily always work out that way, but most of the time it does. So then they have a relationship with that student. They are invested in the success of that student. And the student really enjoys that relationship. So that works out well on both ends for all of us.

JD: If you have been offering the scholarships for twenty-four years, you have seen where those recipients have gone with their lives and done with their education. Do you have any particular examples that come to mind?

FOSTER: I don't have any particular examples, but we know that these scholarships are very much appreciated by the students. We will hear from them. They will say, "I am doing great. Thank you for your help. Without this scholarship I wouldn't have been able to have gone to this school." So yes, some of them have graduated. They are all doing well. I should have taken the time to look up a few of them, of the super-success stories. But they are all success stories. They are all very bright students. We feel really good that they are going to be out in the world doing good things. We are pleased to be able to do that.

JD: You have mentioned the sponsor businesses. How have you developed those relationships? What are you looking for with them?

FOSTER: Bernie primarily does the developing of the sponsors. I don't really play a big role in that aspect of it. Bernie does a lot of the business aspects of the paper as well as the breakfast. I do more of the program, the details. We do the menu and those kinds of things.

JD: You mentioned that you award these scholarships at the annual Martin Luther King, Jr. Breakfast. You talked about that breakfast a little bit last time. Maybe elaborate a little about how that got started, and why it was important, and I am sure it is a lot of work, so how do you keep it going year after year?

FOSTER: Yes, it is a lot of work. But we thought of the idea of having this breakfast many, many years ago and started out with just a very small group. I can't even remember where the first one was, but it was a small number of people. And we got very positive feedback from them so we continued doing it, and it grew and grew. We met for a number of years at the Double Tree [Hotel] at Lloyd Center. And we got to seven

hundred and some-odd people, close to eight hundred, we knew we needed to move to a larger facility, so we then moved to the Oregon Convention Center. We have had the breakfast there for a number of years, although not every year. We have moved it to other places and done it that way. But it really was designed as a tribute to Martin Luther King, for the work that he had done for civil rights and the work that he did for the country, for everyone.

Because a lot of people were complaining or made the remark that it is a Black holiday, or a holiday for Black people. No. It is an American holiday. He was an American hero. He always talked about the poor—not the Black poor, the poor. I remember that poor people’s campaign, the march to Washington where they had mules and wagons, and wearing denim and hiking shoes, boots that you would wear on a farm.

Anyway, you know, Dr. King got a lot of criticism. People talk about King now, and they overlook the fact that there are many people who criticized him—not just white people, Black people too. They just didn’t understand why he was promoting peaceful protest, why he said that in order to be in the movement you had to understand what non-violent protest was. That way they ended up having more disciplined people in the movement. So that was very important. But anyway, Dr. King has done so much, and many people know a lot about what his contributions were. But, you know, getting the state holiday passed was a very long and tortuous journey; so many of the people in Congress did not want to make that a holiday.

So we celebrate the holiday, and we celebrate Dr. King. We think it is important. When you look at the people who are attending the breakfast every year, it is such a mixture. It is so diverse. The Multnomah County judges have a table; the police association has a table; the churches have a table; the Urban League and SEI and all of the community groups—people who are community activists are there. People who are just wanting to pay their respects to Dr. King are there. People who consider it important that they do something to honor him on that holiday. But it is a mixture of religions and races, and it is a reflection, I think, of what Dr. King talked about when he talked about his

Beloved Community. It is a community of everyone together, unified, supporting something for the good of all.

I think people enjoy that aspect of it. They enjoy being able to show up and say this holiday counts for something to me, and so I am not sleeping in, and I am not going on a ski trip, I am going to go to the breakfast. And of course, many of them leave the breakfast, and they go out into the community, and they do community service. And the United Way has a big program where a lot of people go and do work in seniors' homes and do their lawns and so on. And then there are other activities all over town. Sisters of the Road has a march on that day. Many different activities go on that day.

But we start early in the morning so people can come early, and then they have the rest of the day to do whatever it is that they want to do—so they can have it both ways, in a sense. They can have a nice holiday, but they can also do something that they consider meaningful. We have gotten very good feedback about the breakfast over the years. People just enjoy it. It is just kind of taken on a life of its own. Everybody, they are there this year; they are going to be there the next year. They have been there for years, coming every year. That is very heartening to see.

JD: Well, as you were talking about all of these different groups that are there, if you are handing out the scholarships, then there are those young people being exposed to this really diverse crowd. It must be exciting for them as well.

FOSTER: Yes, I would imagine so. They can also see so many companies and corporations that are interested in them and in furthering the education of young, African American students. Well, our recipients are not all African American, but just helping the students who need the help to get through college. So the sponsors, I think, feel really good about that, and also that they are being exposed as well to a large number of people. We are usually close to a thousand people. We have actually had over a

thousand at some of our breakfasts. So it is a lot of people. It is a good place to be able to get to know people and to eat a meal and to just visit with people.

JD: And do I understand correctly that you have either annually, or at times, have presented community awards at the breakfast as well?

FOSTER: Oh, yes! I didn't mention that. Drum Major for Justice Award is the award that we have given out to someone in the community that has exemplified the values, the ideals of Dr. King. They are usually nominated by people in the community. So we have had a number of community people that have received that award over the years. They get a little monetary award for their favorite charities as well.

JD: Nice. And how is the award recipient selected?

FOSTER: Well—

JD: Or is that a secret? [*chuckles*]

FOSTER: No. I'll say this. The essays are all read—I should have mentioned a little bit earlier how the person is selected is a combination of need, grades, and aspirations. They have to demonstrate that they have done some community service. All of them have done—you would be amazed at the things [*JD chuckles*] that these kids do. I don't know when they have time to study. They are out in the community. They are counseling, mentoring. They are helping seniors. They are doing all kinds of things. So that is also something that we like to look at and see what it is. I am sure when they can they would like it to perhaps build upon where they want to go in what they want to study in life. If someone wants to go into medicine, and in the last several years we have had a number of students that want to become physicians, nurse practitioners, or other things in a

medical field. So sometimes they are able to volunteer at a place that gives them a little exposure to that career.

JD: Okay. There have been a variety of, in just looking through some materials that you have saved, it seemed that either the newspaper or the foundation, I wasn't quite sure which, sponsored some fashion shows that raised money or—you know, just a variety of things. I would be intrigued to know how you decided what to focus on? Or what type of program to do, a fashion show versus something else, for example.

FOSTER: I think the fashion show came about through Nordstrom, that they would do these every year, and we participated. So it wasn't that we decided to have a fashion show. It was different things in the community like that. We will be the co-sponsor or we will participate in. But the Terry Porter basketball camp was something Bernie came up with because drugs were just rampant in the community at that time, gangs and drugs, and trying to combat that. So, having Terry coming and doing the basketball camp over at, I think it was Peninsula Park. Bernie said that the kids were just eager to listen to him and were just spellbound. I mean, he is such a hero to them, but they were actually hanging onto every word he was saying so that hopefully they were able to integrate that into action for themselves.

JD: Mm-hmm.

FOSTER: And hopefully that saves some kids from going in the wrong direction. Let's see. I am trying to think; I can't think of other things. The music awards, that was another thing that we did for a few years. That was in conjunction with another group that was doing it. We were kind of a sponsor. So, yeah, those are two that come to mind.

JD: Just to go back to Terry Porter, too. I mean, the Blazers are a big deal in this town. How did *The Skanner* necessarily hook up with Terry Porter and get him to do this? You could see the issues that you just said, about drugs and gangs in the community. But pulling that all together, that's—

FOSTER: Well, yeah. And that's Bernie! It was Bernie's idea; he just decided that he wanted to do it, and he knew he needed a name that the kids recognized and looked up to, and he made the contact. I didn't really play a big role in that at all. I have to give him total credit for that. It was very successful.

JD: But it is also, you are very involved in the newspaper. And the newspaper's name is very much associated with this.

FOSTER: Yes.

JD: I'm not sure how to ask this, but how are you deciding where to put the newspaper and reputation behind something?

FOSTER: Yes. It's things that make a difference in the community, primarily—especially if it affects young people. So, we just really have a strong push towards education. We just see it as a driving force for kids to get into a better life for themselves and their families. So it is primarily that. Health issues as well, we support efforts that promote information to people about health issues. So we partnered with the Red Cross for many years. Not only with the blood drive, but with emergency preparedness, an issue that is near and dear to my heart [*JD and BF chuckle*]. I am going out and telling everybody, be prepared, and then we thought, well, wait a minute, the Red Cross. That is one of the big things that they do, is teaching people how to be prepared for emergencies. And here it would be, obviously, an earthquake. We worked with them on

educating people on what you need, how to do it, how to be prepared. Getting your kit together and how everybody needs to have one in their homes. You need to have one in your front hall closet, preferably, so you can grab it if you have to run out. We work with Multnomah County on also getting the word out about earthquake preparedness. [quietly] There is something else I was trying to think of there.

