

Barbara Haile

Oral History Interview, 02-16-24

Interviewed by Preston Allen and Elizabeth Sine

Our Roots/Our Routes: Living Histories of Belonging and Cultural Sustainability on
California's Central Coast

Elizabeth Sine: [00:00:01] Alright. This is an oral history interview with Barbara Haile for the Our Roots/Our Routes project. Today is February 16th, 2024. It is 2:30 in the afternoon and interviewing Mrs. Haile are myself, Elizabeth Sine.

Preston Allen: [00:00:23] And Preston Allen.

Elizabeth Sine: [00:00:25] And we're in San Luis Obispo, California.

Preston Allen: [00:00:30] All [00:00:30] right. Well, thank you again for taking the time to speak with us.

Barbara Haile: [00:00:34] You're very welcome.

Preston Allen: [00:00:34] So as we kind of navigate through your roots and then your routes a little bit. So we'll give you a chance to do some reflection. So let's and just kind of jump right into it in terms of when, when you were born and where.

Barbara Haile: [00:00:50] I was born in the parish called Clarendon in Jamaica, and I was born in [00:01:00] 1937. It was a little town called Chapelton, Clarendon. And I don't know it because my father died when I was one year old and my mother moved us to Kingston, where her mother was. So I never really knew my father. I was a year old when he died. And I have a brother who is 14 months older than I am. And so I can't tell you anything about Chapelton. [00:01:30] I've never been there. But I can tell you about Kingston, which is where I grew up. Yeah.

Preston Allen: [00:01:36] All right, well, let's hear a little bit about Kingston.

Barbara Haile: [00:01:39] Very busy little city. When I was there, it was very calm and everything was lovely. But lately, you know, things have gone awry, and and there's there's more crime and, but when I was growing up, I left there when I was 18 years old, and that was in 1955. And up to that point [00:02:00] things were very good for me anyway. And we were under we were a British colony at the time. Jamaica became independent in 1962, long after I had left. So we were in the British system and our education was the British education. And the British education stretched throughout the colonies, the same kind of education for all the British colonies in every continent, every country. [00:02:30] That's kind of an interesting aside. But anyway, Kingston was lovely. And we had back then, before 1955, there were a lot of street vendors who would come down the street singing their songs about what they're selling, and my grandmother would sit. My mother worked because she had to take care of two kids by herself. So she always worked full time, and my grandmother was always home. And she'd sit on the on the veranda [00:03:00] and people would come by, the woman with a fresh fish, and she'd be going, "fish, fresh fish, come get your fish." And the woman with the with the chickens live chickens. So my grandmother would buy live chickens and then she would, you know, keep she had many as pets. But then Sunday dinner was one of the chickens, and the bread came and the milk came early in the morning. The milk was already on the veranda when we got up.

Barbara Haile: [00:03:28] And then the bread man came. [00:03:30] And then there was the guy in the evening with his warm peanuts, you know, "peanuts," whatever. And then the coal man. We used charcoal at that time to cook with, and the coal man would come down the street going, "coal man, come again, coal man, come coal man, come again, coal man come." So we had these people singing and selling their wares, you know. So it was, it was a really nice upbringing and we had a lot of fresh fruits and vegetables. [00:04:00] So we, we grew up quite healthy, you know. And Kingston was just a lovely place at that time. You could just... my, my uncles and aunts lived somewhere within walking distance. Some you had to drive, but we would visit on Sundays and Sunday afternoon. The usual venue was you'd have drinks out on the veranda and neighbors would stop by, you know, the neighbor would just stop by. [00:04:30] Or if they didn't do it, you would stop by too. But everybody knew that somebody was going to stop by. So you had something ready. So my aunt would have she didn't have liquor, but she would have soft drinks and ice cream. Made her own ice cream. The old bucket. Yes. And so it was a very pleasant kind of neighborly thing that

people did. And it was lovely. So I enjoyed growing up in Jamaica, I really did. And when I go back there, it's [00:05:00] a little bit less safe. But it's still exciting. It's still exciting. Yeah.

Preston Allen: [00:05:11] Good. Talk a little about your family structure.

Barbara Haile: [00:05:14] Well, my family structure goes back a long way. There's too much to tell.

Preston Allen: [00:05:22] Okay.

Barbara Haile: [00:05:22] You know, there's my, my grandmother was born and grew up in Jamaica, in Saint Ann's Bay. And [00:05:30] this is my grandmother. This is late 1800s, and her family must have been fairly well off. They must have had property because she went to the only boarding high school at the time, private boarding high school in Jamaica at the time. And so my grandmother had a high school, you know, every once in a while she'd come off with some Spanish, she remembered, and a little bit of, you know, here and there and she married. It's a long story, but. She married a man [00:06:00] and had three kids and they moved to New York. He got a job in New York in 1906, around there 1906, 1910, and they moved there. So my mother was about four years old when she went, when they went to New York, and she had one little sister, and then another sister was born in New York. So one of my aunts was born in New York, and she's a natural born citizen, and she's never been here. She's been to Canada because [00:06:30] she went to school in Canada and her kids went to school in Canada. So they, they know Canada. And anyway, so my grandmother came back to Jamaica from New York when her husband died. That was my grandfather. He died fairly young and she had three kids. So she went back to Jamaica with the three kids.

Barbara Haile: [00:06:48] And she was a seamstress, and she made clothes for the very wealthy people who went to the, to the horse racing, what do you call [00:07:00] it? Give me a word.

Preston Allen: [00:07:02] The track.

Barbara Haile: [00:07:02] The track for horse racing. And back then, those women dressed in long things with bustles and all that. And she sewed for those people. She was an excellent seamstress. And anyway, she got married again to a man 15 years her junior. And that didn't work very well. So anyway, so my mother... My mother married... This gets so long... My mother married a man. An Indian man. [00:07:30] Not American Indian. From India. Anyway. And he was an overseer of a plantation. And they had all Indians working for him, indentured Indians working for him. And she wasn't Indian. So when she got there, she wasn't very popular with the people who worked for him because they wanted him to marry an Indian woman. And here he brought this other woman. And so there's [00:08:00] a long story there. It goes on and on and on. And then he died of a heart attack, and she took the kids and went back to Jamaica, I mean, to Kingston. And she got a job as a secretary at... I forget what it's called... I think it was Jamaica Welfare Company, something like that. And she worked there as a secretary for many years, and then she was corresponding with a man in New York that she knew when she was a teenager, and they hadn't seen each other, they both had been married, etc., [00:08:30] etc..

Barbara Haile: [00:08:31] So anyway, I guess she got a fiance visa or something because she left. When I was nine, she left to go to New York to marry this man. And turns out they did not get married after all. But, she stayed. I don't know how it happened that she stayed and she got a green card, etc. And she worked for a union office as a secretary for the whole time she was in New York until [00:09:00] we came. I was nine when she left, and we came to New York. We came to America when I was 18. So for nine years we lived with my grandmother, and she visited. She came when I graduated high school and she she visited every once in a while, but not very much. So that's my mother. My father died when I was a year old, so I don't know very much about him. You know, he was superintendent of roads in Clarendon. I don't know what that means exactly, [00:09:30] but that's what his job was. And my mother was a very good secretary. So she she didn't have a problem getting jobs. But she was lucky, too, because this is 1940s. She's a Black woman in New York in 1940s. And she got this job with a union office because the unions were making efforts to collaborate with Black people and other indigenous people.

Barbara Haile: [00:09:58] So I think she got lucky, and [00:10:00] she was she was hired, and she worked there for...until she retired in, in her late 60s. That's my mother

and my father. Okay. That's it. And my grandmother died sometime after we were here in America. And, um, I have a lot of uncles and aunts and nieces and nephews. They have lots of family back there, still. I have family in Canada. I have two cousins in Canada, and [00:10:30] one in Alabama, and one in Florida, and the rest in Jamaica. We like to travel, apparently. We're everywhere. You go to Siberia, you're going to find a Jamaican.

Preston Allen: [00:10:45] Yes, yes.

Barbara Haile: [00:10:45] There was a Jamaican in the Iditarod in Alaska. Yes. You go everywhere. So anyway, that's...I forgot the question. It was about my [00:11:00] family structure?

Preston Allen: [00:11:01] Yes. Yes. Yes.

