



Kristen Davis and Albert Graham Jr.:  
WAACA Oral History

January 3, 2023  
Location: Virtual

Interviewer: Sulema DePeyster  
Transcriber: Sulema DePeyster

This interview is part of a series conducted with former members of the Windsor Afro-American Civic Association. The content of this transcript has been edited for clarity purposes.



WINDSOR  
HISTORICAL SOCIETY

**Sulema DePeyster:** Okay, good morning. Today is January 3rd, 2023, and I am Sulema DePeyster. I'm the Community History Specialist here at the Windsor Historical Society. I am joined by two children of the founder of WAACA. If you two could introduce yourselves and give verbal consent to the interview.

**Kristen Davis:** Good morning, my name is Kristin Davis. I am the third child of Willie and Albert Graham and I absolutely consent to the interview. Thank you for having me.

**Sulema DePeyster:** Thank you.

**Albert Graham Jr.:** Good morning, everybody. I'm Albert Graham Jr. and I consent to the interview too. I'm the youngest child.

**Sulema DePeyster:** Okay, thank you so much you two. The first question is about growing up in Windsor. So can you tell me what that was like and your experience?

**Albert Graham Jr.:** Ladies first.

**Kristen Davis:** Sure. Well, we moved to Windsor when I was two years old, and my brother was soon to be born, soon thereafter. Believe it or not, from all the way back then, I do have memories of those initial times and coming into the neighborhood. We were the first Black family in that development. It was not met with a hearty welcome, if you will, by everyone there. Back in the '60s, my parents were presented with a petition by some of the residents who tried to create an obstacle in the way of them purchasing their home. But nevertheless, they were not successful, and we went on to live there and to be raised there. Again, my brother was born there and that's where we lived our lives until we all became adults and left home, all four of us. There were four children and all four of us went to Clover Street School for elementary school and then all four of us also went to Leland P. Wilson Junior High. At the time, it was a junior high which is now the community center. From there, I went from L.P. Wilson to Loomis Chaffee, and then from there on to college. Growing up in Windsor to be honest with you, I personally, and I think my siblings too, but I'll speak for myself, have more fond memories than not, in spite of the fact that it was a very politically sensitive, racially sensitive time in history. But I think that in a lot of ways, we were shielded from a lot of that.

**Kristen Davis:** Again, although we were not met with the heartiest of welcomes initially, my parents were both very engaging, outgoing, [and] very loving people and it didn't take long before we were embraced by the community, and certainly the immediate community that we lived in. Grand Avenue was nothing but families up and down the street and we were one of the families. I have to say, proudly, we feel [we were] one of the premier families. My parents worked hard. They were the first family anywhere in that development, but certainly on Grand Avenue, to ever have a pool. I remember as a little girl when the pool was being installed in our backyard and the neighbors coming to stand outside the backyard and to watch it being installed. That was a big deal. And so that made us also very popular in the neighborhood, as you can imagine. We always had bikes to ride. We had toys to play with. We had a big yard. We had a pool in the backyard. We had family cookouts and parties at our home. My parents entertained. Their friends would come by to visit. They'd bring their children. We had friends in the

neighborhood. And again, it was a very family-friendly neighborhood, so we knew everybody. You knew everybody up and down the street.

**Kristen Davis:** Back then, it was a thing where our parents used to have to drag us pretty much into the house come dark because we'd be outside playing kickball in the middle of the street with the rest of the kids from the neighborhood most of the day. One of my fondest memories is our oldest sister, Karen, who's no longer with us. [00:05:00] She was the oldest of the four of us, and so she was the first to become a teenager. So there was a good-sized group of maybe about half a dozen kids in the neighborhood who also became teenagers around that same time, and they became very exclusive. I was obsessed with my older sister back then and I always wanted to do what she did. I was always enamored by the things she did and always wanted to be amongst her and her people. That kind of thing. So this group of teenagers, they became so exclusive and they wanted to shield out the little kids and that kind of thing and make their mark as teenagers and big kids. They actually built a clubhouse and there were woods immediately behind our house. There were woods and then there was the highway, I-91. So everybody's backyard pretty much backed up onto the woods.

**Kristen Davis:** So the teenagers got together and they built this pretty incredible clubhouse in the woods. They got lumber donated from other families in the neighborhood, and they built this clubhouse. They wired, if you will, from one of somebody's house like a black and white little portable television into the clubhouse, and I just remember thinking as a kid that was the coolest thing. And of course, you had to be a teenager to be able to gain entry into the clubhouse. So that just drove me crazy that whole summer, wanting to do that. But those are the kinds of memories that, for the most part, we had. Although we lived in Windsor and again were one of very few Black families, even as time wore on. I was in fourth or fifth grade, I believe, and my brother can probably attest to this, before I remember really having any influx of other Black families coming into Clover Street [School]. And we immediately were drawn to them because it's like, "Oh, we're not the only Black kids this year."

