

Shall we have when and where were you born?

Renee:

So, I was born in 1960. I will be 63 this year, I know. Anyway, and I was born in Los Angeles, I was actually born. The hospital, I was born in was called French hospital. And it's located in Chinatown downtown, and it was called French hospital. So I always like to say the irony, but um, my upbringing was in South Central, if you want to call it that, I was born and raised in Arlington and Adams area. And I lived there most of my developmental life all the way up till about age 18. Of course, we moved up the street, but that was still the general location. But I got to see all the changes on Crenshaw Boulevard, just from being a child all the way up to the 92 unrest. Because what happened, a lot of that area were Japanese immigrants. And so the whole unrest was against, you know, the Asian community. So a lot of the places that I was familiar with when I was growing up, all got burnt down during the 92, unrest.

Kyle:

You said growing up, you got to see a lot of changes. Can you tell us more about that?

Renee:

Absolutely. Crenshaw has changed to the point where **when I was growing up there, it wasn't as multiculturally diverse, but it was a lot of police presence when I was growing up because of the six eight riots that happen.** They call it rise, we call it unrest. But it was the 68 rise after Martin Luther King was shot. And so it kind of became kind of a police state. So all the folks that live there happily have moved away from the area. So in so changes just started to happen, it started to be more of a of a African American population. And then from there, Latino population, and the Asians were pretty much still in the area and still going to school with us. But they had tended, because I guess, because of all that unrest, they had tended to the parents had tended to take those kids out of the school, and then they started busting them out. So we didn't even really have that many interactions with them. We only had interactions with folks that lived in the community. And then in the community. See, you guys think of gangs as someone that's going to do a drive by and all this other stuff, and, and, you know, beat you up to get you to join. But when I was coming up, the reason why the gangs were around is because we had no protection as African Americans. And so the gangs formed as kind of like a protection for the community, actually. So it wasn't like the the situation that we have, and I say, oh, is not what what we think in our head, again, should be these were actually folks that were like, guarding the community and making sure they were keeping out that police presence that I was telling you about because the police were like picking up people and taking dropping them off somewhere like beating them up or, or just harassing them or even keeping up to killing them back then. So that as you can see that hasn't really changed that much. We're still we're talking about the 60s but that has not changed that much and 60s and 70s.

Kyle: Okay for our second question. When and how did your family come to South Central?

Renee: So my mother actually came here before I was born in 19. She got here I think about around 1959. She might have gotten here, um, but they all came from so it was a trajectory. So like my grandmother, Kent was born in Jellico, Tennessee, and then a lot of family members moved up to Kentucky. And then the majority of the family came from Cincinnati, Ohio. And then I was born here I was one of the first generation of my mother's side of the family to be born

here in Los Angeles. Everyone else was born Becky's so so the family just started coming out one by one. My mother in law I'm sorry, it was my uncle first. Then it was my mother. And we all lived in a boarding house together. So when I was born, my mother was a domestic so she cleaned houses. And when she went into labor with me and going back to that French hospital, when she was in labor with me, she had nothing to put me in when I came home. I actually when she brought me home, I slept in the in the dresser drawer. I was a baby in the dresser drawer because I didn't have all the accoutrements like the, like the crib and everything. I wasn't set up like that. And she was she was treated very unjust in the hospital, because most of the nurses were, were were Caucasian. And so when she couldn't breastfeed me, uh, what they did was take some take some tape that you would put on someone to as a cast, you know, to cast their armor, and they put it around her breasts so my mother could have, so they were like, oh, you can't feed her then. You know, then they tie, they bond her breasts up. And she, she would tell me the story about how she had to carefully cut it, cut the bandages away because it was sticking to her body and her skin was coming off. Because they just treated her like trash. But that was the treatment back then. You know? Yeah. So. So that was the trajectory. trajectory was from Jellico, Tennessee, and then everybody headed this way. So I saw my grandmother come, I saw my cousin's come, you know, everybody, and then everybody eventually settled here in Los Angeles.

Kyle: Okay, um, you told us in the beginning, Torres? How a little bit how you saw Crenshaw changed over the years? This question is basically the same thing. But we're asking about South Central in general. Okay. How have you seen South Central in general change over the years?