Barbara Haile: [00:11:02] Okay. So, we came here when I was 18. My brother was 19. And I got a job at...Well, first I went to a convent, Catholic girls' school. All the schools in Jamaica and Kingston especially were private schools. The high schools were private. Everybody wore a uniform, [00:11:30] every...Different uniforms for different schools. So if you saw somebody walking down the street after school, you could tell what school that person went to because of the uniform they were wearing. So we had to be really circumspect with our behavior, because if we didn't behave or we did anything in public that wasn't good, people knew what school you went to, and they can go back to the school and say, I saw this person, and that's what she looked like, and she was doing...

Barbara Haile: [00:11:55] So we, we behaved very well. Yes. As long as we had the uniform [00:12:00] on, we had to behave. Yes. So I finished convent high school. It was a closed convent, which means the nuns lived there and they taught some of the... We had teachers who were not nuns, but some of them were nuns. And all the schools are segregated. At least it was back then. There were boys schools and girls schools, period. No co-ed schools. And so I went to the convent Catholic school [00:12:30] while my grandmother was a Seventh Day Adventist, which means that on Saturdays I was in church all day. And Sunday night also at the Seventh Day Adventist Church, there's a big service. So Saturday and Sunday I'm at the Seventh Day Adventist Church, and the rest of the week I'm at a Catholic school and I'm doing Stations of the Cross, and I'm

doing all, you know, all of that. So I learned a lot from both. I had experience of both, and I thought at the [00:13:00] time that I was very unfortunate because I had to do all this churching, but I learned a lot, you know, and I got really churched. My grandmother dragged us to every church, to every denomination.

Barbara Haile: [00:13:13] We went through every denomination known to man. And she wound up with the Seventh Day Adventist Church. That was her choice. So that was when I- and I never joined, I never converted, I never did the altar call. I never did any of that because I just wasn't convinced. [00:13:30] And when they did the altar call, she would go. She would stick me with her elbow in my ribs to say, it's altar call, come on. And I never did. So she was always going and I never did. But anyway, so we came to America and but after high school, I finished high school at 17. And for a year we, I did secretarial school. So when I came to New York, I was well versed in shorthand, Pitman shorthand, [00:14:00] which is difficult. But you can almost do court reporting with it. It's that good. And my typing was excellent. So my English was flawless. I mean, a British education. Let me tell you, honey, they are really big on vocabulary. And so from first grade, the first class, you knew that if you didn't study your vocabulary and your grammar, you weren't going to make it through because they would take a point off of everything you ever wrote. [00:14:30] If it was misspelled or the grammar was wrong, a point came off of your grade. Even if it's math. If you had to write a sentence to introduce the math problem and you misspelled something, a point came off your grade.

Barbara Haile: [00:14:46] So we learned immediately that we had to have our vocabulary and our grammar perfect. And that helped my mother when she worked at the union office in the 40s and 50s. She was a grammar guru, [00:15:00] you know, everybody wanted to spell something. Hey, Allie, how do you..you know? And so, so when I came to New York and applied for jobs, I didn't have a problem. And first of all, I was light skinned, and my hair was almost straight. And so people didn't know what I was. The people I worked with thought I was exotic, but they didn't know how exotic or what. They thought [00:15:30] I was maybe from Hawai'i or something. And so I have to say that that helped. My light skin helped and my exotic look was getting jobs, because it wasn't that easy to get a job in New York. And my first job was with Columbia Pictures International, and that was a that was really fun because they were popular at that time, and they were just grooming people like Kim Novak. And so she would come into the office every once [00:16:00] in a while, and other actors would show up and in the

cafeteria we'd see... So I was very lucky, you know, and I was young and I started as a typist, but pretty soon I became a secretary. Once they knew how I could write, I became a secretary. And then after a while, my bosses would just say, Barbara, write to so and so and tell him so and so, and he would sign it, because he knew that I could write well.

Barbara Haile: [00:16:25] And all that is because of the British education. It's really severe stuff. [00:16:30] Anyway, um, so I worked at Columbia Pictures International for a while, and then I worked for WNET Channel 13. At the time it was a PBS station. It was the primary PBS station. And then after that, I worked for an advertising agency on Fifth Avenue. So I was, you know, I was coming in from...I lived in Brooklyn for ten years with my mother and my brother. Well, he got [00:17:00] married young and left, but I lived with my mother, and I took those horrible subways, you know, from Brooklyn to work. So I'd be on the subway, like in the summer when it's hot and sweaty and and it's packed. I mean, people are right up against you like this. And then I'd get to to Fifth Avenue and 57th Street, you know, and there's Tiffany's and there's my office building. So these two worlds of the subway. And then I'm working on Fifth Avenue, you [00:17:30] know. You know, it was...It took a little...It was good. I learned a lot about how to deal with different climates and different occasions and different environments, because I had to go through all that. And to live in New York, you have to be young and ambitious because it's a tough, tough world.

Barbara Haile: [00:17:53] If you live in New York, you can live anywhere else. It's a real chore living in New York, you have to be...You [00:18:00] have to have a lot of energy. You have to be...ambitious. There's another word...competitive. Yes. Anyway, so I had all these wonderful jobs, and I met a lot of people, and I enjoyed, i enjoyed everything I did there. But then winter got to me, and I couldn't take winter anymore. I tried to get a taxi one night to go home. When I moved to Manhattan, I was in Manhattan for five [00:18:30] years, and I tried to get a taxi to get home and I couldn't get a taxi. And I kept, you know, trying with my gloves and everything. I was dressed properly. When I did get a taxi and I got home, I couldn't open my hand, I couldn't open my fingers, and I thought, because it was so cold, and I thought, 'No, no, this is not right.' So I decided I'm going to try to leave New York. And I had a friend who had moved to San Francisco. So I contacted her and she said, yeah, come on out. [00:19:00] So I went for vacation and I stayed with her. And while I was there, I looked for a job, because I knew I was leaving

New York. I just thought, you know, let me look for a job. If I get a job, I'll come back, you know? So I did get a job with an advertising agency in San Francisco, and I told them I'd need two weeks to move and get back.

Barbara Haile: [00:19:22] And they said, fine. And so I moved. But I remember in the interview, the man [00:19:30] who was interviewing me said, "I think you would be comfortable in this office. You know, we we have some Jewish account executives." So he was saying, you know, "We have some Jewish people here. So you as a black woman should be okay." And I thought that was interesting, because it wasn't just me, it was the Jewish guys. And there he was thinking were something, you know, uh, whatever memorable [00:20:00] or something or whatever. Anyway, I'm 87 now, so my, my brain is, you know. Anyway, um, so anyway, I found the job and I went to New York, and I, I quit my apartment. I don't remember, I must have had to pay something to get out of it, and I didn't have...I had just a studio apartment, so I didn't have a whole big moving to do. It was very little. I came back to San Francisco, just, just my clothes mostly. And I stayed with my friend [00:20:30] until I had the job. And then I got an apartment and that's another story. But anyway, I got an apartment in San Francisco, and I worked for the advertising agency for a while. And then it occurred to me that all this work I'm doing doesn't mean anything. You know, it's all about money.

Barbara Haile: [00:20:50] It's all about money and success, and what am I doing for for anything else? You know, I started feeling guilty about not doing something that [00:21:00] was profitable for marginalized people or for the earth or for whatever, not just to sell products on television, which is what I was doing. And so I started looking around and I met a man who was a city councilman in Berkeley, and he had an opening. So I moved to Berkeley. I [00:21:30] got a job with him, and I moved to Berkeley, and I was there for some years. And then he was recalled. He was he was a Black city councilman with, a Yale Law graduate, and he got people very upset with the other city councilman, very controversial. And City Hall was packed when he...Every meeting there were people...it was standing room only at the city hall because they knew that he was going to be there [00:22:00] and they were going to be some real arguments going on. And pretty soon they got tired of him. So he got recalled. So I lost my job, you know. But at while I was working there, I knew Barbara Lee. She was working for Ron Dellums in Oakland, and we worked with Dellums office. So I knew Barbara Lee when she was just she was probably she's younger than I am. She must

have been an intern at Dellums' office when I met her. So I knew Dellums staff [00:22:30] and, and Barbara Lee was the one who we would recognize right now.¹

Barbara Haile: [00:22:35] And so he was recalled. And I didn't have a job now. And I was at UC Berkeley and I was poor. I didn't have a job. I had an apartment I had to pay for. So whatever money I, you know... And I went to a party and I met somebody who told me about a job at TWA, and he said, go, go get an interview. So [00:23:00] I went, he told me where to go. And the job was called Director of Customer Services. And this was for the 747 airplanes. They were new at the time, and they needed somebody from management on the plane on the 747 at the beginning, just to make sure that flight attendants were doing what they were supposed to do, etc., etc.. Now, I had never been a flight attendant, but they were offering, they were beginning to hire what they called "off the street," because [00:23:30] they wanted somebody with different eyes to see the customers than the flight attendants who are used to that job and have been doing it forever. And they see the customers in a certain light. They wanted somebody who'd never done it before, so you could be more in tune with customers and what they need. And I was one of the lucky ones. They hired like two of us, and that was it. I mean, of...who were not flight attendants because in the, in the airline business, they move up from, [00:24:00] you know, from one category to the other.