**Kristen Davis:** But in spite of the fact that it was a predominantly white community, my parents did a great job of giving us balance and making sure that we stayed engaged. My dad owned a business right in the city of Hartford on Albany Avenue. First on Main Street, then on Albany Avenue. My mother not only worked for the business, but she worked for Connecticut Bank and Trust for a number of years downtown and then later went on to become a part of Senator Dodd's staff for many years in Hartford. We went to church in Hartford. We grew up in Metropolitan A.M.E. Zion. We all went there, and my brother and I were both baptized or christened there. So we grew up going to church there. Of course, my dad's business was there. We went to camp in Hartford to Trinity, YMCA sports camp, you name it. We went to 4H club. So they did a good job, again, of keeping us [engaged]. My parents were both members of ISIS [Makalia Temple]. I can't think of the formal name but yes, my mother was a daughter of ISIS and my father was a member of Makalia Temple. So we were a part of the ISIS erects. We were a part of a drill team [and] competed all over New England. And again, that took place always down in Hartford on [Mahl Avenue]. We would go to the rehearsals there and have regular meetings. So again, it was

a good balance and for myself more positive memories, considering all that they had up against them, than not.

**Sulema DePeyster:** Okay, thank you so much.

**Kristen Davis:** I'm going to stop talking now and let my brother jump in here.

**Sulema DePeyster:** Yeah, so Mr. Graham, you could also speak about maybe some of your fondest memories of living in Windsor and just the general family life, memories of that.

**Albert Graham Jr.:** Well, my sister did an excellent job of detailing all of that. I've been trying to think of a few things too. It's funny the clubhouse you mentioned, Kristen, in the woods that the Begley brothers built. To this day, now that's been getting up on 50 years. That clubhouse, two of the steps that are [from] the original clubhouse were still there about 12 years ago, if I'm not mistaken. Not long after our father passed. Everything else was gone, of course. When they widened the highway, they tore it out. But it was actually one of the stumps and I don't know why I'm thinking remembering this. My memory, as my sister's going to attest, [00:10:00] is different. At any rate, there were two of the steps to that clubhouse still there. But it's gone now. In regards to our upbringing and whatnot, to this very day I am very blessed to be one of our parent's children. I'm very blessed to have my siblings. I'm very blessed for even our extended family, all of that. Because of our closeness, we had relatives in Bloomfield. We had relatives in New York that were close by. And every summer –

**Kristen Davis:** And New Britain.

**Albert Graham Jr.:** – Yes, and New Britain. Every summer, I remember my cousin Ronnie and I, we were the two youngest and our mothers were sisters. Kris was talking about being excluded. Our parents would send us to New York to our aunt's house and our other cousins. Those were my brothers. I didn't have biological brothers in that sense, but my first cousins were my brothers and I still love them to this day. But we were sent to New York every summer for about four or five years that I can remember. Early preteen and early teenage years.

**Sulema DePeyster:** Okay.

**Albert Graham Jr.:** And I was in the Bronx. I remember the first few years, I loved going. But as I became a teenager, I remember that when it was time to go in the summer, it was just like a week or so after school ended. I would want to stay and play with my friends and things like that, but I understood. I kind of laughed about it. Years later, I was saying to myself of all places to send us. At that time, Windsor was like one of the places to be at and to live. So anyway, [I was] sent from Windsor, in my case, to the Bronx in New York on 219<sup>th</sup> Street. That was quite the experience. But at any rate, one thing I knew was if mom told us to do something, you didn't say no. I just did what she told me and for the most part, if I didn't, then I'd get to look from dad. It was just the way it was. So I went to school in Windsor like my sister said. The only difference was when it came to high school, I went to Windsor High. Two of my other sisters went to Loomis [Chaffee]. My older sister Karen that she mentioned that passed away, she went to Windsor High. I graduated in [19]85 from Windsor High School.

**Albert Graham Jr.:** It was around that time, I remember my high school years, if I'm not advancing too far in regards to our mother's creation here. The reason why we're doing this interview today. It was those early high school years or late junior high, I guess, that our mom came up with the idea that she wanted to find a way to start uniting all of us minorities. My sister touched on that a little bit about growing up and how we were looked upon as being different and all of that. I won't go too far into that, but I could tell a million and one stories of racism, et cetera. Even though I was the youngest, being a male, of course I had a different perspective on it. I saw a lot. But as I said, our mother came up with the idea. She wanted to find a way. I remember this distinctly. In the kitchen one night, she was cooking chicken, which she was famously known for. It was about 11:30, 12 o'clock. I think we were waiting for my aunt and her husband and my cousins to come in town from New York, if I'm not mistaken.

**Albert Graham Jr.:** I'm almost positive because I remember Kojak was on. [laughing] So anyway, it was usually around that time that they would always get in town. At the same time or they'd come up Friday night. And so I didn't understand what she was saying at the time but I remember that conversation. I think our Aunt Mary was there too, but I remember that conversation. I didn't understand it at the time. I was a young kid. [00:15:00] But I remember that distinctly. What brought that memory back was maybe a couple of years later. I think that was when I was in junior high so I was in high school, I guess, by this time. Mom called the meeting, and she summoned a number of well-known Black families in the town of Windsor at that time. To name a few, I can think of the Cicero's, I can think of the Davis's. Oh gosh, I just drew a blank. The Bellamy's, the Fraser's, just off the top of my head. I don't want to exclude anybody so I shouldn't have started, but those are names I remember. And so they'd all come to the house.

**Albert Graham Jr.:** I remember they were sitting in the living room, and my sister Kris and I being the two youngest kids, our thing was whenever people would come to the house and they started having grown folk conversations, we had a certain area that we'd go to upstairs where you could look out over the living room and listen to everything. [laughing] So I remember I was there in our spot. Kris was still in high school then, but she wasn't home. But I remember that evening and I remember the conversation, and it was at that time I started to get some clarification in my mind as to what our mom's plan was. And I remember the look on the other adults' faces, and I remember thinking, "What do they think about what mom is talking about?" And what she was talking about was simply trying to unite all of us. All of the minority families. Also, to support one another, et cetera, et cetera. All of that, and to give us an outlet as my sister Kris had said. Find another way for us to all have opportunities. Also, at the same time, it was kind of like a history lesson.