The Red Cross did a lot of work with not only the blood drives, but blood disorders, people with blood disorders. Sickle cell anemia is one of the things where they need to be able to match people with different blood types, so encouraging African Americans to give blood. We worked a lot with them on that. And then various other entities that have as their goal better health for all. So health is another big one, along with education.

JD: Am I recalling that you have some fairly strong interest in environmental issues, as well?

FOSTER: Yes. Well, here we have the solar [chuckles] panels.

JD: Talk about that a little. I just noticed that sign on the way in today.

FOSTER: Again, that is Bernie's idea. I am a very big proponent of energy conservation, and he is too. That was one of the things that we saw as a something that we could add to the building that would be beneficial to us, but it would also—it is so visible that other businesses in the community, even up and down the street could see that and consider possibly doing something like that for their buildings or their homes. So we decided to do it, and Bernie shepherded the whole thing through. He is very proud. I want to tell you. He is very, very proud of that. We at one time had the stats where you could see how much energy—anybody could come in and see that. [chuckling] And Bernie made sure that they looked at it, and they saw it, and that it was a good idea to do

that, and why don't you take a look at your building and see if that is something that you could do, or you could do it in your home as well. So, yeah, that was a very fun thing to do was to get the solar panels up.

JD: Mm-hmm. How long have they been up? Have you noticed a considerable difference?

FOSTER: Oh yes! We definitely have saved money on our utilities. We have had it, I really can't tell you for sure. I would say, maybe eight to ten years? Eight years, maybe, for sure. Something like that.

JD: That is a nice innovation.

FOSTER: Yes! We are happy that we did that.

JD: One big process that *The Skanner* and you and Bernie became involved in, in the late 1980s, was the renaming of Union Avenue to Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard.

FOSTER: Yes.

JD: I am guessing some of the motivation for that was some of the reasons you were saying earlier about his importance in American history, for all Americans. But talk about how that idea came about and the process, which was multi-year.

FOSTER: Well, we knew that a lot of different cities in the country were [*background music from street*] renaming streets for Martin Luther King. A lot of the cities that were doing that; the streets were primarily in the Black neighborhoods and so did not necessarily get a lot of exposure to the people of the city. Bernie went to a couple of

cities. He noticed that, and he thought, well, we should have a street named after Dr. King, and it should be an important street. It should be a street that everybody knows and that people can experience driving down the street, and it is just not a little five-block street somewhere hidden away, and the city can say, well, now we have street named after Dr. King.

He set out to work on that and get community support for that and talk about it. And we had some petitions made up, and we put the petitions in the papers. The papers went to all of the neighborhood businesses. People could fill them out. [*background talking*] We started to encounter a lot of resistance. Neil Kelly was one of the business owners. His business is right over on Albina and Alberta. He decided that he wanted to help with that. He said, this is something that he thought would be a good idea. Well, he was very surprised when some of the businesses on then Union Avenue were very much against this.

They come up with every reason under the sun. They would have to change their letterhead. They would have to change their business cards. It would cost them too much money to do that. People wouldn't know where to find them. People would not necessarily, their clients wouldn't necessarily, like to come to a street named [*laughing incredulously*] Martin Luther King Boulevard. Anyway, it was any kind of ridiculous reason, or excuse, you could think of that they came up with that they didn't want this to happen.

Neil did talk to some of the business owners to tell them that he was supporting this, and he thought it was a good idea. There were other people in the community that supported it and helped to get the word out about it. The National Association of Colored Women's Clubs, Portland Chapter took it upon themselves to go to a city council meeting, where they were discussing this issue. Dick Bogle was an African American on the city council at the time. And they were the only Black group, really, at the city council hearing to testify for the street name change.

Anyway, it went through a lot of different stages. The city council did, I think they did an emergency renaming, supporting the renaming. Then it was contested. No, no. I am ahead of myself. No. That is not what happened—I should have refreshed my memory about how it all unfolded. [JD chuckles] It took so long until I kind of lost track. But I do know that the city council made a decision that was litigated because people did not agree that they should be able to do that, to change the name of the street.

So that finally, it ended up with the Supreme Court deciding that yes they could do that, and the street could be named Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard. And, it ended up on being on the interstate. I mean, Union Avenue used to be Highway 99, and so now Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard starts as soon as you cross the Vancouver-Portland, the I-5 bridge, all the way to the overpass that starts into SE McLoughlin Boulevard. I don't know how many miles that is, but it is quite a way. So a lot of people get to experience that. They also, if they drive far enough along Martin Luther King Boulevard, they will also see at the convention center, the statue of Dr. King.

JD: Sure.

FOSTER: Which is something that we are all very proud of. I hope that the city is proud of it as well. When visitors come to Portland, if they are staying downtown or if they are going to be in a conference or something that is going to keep pretty much downtown, I will tell them that they can just hop on the MAX and come to the convention center and see the statue, take a picture of it, you know, because it is not every American city that has a statue like that of Dr. King. I think Portland at large can be proud of that.

JD: Were you involved in the statue process at all?

FOSTER: [sighs] We had conversations with people about it, and we gave a donation for it. It had to go through a number of processes as well. But yes, we supported that.

JD: In going back to the renaming, *The Skanner* newspaper itself was very closely associated with the renaming process.

FOSTER: Right.

JD: How did *The Skanner* report on that story, that was coming out of your offices, in some ways?

FOSTER: Well, we just reported on the facts. What is the city council doing? What are they thinking? We interviewed businesses and people on Union Avenue. What did they think? So we just reported whatever the facts were about the case, just so people would know what was happening because at that time also we had the skinheads, that were very prominent, intimidating people. It was a very tense time.

JD: How did you feel like other news outlets covered the issue?

FOSTER: The daily paper covered it somewhat. They especially covered the skinhead aspect, because they were an organized group that was against the naming of the street. They covered that. They did more than one article, but they did an article at the time that kind of gave a sequence of how the steps that the street renaming process had gone through. So, yes, it was a hot-button issue, and people were interested in it. So anytime you have that, the daily is definitely going to cover it.

JD: Mm-hmm. You are talking about feelings were running pretty high, I guess. Maybe from the pros and the cons about the issue of renaming. There have been other streets renamed in Portland since then. Do you feel like there have been any changes in *The Skanner* leading the way in renaming a street to reflect a more contemporary person as

you have seen these other ones play out? I am thinking about Rosa Parks and Caesar Chavez Boulevard.

FOSTER: Naito Parkway was one—

JD: Of course, yes.

FOSTER: That it didn't seem—and that is from my perspective, I wasn't in on all of the inside story about it—but it seemed like there was not as much controversy, and it just kind of passed, and it was not that much of an issue. Rosa Parks didn't seem to be a huge issue. Caesar Chavez Boulevard, on the other hand, there were a lot of people shouting about how that was just totally unnecessary, and that was a major street, and why couldn't they find another street for that name. And there were a lot of people that were just very, very upset about that. So that ended up being a lot more controversial because of the street that was selected.

JD: Mm-hmm. Around, I think it was actually after the street had been renamed, and it took a number of years for it to become just Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard.

FOSTER: Right.

JD: There were sort of the—

FOSTER: Two signs.

JD: Two signs, so—

FOSTER: So everyone could get used to it over five years, yeah.

JD: Well, and people could use up their stationery.

FOSTER: [*laughs*] Use up their stationery.

JD: I think you should mention the artifact that you have in your offices related to that, too.

FOSTER: Yes. We have the street name, the replica of the street name, both Union Avenue and Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard in the building here, out in the lobby. [*chuckles*]

JD: In the intense time that this was happening, there ended up being, I guess I would say, a suspicious fire?

FOSTER: Oh, the building—we owned the building next to our Skanner office, on Williams Avenue, that we stored newspapers in, and one night it just caught on fire—it was two or three in the morning, or something—and burned completely down. It was investigated by the police bureau, and they never came up with how it started or did someone start it, or anything. It has been a mystery all of these years.

JD: Mm-hmm. So you didn't necessarily feel like there was some correlation there, or—?

FOSTER: I don't know. We had done an editorial about the naming of the street, just a week, a few days before that had happened. But we just really don't know. It just seems very suspicious that right at that time is when it happened. But like I say, the police were not about to give us any explanation of what caused it. And unfortunately a

lot of our early editions of the paper were stored there and nowhere else, and so they are gone. We will never be able to have those physical copies of the paper from that time.

JD: There seems to be a bit of a thread as you talk about both your work here at the newspaper and through the foundation about programs or events that have some community benefit, something positive contributing to the community. I know that you have talked a little bit about some organizations that you belong to, but also maybe to just start off about why community organizations are important, and maybe you could just name and talk through a few that have been important to you and why.

FOSTER: Well, some of the organizations have chosen me; I haven't necessarily [*laughing*] chosen them. Albina Rotary is an example. Neil Kelly was a member of Albina Rotary, and Bob Hughley was also a member of the community. They came and talked to me about how Rotary was accepting women and that they really wanted me to be a part of Albina Rotary. I had a lot of things to do at that time. I told them, I don't know how I'll be able to do that. But these are people who don't take no for an answer. There was no way they were leaving out of my office until I told them that I [*laughing*] would join the Albina Rotary. And so I did.