Barbara Haile: [00:24:03] And most of the, the people, the, the management came through flight attendants. Anyway. So that was a little bit controversial because the flight attendants would say, you can't tell me to do my job. I've been doing it for ten years. You just walked in here. So I had to be as diplomatic as I could. And I did okay, you know? And so we were on the 747 for a while, and then afterwards we were in the office as flight [00:24:30] attendant supervisors. And so I had like 20 flight attendants that I was supervising, but in the office. So a lot of letters going back and forth, letters to customers who were upset, letters to the flight attendants who were doing bad or wrong, and I had to correct them, or I had to put them on a weight check back then. So I had, I had two children, and I was still going back to work after having two children, [00:25:00] and I had to be trim because I'm putting them on weight check. So I had to be trim. I couldn't be up here and telling them to... So anyway, TWA was fun. I got to travel all over the world, like, free. There was a lot of stories, but anyway, I saw a lot of the world

¹ From Barbara Haile via email 02/16/24: "I forgot to say that I finally got a BS degree from Univ of San Francisco in Management - Organizational Behavior."

and, and I enjoyed that job and... So I quit TWA. Now I'm getting into my job. You didn't [00:25:30] ask me about that.

Preston Allen: [00:25:31] Okay, well, what about can you... Do you have any memorable moments from the people in your life up to this point that just kind of stand out for you?

Barbara Haile: [00:25:39] In my life?

Preston Allen: [00:25:41] To this point that you've brought us to?

Barbara Haile: [00:25:42] Oh my goodness.

Preston Allen: [00:25:44] Just just things that just come to mind.

Barbara Haile: [00:25:46] Oh my goodness. Well, my grandmother was very strict, very strict. I think she should have been a prison warden. She was very strict. And so I didn't enjoy being with my grandmother from [00:26:00] 9 to 18. Sometimes it was fun, but for, for, you know, she was an old traditional whatever. And for example, my brother one morning was standing on the veranda with his hands in his pocket, whistling, and she came up and slapped him in the face. She said, "Go find something constructive to do. What are you doing whistling and with your hands in your pocket at this time?" That's was my grandmother. Okay?

Preston Allen: [00:26:28] Gotcha.

Barbara Haile: [00:26:28] And if she heard us, I [00:26:30] had a next door neighbor who would come over about my age. And if she, if we were playing and she heard me or heard us laughing too much, she would get me in the house and tell me to do something. And, and no friends. Friends just, just led you astray. So, no friends. Church friends were okay. But not school friends. The neighbor kid, okay. She knows the parents, so that was okay. She could come over, but that was it. So she had this old fashioned, old...I don't know where she [00:27:00] got it from, but maybe people at that age...She was, you know, she was in the late 1800s when she was born.

Barbara Haile: [00:27:06] So it's a whole couple of generations. So I didn't enjoy...So when I left Jamaica, I was happy to leave because I was, you know, with my grandmother, who was very strict. And sometimes we had fun, you know, because she had a lot of good stories to tell. But it was no freedom. You know? So anyway, my grandmother [00:27:30] stands out because she was so influential in my, in my life. And, um...

Preston Allen: [00:27:37] How about teachers?

Barbara Haile: [00:27:38] Teachers, yes. I had a couple of teachers, one who was also very strict and I admired her, but I didn't have mentors. I didn't have teachers saying, you can do this or you should do that. You know, they they taught you and they gave you an exam. And if you pass the exam, that was fine. You know, we didn't have [00:28:00] much personal contact with our teachers. They were teachers, and they were respected, and they were on a pedestal. And, you know, um... My mother too, my mother was, was... She had a lot of what's the word I want... She was persistent about survival, and she, she worked hard to make sure that she survived and that we were [00:28:30] okay. And when we came to New York, we didn't go to college. Well, I went to Brooklyn College at night, but I had to stop doing that because it became dangerous walking home at night, whatever.

Barbara Haile: [00:28:41] Whole different story. But anyway, she wanted us to work to help her get a new apartment for her with three bedrooms, because she was in a one bedroom. And here we came. And so she wanted us to work. So going to college was not in her, in her arrangements. [00:29:00] It was just that we would work. So we did that. And so I went to Brooklyn College at night and then stopped because I had some problems with people, men, you know, annoying me when I'm going home late at night because it was after work that I went to college. And so there was Brooklyn College and, um. Teachers, ministers I can't think, aside from my [00:29:30] grandmother and my mother, I had uncles who were influential too, and aunts, but not nothing that stands out.

Preston Allen: [00:29:38] Okay.

Barbara Haile: [00:29:39] And in my work life, no. I have friends, you know, I have a friend from my first job. She lives in New York still, and she was here for Thanksgiving. We stayed in touch.

Preston Allen: [00:29:52] Okay.

Barbara Haile: [00:29:53] Yeah, but, um, I can't think of anybody in particular that I could say was that [00:30:00] influential in my decisions or my...Has to be my my parents.

Preston Allen: [00:30:07] Okay. How did you get grounded in your cultural identity? Like, is that in school? Did you.

Barbara Haile: [00:30:12] Oh, it was all around. It was everywhere.

Preston Allen: [00:30:15] Okay, okay.

Barbara Haile: [00:30:16] It was everywhere. As you can see from my high school graduation picture, I grew up in a very mixed, ethnically mixed Jamaica, which it's changed [00:30:30] since then. And we were in school. My, my best friend in elementary school was Chinese. My best friend in high school was Chinese. And there were just Indians, half Indians, half Chinese, quarter Chinese, a lot of mixtures. Lots of mixtures. Everything from ivory to ebony. I mean, it was everywhere. So it was...It was something I still think about, and I'm wondering [00:31:00] if I should go back eventually just so that I can soak it up some more because it's so different here.

Preston Allen: [00:31:06] Mhm mhm.

Barbara Haile: [00:31:06] And it was the food. It was the music. It was the the mixed ethnic...mixed ethnicities. Those were very influential. Music, food, and just people of every color and every mixed heritage and...That's [00:31:30] what I miss most, I think, is the food and the music and just the atmosphere, the warmth, the sun, the colors. It's just, when I was there, it was a happy place to be. I don't know what it's like now. It's been so long. But I still have relatives living there, and they seem to be fine. So...You have to know where to go and what to do.

Barbara Haile: [00:31:58] Yeah, but [00:32:00] it's, it's... And the history and my... The British education had us doing British and European history not American history. So when I came here I had to learn American history because it wasn't in our, in our curriculum. I mean, it was all British and European and we were...we thought we were British. No matter what color we were, we thought we were British. So we did stuff that the Brits did [00:32:30]. And we, we, we didn't dress like them. We dressed probably more interesting than they did. But um, yeah, we thought we were British. So we listened to the BBC and we, uh, I, I'm trying to think of other things that the British did that we thought we were British. It was mostly because of the education I think.

Preston Allen: [00:32:54] Mhm.

Barbara Haile: [00:32:55] And so we were Jamaican, but we were a British Jamaican. And [00:33:00] after I left and Jamaica became independent, um, there was a new prime minister. He was prime minister while I was there, and until shortly before I left. And he was a socialist. And so the business people who were mostly Syrians and Chinese, Lebanese and some Indians, there were a lot of Indian entrepreneurs also....They [00:33:30] left. They're in Florida. I mean, they, they left because they didn't like...The socialism did not agree with their with their business ethics at all.