**Albert Graham Jr.:** Because I started to learn more and more, and I was never the greatest student. But one thing I excelled in because of our mother. I attribute this to her. It was a class about current events and it was about power political. What was the name of that? I can't remember the exact name. Oh, one of them was social studies too. I remember that. Mr. Schweizer's class. And we're always talking about current events and about the political world. Even now, I guess it's worse. You don't pay attention, but I remember because of our mother and

fathers' involvement in the political aspect of things, and because of the teachings and the conversations at dinner. Or the conversations at meetings like that that our mom had. My uncle and my mom's brothers would come over and those conversations. But I remember listening to this stuff and I was learning. I didn't even know it. When I realized what I was learning was in those classes I mentioned. And I went from getting C's and B's to getting straight A's in particular areas.

**Albert Graham Jr.:** And I also remember it was a point in time when I think my teachers would get tired of me raising my hand and having the answers to so many things. They were trying to teach us and none of us really were supposed to know. But because of being around our parents, I knew things that I didn't even know I knew. And so I give that credit to our mom. She was telling us things to make us understand that it's okay to be a little different in order to be better. So back to those meetings. Shortly thereafter, it started to pick up steam. More people started coming to the meetings, things of that nature. And with that, they started to expand in different areas. They started to get involved in the community on a whole different level. And then came the time shortly thereafter. I want to say within the first year and a half, maybe, of the group picking itself up. They started involving us kids.

**Sulema DePeyster:** How so?

**Albert Graham Jr.:** That's how that started Oh, the Higgins family. I remember them. They were involved. That was the first location of the very first junior chapter of WAACA. [00:20:00] In attending that event, I remember there was about six or seven of us, if I'm not mistaken, of kids of the original members. And to make a long story short, I was actually voted as President of that. I didn't know what to do with that or whatever, but it was with my vice president and our treasurer. I believe that was Carlene Davis, Monica Pruitt. I can't remember the other names right now. Peter Higgins. I'd have to think about that, I guess. So anyway, one of the first things our parents had us do was to try to do some type of an event. That event, to make a long story short, ended up being a fashion show. I don't remember what year that was. It was the mid-80s, I would say. It was the early '80s. Probably [19]83. I graduated in '85. Maybe that was '82 or '83.

**Albert Graham Jr.:** So that was one thing I remember. And my mom started making us have weekly meetings. That didn't last long. We kind of got out of that and we ended up doing it I think once every other month. Because after the fashion show, and it was actually successful, but after the fashion show, I don't remember. I could be mistaken, but I don't remember us doing another event because it seemed like in the blink of an eye, two years went by quick, and I remember I was graduating. Maybe one or two other members were graduating. And after that, as far as the junior chapter, we kind of fell off. Now the adults were still having meetings at that time regularly and doing different types of things in the community and things of that nature. That's my memory on how the first say three or four years of WAACA things came about. There's a lot of other things, I'm sure, that my sister may be able to remember. I'm kind of drawing a blank.

**Sulema DePeyster:** Okay.

**Kristen Davis:** Sulema, we'll let you get your next question in.

**Sulema DePeyster:** Yeah sure. I think that's a great place to start, and I've actually learned a lot. This is the first time I'm hearing of the junior chapter of WAACA, so that's really interesting to hear about. But I do have a question about your parents as individuals. So if you could both talk about them and what you remember of them; their characteristics and things that stood out about them as people.

**Kristen Davis:** Sure. Well, again, clearly biased we may be, but we had two pretty incredible people as parents when it's all said and done. They both came from large families. My mom was one of nine. Originally 10 and my grandmother had grandparents had one child that didn't survive, so she grew up with eight other siblings. And she was, I believe, the third oldest in her family. Or actually I believe she's the second oldest. Yeah, she had one older brother and then everybody else was younger from there. There's so many adjectives that come to mind, but the first one that stands out the most is strong, unique, engaging, kindhearted, firm, determined. Again, I could go on and on and on, but initially she didn't go to college formerly. When she graduated high school, her older brother, Clifford, was actually the first African American Police chief in New Britain. In the '80s and growing up, he was her older sibling and she said, "Oh I'm done with school," or whatever. "I had enough. 12 years is enough for me." He said, "Oh no, you're not." He told her that she was going to further her education and so she went to Business School at that time and completed a couple of years of Business School. Many years later, after we were grown, she went back [00:25:00] to school and got her bachelor's degree. And so in spite of the fact that her education was not formal, let's say, she was again a very unique person in that she was a very quick study, very creative, and she was able to take on a number of different objectives in life and see them through; bring them to fruition that the average person probably wouldn't be able to accomplish.