And I am glad I did; I am glad I did. Rotary International has been one of the best things that I have ever did, or the best organizations that I ever belonged to. Their reach is just so immense, you know, it is international. The Rotary took upon itself to eliminate polio, and we pretty much—see, I am still saying “we” because I still identify with Rotary. It had a very important part in that it was just many, many millions of dollars and in education and in providing the immunizations and so on all around the world. It appealed to me because of its international reach. It appealed to me because each club has its own projects that they work on, but then you also can collaborate with other clubs as well. Rotary promotes friendship, international friendship, so that is always near and dear

to my heart. Anything that has to do with people coming together as one is something that I am interested in.

Our club had food baskets that we'd deliver at Christmas. We had a very small club, but we would all get in our cars, and we'd take a day, and we'd pack the boxes. Then we would take them over to where ever they needed to go. Some organizations would give us the names of places that needed them. Then, at Peninsula Park once a year we had, at that time there were junior princesses—

JD: For the Rose Festival.

FOSTER: —for the Rose Festival, thank you. So the Rosarians promoted that. They had an event at Peninsula Park every year, and so, it attracted a lot of people. So after that ceremony was over, where someone was knighted and they got to plant a rose— [*amused*] I got to do that one time, and the little princess was Ethiopian. She was the first African girl to be a princess. And I chose the peace rose, which is a beautiful yellow rose with a little pink tint, and it makes just such beautiful roses.

Anyway, that's an aside. So there are all of these people there. Rotary, what we did, Rotary Club of Albina provided hot dogs and hamburgers for everybody that was there. We had drinks. We had ice cream. We had all kinds of things. And then we had a program where people performed and did things. We even had children from some of the different schools. Some had drill teams. There were all kinds of events, like a field day, you know. And so we became known for that event, and we did it over a number of years. I don't know whether they are still doing it now or not.

Of course, there is another thing I want to tell you about—our scholarships. They have a scholarship luncheon every year, and they give, I think, when I left it was at least six scholarships to students. Now it is probably more, but they are still doing it.

And then we also had this program, Amigos de las Americas, where we had a student, they applied, and they went through training, and then we supported them to go

to Latin America. They went to a country where they lived with a family and taught hygiene to the kids. Or sometimes they went to a village where they were working on a well. So they ate the same thing the families ate.

And they came back, and they'd tell us about these trips, and they'd say, "my sister" and "my brother," "my mother" and "my father." They had these friendships that were so meaningful to them, and they would come back, and they'd talk to them on the phone or send letters to each other. I remember one teenager said, "My parents asked me what I wanted for Christmas, and I told them nothing because I have everything I need. When I was down there," he said, "my brother had three CDs. I have, like, one hundred and fifty CDs, and he had only three, and he would guard them from his little brother, put them in a certain spot." And you know, he said, "I just don't need anything."

You really get to understand how much you have when you go down and see people who don't have very much of anything. And the fact that they accepted them so much—they just embraced the students. They had never had that experience before. Well, when you are a small village, everybody knows everybody, and they would walk down the street and people would call them by name and wave to them and come up to them and give them a hug. They loved that. And all of the ones that went, that we supported, they wanted to go back. They enjoyed it so much. So that was one program.

I think there might have been one other thing, was the international program where we host students from other countries. So our club hosted a student from Brazil one year. And we hosted a young lady from Japan. I remember her so well. She said, "My parents don't know this, but I am coming back to America to live." [*laughs*] She and her parents came to visit the club and everything. But yeah, I am sure she kept her word. She was very, very sure that was going to happen for her.

One other think I ought to mention is that when Rotary International met in Paris, not in Paris, I am sorry, in [*trying to remember*]*—the Riviera, south of Paris, what is the name of this town?*

JD: Cannes?

FOSTER: Cannes. They had a program where you could sign up to go to someone's home for dinner, and they were supposed to serve a typical dinner that they would normally serve. And so we had a psychologist and his wife that came over to our hotel, picked us up, took us over to their apartment and served this really neat dinner. We had a really nice time. They took us back.

And so I think I took a picture of something else about Rotary, but I think I mentioned the trip to—I sent *The Skanner*, over to this couple, and this was not a good outcome. I sent it to them, and about maybe a month later, maybe a little longer than that, it was sent back to me. Yeah, they sent the paper back to me. And so, this was certainly not an example of how Rotary is supposed to play out, but I was so shocked. I had to go all the way over there to experience racism in another form. So, yeah. I will always remember that.

JD: So, did you feel any kind of odd vibe from them while you were dining with them?

FOSTER: No. No!

JD: And they didn't send any note that said why they were returning it?

FOSTER: No. No.

I think it was the husband. [JD chuckles] I don't think it was the wife, because he was a little bit, you know, whatever. I don't know how to, just something.

JD: Mm-hmm.

FOSTER: But that didn't spoil my love of Rotary, but I just mentioned it because I never really mentioned it. I maybe mentioned it to one or two people over the years, but it is still, when I think about that particular convention, that is what I think about.

JD: Mm-hmm.

FOSTER: Anyway. It didn't spoil it for me. I mean, I got to see a lot of the good things that Rotary does around the world and continues to do. I highly recommend that organization to anyone. It is great for networking. There are things that are done where other clubs can participate. It is just building friendships with other people is just a wonderful thing. Other organizations, Association of Women in Communications; no longer meeting.

JD: Okay.

FOSTER: But, I really enjoyed being a member when they did. We did some things with PRSA, Public Relations Society of America, with different events that we did. But the main thing about that organization was, I saw a lot of women who are successful in their careers in communications. And so that was very valuable to me. They were also very good mentors. In fact, our two business coaches, the owners of Continuous Breakthruz, Karen Carnahan and Marsia Gunter, each were presidents of the organization as well while I was a member. I really learned a lot from that.

Then, let's see. The De La Salle High School [De La Salle North Catholic High School] was a concept that came out of Chicago, Cristo Rey model, where students go to school, and then they work at a business in order to pay for part of their tuition. So it was decided that we would try this model. The Christian Brothers in Northern California were taking this on and were going to start a school here in Portland. I was asked to be on the board.

We started off with this small building. It wasn't a building that was made for high school students or anything. And we kind of made it work as long as we could. And then we finally got them into a real building that was built for a school. And so they are located in North Portland now.

It is probably one of the best boards I have ever been on as far as making a difference in the lives of young people. The goal was to have all of these kids, one hundred percent of them, to go to college. They took that on as a mission and had to recruit companies to hire the students. At first companies were going, "A fifteen-year-old coming to work? What can a fifteen-year-old do?" And so on and so forth. We had to finally show them how these kids go through an orientation. We have business people come in and coach them. They learn about business attire. They learn about being ready to go to work when you go to work. They learned about how to listen, how to take directions, everything. So they were very surprised at the quality of student that they got, even at fifteen. Now of course, as they matured, they got better at things.

So they were taken on by someone in the company—insurance companies, companies downtown; they are now at Tektronix, Nike, everywhere. But when we started off there were not as many. But the kids got there. They built a relationship with the person in the department that they were working in, and then we soon started getting calls from these people, amazed—amazed at how these kids were so disciplined and how they did their work and they were on time. They did what they were supposed to do. They were very accountable for what they had to do.

If there was any issue that needed to be addressed, the employer would then address that with our crew that worked with the students to place them, and then those students would then get a one-on-one; they would get some retraining to make sure that this was a good place for them. It worked out really well. Now we have graduates that are coming back [*snaps*] to the community and talking about, they want to give back. They want to come back and make a contribution.

Every time I talk to someone who has been over to De La Salle or who has encountered one of the students, they always say, they are so self-assured. They are so self-assured. Yes, they are self-assured, and they know how to communicate with people. They know how to communicate with an adult in a way that is appropriate, that is respectful. But those students are excelling. They have been accepted into all of the best schools all over the country. I think the graduation rate is somewhere between, I don't know, ninety-six or ninety-eight percent, something like that. I mean, not the graduation rate but the college-acceptance rate. So that is still within where we want to be.

I cannot say enough for what the teachers at that school do for these kids and how they respond to people believing in them. They are going to be successful in this world. They know that when they walk in the front door, and they know that when they walk out the door. So that has been a really great program.

JD: That offers an interesting example in that, yes, there had been a model that was successful in another place, but starting something from the ground floor and building it takes a lot of time, dedication, and belief. Can you talk about when you were involved in those first years? [*chuckles*] You are talking about, they were in a building that wasn't really meant to be a school, particularly for high-school-sized young adults. Kind of, how do you keep a vision going in your head, even when it is not necessarily a vision that is realized yet?

FOSTER: It is just a belief. It is a faith in God and a faith that we are going to succeed. We may not know where the next company is coming from that we will be able to place one of our students at—we don't know how we are going to get this van that is going to transport the kids, but we keep making outreach. We keep asking, and we keep knowing that there is a need; there is a need. We had all of these statistics about kids graduating. They were getting out of high school, and they were not at the grade level that they should have been at. They were lacking in so many skills, so many subjects. They were

not ready for college. So we knew that there was a need. The Christian Brothers were just totally in this. They were in it for the long haul, and they believed that it was going to be successful.