Barbara Haile: [00:33:43] And so he got the Rastafarians. If you ever heard, you heard of the Rastafarians? Well, when I was a child, you never saw them. They lived in the hills. And we knew they were there. And occasionally you'd see one in Kingston and people would go, "oh, there's a Rasta man." So [00:34:00] it was, you know, but then when this new prime minister came, the socialist prime minister, he got them out because there were artists, lots of artists who were up there and not selling their stuff because they didn't come in to Kingston, because they were considered pariahs, you know. They had the, the dreadlocks, and they smoked marijuana. And that's what we heard. And so, you know, we didn't want them around. So he brought them and he brought their art and their music. And so [00:34:30] a lot of the business owners left. They went to Florida. So Jamaica is not as ethnically as diverse as it used to be. I mean, there still there are Black people in Jamaica with Chinese last names. Lots of them. So that's how mixed it is, you know, because I guess the Chinese came and the Chinese men were prolific. I don't know, they, there were lots of Black people with

Chinese heritage. So anyway, um, I don't [00:35:00] know where I was now, about influencing, uh.

Preston Allen: [00:35:03] Culturally, like...

Barbara Haile: [00:35:04] Culturally. Right, right. So I grew up British and, the Jamaica that exists now is very different to what I grew up in. But it still, it's a lot of fun. It's probably more fun because, um, I'll get to that later about what I miss about Jamaica. That's different.

Preston Allen: [00:35:28] Okay. Okay. Okay.

Barbara Haile: [00:35:30] Okay. [00:35:30]

Preston Allen: [00:35:31] Good good, good. Appreciate that. All right. You want to go and make a transition? Get into here, now?

Elizabeth Sine: [00:35:37] Sure. Yeah. Um.

Barbara Haile: [00:35:40] Well, I want to tell you one more thing before I come here.

Preston Allen: [00:35:43] Okay.

Barbara Haile: [00:35:44] One more thing. When we first came here, my mother and my brother and I used to go back to Jamaica every Christmas. Because Christmas in Jamaica is Carnival, it's fabulous. And we did that for four years. Four years, we went to Jamaica for Christmas, [00:36:00] and after that I stopped, because when I came back to New York in January, I was depressed for a month. It took me maybe probably a month to get over the depression because I'm leaving all this color and music and sun, and I'm coming back to New York in January. It's gray and cloudy and cold and oh, so I said, I can't do this anymore. If I'm going to live in this country, I'm not going back there. So [00:36:30] I haven't been back for a very long time because I don't want to come back, you know. But this is different. California is different. That's a whole different thing to New York City in the winter. I mean, New York City in the winter is really tough. So I just thought I'd throw that in that I missed the music, I missed the colors, I missed the

sun. I missed the partying. We party from 12:00 in the day till 3:00 next morning at the same house. You know, it [00:37:00] was just normal. You go around noon and we'd have some lunch and we'd dance and whatnot, and then we'd go home and change and come back, and then we'd dance some more till 3:00 in the morning. And I missed that. You know, I missed a lot about it. So I figured if I'm going to live here, I'm just going to have to stay here. I'm not going to go back.

Preston Allen: [00:37:20] Yeah, yeah.

Barbara Haile: [00:37:21] So anyway, I just thought I'd throw that in about the cultural difference.

Preston Allen: [00:37:25] Yeah yeah yeah yeah.

Elizabeth Sine: [00:37:27] Yeah. And it sounds [00:37:30] like even, even though you chose not to go back, did you continue to stay in touch with family in Jamaica and follow events in Jamaica?

Barbara Haile: [00:37:40] Oh yeah, the last time I went back was probably a little over ten years ago. My favorite uncle died and I went back for his funeral. So I was only there for like three days, so it wasn't like a vacation. So I came right back after that. But that's the last time I went, and I keep saying I'm coming. And my cousins say, okay, you're coming. And [00:38:00] I just haven't gotten there.

Elizabeth Sine: [00:38:02] Yeah. And I'm wondering, so you moved to New York when you were 18.

Barbara Haile: [00:38:08] Mhm.

Elizabeth Sine: [00:38:08] And then what age were you when you moved to San Francisco?

Barbara Haile: [00:38:12] 30,

Elizabeth Sine: [00:38:13] 30. Okay. Yeah. And where were you when you learned of uh, Jamaican independence?

Barbara Haile: [00:38:20] In 1962? I was here in '55, and independence was '62.

Elizabeth Sine: [00:38:26] So you were...

Barbara Haile: [00:38:26] So I was in New York.

Elizabeth Sine: [00:38:28] Oh, okay.

Barbara Haile: [00:38:29] Yeah. [00:38:30]

Elizabeth Sine: [00:38:30] Yeah. I'm curious what impact that had on you or what response you had?

Barbara Haile: [00:38:33] It didn't because I was now American.

Elizabeth Sine: [00:38:35] Yeah. Okay.

Barbara Haile: [00:38:37] Yeah. And one other thing I wanted to tell you about. I had a friend from Scotland when I worked at one of those agencies, and we went to the YWCA to fill out forms to join the Y, and I filled out my form and she filled out her form, and she looked at my form and she said, "Barbara, you made a mistake." I said, "Why? What?" She [00:39:00] said, "You marked Negro." I said, "Well, what do you think I was supposed to mark?" She said, "You're not Negro, you're Jamaican." I said, "Well, that's what Jamaicans are, for the most part." She didn't know. She was my friend, and she had no idea that I was Negro. She thought I was this exotic thing from somewhere called Jamaica. She didn't know anything about Jamaica, because before Bob Marley [00:39:30] and Usain Bolt, nobody knew anything about Jamaica. So she just knew...she knew I wasn't from America, and I looked exotic, so, hey, I must be Jamaican.

Elizabeth Sine: [00:39:41] Yeah, yeah. I was wondering to hear a little more about how you navigated the kind of racial landscape of the United States. You've mentioned some of the stories along the way of kind of the kind of ambiguity.

Barbara Haile: [00:39:55] Yeah. Yeah. That I was exotic, but there's some of them, when I told them I was from Jamaica, they asked if I lived in trees, [00:40:00] did I ever wear shoes, you know, stupid stuff like that. And so that happened too. But I just ignored that because I realized they're just stupid. So it didn't bother me, but I was always accepted, sort of like this exotic thing from some other country. I think that's what that's how they accepted me. And at the time, the racial stuff, it was it was happening in the South, but not in New York, not [00:40:30] in New York. All that horrible stuff that was going on in the South with Black people wasn't happening in New York. It was in the 50s and 60s. It wasn't happening.

Elizabeth Sine: [00:40:45] And. And what about the experience of moving from New York to San Francisco then? And what sorts of impressions did you have of...

Barbara Haile: [00:40:54] Oh I loved California. Oh, yes, oh yes, I loved San Francisco. I thought, this is where [00:41:00] I need to live. And I liked Berkeley, too, I love Berkeley, I lived in Berkeley for a while and then went back to San Francisco, and it was easy. Except the big difference was in clothing, because in New York you had your dressy clothes and you got dressed up to go to parties, to cocktail parties, you got dressed up. And when I came to California, my dressy clothes just sat there in the, you know, [00:41:30] in the closet. I there was nowhere to wear them. I would be looking very odd if I wore some of that stuff, you know, around California. So that, that got me because I had to get rid of those things because I wasn't going to wear them anymore. That was that was an era that was over with. And when I was in New York, if you're invited to cocktail parties, especially when I was in advertising, I would have to do some... A friend of mine and I, who both worked for the same [00:42:00] advertising agency, we'd have to study to go to a cocktail party. We had to make sure we knew everything that was happening in politics, in entertainment, in, in socials, whatever. So I had to read the New York Times and all the local magazines and what, I had to study, because those cocktail parties were all discussions about important stuff. So coming to California was nice because I [00:42:30] didn't have to do...I didn't have to go through those cocktail parties where I had to know everything that was going on in the world.