**Kristen Davis:** She migrated to Connecticut at the age of 14 from Orlando, FL, having lived South the whole time. And then again, she was the second oldest of a large family, so there was a lot of responsibility placed on her and her older brother, and that was one of the things that I remember. She talked very often [about] education. We heard that throughout our upbringing. How important it was and that no matter what that she wanted us to get an education, and she always would say that that's one of the things that someone can never take from you. She always talked about exposing your children and how I would hear her say that all the time to other adults. You can never expose your kids too much. You can always tell a child who hasn't been exposed to the right things and so she always made us feel, and I'll speak for myself, made me feel like there was nothing that was out of reach. But you had to be willing, and you had to go after it. And I think she lived up by example because again, coming from a more minimal education and that kind of thing. But she had the wherewithal. She had the ability and the know-how to push her kids to go as high as you can go and to never stop. And not only us, but nieces, nephews, family. Anytime she came in touch with a young person, she was always motivating and encouraging to them. It just dawned on me, I'm sorry, one other person that you may want to interview. Long story short, June Archer.

**Sulema DePeyster:** Oh yes, we've actually spoken to June Archer before.

**Kristen Davis:** Because it was so funny. I worked for the Bushnell. I was in a meeting a year ago and June was in the meeting and so we were talking trying to remember. I knew of him through the Bushnell, but he was like, "I know you from somewhere else, though." Because I've been there for 10 years and [he said], "I know you from somewhere else." And so long story short, I asked him if he knew my brother because he was younger. He grew up Windsor, and he's like, "Of course I know him." He goes, "Wait a minute. You're Al's [sister]. Oh my God." He started talking about my parents, and he talked about the fact that he was there. At this time, I was living in DC at college, but he talked about the fact that he was their paper boy. I think he said the North End he was delivering, and he said, "Your parents' house was one of my favorite stops because not only did I get the best tip in the neighborhood, but they always sat me down and gave me some inspiring words, some motivating uplifts to his day," and that he remembered them fondly. So that was very endearing to me and very touching to know that. And that's the kind of thing I say because that's the kind of example that would happen. You know what I mean? Often than not, my friends looked up to my parents. In particular, my mother in that same kind of way. Don't get me wrong, she was a kindhearted person and would do anything for anybody. But she was also very firm and when she said something, she meant it. So we had a great deal of respect that was taught, but it was also somewhat kind of innate. Because again, she was just the kind of person that commanded respect, by the way she carried herself. Not just in the professional world, but in her personal life as well.

**Sulema DePeyster:** Okay.

**Kristen Davis:** So for me, she was certainly my shero and continues to be to this day. And I marvel now. Of course, as an older person and now looking back and I just marvel at some of the things that she was able to accomplish. Not only did she raise a family of four children [00:30:00] and was an incredible wife to her husband, she assisted him in running his business. And then she worked outside the home, and she was involved in pretty much every kind of organization you can name and involved in the leadership kind of role always. One thing I'll just mention really quickly is my brother's memory of WAACA. When it started, I was in fact home. I was actually a junior in high school at Loomis [Chaffee], and I'll never forget. So there was kind of like an inside joke in the family amongst my mom and my aunt who lived in Bloomfield at the time. When I got my driver's license, I was all excited. I'm 16. I'm going to be getting the car. I'm going to be going here and there. Huh, I don't think so. But what I was able to do was constantly run errands for my mom and for my aunt and stuff like that.

**Kristen Davis:** They'd be sending me back and forth from Bloomfield to Windsor and then to my grandmother's [house] in New Britain. And I, of course, wasn't too happy about that and my aunt used to tease me. I said, "You guys might as well just call me Ellen Errands because that's all I do. I run errands for you guys. And so Ellen became my little internal nickname. And so on the day of this initial inaugural WACCA meeting that was held in our living room at 50 Grand Avenue, she had enlisted the help of Ellen Errand to run to the A&P and to get a list of last minute goodies and refreshments that she needed for the meeting. And I remember being annoyed as usual. The eye rolling, the whole nine yards. Like here we go again. You're having another meeting and I've got to run errands. And I remember again, by the time it actually started



to really take off and come into its own, I was in college at that time, so I wasn't living at home. But years later, coming back, and it was in the spring of 1992, which I'm sure you probably heard about when they honored her at La Renaissance in East Windsor. It was over those years when I really had come to see the reach that the organization had and to see the impact that it had in the community and on individual lives. And really I was really able to take heart and to be in awe of what had been created yes by an incredible group of people, but first and foremost by Willie Graham, and this notion that she had, and brought it to fruition in the most incredible way.

**Sulema DePeyster:** Okay, that's great. Thank you so much. So Mr. Graham, you could also talk a little bit about what you remember of your parents and a few adjectives that come to mind when you think of them as individuals.

**Albert Graham Jr.:** Well, again, my sister pretty much said it in great detail. She's very good at articulation. Our parents, as I mentioned to you prior one-on-one in the conversation, they were special. And I didn't know how special they were as my sister just said. A lot of the things that our parents were doing behind the scenes and things like that. Oh, something I'll reflect back on was moving to Windsor. When I was a kid, I remember that my sister mentioned how our parents buying that house on Grand Avenue was met with some rejection from some of the residents that were there at the time. When our father passed in [20]07, we found the letter that told that story, and it wasn't really a pleasant one, but I'm just reflecting on that. I won't go too into that, but the stories that I remembered hearing as a kid, I was able to finally actually see them in black and white. Referencing this to our father, it made me respect my father on a hero level.