We had a relationship with the Cristo Rey people in Chicago as well. I think more of their students were Hispanic than the ones that we had here. We started off with a lot of African American and white students, and we were trying to get more Hispanic students in. So, over the years, that has occurred. It is a diverse student body.

The day, [*laughs and hits table*] this is so funny. It wasn't funny then, but we thought, "well, what does this mean?" The morning of the official announcement to the media was the rainiest, stormiest, windiest day you have ever seen in your life. And we thought, nobody is going to come! [*laughing*] Nobody is going to know anything about this. But people did come. The information got out.

Yes, a lot of it, like I say, was a hope and a prayer. It was about faith that we were doing the right thing and that our way would open up, and we would find the things that we needed in order to make the program succeed. And you know, it is still—whenever you have this kind of school where you had to fundraise to pay the bills—it is always a challenge. Every year is a challenge. Every event is a challenge. We have a luncheon every year. I mean, I have not been on the board for a number of years. There is an auction in the evening—so, an October event and then a spring event. And they have to raise a lot of money to make the school go and to make it continue. So far it has been successful in doing that. I am just very proud that it has found its niche, and it is operating well, very well.

JD: It pops up in stories about seniors graduating and students of achievement, so it has definitely attained kind of, I guess, an equal status with the public schools or with the long-established private schools.

FOSTER: Right, yes.

JD: I have been aware of it as it has evolved over the years.

FOSTER: Yes, the students have a very close relationship with their teachers. *[background street noise]* Everybody knows everybody in the school. The teachers are just in the corner of every student. They are just there to make sure that they succeed, and the parents are very much involved. The buy-in from the parents is key. So they have to be there and know what is going on and what the students need. If they don't have money, which a lot of people don't have, then they can volunteer to do other things. And they do.

JD: There are a couple of other organizations that I am not completely sure how involved you have been with—the NAACP, which is a very old civil rights organization, particularly around here. We are sitting in *The Skanner* conference room, or one of them, while we are doing these interviews, and I couldn't help but notice a lifetime membership plaque on the wall related to NAACP, there in the second row up from the bottom. I am assuming that—well, I shouldn't assume—

FOSTER: Yes, the oldest civil rights organization. It has done so much for African Americans in this country, and it has done so much in recent years to highlight the voting rights issues that have been in the forefront of many of the cities in this country, where there have been all kinds of things done to discourage the Black vote. You know, closing the polls, changing where the polls are, not accepting that a person is registered to vote, just any number of things, of course the gerrymandering of the districts, and so on—these things continue to this day. So the NAACP is still fighting for civil rights and will be for a long time to come.

They have kind of like taken a new life or a new urgency in the country now, where they are going around to cities and listening to what people's concerns are to

make sure they are attacking the issues that need to be addressed. They have a lot of talented people in that organization, lots of attorneys that are well versed in the issues that we are facing right now with discrimination in voting rights itself, the issue of voting rights. I was in Washington D.C. and heard from one of the people in the national organization. It sounds like they are revitalized. They are just really ready to address the issues of the time. I am very grateful for that. NAACP here in Portland used to have a credit union.

JD: Yes.

FOSTER: I remember, my grandsons were, I don't know, maybe five and four or something like that. They weren't in school yet. We went over and got them to join the credit union. Of course, they didn't know what the NAACP was or anything, but we had these little books, and that was the money they had in there. I thought it was a good way to get them started, to have some knowledge about the NAACP, although they were probably too little to understand.

JD: Well, and saving money, which is also important.

FOSTER: [*chuckles*] Yes, they ended up learning about what that meant as they grew a little bit older.

JD: Delta Sigma Theta is an interesting sorority for Black college-educated women, and I know the chapter in Portland does a wide variety of activities. Maybe you would talk about your involvement with them.

FOSTER: Yes. Well, we have programs around education, social action, international awareness, physical or mental health, and arts and letters. These are projects of all of the

Delta Sigma Theta sororities in the country. So in the local chapter, we give scholarships. We have a scholarship event once a year. We partner with the Urban League for the annual day to visit the state representatives, to go to Salem to talk about issues. We do a lot with stuff that is going on with mental health, with different organizations. We do something with the Red Cross. The Komen Walk, we participate in that. March of Dimes, just various—[*trying to find the right name*] Bike Sundays, Sundays in the park [Portland Sunday Parkways], we have participated in that as well.

International awareness—we have an orphanage in Africa. We have programs in Africa and in other countries where we work to develop safe water for people. We have many of these in Africa. We have chapters in Okinawa, in Germany, in the Virgin Islands, as well as in the United States. I tell people, this organization, we have so many programs and so many events that you could just fill your whole calendar without belonging to anything else. We do a lot of good work. I am very proud to be a member of this sorority.

The house that we have now, across from Peninsula Park, is—I am trying to think of the technical term for it. It is, an energy-efficient building. So we have a lot of features in the building that help us to save on electricity, and save on the utilities, and the City of Portland, PDC [Portland Development Commission], worked with us on that. We have other organizations work with us on that. Colas Construction was the company that put the building up.

JD: Maybe just tell a little bit about what the origins of that building were.

FOSTER: Oh! The service station. It was a service station many, many years ago. It just was there. Nothing was happening with it. One of our sorority members found out that it was available for next to nothing. And at that time we were meeting in different locations and paying rent for that. She decided that we should purchase it and remodel it. So we did. We purchased it, and when we started looking at remodeling it, that is when we got all of these ideas about how it could be a building that was an energy-efficient

building. I don't know who brought this idea about railroad boxcars, which got integrated into the design concept of the building.

So it is now a really nice building. We have a meeting room. We have a really large kitchen. We have a foyer that is also used for art exhibits and other things. And we rent the space to city, county; they use it a lot for business meetings, but also for community events. Some people rent it for birthday parties or anniversaries and things like that. So we use that to defray the costs of operating the building. We are always hoping that we will get more people who would like to rent the building so that we can continue to be able to operate it the way it needs to be operated.

JD: Am I remembering correctly that it is named for—

FOSTER: June Key. She was the lady who initially said we should buy this property and we should remodel this building into a building for our chapter.

JD: Any other thoughts about organizations in general?

FOSTER: I don't think so. I feel like a lot of the work that I do here takes the place of my being in an organization because I am taking all of those organizations and the information and the impact that they are having in the community and getting the word out to people. And so I feel like that is a service that I am doing. So that helps me to not feel like I have to belong to everything. *[laughs]*

JD: Well, awareness of what organizations are doing is important to them.

FOSTER: Yes. It is important to them and to the community. Because you know, most of these organizations are doing things for the community. That is what their goals are.

That is what they are founded upon. That is what they want to do. So we want to make sure that people know when services are available to them.

JD: As you were talking about your involvement in De La Salle high school, you mentioned faith a few times.

FOSTER: Oh, yes.

JD: I believe faith has been core to your life and work from a young age to the present. You were raised as Catholic. You are Catholic. Maybe just talk a little about the role of faith in your life and in your activism.

FOSTER: Well, I always tell people that faith is not a concept, it is an action. It is something that I was exposed to. I was around people, women in particular, who believed in God and believed that their needs would be met if they had faith. So have faith in God, and God will take care of you. Do the best you can with what you have. You know, just have that assurance, that you are not going to be deserted. Your faith will get you through whatever it is you need to get through. My grandmother lived by that so I saw it every day. I saw it. It was, like I say, it was something that was instilled in me from just being around her. And she had a lot of qualities that we didn't like, because my mother died when I was sixteen and she came to live with us, and she had her rules and her ways of doing things that, you know, we didn't agree with. But her faith in God was unshakable—unshakable! There was no doubt about it. She read her Bible every day. She prayed. Sometimes we would wake up at night, and she would be praying out loud. We didn't care for that too much, but we could appreciate it as we grew older.

But anyway, my mother was very devout. She didn't go around saying do's and don'ts and precepts and things like that so much, it was more, do the right thing. Treat everybody with kindness and love and respect. She was very much looked up to in the

community. In the little church that we grew up in, all of our neighbors, pretty much, were Catholic. We all went to Catholic school and to this church. Our lives kind of revolved around what was going in with the [*background street noise*] church. I think I grew up as a very spiritual child, a very spiritual person. I really liked going to mass. I liked the music. We had a lot of Gregorian chants when I was younger. As I got older we were singing the English hymns and so on. I think I got a lot of it from my mother and my grandmother; this feeling of being blessed and wanting to be a part of the grand scheme of things God's plan for the world. In other words, like, I am a part of that plan. How do I realize myself in that? So it was affecting me, the spirituality of the people around me were affecting me.

The little Sisters we had that were from France, well, they spoke French, and my mother and everybody else spoke Creole, so they could converse. But they had activities for us. We did a lot of things with them. I was involved in, we would sing for some of the masses. But back then, the school was right next to the church, back then you would have the high mass, so you would sing that in Latin. Sometimes they would have us go over and sing for the mass.