Barbara Haile: [00:42:36] Yeah. So that was that was a difference. The more casual atmosphere in California dress. Yeah. I mean, I was appalled that you know, when I went to church and I saw kids in jeans and t shirts or whatnot, and I said, "What?" I mean, in Jamaica, you... In Jamaica we had clothes, we had three different kinds of clothes. We had dressy clothes for Sunday church and [00:43:00] for special occasions. And that was, you know, the real special ones. Then we had our school uniforms and then we had house clothes. So you came home, you took your uniform off immediately because you had to. It had to be looking good. You couldn't go to school with a dirty uniform. They'd send you home. And so we put on our house clothes. And the house clothes we wore when we were in the house. So we had these different kinds of clothes. And I come to California and people wear the same thing everywhere, you know, the same casual [00:43:30] clothes-- weddings, funerals, church, you know, even the symphony. I got dressed up to go to the symphony recently, and I was the most dressed up person in the whole place. I mean, somebody stopped me and asked me, you know, where'd you get those? Whatever, because I was wearing my... So California is casual, yes.

Elizabeth Sine: [00:43:56] Do you miss those opportunities to to dress up then? It sounds [00:44:00] like it sounds like maybe a mixture of liking the casualness...

Barbara Haile: [00:44:02] Yeah, I'd like to still do it. Yes. And even here, when I go to lunch, I'm usually a little bit more dressed than a lot of the women. I, there are 15 women in my lunch group, and they're more casual. They're wearing jeans and...nice jeans and nice jackets and stuff, but casual. And I'm still wearing, you know, the old lady skirts and whatnot and whatever. Anyway, I still wear it because that's what I feel comfortable in. So [00:44:30] the casual and also how nice people were in California. People just in general and people who work in stores, like cashiers and, you know, they were so nice. In New York...in New York, it's, it's business. Because it's busy. So you go to buy something, it's "This is what you want. Here it is. Give me the money. Goodbye." And no chit chat. No "How are you? [00:45:00]" No "Hello." Hello? They'd throw you out! They'd said, "What's wrong with this person? She's crazy." You know? In New York, I was not used to people being polite and kind and nice. That was a big deal. And I really appreciate it even more now that I'm down here. Because even here, it's a little different to San Francisco, too. It's it's better here with the, the communications [00:45:30]

between people who work in places that you frequent. They're all very nice. The banks... You know, in New York... Bank? You go in and you do your business. You don't say, "Hello, how are you?" Are you crazy? They'd think something's wrong with you? So that was a big, a big improvement. California to New York. Yeah.

Elizabeth Sine: [00:45:55] So what brought...When did you move to the Central Coast and what brought you here? [00:46:00]

Barbara Haile: [00:46:00] Well, we were in San Francisco and we moved. We were in Saudi Arabia for three and a half years, about four years from 82 to 86. And I quit TWA because they wouldn't give me a leave going to Saudi Arabia. They didn't know when I'd be back. So I quit TWA and moved to Saudi Arabia because Allan, my husband, had a job with Bechtel Corporation, and they were building a city in Saudi Arabia, [00:46:30] and they wanted they needed people to to set up the teaching curriculums and schedules for the people who would take over when we leave, which would be mostly Saudis. So like the police and the transportation and all those agencies. So Alan's job was to make sure that those agencies were working well and teaching the Saudis how to run, because Bechtel [00:47:00] wanted it to be run like an American town, which, of course, didn't go well with with the Saudis at that time. Uh, the, the, the Imams, the religious leaders were very powerful, more powerful than they are now. And so, um, and then each each American or expatriate, there were expatriates from all over the, all over the world working for Bechtel. [00:47:30] And they all had what they called a Saudi shadow. They had a Saudi person with them all the time while they worked, supposedly that the Saudi person would know what to do. But part of it was to make sure that the person they were shadowing was not doing anything illegal, or, you know, immoral or illegal, because the morality thing was really big. And I went down to...We had to wear kaftans.

Barbara Haile: [00:47:59] All the [00:48:00] expatriate women wore these big kaftans. I gained 40 pounds in Saudi Arabia, and I didn't even realize I was gaining. Anyway, um, I went downtown and I had a kaftan that had a slit just up to below the knee, and this little holy man came along with his stick, and he didn't hit me, but he went, "Go home, go home. No, no, no, go home, go home. No, not here." Because they could see that the slit of my leg. So anyway, that's that's the Saudi Arabia [00:48:30] we were in at that time. And, um, I couldn't work. You could, you could work as a, as a nurse or a teacher,

but I wasn't either. And even the teachers didn't have that much, that many jobs to fill. And so I, I learned a lot about Islam and how people live and what they do because we had Saudi neighbors, we weren't in a compound. You know, the compound is where everybody [00:49:00] is in a walled place. We were in a, in an open Saudi city. So we had neighbors-- British, Indian, French, Somali, Saudi, a little bit of everything on the street. Like a little UN. So we...and the women always got together, to tea in mid-afternoon and mid-morning, lots of food, lots of food, lots of eating, lots of chatting. So I learned a lot [00:49:30] about their culture because they were, I was invited to their home for dinner, let's say. And I saw how that went. And that's really interesting because men, men eat first and then after they're finished, the women and children can come and eat what's left.

Barbara Haile: [00:49:48] Yeah. But anyway, so I learned a lot about the culture and they learned about us. So it was interesting. But I wouldn't want to do [00:50:00] it again. But I learned a lot and it was interesting. And I had some fun too, because we, the expatriates had to get together. There was nothing to do. There were no movies, no movies, no plays, no nothing to do outside. And the restaurants were segregated also. So you didn't go to a restaurant with your husband because you couldn't, whatever, you couldn't sit with them. So we had dinner parties. So every weekend either you were giving a dinner party or you were going to somebody else's [00:50:30] dinner party. So there was a lot of eating, a lot of food and, and mixed with, you know, I'd invite some Saudis, the ones that I think would be okay eating, you know, what I'm serving, and watching other people drinking while they don't, and that sort of thing. Drinking was illegal, but we made our own wine. We made our own wine. Everybody made their own wine, so we'd have wine with dinner. But the Saudis didn't know what we were drinking and we weren't telling them [00:51:00] so... They enjoyed the food. So anyway, I learned a lot, and so did Allan, I think. I think we both learned a lot, and the kids loved it because it was the first time they were in a suburb, you know, they were they grew up in San Francisco, in the town itself, not in the suburbs. And so this was the first time that they could go outside and play with neighbor kids.

Barbara Haile: [00:51:24] It was we were at a cul de sac, so there was no traffic so they could play. They really enjoyed it. [00:51:30] And when they came home, they were one grade ahead of where they would have been if they had been here because of fewer distractions.

Preston Allen: [00:51:39] Yeah, yeah.

Barbara Haile: [00:51:40] No distractions. They went to school, they came home. We we had a TV and we'd see some shows and I'd have some videos, you know, exercise videos. We do our exercises, but none of the distractions that American kids had. And so they were ahead of their grade when they came back here. [00:52:00] And it happened... A friend of mine had a son go to school in Jamaica, a boarding school in Jamaica. She lived in L.A and he was getting into some bad company. She took him to Jamaica, got him into this boarding school, cried all the way home. He was crying. She was crying. But he came back. He was two grades ahead of his American, what he would have been here. [00:52:30] And he went to Brown University. He was two grades ahead, because of no distractions. You go to school, you go back home. You're in a boarding school. You know, you study all night till you go to bed. No distractions. And the same thing in Saudi Arabia. They had no distractions. So they were able to spend more time with their studying. There are too many distractions for kids here. It's just it's really serious.

Preston Allen: [00:52:59] Yeah, yeah. [00:53:00]

Barbara Haile: [00:53:00] Anyway, where were we? I'm sorry.

Elizabeth Sine: [00:53:03] Oh, we're just talking about the pathways and places that you moved prior to coming here to coming to the Central Coast.

Barbara Haile: [00:53:08] Yeah, that was it. So Allan got a job at Cal Poly as Dean of the School of Business, and that's why we moved here. And it lasted about less than two years, and he was no longer a Dean. But he stayed in administration at Cal Poly until he retired in [00:53:30] his 70s. I forget how old he was at that time. And, um. When I came here, I thought, "Am I going to really want to live here?" I looked around and I didn't see any of the, the varieties of people and things that I knew even in San Francisco, never mind New York. I mean, New York is everything. I mean, you walk down the street in New York, you can have restaurants from different [00:54:00] countries with their music playing from different countries. You know, in one block you can do it. And so San Francisco didn't offer all that either, but at least it was a little

more. If you could go to Oakland, you might get some feel of that. But when I came here, I was thinking, "Hmm, okay." You know, everybody was very nice. I mean, people were just very welcoming. It was really nice, and I enjoyed that part. But I missed [00:54:30] the, the varieties of New York and San Francisco, and I missed seeing other ethnic types, other ethnicities, Black, Indian, whatever, you know, just something different. And the only way, the only time I see it here now is that, um, farmer's market on Thursday night is the only time you see non-white people.