**Albert Graham Jr.:** Because I would have never known he went through the things that he did or our parents, even per se, to give us the life that we had. While our mother was a disciplinarian and would verbally come at you, but she'd be there for you every step of the way, our father didn't say too many words. He didn't say hardly any words to my sisters other than pleasantries. But to me, I knew [00:35:00] if he gave me the look, I knew what that meant. But yeah, our parents were great in my mind, and it's always been a life goal of mine to just be half of the man my father was to my children. I'm blessed to have four of my own children. I have ten grandchildren and I love them all with every part of my heart. I just want to be the man that my father was in so many ways. I wish I had his inner strength because he didn't say too much, but my father would get his point across as well. While our mother, nobody messed with mom. [laughing] I'll just leave it at that.

**Kristen Davis:** Yeah, true. I agree with my brother. I didn't add any commentary about our dad, but again, an incredible individual. Just like most people in life, you grow up, you grow older, you grow wiser, you hope, and you really reflect and you realize a lot of the things that we weren't able to see as children and as younger people. My dad was more a person of fewer words. He was not about confrontation, if you will. Whereas my mother, if she had to be overt, she was going to be overt. But she did it always with class and with her own particular style that was very unique and very well respected both, again, professionally and personally. My dad was, again, a little bit more introverted, if you will. But when he had to step up, he certainly was going to do

that and I don't think I really understood or appreciated a lot of his versatility and capabilities and accomplishments until I grew older.

**Kristen Davis:** It wasn't until we grew older that I remembered. One of our rituals every Christmas was we had to go to the living room. We always had our Christmas tree in our family room on the lower level of the house. But we had to first stop in the living room and get on our knees and pray as a family every Christmas morning before there was any opening of presents or eating the food or anything. That was the first thing we had to do. I remember my mom would tend to always be the one to lead the prayer. Not just then, but always. I knew my mother could pray. It wasn't until I was a young adult that I heard my dad pray for the first time aloud and I remember being really taken aback. I know I always grew up hearing that he was raised in the church and that his family was religious, rooted in that kind of thing. But again, my mom always kind of took the lead with that kind of thing. She was the one to drag us out of bed on Sunday morning. You're getting up, you're going to Sunday school, you're going to choir rehearsal. On Friday night, you're going to youth fellowship. All that kind of stuff. She was the one pushing and leading, but he was very articulate in his own right and, again, quite capable of a lot and a very versatile person and very much a leader in his own quiet way. He had a subtle fervor about him.

**Sulema DePeyster:** Okay. So I think we can talk a little bit more about WAACA, but I do also want to go into detail about your parent's involvement in Windsor and surrounding towns, since I know you had mentioned that you spent a lot of time in Hartford as well. So can you talk a little bit about those organizations? You said Makalia Courts is one that they were involved in, but are there any others that you'd like to mention?

**Kristen Davis:** Yeah, so they both were involved in the Shriners. Again, he was a part of Makalia Temple. She was a daughter of Makalia Court. They were both pretty active in that when we were younger. My dad was a leading businessperson back in his day in Greater Hartford and he owned a gas station on Albany Avenue; Arco Station. Prior to that, he had owned one on Main Street. He, along with Glover Thompson, who at that time owned Thompson Furniture. I believe it was on Main Street.

**Albert Graham Jr.:** Mr. James.

**Kristen Davis:** Harold Ford and Mr. James. Ford and James Pharmacy. I was trying to think of Mr. Ford's first name, but Ford and James Pharmacy. [00:40:00] The three of them and I'm probably forgetting somebody else, but I know it was definitely the three of them as I think the founding members. They founded an organization called Pioneer Budget in which they helped to create a resource for funding for other minority startup businesses in and around the Greater Hartford community. They had an office on Main Street, and I remember being at a grand opening with some of Horace James's kids there for that organization. Let's see, what else? My mother, of course, was involved in the Windsor Democratic Town committee. Obviously, WAACA. She was involved in a lot through her work as a community liaison for Senator Dodd. She started working for Chris Dodd when he was a [congressman] and then moved on. As he matriculated and moved on to US Senator, she was with him kind of every step of the way.

**Kristen Davis:** She actually knew his father quite well, Chris Sr., so she knew him as well. So she did a lot by way of her work for Senator Dodd, representing him throughout the state and different organizations, especially African American churches and organizations. Prior to being a permanent member of his administrative team, she also originally, during his campaign for U.S. Senate, served as the coordinator of the volunteers throughout the state. So again, she was very much a people person. She knew how to bring people together. She knew how to lead people and how to motivate. And so she was very, very popular as his volunteer coordinator and the volunteers loved her. They would come and do pretty much anything she asked them to do, and there were volunteers from every walk of life all over the state. As you can imagine, every shape, color, and size who came to support. Most of them made no secret in telling Senator Dodd and or his staff that they were there because of Willie and that they would do anything to kind of support him as long as she was going to be there kind of leading the ship. I'd have to actually kind of do a little bit of homework to look up some of the optimizations, but there was a lot. She also served within our church. At Metropolitan [A.M.E Zion Church], she was a part of the usher board.

**Kristen Davis:** She was part of the PTA when we were children, for sure. I remember as a really young child, she started because I was so intrigued by this. But long story short, it was very much ahead of her time with something that could have absolutely happened in this past year of COVID and the pandemic. I don't remember what caused it, but I just know that they had some kind of an annual tea fundraiser that would take place amongst the PTA at Clover Street Elementary. For whatever reason, that year my mom had come up with the idea that they set up as a kind of DIY tea [that] you did at home. So they actually sent a little tea bag in the information. Once people registered or signed up or something, they got, in response, a thank you note and some kind of a little invitation. They got a little tea bag to have their tea at home with their friends, which I thought was very unique and I remember watching her and her friends stuff these tea bags into little envelopes. And again, I didn't really understand it at the time. But when you think about it now, how prophetic all these years later, that would have been something very much a part of this day and time in light of what's happened over the last couple of years. But again, you name it. If there was something to be involved in, and especially something that affected her children or that was impactful in the community in any great way, she usually was engaged in one level or the other.