So that was all very powerful stuff for me. I just really took it in. I always wanted to be one who could make a difference in the world, a difference for people. I think that is one of the things about challenging people to shape a better future now. This gets manifested in that, and that is something that Bernie, Bernie is always interested in the downtrodden, the have-nots, the people that need a little help. They just need somebody to acknowledge them. They just need something to keep them going. And so we are very much in sync with that in our mission of challenging people to shape a better future now. And not only that, but of course, challenging ourselves to shape a better future now as well.

Another thing I was exposed to as a teenager was going to Loveland, Ohio, to Grailville, which was a place where young women gathered to explore scripture, to be out on a farm and do things you do on a farm, to come together from all over the country and interact and learn something from each other. So there were girls from Brooklyn and

from all different places around the country. And here we were, you know, our little group from this little town in Louisiana. [*JD laughs*] You know, never had been anywhere, really. I remember being on this bus, and we kept going. We passed the city, and we kept going. I said, “Is this place out on a farm somewhere?” Thinking I was making a joke! “It’s out on a farm somewhere?”

And nobody said anything. [*JD and BF chuckle*] Yeah. It was a farm.

The women there, they went out; they farmed; they had cattle; they planted things. They took the wheat, and they made it into flour and made the bread and cooked the food. It was all-natural food. We had whole-wheat bread and that kind of thing. Then everybody participated in the meals, the preparation, and the cleanup afterwards. We had liturgy in the mornings, and we also had kind of a theme that we would carry within ourselves and go to some quiet spots and reflect. Kind of like a retreat, kind of thing. We did games and dancing and all kinds of activities to get us acquainted with each other. I just had a wonderful time there. I really loved going to Grailville. I was really glad that my sisters after me were able to go. But by the time my youngest sister went, it was the change in the liturgy. So we had the African American influence into the liturgy. And so they had drums, and they had African songs, and they had dancing and all kinds of things that we didn’t have, we had never been exposed to. So it evolved over time. That was a good experience.

I do remember it was because the Sisters saw that as something that would be beneficial for us to be exposed to. It was only two of us, I think, from our town that went. I just never thought it would happen. Because, you know she showed me a picture in a brochure. “Would you like to go there?” Well, yeah, but that is not going to happen. And then the next thing I know, she is talking about, it is going to happen! It was so amazing to me! [*JD chuckles*] She was this little nun. She was Mother Saint Paul. She was not even five feet tall. She was fearless, fearless! That was another good influence on me, as somebody who would—she was not a person who was going to be subservient. She was who she was, and she met people on that level. So the priest and the other people in the

hierarchy and everything, she was not intimidated by that at all. So she was a really good role model for me, way back when I was a teenager. [*JD chuckles*] Yeah.

JD: And I am not quite remembering, these were Dominican sisters?

FOSTER: Yeah, the Dominicans.

JD: But your faith has continued to the present. It seems like, perhaps, your activism and your faith often fuse. I think you have been a member of Saint Andrew Catholic Church for quite some time.

FOSTER: Yes, yes. Saint Andrew [*laughs*] was—when I first came, I asked somebody about different churches to go to and everything. And this person said, “Well, you really don’t want to go to Saint Andrew [*continues, laughing*]—you really don’t want to go to Saint Andrew because they have guitars and stuff there, balloons and things, with the kids running around.” And I thought, I have got to check this out. It has been over thirty years. I am still there.

Saint Andrew is a welcoming community. We welcome everyone. We have a committee that is specifically welcoming gay, lesbian, LGBT people. We have Hispanic groups; they have all kinds of—they have the women organized for different things; the men. We come together for different activities. We have bilingual masses with them. We have had Muslim people come to our service. We have had, just—it is just anybody. If you have a disability, if you have anything, we don’t care. We mean what we say—all are welcome. So, it is kind of a theme of our church. All are welcome, in that we are all here as one. We are here to do the work, which is the work Christ instilled in us to do, which is to accept every person—every person, and not distinguish between this one and that one and the other one.

We have activists involved in everything. We have a group that is involved in housing. Right now they are getting ready to go to city council to look at how the money is going to be spent for low income housing. And it has been a long road and a long process that they have worked on that. It is the Metropolitan Association for the Common Good that the Saint Andrew group is affiliated with other groups in the city, so it is not just church groups. It is other groups that are trying to make a difference for the needs of the people that don't have a voice.

So we have a dental clinic. We have a food pantry. Anybody in the community who needs food can go to that food pantry and get food. You know, it is not like the ones that say, well, you can go, and then you need to come to my church because we gave you food. No. If you are in need, we have it. If we have food, you can have it.

I just like that freedom to be who you are and to be Christ in the world, which is to right wrongs. When you see something is wrong, do something about it. The phrase has been over used, I think, speak truth to power, but it is true that we do have to go to where racism is institutionalized, and we need to look at the institutions and the people who are in the institutions and how is it that we can change that to have an effect on the whole community, the whole city, as opposed to just one thing. So, you are always going to need to help people with food and with clothing and with lodging and things like that, but with the goal of everybody having a just wage, everybody having a job where they can support their family. We have a group that has worked over many years with the janitor's union. We have a group now that is working with stopping gun violence. They have had a number of activities around that. You could just name whatever the issue is, we are there trying to do something about it. That is what I like about the church.

We even had an anti-racism committee at one point because, you know, racism is a sin. Racism is not to be tolerated. Racism needs to be called out. It needs to be called what it is. And people need to see what that means. You have to give them examples sometimes because it is not something people want to talk about. It is uncomfortable to talk about it. A lot of people are getting tired of having to explain this over and over and

over again. But it is one of those things that I think we will just always have to work on. We will just have to keep working on it. We can get tired of doing it, but we still need to do it. We have to do it. So we have to take on that responsibility, and I think that these people are.

So I identify with them in that regard. You know, these are people that, we have similar beliefs. We want to see women have bigger roles in the church. We want to see women become priests. We want to see the wrongs righted. But we still have to be a voice for that, you know, so that is what we are doing.

JD: Well, we have been talking for quite a while. I guess you might be ready to call it good for today?

FOSTER: Yes.

JD: All right. Well, thank you so much, Bobbie, and we'll pick it up again soon.

FOSTER: All right.

[End of Session 2]

Session 3
2017 September 26

JD: Today is September 26th, 2017. This is the third and final interview with Bobbie Dore Foster for the Oregon Historical Society oral history project. My name is Janice Dilg. We are in The Skanner News Group offices in North Portland. It is a nice, clear sunny day today.

FOSTER: Yes it is.

JD: No more smoke. [*referring to the smoke of the Eagle Creek fire*]

So, in some of your previous interviews we have talked about awards, that particularly *The Skanner* has given out to other organizations and individuals and scholarships. But over the years of *The Skanner's* existence you have also personally received some awards for the work that you have done in a variety of capacities. I thought we would start today with talking about a few of those. And, I don't know if you want to just kind of talk about ones that are particularly important to you?

FOSTER: Well, I will start with the Delta Sigma Theta Women of Excellence Award—one for community service and one for business achievement. Delta Sigma Theta is a national sorority of both college women and post-college women. We have chapters, alumni chapters, across the country. I think there is at least a hundred and eighty thousand members. I think I mentioned something about Delta a little earlier.

JD: Mm-hmm.

FOSTER: Working in different countries, and so on. Anyway, so every year we have a luncheon where we acknowledge women in several different categories, community

service being one, business being another. I think there is one for religion. We even have one for youth. I think one in the arts. So that is one way that we have the community come together to honor women in the community. So that was very meaningful to me.

The University of Portland Distinguished Alumna award was also, it was a total surprise to me. I thought, they have got this wrong! What did *I* do? [*JD chuckles*] But they said that I definitely was deserving, and they said a lot of good things about me. My family was there. At that time it was a brunch. It is now moved on to become a luncheon. It seems to grow every year. But that was, as I said, unexpected, but also very rewarding. I was also surprised to see my Spanish professor, Professor Macias—he just passed away a couple of years ago—there. I just had no idea. He was there, and a few other of my professors as well.

JD: We didn't really capture a lot about your degree from University of Portland, and when you went there. Maybe just at this moment talk a little bit about what your experience was there.

FOSTER: Yes. Well, I was doing all of the things that I have described before for the paper. You know, accounts receivables and payables and editing the paper and doing—earlier on we had a number of local people who did columns, and that required a lot of work. But I went to class in the morning, and then I would work in the afternoon. It is a small university. A lot of the students were, you know, they had just graduated from high school, and now they were in class, and they were on the ball. They were on their toes. They know everything. It seemed to me that they just knew everything, all of the answers to things.

And I was kind of struggling to get back in the mode of going to class and doing the papers and all of the things that were necessary. I ended up getting up in the mornings, like at four or five, because I found that if I studied then it seemed to work better for me. Now that I have read a lot about what works best for memory, it's said that

if you study before you go to sleep, then you will recall it the following day. So, I don't know. I haven't tried that because I have been out of school for so long. But anyway, that is what I did back then. It was a very rewarding experience at the university. I enjoyed my courses, my professors, and the people that I met there, so that was a good place to be.