Barbara Haile: [00:54:58] You have the, the [00:55:00] Latinos with their kids, you know. They come to farmer's market. And I see some Black people. And I remember when the kids would come to visit us when we were at another house. They'd go downtown, and then they'd come back and one would say, "I saw three," and then somebody else would say, "No, no, I saw five." And we go, "Five, really?" And they're talking about Black people downtown, you know. But they always came back with the number that they saw. It was like this [00:55:30] big deal. I saw five. They were competing. Anyway, so I missed that. You know, I missed music, the music, different kinds of music. I listened to, um... KCBX sometimes plays in the morning. They play some different types of music, which is good. I get some reggae and I get some African music and some, you know, KCBX, but not where you go to, to eat or [00:56:00]to, you know, go out to have fun. It's not the music I'm used to or that I like best, and it's not... It's not the food that I like best. I mean, the food is okay, but you know, I'm used to more exotic, exotic food. And there, there isn't that much around here. So I miss food and music and atmosphere and just seeing people of different colors, which we don't see very much here.

Elizabeth Sine: [00:56:29] And so, [00:56:30] did you move to the Central Coast right after you came back from Saudi Arabia?

Barbara Haile: [00:56:35] No, we had a we had a break. We had some time. We came back in '86 and we left in '93. And Alan was, um, at Golden Gate University. He was a professor at Golden Gate, and I worked for the Dean of Grace Cathedral. I don't know if you know, you have... Grace Cathedral is the the diocese, the California diocese. It's on Nob Hill. It's very famous. It's [00:57:00] this huge cathedral on Nob Hill. And they don't call him a pastor. They call him a Dean, the Episcopal Church. So I worked for the Dean as his, um, i don't remember what they called me now...personal secretary? No, that

wasn't it. I forgot my title, but I made sure he, he went where he was supposed to go, when and how, and that he had all the material he needed for these various things. And the Board of Directors of Grace [00:57:30] Cathedral are very, very wealthy San Franciscans, the wealthiest San Franciscans. Because Grace Cathedral is like the place to be on Nob Hill. It's beautiful. It's beautiful. Anyway, so I worked with with him for, until I came here. So I quit to come here. And I wrote a piece for the San Francisco Examiner when I was there, and they printed it, and [00:58:00] it was... I forgot what I was Executive Assistant to the Dean or something... It was on the bottom of the thing that they printed. Um, so that's what I did before I came here. So aside from from the different atmosphere and the different, the different way of being here, people are lovely.

Barbara Haile: [00:58:23] They're very friendly and welcoming everywhere I go. And I'm in a lunch [00:58:30] bunch of women, they're like 17 on... Listed 17, usually 12 to 14 show up for lunch. And I'm the only non-white in that group. And we get along great. And I have friends among them. And, you know, I do pretty well socially, but not as well as I'd like. But, you know, but I do have lunch bunch and I have book clubs. Ten of us have formed a book club among the 17, [00:59:00] so that keeps me a little busy. I go to lunch every Friday and book club once a month, and I've tried church hopping, but, um, I haven't decided on a church. I've gone to lots of churches just to check it out, and I can't find any like the one I grew up in in Jamaica. That's another thing, I grew up in a Methodist church in Jamaica that was just wonderful, a fabulous, fabulous edifice, beautiful church and just everything about [00:59:30] it i liked. And I'm looking for a church that has those traditional hymns. Can't find it. They have this new music. I don't know what they're singing. I've never heard, you know, what's going on here with, not just here, I think it's all over the country, these new churches where you have a band on the stage and songs I've never heard. I mean, none none of the hymns I know. I was on, I was on a flight once, [01:00:00] sitting next to a minister, a Methodist minister, and I told him how much I missed Methodist hymns. And he took my, he took my address and he sent me a Methodist hymnal, which I still have, because I love those hymns and I can't hear them anymore. I went to the, to the, uh, the Methodist church a couple of Sundays ago. I didn't know what they were talking about. I didn't know any of the music. It's all new songs [01:00:30] of some kind, and they're all up there on the screen, you know, so you can read them. You don't have to use the hymnal. And... I haven't decided on a church, I think I should, but I've tried several here and... I haven't found the right

one yet. I go to the Anglican Church and I went there not too long ago, and they have instead of a choir that Sunday they had the bell ringers, the bell, you know, they ring the bells in [01:01:00] a tune and it's nice and all that. But I like a choir. I like to see people singing. That's what I'm used to and I can't find it. I used to go to the House of Prayer and they had a choir, but they split and they divided. Some went to Nipomo and I don't know where the rest of them are. Anyway, where was I? Here, I forgot.

Elizabeth Sine: [01:01:24] When you, when you first moved to the area and you were adapting to living on the Central Coast [01:01:30] and and how different it was, did you eventually come to feel at home here?

Barbara Haile: [01:01:37] Oh yes, oh yes.

Elizabeth Sine: [01:01:37] What was that process, and what were the places...?

Barbara Haile: [01:01:41] I'm staying here because it's very convenient. Every thing is convenient. I mean, you know, you can drive--well, downtown is getting a little weird--but you can drive just about and park anywhere, and there's never a long line anywhere you go. You know, I'm used to those long lines in big cities. And here [01:02:00] it's like, if you go to the DMV and there are ten people ahead of you, you think it's a bad day, you know? But so it's, it's convenient and it's safe. I feel very safe. And I love the convenience. And so I'm staying. You know, I decided to stay. I could have left after Allan died. You know, I could have gone back to Jamaica, or I could have done something else. But I decided that this was a good place to be for especially for my age you know? [01:02:30]

Elizabeth Sine: [01:02:32] What, what sorts of places around here... Are there particular places where you find a sense or feel at home, or find a sense of belonging or community? Like, what have those places been or how have they changed over time?

Barbara Haile: [01:02:51] I've been to places where, well, my late husband was very charming and everybody liked him. And so wherever he went, [01:03:00] he was popular. And for example, he used to hang out at Cafe Roma. So every Friday the brothers, the Rizzos had their, their friends there every Friday for lunch. And he did that for years. And they, they just loved him. So they liked me too. But they loved him. So,

um, we did things at Cafe Roma and at other places where he went, you know, he went to [01:03:30] other, um, sports bars. Not sports bars, just bars after work, bars. And we met people there. And so we had some some socializing there. Um, the Rizzos at Cafe Roma liked him so much that they invited us to their home in Italy. So we stayed with them for about a week in northern Italy. That's how, that's how much they loved Allan. But, and they thought I was okay, but, you know. Anyway, [01:04:00] um, so that's the socializing I used to do when he was alive. But since then, it's mostly my lunch bunch and book club. That's pretty much what I do now. I don't go out much because I don't want to drive at night. And a lot of the things to go to are at night. If I was in a church, I would have things to do because churches will use your whatever, you know, help to do [01:04:30] this and that. But I don't belong to a church, so I don't have that, and I don't play any board games.

Barbara Haile: [01:04:36] I have friends here who play bridge and and bunco or whatever. They have all kinds of things they play, and I don't do them. And I'm, I'm not trying to learn. I want to learn mahjong, but I just haven't gotten around to it. But I'm, you know, I should learn mahjong so I can get out because it's a daytime thing with other people. So I [01:05:00] might do that, but I don't do much else as far as socializing goes. You know, when Courtney has her little events, I'm there. And I'm usually the one who starts the dancing. And if nobody wants to dance, I dance by myself, because I love to dance. And when she has that good music, you know, I say, "Why isn't everybody dancing?" We don't dance enough. What, what's going on with America? We don't dance. It's very American [01:05:30] not to have dancing at parties. And that's something I miss. I love dancing parties. And when I was in San Francisco, we had a number, of a number of Jamaicans living around there that had parties. So we went to a lot of those parties. It was really good. So that's something I miss about uh, Caribbean culture, and American culture. Caribbean culture, you dance. You [01:06:00] don't have a party unless you're dance. You know? Anyway. And one of, one of the Caribbeans who usually came to the parties was, um, what's her name's father, our Vice President, what's her name?