**Sulema DePeyster:** And this is an overall question about the impact of WAACA, but [how] do you think WAACA impacted the town of Windsor? [What] do you think their influence was? There are so many directions that you can go with that question, but what was the overall impact [00:45:00] that the organization had on the town?

**Kristen Davis:** Well, I'm going to speak very briefly to that, and then I'm going to pass the baton to my brother because again, I was there for the inception. Shortly thereafter, I went away to college and then ended up living in DC for over 20 years. So a lot of it, I didn't witness firsthand. Again, I would come back and I would see and hear the things that were happening. But as I said, I think I became more knowledgeable or more aware of the level of impact that it had as an adult coming back and seeing things. I think I mentioned to you [that] I moved back to Connecticut

years after my mom had passed away in 2003, and I was pregnant with my daughter at that time. I remember a couple of years after that, maybe about 2005, I was sitting in a hair salon. The owner of the hair salon let me know that there was another woman in there who grew up in Windsor. I don't have any recollection of her name or anything at that time. But long story short, bringing it full circle, this woman ended up telling me that she was a WAACA [scholarship] recipient. She had gone to school for four years and received funding from the organization for her entire four years. She talked about how impactful it was, and how it had helped her, how resourceful it was.

**Kristen Davis:** When she found out who my mother was, she was quite enamored. So again, it was those kinds of things for myself because I wasn't there personally to witness it all. And then I mentioned to you, and I'm going to share their name at the end but as it turns out, we have a family that my sister Karen was very, very close to. In fact, one of them is the godparent to two of her oldest grandsons. The Chester's. It turns out that both Candace Chester, who's now Candace Chester Mafe, and her sister Chari Chester, who is now Chari Chester Anderson, [were] both recipients and we didn't even know that until literally just a couple of days ago. It's Chari, C-H-A-R-I Chester Anderson and Candace is Chester Mafe, M-A-F-E. I believe they are somewhere within my brother's age range so I'm pretty sure it was in the '80s that they were at the high school. But after talking to you and you were telling me how you were having some difficulty getting ahold of some of the recipients, I had this memory in my head of Candace one time telling me. I thought she told me she knew somebody who was a recipient. So when I called her and I told her, she was like, "Yeah, I know somebody." She goes, "Me and my sister both got money from WAACA, and we both received scholarships." So I will share their contact information with you, but they both are willing to talk to you and share their reflections as well.

**Sulema DePeyster:** Okay.

**Kristen Davis:** So again, it's those kinds of stories and things like I said that, for me, brought it full circle and I was really able to see how this unfolded. I shared with you how heartsick I am over the fact that we can't put our hands on that VHS tape. There was a recording of the entire event that happened in 1992 where they honored her in the spring of the year that she passed away. And although we can't share that, I do have a photo that was taken just outside the banquet room of our immediate family that I will send to you from that day. But long story short, they had asked my mom. Of course, she was delivering the keynote address as the honoree. However, they asked her to have a member of her family introduce her. So she had selected my oldest sister Karen who at the time lived in North Carolina. Within a couple of days of the time that Karen and her family were supposed to travel from North Carolina to be in Windsor for the event, her children contracted chicken pox.

**Sulema DePeyster:** Oh no.

**Kristen Davis:** So they weren't able to travel at the last minute and I remember my mom calling me. I lived in Maryland at the time, and she called me. It was just maybe two or three days before the event and she said, "Your sister can't come. Karen can't come. The kids are sick." She goes, "I want you to do this," and I'm like, "What?" "Yeah, I want you to do this. [00:50:00]"

They need somebody from the family to speak and to introduce me.” I remember I was like, “Ugh.” Long story short, it all came together. The Lord was working with me and on my side and it came together, and I remember being just so in awe. That moment, being able to stand up there and to represent my mother and looking out to this audience of hundreds of people who had come there to honor her that day. And that was just a small sampling of the kind of people that she touched and the way she impacted and motivated and encouraged and inspired people. But that was one of the biggest honors of my life, as it turned out, to be able to do that for her that day.

**Kristen Davis:** In doing so, I remember I shared a little story about the beginning. I opened up the speech [by sharing] about Ellen Errands and how Ellen was annoyed on that fateful day [of] the first inaugural meeting, and how I had to go out and get the refreshments. Ultimately, it was like I could have never imagined back then that WAACA would become the vital and impactful organization that it ultimately became all those years later. Certainly that junior in high school, Ellen Errands, didn't have the ability or the wherewithal to know or to see. But it was pretty incredible. Pretty incredible. I hate to do this. I'm so sorry Sulema and to my brother, but I'm going to have to excuse myself at this point because I do have a 12:30, which I'm now a couple of minutes late for, that I need to jump on for and my boss is waiting for me along with a couple of other department heads. So I'm going to need to go and do that. But if there's a time, Sulema, where we could connect again. I don't know, later today or sometime this week and do the same thing and finish it up. And I'll also send you the information for the Chester's as well as the photos that I have. I'll share those with you as well.