JD: Can you recount some of the things that were said when you received your alumna award?

FOSTER: It is hard for me to recall. A part of it was that I was active in the community and was giving back to the community and that I [*background street noise*] had a business that had a purpose in the community. So those were a couple of things. But I would have to go back and read the article to remember what they said. [*JD and BF chuckle*]

JD: And *Portland Business Journal* recognized you for your work in 2007.

FOSTER: Yes, *Business Journal* regularly honors women in business. They do this every year, and again, I was very surprised that I had been selected. We had an evening reception and photos and so on. We also were interviewed briefly by, I am trying to think of the person from KGW-TV—Brenda Braxton also interviewed the winners. So that was a very nice award as well. It gave us a little more presence in the business community. There was an article in *Business Journal*, and so that was really something that we appreciated very much.

And then the Oregon Historical Society's History Makers award—Oregon History Makers is an award that Oregon Historical started, I don't know, maybe four years ago or so. And Bernie and I were very happy to receive that award because, as an African American newspaper in the state of Oregon, we survived some very difficult times in still being published. That was in 2013, just a few years ago, yes. But it also, we also became

known to more people in Portland, and the exposure was really, really excellent. We were really grateful for that, and very honored for that award. I mean, the dinner, and the auction, and the speakers and everything were very interesting, and what was really so fun for us, was having our family there—our family members and some friends. We had people who were celebrating with us. So that was really a memorable event.

The Martin Luther King, Jr. award from Saint Andrew, that was also a surprise. I have been there for thirty some-odd years, and I was on the anti-racism committee, and I have been on the pastoral council, the administrative council—you know, I have done a lot of different things there. So they were acknowledging that. That was very heartwarming, and in addition, my family was there as well. It was nice to be acknowledged in my faith community for that. They also, Saint Andrew has been doing this for many years, and they also have a parishioner who is honored and there is someone from the community that is honored for their role in the community that has upheld the values of Martin Luther King, Jr. So that was nice.

JD: Do you think there will come a time when you are not surprised when you get an award? [*chuckles*]

FOSTER: Well, you know, it is something that you never really expect. But then some of them are just so out of the normal realm of what I am thinking about at the time.

JD: Mm-hmm. And you have mentioned a couple of times, I think both on recording as well as when we have been talking before or after the interviews that you are very focused on the here-and-now as someone in the newspaper business, or the communication business. That is kind of where your focus always remains, it sounds like.

FOSTER: Yes. As I have told you, remembering, you know, what the stories were a week before last; they are not on my mind right now. It is: what are we doing next week

and the week after that? So, yes. Oh, and what is happening right now? Like this week we are doing a special issue, Minority Business Enterprise, so there is always a lot more excitement and a lot of deadlines to meet, a lot of activity going on. Those are the kinds of things that when those things are happening around you, that is where your attention is. That is where it *has* to be because you want to make sure that everything is as it should be and that we meet our deadlines and so on. That is why you just get caught up in the details of the operation.

JD: Mm-hmm. In addition to personal recognition that you have received for your many years of hard work and service, *The Skanner*, as an entity has also been the recipient of some awards. We're actually, as you mentioned, sitting in the conference room, and the walls are pretty much covered with plaques and awards and news articles. So there is lots of evidence that I am looking at.

FOSTER: Yes. We are very proud of these, and they all have a special meaning to us. The Austin Family Business Awards, it is awarded by Oregon State University, it is nothing to be taken lightly. They had a small business award, medium business award, large business award. I don't know if they later added female business award. I am not sure. But the process to earn this award, there is a questionnaire that you have to answer and essays that you have to write. It takes a lot of time and effort. This is an award that I was really hoping that we would win, but I knew that there were others that were going through the same process that we were going through.

Another thing about the award that was special is that one of my brothers, my oldest brother, who had lung cancer at the time, was here visiting, was present at this luncheon for the award. So that made it really special for us, for me in particular, to have him there. All of the family members were there as well, in Corvallis for that award.

Then we have the West Coast Black Publishers Association, which met every year and have awards for the newspapers that were, the membership. You always want to

stand out in your area, and so in the newspaper business, getting an award for what you have achieved in the business by people in the business always has a special meaning. And so we received many awards from the West Coast Black Publishers Association for news stories, for feature stories, for photos, for use of photos—over the years, many different awards. It is always good to be with your peers to find out what is happening in their world, in their businesses, and so on.

JD: Sure. Can I digress for a second? You mentioned photo awards, and I kind of wanted to tie it back because *The Skanner* has a large photo collection that you have donated to the Oregon Historical Society not too long ago. I wanted you to talk about the value of photos and how you made that decision.

FOSTER: That was a hard decision for me. I am so attached to photographs. I will just sit there and get lost in time. I have to get pulled away. When we were trying to decide the photos, we met, and we had them out on the table, and we talked about them. But we had so many, we couldn't really do that for all of them. So Oregon Historical got a grant, and we had someone come in, and luckily this person was able to do a really good job, because he knew so many community people that were in those photos. You know, there would be a photo of a group of people, or a photo of just one person, or a photo of a child. Some of them, most of them, had IDs on them. A lot of them didn't have IDs, and we had a number of different photographers over the years who took those.

I have to brag about those myself, because I am so proud of the photographers that we have had that have worked for us. They have done outstanding work. Well, you know Julie Keefe, who has been our photographer for many years, since her daughters were babies, and one of them just got married! [*JD laughs*] But she just does outstanding work. I was so happy to see that she had a show of her work at the Oregon Historical as well.

Yes, so Oregon Historical gained those photos and digitized them. As I said, it was so hard for me. I think I am the only one that was so attached to those photos. Oh, look at so-and-so! There is Margaret Carter at a community meeting! Oh, there is another person. There are children at play, showing, like they might be at Peninsula Park at the swimming pool. Or that is a summer photo, and we would do these seasonal photos just because it became very popular and in addition, Julie would give photos away to some of the people whose photos she had used. Other times people needed them for other reasons. Maybe they needed more than one, and so then she would work with them to make sure that they got those. But that was very generous. And everybody in the community knows her, and knew her, and loved her, and still do. [It is so hard not to have her with us. But she is doing very well teaching young people photography and, of course, running her business with her husband.

So, the photos—they are just historical documents. They have just captured what has happened in the community for all of these years, and every time I look at them, I can get caught up in the memories of what those things were. But they are in a place now where they can be preserved, and so I thought that it was very appropriate that we should donate them to the Oregon Historical. And they are being digitized. I think that they have already digitized all of them. They are available to the public so people can decide what they want to order, and they can purchase the photos from Oregon Historical. So that is something that is a service to the community as well.

I want to say one thing about—we had a huge collection—I don't know what happened to it—of entertainment promo photography, groups like The Supremes, and the girl groups, the boy groups, other prominent and well-known entertainers—also things I like to look at! [*laughs*] I just like looking at those photos! A lot of them were black and white in the old days. I don't know why I am so attached to those photos.

But anyway, I cried when we went to Julie's opening. I looked at her photos, and I was just crying and crying because it brought back all kinds of memories.

JD: Sure.

FOSTER: So that is what, I just wanted to answer that question about the photos. I could, as you can see, go on and on about photos. [*JD laughs*] I am not going to do that right now.

JD: Well, as a historian who also loves photos, I am really glad you donated them. [*chuckles*] Because photos are an important way to tell a part of the story of history, and some institutions, or many institutions just have a fairly narrow focus, and the more information and the more views there are, the better the history is. Or it can be.

FOSTER: Yes, yes. And a lot of people don't know Maya Angelou was here. They don't know that Margaret Carter met Bill Clinton [*chuckling*] on the tarmac at Portland International Airport. You know, there are just a lot of jewels in those photos.

JD: Mm-hmm.

I know there was another publishers' association, the National Newspapers Publishers Association, that you also were recipients of numerous awards from.

FOSTER: Yes. National Newspapers Publishers Association consists of two hundred African American-owned newspapers in the country. We meet for a national conference once a year in the summer, in winter for our mid-winter workshop, and in March we celebrate Black Press Week in Washington DC, and we go to honor deceased publishers in the archives at Howard University. But there is a lot of competition among newspapers for these awards at NNPA—a lot of competition, and we have been very fortunate to have won a number of awards. We have been very proud of—in particular, we were proud of the ones we won in Best News Story, Best Feature Story. Those are the areas that we primarily won awards in, although we have won one for the best advertising for a

promotional ad that we did. We did win for Best Photo, and I think we have also won for Best Use of Photos. We did win one for an editorial. So we have won. The really difficult categories to win are the Special Issues, like the Martin Luther King issue, the Black History issue, Minority Business Enterprise issue, things like that. People put in a lot of effort and time into those publications, and you know, we are up against East Coast publications that have ten times the people that put their papers out than we have here. So it was always a thrill to win those awards.

JD: Can I just ask you one follow-up question? You mentioned with some of the awards you received, like the *Portland Business Journal*, and Oregon Historical Society History Makers, that it made the paper, and you and Bernie, more well-known, perhaps in a broader context. Did you feel like that was a part of the result of some of the national awards that you won also?