Elizabeth Sine: [01:06:16] Oh, Kamala Harris?

Barbara Haile: [01:06:17] Kamala Harris's father.² He was... He's Jamaican, and he used to come to the Jamaican parties in San Francisco. He lived down the coast a bit in Palo Alto, but he came to San Francisco parties. [01:06:30] So that's where I met him. But he's, he's Jamaican. Yeah. And she doesn't talk about him much. She talks about her Indian mother, but she doesn't talk about her Jamaican father. Yeah, whatever. You know. And the woman, the judge who is giving... I don't know if I should... There's a judge who is well known now in D.C.. Her name is Tanya Chutkan, and she has been [01:07:00] very active with some of the more famous trials that are happening now, and especially our ex-President. She's the one who's been giving him nightmares. She's Jamaican. I went to school with her mother and her aunt. Her aunt was a friend of mine. Her mother was a year behind me. Her aunt was a year ahead of me, but I was friendly with her aunt and her whole family down there. And, you [01:07:30] know, that's two Jamaicans I know, one, the Vice President's father, and this judge, who was giving what's-his-name a rough time. So, you know, Jamaicans, I told you, they go everywhere and they do everything. You know, they don't think there's anything they can't do. You know, we have the bobsled.

Barbara Haile: [01:07:49] We have our ice hockey Jamaican team in Canada. Now a lot of them are Canadian, Jamaican. Have been there, you know. Their parents went there. But, ice [01:08:00] hockey, bobsled. I mean, you know, Iditarod. There's something about the culture there that makes people think they can do anything.

Preston Allen: [01:08:10] Right.

Barbara Haile: [01:08:11] I don't know what it is. And I can't put a, I can't put a finger on it. But there's something about the culture. I think it's growing up where you're...the people you look up to are not necessarily white. Some of them are. But our radio, TV, you know, anchors that we admire [01:08:30], or our politicians, they're all Black or almost Black or whatever they call them down there. So you grow up in that atmosphere where you don't think there's anything wrong with being Black, and then you come to America and all of a sudden you have to be either Black or white. You come from some

² From Barbara Haile via email 02/19/24: "I neglected to mention that Don Harris, Kamala's Jamaican father, was Professor of Economics at Stanford University. He's now retired and lives in Washington DC. There was a rift in the family following her parents' divorce when Kamala was very young but he was still involved in guiding her educational development. Just thought I should throw that in after talking about him with respect to great Jamaican parties in the Bay Area."

of these other countries, you're Jamaican or your Singaporean or your whatever the country is from, [01:09:00] that's what you are. And then you come here and you have to decide whether you're Black or white. You don't have to decide, it's decided for you. But anyway, so that's a that's a big difference growing up in that culture rather than growing up here.

Barbara Haile: [01:09:17] And my, my best friend, my oldest, bestest friend is a Black American woman. And she's dark skinned, she's dark brown skinned. And when I talk about the life I lived and, you know, getting jobs in New [01:09:30] York, she didn't say that, but I know she she figured that she wouldn't apply for that job because she just thought she wouldn't get it. She wouldn't do it. And that's the difference in growing up thinking you're, you're on top and you're okay. And then coming here and being told that you're not okay. And I hear immigrants who come here say, "I didn't know I was Black until I came to America." A lot of immigrants say that because they're from a country and they consider themselves [01:10:00] that ethnicity, whatever the country is. So, you know, America has a real problem with this Black and white and with all the mixed marriages and the mixed kids. Now something has to change. It can't be just Black and white anymore. Something has to change. Because all these mixed kids now are growing up in, in America, and they're going to be a lot of them. So, you know, something has to change. You can't be just Negro or white [01:10:30] as my my Scottish friend said, "Barbara, you're not Negro."

Preston Allen: [01:10:36] "You're Jamaican."

Elizabeth Sine: [01:10:37] And um, just to trace one of the threads that we didn't get to either, your you mentioned your husband grew up in Pennsylvania?

Barbara Haile: [01:10:48] Yes.

Elizabeth Sine: [01:10:48] Is that right? And then you met in the Bay area?

Barbara Haile: [01:10:50] We met in San Francisco? Yes.

Elizabeth Sine: [01:10:52] Okay.

Barbara Haile: [01:10:52] Yeah, we met on a boat ride. A boat party in San Francisco. He was running for the BART. BART was the [01:11:00] new transportation thing in, in the Bay area. He was running for BART Board, so he was on this boat party because, he wasn't campaigning, but he wanted to meet people because he was new. He was brand new in, in the Bay area. He, he lived in Malibu for a long time and moved up to here. He had a boat. He moved his boat up here to Berkeley. And so I was at the party [01:11:30] with my friend. My friend I just told you about my good friend, and he was at the party. And that's how we met. And there was a young lady there who had worked with, with both of us somehow. And she introduced me. So that's how we met. Yeah. And he was handsome and charming and had this beautiful smile. And I was looking at my best, you know, and so and so it was, um, a mutual [01:12:00] something. But anyway.

Preston Allen: [01:12:02] Did your family experience any challenges here in San Luis Obispo area?

Barbara Haile: [01:12:07] Not that I know of, you know. Courtney went to school at SLO High, and she...her friends...they were all white friends, because she was probably the only Black kid in her graduation class. I remember when I went to SLO high, when she first started, and I saw these blondes, I thought, "This is California?"

Preston Allen: [01:12:29] Yeah,

Barbara Haile: [01:12:30] There [01:12:30] were all these blonde kids, and I thought, "This is California. We're supposed to be, you know, mixed or something. There's something... Why is this so different? All these blondes..." But, you know, she she did well at at SLO High and her friends were all white. It just happens that, you know, she was she was sitting in the hallway she said when she first went, at lunchtime... I don't know if she was eating lunch or whatever...and Michelle [01:13:00] Arata came. Michelle was very popular and had a little group of friends. And Michelle came and said, "You're not going to sit here forever. You're going to come out here. Come on, let's go." And she dragged her out and introduced her to her little gang, and she became a part of the gang and she had a good time. I don't know how much studying she did, but she had a good time. Yes. So she was an athlete too. [01:13:30] So she, she, um, the the

board at...not the billboard, but the board at the stadium had her name there for a long time with the, um, her 100 or 200 [meter dash]. I forgot words...

Barbara Haile: [01:13:48] I don't remember words anymore. But anyway, it was up there for a long time. After some years, some other kid broke it. So she was popular as an athlete. And then she did what [01:14:00] they called, they used to call, um, mock... What is it called? Where where they, the schools compete, um, lip syncing and pretending to play music, to the music of some very popular group. It was called something. I don't remember what it's called, but anyway, all the high schools competed, and she did Tina Turner and [01:14:30] she did... She got her friends to come to to practice. They had a video of Tina Turner doing, um, "Proud Mary," and she had her friends come and they all practiced the dance moves that Tina Turner did, you know, and, and of course, Courtney was Tina Turner was a big wig and her fringe dress and everything. She did a fabulous job. I mean, she was, she had the microphone down on the floor, you know, she did all the Tina Turner stuff and, and she won that year. [01:15:00] It was outstanding. There's an old tape of it somewhere. I don't know where it is, but it was really good. So anyway, she was very popular in high school, so and then she went off to, to the University of Maryland and I chose that. I thought it was a good it was a good school for her because she grew up in San Francisco, being pretty much half, most of the time, the one Black kid in school, in class. And she went to a convent [01:15:30] high school there before she came here, and she was like, you know, one of the few Black kids in there.

Barbara Haile: [01:15:37] So I looked up Maryland and there they have a lot of Black students. So I thought that would be a good place for her. She went. She didn't like it at all. Two years there. She did not like it. Um, but she was... She wasn't doing well in in track because this was college track. [01:16:00] You see, high school here was a whole different thing. Track there, she couldn't, she couldn't do anything. She couldn't keep up with the Black kids who had who were track stars at Maryland. So she was kind of stuck in the, the track thing, whatever. She didn't like it. So, so she, she tried out for USC and she got into USC. And so she spent the junior and senior year at USC. And then she [01:16:30] went back to San Francisco. After she left USC, she went back to San Francisco and she did a graduate program with the San Francisco State. And then I don't remember what made her leave San Francisco, but she came back here and

decided to stay. And Jonathan went off to college, too, in the East Coast. He was at Rutgers and he came back here and decided to stay. So I was lucky.