**Sulema DePeyster:** Yes, that would be great. It was great speaking with you today.

**Kristen Davis:** You as well and one other thing. Although we don't have that VHS tape, I do have her on a recording speaking at my wedding. Again, it's her voice and it's just a general message. It had nothing to do with WAACA obviously, but I don't know if you wanted any audio or something of her voice.

**Sulema DePeyster:** Yes, it would be great. We accept anything in relation to Ms. Graham. It's always good to have that history.

**Kristen Davis:** Well, thank you so much and I can't tell you how much this means to our family. Thank you for taking on this project and helping us, in some small way, to pay tribute to my mother and to our family. So thank you so much and I will reach back out and hopefully we can connect again and finish up.

**Sulema DePeyster:** Okay, that sounds great. Have a good rest of your day.

**Kristen Davis:** Thank you. Bye brother.

**Albert Graham Jr.:** Bye, I love you.

**Kristen Davis:** I love you too.

**Sulema DePeyster:** So I do have a few more questions that you could definitely answer. But I guess we could also follow up from the question that your sister was just answering about the impact of WAACA. So in your perspective, how did WAACA impact the town of Windsor?

**Albert Graham Jr.:** The impact, I think, was felt beyond the town of Windsor. That was, of course, started by her mother, but I think it was also our Aunt Mary and our Uncle Joe Suggs in Bloomfield. Our Uncle Joe Suggs later went into politics real heavy. I think he was the mayor in Bloomfield at one point. I think he was also the Secretary of State. Our impact was felt in New York, of course, because all my mother's siblings were very proud of her here in New Britain, down South, I mean everywhere. In regards to WAACA per se, the name WAACA was known because of our mother in all those areas. And there were groups that were subsidiaries more or less that were started in other areas due to the members of WAACA who went on their own and when they moved or relocated, started their own organizations. I'm not up on all of the current names or whatever may be out there. I just remember a little bit of that. But I also wanted to touch on our father again too. My sister was talking about our mother, and I can't say enough about our mom. But I know [00:55:00] how our parents were and they wanted [everything] to be done together and to be shared equally. And so our father, during all of these things, and our mother was in so many things. After our parents were gone and as far as their home that they raised us in, there were so many awards and things that pretty much would speak more than any of us can articulate. Some of them, we do still have. Some of them have been put away, things of that nature. Some of them, some family members have obtained.

**Albert Graham Jr.:** But in regards to our father, one thing I want to say is my father worked three jobs dating back to the '70s when I was younger. During the time, he had his gas stations on the side. That was his side job. His primary thing was he was an inspector for the state of Connecticut for 30 something years. I don't know, maybe my sister forgot. On top of that, kind of in the same way when we moved into Windsor and there was an attempt to force us out of the home that my father and mother had just bought with cash money. It was kind of the same with the gas stations because he became very successful, and he was not looked upon too kindly because of his success. Because as a man of color, at that time there were certain things you just weren't supposed to do. I'll leave it at that. But yeah. He worked two or three jobs in my whole life. My father, he would leave at say 5, 6 in the morning. He'd come back home say 3:00 o'clock, and then go to another job at 4:00 o'clock. I remember [that] distinctly growing up. My father worked well beyond retirement years. Oh, I'm sorry. I forgot another one of his jobs. He was a Special Deputy Sheriff. He was a constable. Matter of fact, my father was how I got into law enforcement.

**Albert Graham Jr.:** I always saw my father in uniforms, especially dating back to his days with the state of Connecticut. And so it was a thing. "Okay, let me get a job wearing a uniform." I didn't know what that was doing. I remember, I was going to go in the military and stuff all because of my pops. Matter of fact, my father got me in the Sheriff's Department. Well, actually I take that back. It was our mother who picked up the phone and made a call to the high Sheriff of the time, Al Real. She says, "You're going to give my son a job." Back then, everything being so political, that's pretty much how it was it was. Just a phone call and I'll never forget. I

remember I was blown away by that. I was like, “Mom, you got that kind of juice?” But that is exactly what happened. The very next day, Al Real says he told his subordinate. He told him, “Look, this young man is coming in here. You're going to put him on blah blah blah blah.” The next day I went to work for the Sheriff's Department. From there, I stayed in law enforcement for many years. So that was all due to my mom making a phone call. But it was also due to my father wanting to, once again, kind of just be involved in some way. So I just wanted to add that stuff.

**Sulema DePeyster:** Okay, that's great. I think that actually covered a few of my questions that would have followed at the end, but I did want to ask about your perspective of your mom's legacy, and that's something that's kind of been discussed throughout the conversation; just how others have viewed the things that she's accomplished. But in your mind, what is your mom's legacy that she's left behind?

**Albert Graham Jr.:** I have no words per se other than to say this. To this day, my siblings, our children, our other extended family relatives and whatnot, we're still learning. We're still getting information. We're still being told of how our mom touched different people in different ways that we never had a clue of. We had no idea. But just by this interview and the history that you're doing on everything, I think it speaks for itself. What more is there, [01:00:00] for me anyway, that I can really say? It blows me away and I'm honored to be Willie Graham and Al Graham's son. I do have three sons, but I have a daughter, too, as well as other nieces. I just wish our mom was here for those young ladies. My daughter, I'll never forget this, is 25 now. She's at school one day, right? She comes home with her papers. She hands me a paper. She says, “Daddy here.” She empties her bag, pulls out all of her papers and put her lunch box up. One of her papers was this very kind note from her teacher who was talking about how Janelle [Albert Graham Jr.'s daughter] was so impressive that day at school. I'm like, “Well, what did she do?” What she did was she was telling the story of her grandma who she never met. Now that I'm saying this, I apologize. I have that letter, but this came about the way it did. With the holidays, I should have pulled out those boxes.