FOSTER: No.

JD: Okay.

FOSTER: We are judged specifically on the content.

JD: Okay.

FOSTER: So, let's see. A few other awards, the Legacy Award from Black United Fund—that was something that we were very proud of. And the Vic Atiyeh Lifetime Achievement Award,; this is an award that Volunteers of America gives out, and they named this after Vic Atiyeh. And so, Vic Atiyeh was at that dinner. He passed away not too long after that so we were all shocked to see him there. I think he had driven himself there! [JD chuckles] He came alone. I was so surprised to see him. He got up and told a

few stories, and he says, “I have to tell this story about *The Skanner*.” He says, “Bernie—” [BF tries to recall the story] Let’s see how this goes. We wrote up something, I think, about Vic. Now, I should have asked you to have Bernie tell this story. It was something about an ad that we ran that—oh, I know! He was running for governor, and he wanted to run an ad. And so he told Bernie, okay, I’m going to go ahead and run an ad. And he thought it was going to be just, you know, a regular, small ad. It was a full-page ad. It was way bigger than whatever he thought it would be.

And so he says, “Yeah, that is what happened in *The Skanner*. They put that ad in there, and it was a real long ad.”

It was a big ad. It was a real, true story. And even Bernie had kind of forgotten about that. But the only reason I remembered it was, I had seen a letter that he wrote to *The Skanner*, and when I knew it was the Vic Atiyeh award I kind of was looking at that and just refreshing my memory about his years.

Yes, you know. Vic Atiyeh had a really kind heart. I remember one time we were in the car with him. I don’t know where we were going. But we were talking about someone in need, or some program or something. And he just took out his checkbook and wrote a check for whatever that was and told us to give that to whoever that was. Yeah! It was just so surprising.

But that was the story about Vic. I just butchered that story. But, kind of the gist of it was there.

JD: We’ll edit. [chuckles]

FOSTER: [laughs] Then, the Whitney Young Award and the [reading] (Boy Scouts) Cascade Pacific Council Community Impact. Oh! Community Impact was that award that was very recent. It was last year. We were very proud of that award. There were Scouts that were there, and they spoke. And we were so proud of them and their achievement. They talked about some of the things that they had done, some of the project that they

had been involved in and some of the things that they had achieved in camp. You know, you really got to see how they flourished under mentorship and under the guidance that they had received. So that was a really special award as well.

JD: The Community Impact, maybe you could say, just briefly, what the focus of that is.

FOSTER: I am assuming that it was the fact that we do stories that impacts the community and that we tell the good and the bad, but we are wanting to have an impact with whatever it is that we are doing. I think it was probably around that line.

And then the Albina Ministerial Alliance, I just love the name of their award, the Frontline Soldier award. I just love the name of that. There is a bust of Martin Luther King Jr. that also went with that award that we have displayed in our offices here. Albina Ministerial Alliance, they have been on the front line for years and years and years—getting in there when nobody else would do it, taking the lead on so many issues that possibly if some leaders in the community would have weighed in, it might have had a detrimental impact on their business or their project, you know, if it is a non-profit. And Albina Ministerial was always there to lead the way and to explain what the issues were; what needed to change. And they have been steadfast in that.

I always have felt a lot of respect for them for the work that they have done totally in the footsteps of Dr. King. You know, whether that is their inspiration or not. Of course, God is their inspiration, and justice is their inspiration. You know, the Constitution is their inspiration as well. All of those things. But also, knowing that they have congregations, they know the members of their congregations are affected by injustices that happen all of the time. And so, there they are, trying to find a way that things are equitable for all.

JD: Mm-hmm. And so were there particular criteria that *The Skanner* newspaper met in order to be the recipient of the Frontline Soldier award?

FOSTER: No. We didn't do anything. They just told us that we had been selected. And so we said, "Really? That is great!"

JD: [*chuckles*] So, *The Skanner* has been published for forty-plus years now.

FOSTER: Forty-two years next month.

JD: Despite the fact that in some of the earliest issues, or older interviews with you or Bernie, the success longevity was projected to be three months.

FOSTER: Oh yes. [*JD and BF laugh*]

JD: So that is quite a difference. That is a long period of time, and I am sure some of the challenges have changed over time. But maybe some have stayed the same, or have remained the same. So, will you talk about some of the challenges, or perhaps even the least favorite parts of this work for you?

FOSTER: Mmm. [*pause*] Well, the challenges have always been having the income that we need in order to run the paper, which means advertising. So many, in the early days, would send up press releases to get the word of about whatever it is that they were wanting the word to get out about. And a lot of these were paid events. But they would not put ads in the paper. They would go to *The Oregonian* and do that.

So my question always was, well, if you think that we could help you by running your press release, why would you think that we could not help you by running an ad as well? Or an ad, either one. It has been an education process. I think for a while there, this was, you know, probably, 70s, 80s, maybe even a part of the 90s, people seemed to think that we were like the Urban League or something. We were a non-profit. I mean, we had to constantly tell people, we are a business. This is a newspaper. It is a business.

And we need advertising in order to succeed, just like any other newspaper needs advertising to succeed. As I mentioned earlier in the interview, the people who were the contractors who had obligations to minority-owned businesses tended to just overlook that until we brought it to their attention. So the challenge always was educating people. This is what we do. We are influencing a lot of people by what we do. And we have evidence of that because we have feedback about it.

I don't know if I told this story. There was one person who told me that she would wait for the endorsements [*chuckles*] to come out during an election. And then she would get copies of the paper, and she would cut those sections out, and then she would share those with people—in other words, kind of like of a study guide—with people who didn't really know, necessarily, the issues or how to vote or who to vote for. She wasn't telling them who to vote for, but she was saying, this explains what the issue is and this is who *The Skanner* has endorsed. You make up your own mind, but this is, you know—. So we had some influence in that people trusted our decisions and our endorsements, and so that was helpful to some people. So anyway, that was fun to hear.

That was not the only thing. People would come and tell us, well, I went to a meeting—a school board meeting or a community meeting, during the busing or whatever it was that was going on in the community at the time—and we took this article in *The Skanner*, and we made copies, and we gave it to everybody in the meeting. [*JD chuckles*] I was very proud of that, of course. So those were some of the rewards.

And then, national advertisers as well, you know, they want to be in certain markets and so we had to explain to them how the West Coast is different from the East Coast, and that even though we don't have as many minorities or African Americans here, we still have influence in the community, and people turn to us for information. Many people, and not African Americans, have told me that they read *The Skanner* because they really want to know what we think about what is going on and what we consider newsworthy or issues that need to have stories written about. And so, I think

that is true throughout the city and the surrounding areas. So it is a service for everybody.

I am proud of the fact that people feel like they can trust *The Skanner*. They can trust what we are doing, what we are saying. I always tell the writers, there are two sides to every story, and we want to tell both sides. It is not the job of a journalist to interject their opinions [*chuckles*] into articles and so on and so forth. That is not what journalism is about. People, if given the information, can discern for themselves, make up their own minds about what the issues are and what is important to them. We just need to make sure that we listen to as many voices as we can to get a story out. So it is not just one person saying one thing and then that's it. So that is something that I am very conscientious about, is being balanced in our articles and stories.

JD: Do you think that has remained pretty steady throughout these forty years, or do you feel like there are more challenges around that more recently?

FOSTER: That has always been the way that I feel like journalism should be. I know there is now the journalists are the stars, and they are interviewed now about their breaking stories and so on. And that is just kind of the nature of how things have evolved. But the reporter is not the story. The story is the story. It is whatever it is that they are telling. So I come from the old school of journalism. It is just be factual. Be fair. And just put the information out there.

JD: Mm-hmm.

FOSTER: And of course, when you do an editorial that is a whole different thing. Then we can express what our opinions are. And people know that that is what we are doing, and it is separate from everything else. So that is important to me.

Success is not only, well, we have a large presence now on the internet as well as the print editions. And we have tried to stay on top of being current with what is happening now with the internet and with everything else with social media and so on. It is becoming more of a challenge to stay on top of that because it changes so fast. And it is so expensive. To do a lot of the things that we do, we have made a big investment in that. A lot of the newspapers are still trying to figure out how to monetize their website. It is difficult. It is very difficult. A lot of people have an aversion to looking at ads when they go on to your site. But we are working with some of the best people in the business on those things. I think we are keeping up pretty well.

What are other successes? I think success, to me in particular, outside of the awards that we won, which, as I said, these are journalism professionals who are judging the work, and so it means a lot to us to have won those awards. But you know, one little success is, if I go somewhere in the community and I see someone reading *The Skanner*, that is a success! You know, a lot of times they take the paper home and read it and then share it with Mom and Dad and Grandma and Grandpa or Aunt and Uncle. I know especially in the early days that the paper would go through at least ten hands—each issue would go through at least ten hands because people were sharing the paper. Now, we have the news updates that go out twice a week, and people are keeping up that way. I know I have run into a lot of people that will tell me that they were grateful for getting such and such and such a thing because they didn't know about that. I consider that a success.