Renee: Well, I've seen a lot of changes because there's been an ebb and flow here in south central because South Central would when I was coming up, it was one of the business areas, this area was like a business area. And so all the stores the big stores, as you can see, in these pictures, these stores were these, this is all of Vermont, and these were where people actually came and did their shopping. So they went to Carl's for the shoes, they went to Leeds for shoes, they, they bought their school uniforms, their nurses bought their uniforms, people went to the tailor over here, the cleaners over here, everything was booming. It was booming at when I was a baby as a child, my formal my formative years until about high school, this was a very very flourishing area and then once the 70s hit like the mid 70s and everything well when all these factories and and the stores started moving out moving more towards harmful and more towards you know the beach area more towards Hollywood more towards you know, some of the downtown was already built up but but downtown had a lot of the bigger stores do so they kind of like merge with the bigger stores. And then Crenshaw Boulevard had a lot of malls up and down Crenshaw, there was a lot of car dealerships. I mean, you could buy a brand new, you know, Cadillac, there was a huge Cadillac dealer on on Crenshaw Boulevard. And even my mother in law. She was the first black woman to own a business on Crenshaw Boulevard because she was the owner of brick Crenshaw beauty college. And she actually graduated people in the area. She adds high schools coming to her doing like AP classes and everything like that. And she actually offered her students a Pell Grant, which is unheard of for an African American and a beauty school. So she taught the community as well. So so there's a lot of rich

history of African Americans and even the boarding house that I was born in. That was my godmother, and she, she house, most of the folks that were coming from back east, like my mother, my uncle, like she had four apartments in the back of the rooming house because because we all kind of lived in a rooming house because it was for safety reasons, because we still were not safe. Even though we were in Los Angeles, where it was a little bit, the rules were a little bit more relaxed than they were in the South. There was still concern about about lynching because it was there was still concern about the police brutality, because it was. And there were still concerns about, you know, just overall, you know, white supremacy, unfortunately, you know, because we were kind of scared of white folks, when we were coming up, because we didn't know what was going to happen to us, which is a terrible concept to grow up with. And that's all we saw on TV. But we were kind of scared of them. Because, you know, we're kind of used to them doing something to it, we're kind of used to being kind of the victims. So it's been a lot of ebb and flow. And so, actually, Crenshaw Boulevard, you want to call that kind of like more of a middle class for the blacks in the area. Um, but as time went on, you know, things started to decline. And business started going away the big Cadillac dealership, you know, we had, we had all the big stores and everything that were up and down Crenshaw, all that started to go away. Now, when you see Crenshaw, they're trying to bring all that stuff back. But what concerns me is that that mall has been there since I was a little girl, and I hate seeing that mall go away, I just, it crushes my heart to see that Crenshaw Mall go away. And it's about to go away. A developer is going to make it like, that's great. It's gonna be for housing, but it doesn't sound like it's gonna be housing for us. It sounds like it's gonna be housing for folks that are wealthy, in other words, gentrification. So that areas had so many things, excuse me, different changes. Since I was a child and going to school, they're going to school in that area. Man used to vary for your life. Because if you weren't talking like the other kids are looking like the other kids or the other kids. And that's just the nature of the beast. Yeah, you get you get you bukkake. Or you better make friends with somebody who's hard hit, you know what I mean? Because it was all about the protection. But, but yeah, so it's the businesses and everything as the business is is the demographic is everything that's changed over on Crenshaw Boulevard.

Kyle: Okay, so I'm wondering about now is your school life. I want to know more about your school life, okay, um, you said you live in a boarding house? Yes. I want to know about that. Yes. And I want to know, some of the memories you have the most up and down crush or just

Renee: in general. Okay. Sure. So so your first question was my school life? So I went to what's called now Johnnie Cochran? Well, well, first, it was Arlington Heights. That was that was my formative years. That was Elementary School, Arlington Heights. And then junior high school, I went to a it's called, it was called Mount Vernon. But now I think it's called Johnnie Cochran. So you know, that's changed a lot. Well, that school was I don't know how anybody got an education, to be honest with you. Because it was like, it was fights almost every day because the kids were frustrated. And you know, you don't, you don't see that when you're a child and going to school in there. You just wonder why is everybody such a knucklehead, but things at home things, live things in environment, you know, you know, kind of formulated their ideas, and me being light skinned, and you know, hey, it is what it is. I'm just black as anybody else. Just so don't get that wrong. But because of that, and then because of my mother and my grandmother,