**Albert Graham Jr.:** But I have, as I mentioned, those awards and things like that. I've got stuff, and we can get this together before whatever the event that you guys are going to do. I'd be glad to add those things in. But yeah, to this very day, we're still finding out things. Stories and things like that. But our mom's legacy, to me, is far greater. I know it's what she wanted, but I don't think my mom would say that she left the type of legacy that she has. I think she surpassed her expectations, which I think any of us in life, that's all you can ask for. There's nothing greater than being content. But there's nothing greater than knowing that you accomplished things in life. Our mom's been passed away over 30 years and here we are. I'm appreciative of you and the organization that you guys have for doing this. Like my sister said, we really do appreciate it. We're really honored, and we'll do whatever we can to assist you in making this successful.

**Sulema DePeyster:** Thank you. It's actually been really great working on this project and we're really happy to share this history. It's been a work in progress and we're very excited for it. I think towards the end of the interview – we only have two or so more questions left – it's good to talk about where we are today and where WAACA fits into the overall context of Windsor's

history. But I also do want to ask what you're doing now. I know you said you'd worked in law enforcement for a number of years, and I'm assuming since then you've retired. But what are you up to today?

**Albert Graham Jr.:** Learning to enjoy being an empty nester for the first time. [laughing] People ask me all the time: "Well, what are you going to do now?" I've done a lot of different things. I don't know. I just want to make my family happy. I would love to be able to leave the type of mark that our mom and father did. That's not really my cup of tea but if I could, at least in my children's memory, I'm happy with that. My next career, I'm undecided. I'm not physically able to do what I used to do so I'll just accept that and keep going.

**Sulema DePeyster:** Okay, and are you living in a neighboring town? Because I'm assuming you're no longer in Windsor today. Where are you currently?

**Albert Graham Jr.:** I've been in Newington, the New Britain area now for about 20 going on 30 years. I lived in Newington for many years and New Britain as well, which is funny because as my sister touched a little bit on, we had family growing up right here in New Britain, CT. But I never thought I would be living here. About 17 years of my career was spent [01:05:00] out towards the Cheshire area and the facilities out there doing transportation for of all kinds for some people. So anyway, that's how I kind of moved this way. To be a little closer to work. I had lived in Bloomfield prior to that, and the distance was just a little too much. After leaving Windsor, I got married and started having a family.

**Sulema DePeyster:** Okay, and this is actually my final question. So although you no longer live in Windsor today, would you join an organization similar to WAACA in present day?

**Albert Graham Jr.:** Absolutely. My uncles that were in New Britain when I first came here, because of them, I was involved in a few different things. [...] Did we lose connection?

**Sulema DePeyster:** Now I can still hear you.

**Albert Graham Jr.:** Okay, I'm sorry. You mind repeating that last question? I'm sorry, my phone went dead.

**Sulema DePeyster:** Yeah, sure. So I was saying even though you no longer live in Windsor today, would you join an organization similar to WAACA?

**Albert Graham Jr.:** Yeah well I still keep a connection to Windsor, and it's not like WAACA per se. But I administer a group. A Windsor Hometown group. It's a group that's via Facebook, and there's almost 3000 members. People that currently live in Windsor now, lived in Windsor in the past, or just whatever the connection may be. Went to school there, whatever. A big part of that is because of the fact that my family being so well known to many people. And then there's also people younger than me [and] there's people older than me in the group. So yeah, that's my connection currently to the town of Windsor. I always consider myself a Windsorite. And growing up in what we called the Grand Avenue, Ford Road area, but back then it was called Oakland Hills. I don't know if anybody ever talks more, but that whole section was called Oakland Hills by the shopping center and all of that and Custer Park. But that's my home no



matter where I go. It was always my goal when I retired to move down South. But because of our father's illness at the time years ago and whatnot and other family issues, I'm still here currently. But I intend to relocate within the next couple of years. But Windsor will always be my home. I don't know anything different. That's my beginning.

**Albert Graham Jr.:** My fondest memories when I think about my family, because we're all much older now and everybody's going their own ways. Our parents are gone and one of our siblings is gone and so we're now the older generation, and I value that. My sister brought up a name that you guys were talking about. June Archer. There's a lot of people from Windsor who are now very successful. All over, and it's not just locally, but there's a lot of people. A lot of them, I grew up with. My son Julian, who lives in California now, he was in law enforcement. But what he does now, he's a bodyguard for the stars. He actually is a bodyguard for some very famous celebrities. All my kids, I'm very blessed. My son Julian, he knows a lot of those people. My two older boys, ones a barber and one has a trucking company. In their own right, they're all very successful. My daughter, my little baby girl, she's the youngest. My boys are all in their thirties.

**Sulema DePeyster:** Well, thank you so much. Those are all of my questions. It's been very great speaking with you today, and I look forward to this exhibit, which will be opening February 25<sup>th</sup> just so you are aware. We're going to be sending out more information about that shortly. So thank you so much again. [01:10:00]

**Albert Graham Jr.:** Thank you so much. I appreciate you.