Small successes, but I think one of the successes is being recognized by the city and the state as a viable business that is actually serving the community and doing a good job of it. From the mayor to the governor to the representatives, the school board people as well as people in the community, leaders in the community, people that head up non-profits, the educators, all of those people. The more they know about what we are publishing, the happier it makes me because I know that it is important, and it is important to share that. So to the extent that they are influential people who can share

what they have read or what they saw on the website with others, then that is success to me. And you know, having people all over the world come to our website and seeing what we are publishing, that is also a positive thing.

JD: You have talked several times over the course of these series of interviews about the many hats that you wear and probably different ones over time, but do you have a favorite part of the work? *[laughing]* Or a least favorite part of the work?

FOSTER: Well, one of the more demanding parts of the work was when we had a number of freelancers and columnists. You know, it requires a lot of work to make sure they get their columns in on time and that they realize that this is a newspaper, and if we say that your column is going to be every week or every other week or once a month, you have to stick to that deadline. So that has been, you know, people who are not professionals, they are doing this out of the goodness of their heart sometimes, it is just that if they say: "Well, I don't have a column this week," that is a problem. So getting them to do several in advance was one of the ways that I tried to deal with that.

But also dealing with the freelancers, a lot of times they don't have a mastery of AP stylebook, AP style, or just the length and type of story that we are looking for.

JD: Mm-hmm.

FOSTER: So, it is just mentoring and giving that information out. It takes time. And sometimes I have to go over a lot of things with them. Then that goes in, you have done that, and then the very next time that you get something, it is the same things that you have to go over again. So, it becomes a lot of work and very frustrating. That is something that I didn't enjoy too much. But I do enjoy the other aspects of running the paper. I don't do the advertising part. Pretty much, the news, and so I just enjoy *[background street noise]* looking at, what are the issues and the stories in the

community that we should be telling? And how are we going to tell those? Who is going to tell it? That is very rewarding to me. Because I feel that so many of the stories, people just don't know anything about, or else if they have read a story about it, we have some additional information that you might not have gotten there, and we want to be sure that you know what that is. Anybody giving us feedback that they appreciated a story, I consider that a success, and that is something that I enjoy. I also enjoy my writers becoming better at the work that they are doing and getting to know the community better. Being a small newspaper, you know, you do get a lot of people that are on a career path, and they are going to be here two or three years or so and then they are going to something else. They are going to leave with a lot of experience, and it is always difficult to get people on board, hire journalists who have a heart for the community and an ear for the community and what is important about that in how we operate.

But I am very proud when I see them—I hate to see them leave, but I know that is inevitable. We have had one writer who went on to become a medical doctor. We have one that left and he is now an attorney. We have one that left, and she ended up heading a city department, then she actually moved to another state, where she is also in a leadership position. I am very proud of that, very proud that they were here and they did the work for us that they could and then went on to bigger and better things.

Of course, really though, I would like them to just stay here [*JD and BF chuckle*]. You know, just be here, and I can depend on you because now I know you know how we operate and how things go. But yeah, the challenge is always being able to have the quality journalists, the quality of people that we need to do what we do. That is a continuing challenge. And then we do get them, and they turn out the stories that we want, and we are very happy! [*JD chuckles*]

JD: As you were talking about stories and who is going to write the story, I am guessing that is a bit of an art on your side. You have several writers on your staff and figuring out who pairs up best, perhaps.

FOSTER: Yes, you know, I want them all to be able to do any story. I once had somebody that wanted to do stories on ecology all the time. I had another one that wanted to do stories on education every week. People wanted to do stories where they have expertise. I want to do stories that people need to know about. I want to do stories that the community wants to get a story about. So that is what we need to do, and we need to also just be aware of what we are doing and what topics we are addressing because we don't want to have police stories all of the time, or education stories all the time, or business stories all the time. We want to have a variety of stories because we have a variety of readers, and they have their special things that they look for that they want to hear, they want to read about.

JD: We were talking just briefly before the interview that you are certainly not finished yet, but as you said, you are almost at forty-two years. Can you think back to where you thought the paper would go in the future, and where you are now, and whether that path looks the same from where you thought it might go to where it has actually ended up?

FOSTER: Mmm.

JD: What were the aspirations you had for *The Skanner*?

FOSTER: Well, one of the things, this is kind of backtracking a little bit to the previous question that I didn't mention that I want to mention, is that I am very proud of this building that we are in, that we own this building that is right in the heart of the community, across the street from the library, down the street from the community college, very accessible to people. And that we also have people that we employ, so we are employers, so we provide jobs for people—not many, but still we do for a few. That was another thing that I wanted to mention.

The paper and how it has evolved—I guess I have always seen the paper growing and always wanted it to be as big as possible. I wanted the circulation to be as wide as possible because I want people to be exposed to the news that we provide. I always envisioned more employees in the newsroom that we have actually been able to afford to have or we have had the capacity to hire. So that was one of the things that hasn't necessarily materialized. But we have gone through some very difficult times, especially with the internet and where people are not reading newspapers as much as they used to, and the part that the internet would play in circulation. I was reading about it as it was happening and reading about the projections about that would affect newspapers as it was occurring, and what I kept reading was: we don't know. We don't know. It is a mystery to us. We are trying to figure it out. It is a puzzle, but I am sure we will soon be on top of it.

And years went by and everybody was saying the same thing. And almost now they are still saying the same thing, is that, we are in a revolution right now with print, and we just don't really know. Even books, people are not reading books as much. So, I think that even the movies are affected. I don't think as many people are going to the movies. They can just get Netflix or buy the movies or do whatever they are going to do. So, just this flux.

It kind of interrupted the heyday of everybody reading the paper, and waiting for it to come out, and looking forward to it, and so on. That is changing. But we are still here; we are still relevant. I have never been very good at projecting or predicting the future of what I would be doing or what the paper would be doing. Anytime anybody said, what's your five-year plan? Well, I don't have a five-year plan. I can think about five years from now, but really, I am thinking about like, today and tomorrow and next week and next month. And maybe, maybe next year. How about one year, I can think about one year. *[JD laughs]* I think it is just because there is just so much involved in the day-to-day operations.

But I did see the paper increasing in pages as we went along. The color did happen; we went into doing color, and we went from just doing a color ad to doing the whole paper in color. That was something that I knew was important and expensive as well. But that would possibly garner more readers, especially children, young people. They are used to everything being in color, and they are not attracted to something that is in black and white.

I don't know. That didn't really answer your question, but that's—

JD: Oh, no. I think it did. [*laughing*] I won't ask you where you think you'll be in five years. [*JD and BF chuckle*]

I don't have any more formal questions for you, but if there are some topics that have come up as we have been talking today, or other thoughts that you want to make sure are included here, this is your oral history, so I want to make sure we collect them.

FOSTER: I kind of mentioned children just now. I just wanted to say that for young people I think it is very important for them to see a Black business success. Bernie, I remember he used to go into some of the schools. He would be invited to go in and say something to the kids about a newspaper. The first thing he'd do is ask the kids, well, what kind of job do you think I have? And almost always they would say that they thought he was a minister because that was the only person that was a main person in the community that they saw dressed in a suit, that they could identify with. So he had to tell them about a newspaper and give them a copy and show them what it was, and what it was like. And these were younger people. So he had a lot of fun with that.

Having young people, and I am talking about elementary age all the way through high school and college, having them see that we are a business that they can be proud of, that is providing information to people in the city, that has the respect of a lot of people and a lot of entities, that is important to me that we have that legacy, that they have something to look up to. Now, there are other businesses in the community as well

that are Black owned, and I think the same thing for that. I think they just really need to have a sense of pride and ownership in the businesses that are surrounding them, because they so often—they are in schools, in classrooms where they may be one of just a few, and so to be able to have that identity, I think it is very important for kids growing up.

I was just listening this morning to OPB. Specifically, I think it was, [*trying to remember the program*] I think maybe it was a syndicated program talking about the absence of Black figures in children's literature and how important that is. Children need to see themselves represented in all aspects of life. Having grown up in a predominantly African American town, church, school, I have had that experience. A lot of children now don't have it, and I think it is important for them to have a sense of belonging. A lot of times it just feels so alienated when they are the only one of two or three or four in a classroom and so on.

I just wanted to mention that because the youth are very important to us in what we do and what we cover. That is why we try to be just as up on education issues as we possibly can because we know how important it is that the teachers be comfortable teaching all races of children and that they treat all of the students equitably. And I know that doesn't always happen. We have many horror stories that we have heard and we have reported on over the years, but we want the best for our youth. We want the best for them so that they can then make sure that we continue to have a thriving community, thriving city.

JD: Any other final thoughts?

FOSTER: I think I'll end on that note.

JD: That seems like a good note to end on.

On behalf of the Oregon Historical Society oral history project, thank you so much for taking time to share your history with us.

FOSTER: Well, I am very glad to have done so. Thank you.

JD: Thanks Bobbie.

[End of Session 3]

[End of Interview]