they wouldn't let us talk slang in the household. So we're, we're going to school speak in the King's English and the kids are like, what's up with that? That'll get your ass kicked. Just because you talking all you know, you think you better you know? That's the kind of stuff that will come back on you, you think you better I'll see you after school, you know, that kind of thing. So I would fear for my life a lot. But you know what I also said to you know, if you're going to come in mess with me, then I'm been I'm showing you that I am not the one you know, so and nobody wants to do that. But you know, when you're in school, have some provide all about you because or else you meet somebody. You know, so and I'm pretty sure that God hasn't changed but they were going on When I was growing up, it was crazy. It was crazy. But school. I don't even know how we got an education half the time, because we wouldn't listen to half of those teachers and guidance teachers, half the half of the student body wanted to get out and go get high. So it was like, yeah, there was a lot of ditching going on. Oh, you're like, you're like, that's enough? That's five more minutes. Okay. Okay. Yes, yes. So that that that kind of happened in men. And then the other trajectory, you said, you said, the businesses up and down crypto. And then you asked about the boarding house. So boring, again, boarding houses were were for us talking about us, because we couldn't, we could have rent anywhere. We even you know, even the Japanese and the some of the Chinese and Asian community discriminated against us, you know, they didn't even want because they had their preconceived notions about who we were, you know, not giving us a chance either. So wherever we could rent, we could rent and usually, you know, somebody, somebody that knew somebody would let you stay in their house, and then you pay you pay rent from there. So that's kind of what a boarding house is you you pay the person that owns the house, and that house is still there on Crenshaw Boulevard should take a picture and bring it next time so that you could see it, but that house is still on Crenshaw Boulevard. Anyway, I'm, the owner would buy a house with a lot of rooms in it. And so like my mother rented the downstairs room for us kids, and the upstairs room for herself. And so that's how it works. You You rent rooms. And so she had other tenants. And she had four apartment. Little little tiny, I mean, really, they were closets, little tiny apartments in the back so other folks can rent the back. So that makes a as what you call a, a boarding house, and then again, about their businesses up and down Crenshaw, once all the big businesses like the Cadillac dealers, like the malls and everything, you know, found that they can make more money somewhere else and didn't want to stay in the community. They moved out of the community. And then I can bring you stories to from my mother in law of her days owning Crenshaw beauty college and the kids that she helped get into college. Just coming there learning. What do we want to call it a beautician training and, and there are people today that are in the Crenshaw area that own their own beauty shop that are graduates of her students of hers, which is really a beautiful thing. And my mother in law is still alive. She's 98, she's still alive. She is something else we need to integrate. For real, I mean, really, we ought to really set that up when you're interviewing her about her experience on Crenshaw Boulevard and went and her being a teacher, the first black person to own a beauty school. That is unheard of. And that's history right there. And she's living history that secret to a degree.

Kyle: Okay, so our next question What do you think are Central's greatest strengths?

Renee: e its their people were you trying to get it hands down is the people because the people in South Central will have such a heart because South Central has gone through so many changes so many back and forth, you know, it's been down load spin up been up high, but it's the people that make South Central the place to be the place, the place all of us want to be. We want to be like the people in South Central because South Central sets the pace for the rest of them. What do you think the music is? The music came from here and everybody's trying to do it. It went all the way across to Korea. That's why do you think those Kpop band What do you think they're doing as hip hop? And that came from South Central and everybody wants to be us? When I'm trying to keep my group or you have like she's still talking I gotta keep talking

talking I gotta keep talking

you like they don't want to stop Okay, go ahead. Good, good.

Do you think has made a huge change?

So what's made a huge change in South Central's that is getting more attention. And that people are actually the pandemic, I think, is driving that change because the pandemic expose, you know, all the inequities on this on this side. And just like I said, everybody wants to be us and everybody wants to be like us. Well, now they study in us, and now they thinking, well, we need to invest over here. So that's, that's one of the biggest changes, I think, I think the pandemic helped to move that but it's the people, it's the people, it's the heart. It's, it's, it's people that leave South Central and come back and want to, you know, start their barbecue business here, you know, they come back, they want to start their clothing business here that come back that just want to open a business that come back and just want to be amongst all of us and, and join Community Coalition. You know, so it's, it's so many ways that South Central, it's in our heart, and it's in everybody's heart and the people of South Central. You can't beat that. You can't beat that. You can't beat that. I know everybody doesn't like the Lakers, but it Yeah, everybody likes the Lakers. And the Lakers

is a South Central team.

I mean, we can talk about that golden warriors

of our team. And you know, I thank you for this interview. No,

thank you for this interview. No,

Thank you for keeping me over. And if you have any other questions, please feel free and I need to I need you