Preston Allen: [01:16:58] Yeah, yeah,

Barbara Haile: [01:16:59] I'm [01:17:00] lucky that I have two, two kids and they're here.

Barbara Haile: [01:17:02] I have four steps and they're in San Francisco and Los Angeles and now in Georgia. But they were all here for Thanksgiving except the Georgia group, because that's too much. Anyway, so I'm lucky I have these two here, so I like living here. One of the reasons is that my two kids are here. And the other that it's very welcoming and people are very, very nice and [01:17:30] I feel safe and it's very convenient. And so I like living here and I'll probably live here till I pass because I can't see moving again. I just moved a year ago and this was a huge operation, so no more moving. I like this place. I feel very safe here because it's not a public street.

Preston Allen: [01:17:53] Yeah,

Barbara Haile: [01:17:53] There's nobody just wandering off the street, you know? So I feel very safe. And I like [01:18:00] it, you know, it's nice. And I would like to have more reggae and and other kinds of music, you know, because back in New York, you know, in Brooklyn, there's that music pounding out of every little store you go by, every little restaurant you go by, you know. Oh, it's fabulous. Lots of sound. And in Jamaica it's that way, too. When I was in Jamaica, too, there'd be music on any [01:18:30] little shop. Little shop someplace. Somebody's selling something that have a record player or something, and there'd be music playing. It was very important to have music and food, music and food together especially.

Preston Allen: [01:18:46] Right. So you've had just an amazing life, really, and all your different journeys and travels and twists and turns. What would you want future generations to know about your life? [01:19:00]

Barbara Haile: [01:19:00] Oh my goodness, there's so much. I would want them mostly to know about my, my family, about how my family came to be and how where they

went and how they managed, etc. etc. I think that would be it about my life. I had a very interesting life, so, you know, but [01:19:30] um... My life was interesting, but some of my, my mother's and my, my aunts lives were even more interesting than mine. My grandmother's life was much more interesting than mine, much more. She had a lot of guts, and she did a lot of stuff. And she she was it was a lot of... So it would be mostly my, my family heritage. Um, for me, I don't know, you'd have to ask Courtney and [01:20:00] Jonathan.

Preston Allen: [01:20:00] Okay.

Barbara Haile: [01:20:01] You know, when I first came here and I didn't have a job, I thought of jobs. So I went to American Eagle because at TWA, I supervised flight attendants, and I would go on flights and figure out what could have been done better. So I went to American Eagle and told them about this job that I had. They didn't have it here. So they said, okay, we'll, you know, we we won't pay you. You have free flights and that's it. They may have given me, [01:20:30] I don't remember what it was now, but anyway, I don't remember the name of the man who ran it at the time, American Eagle. But I did it. I was on planes with flight attendants for a while, and then after a while they figured they'd heard enough. You know, it wasn't just the flight attendants, I would also supervise, or at least...not supervise...I would see how the, the terminals, the people at the terminals were doing, too. So I made that job, and then KVEC [01:21:00] radio was on at the time, and I did a lot of elocution in high school. I won awards in elocution and whatnot, lots of Shakespeare and and Keats and Shelley and you name it, Byron. They're all in there. And I still remember a lot of those things. Isn't that interesting? I don't remember what I did last week, but I still remember a lot of the poems that I had to, when I. So anyway, I went to KVEC and they had a morning [01:21:30] show. There was a woman there who did the news in the morning, and I don't remember her name. She left a long time ago. And so she said, "Okay, we'll hire you." So I would get in early in the morning and I would call different agencies, the police and transportation and whatnot and get the latest, and then I'd type it up for her and give it to her so she could use it. So I did that for a while, and then one day she couldn't come in. So she [01:22:00] said, "You're on it." Now this is not easy. This is, this is before computers. And you know, so I'm at the board and I have to control the sound, etc.. And the cartridges for the commercials are here, and I have to remember which cartridge to pull

to put in there for the commercials. And I had to know what time it was at all times. And I had to... I mean, it was a big deal.

Barbara Haile: [01:22:28] I managed to do it. [01:22:30] I managed that morning, but it was not easy. And Dave Congleton was there at the time. Yeah, but this was morning, so he comes in in the afternoon. But that was quite a challenge. I mean that was it. Nowadays with I don't know if it's any easier with computers, but back then everything was manual, you know, these cartridges of commercials and I had to grab the right one at the right time, put it in while I'm doing the news. [01:23:00] And I mean, it was amazing. But anyway, so I made two jobs when I came here because I wanted to work and I didn't know what to do, you know? And then I was hired. This is my most important job. I was hired by Walter Capps. Anybody remember Walter Capps?

Preston Allen: [01:22:28] Yes. Yes,

Barbara Haile: [01:23:21] To work in his district office in, in SLO. And so I started there with two other women. [01:23:30] We started. And then Walter died ten months into his first term, and his wife ran for the office, and we stayed in the office until she was elected. And then she asked us to stay. So I worked for her for 14 years.

Preston Allen: [01:23:46] Wow. Yeah.

Barbara Haile: [01:23:47] I started in '79, I mean, '97, and I think I retired in '74 or somewhere like that. But I worked for her for 14 years and that was my, my, I think that was my [01:24:00] most enjoyable job because I was doing things for people.

Preston Allen: [01:24:03] Yeah, yeah.

Barbara Haile: [01:24:04] And that was really good. Yeah, yeah. I mean compared to advertising, please. I mean, this was a real good job. And I enjoyed it. Yeah. Until I retired.

Preston Allen: [01:24:17] It was a lot of familiar names. I think the Capps in general, that because we had just come here then.

Barbara Haile: [01:24:24] Walter and Lois and their daughter Laura now is on this, I think the Board of Supervisors [01:24:30] in Santa Barbara, she she's active too. Okay. And I stay in touch with Lois. We used to have lunch, a couple of us from the local office, and Lois every year. Well, we haven't done it in a couple of years. I think we all got older and was.. Didn't want to drive all the way to Santa Barbara anymore.

Preston Allen: [01:24:52] Yes, yes, yes.

Barbara Haile: [01:24:53] Anyway. But she's a lovely lady and I enjoyed that job. Now what I would want my future [01:25:00] generations... I don't think about it very much because I don't have grandchildren. Yeah, I have step-grandchildren, but they're in Georgia, you know, and so it would be it would have to be my, my family history because it's, it's very interesting.

Preston Allen: [01:25:18] Yeah. Yeah. Good.

Barbara Haile: [01:25:19] And I think that would be it. And I love living here because of the, the um well the convenience is [01:25:30] one but the people and uh, safety. But I do miss some loud music on the street every once in a while. And dancing. Yeah. I don't know where to go. I guess I could go to Madonna Inn to dance.

Preston Allen: [01:25:49] I think R.A.C.E. Matters got you on this. We'll do more parties. Let me tell Courtney, we need more parties!

Barbara Haile: [01:25:54] [Laughter.]

Barbara Haile: [01:25:57] I know.

Preston Allen: [01:25:57] We love it, every time it happens, its beautiful its really beautiful

Barbara Haile: [01:25:59] I love [01:26:00] parties, I love dancing. Yes. Yeah. I have to urge her to have more of those events.

Preston Allen: [01:26:05] Yes, yes, yes.

Barbara Haile: [01:26:06] And I think she's doing a great job, and she's doing something that was needed.

Preston Allen: [01:26:10] Yes, yes.

Barbara Haile: [01:26:11] And nobody knew what to do about it. You know, Black people would come here and leave in two years.

Preston Allen: [01:26:16] Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Barbara Haile: [01:26:16] We knew people from Cal Poly. They lasted a year or two and they were gone.

Preston Allen: [01:26:20] Yeah. This is great work.

Barbara Haile: [01:26:22] Yeah. There was a Jamaican doctor here and she lasted about a year. And she, she moved to San Diego [01:26:30] because... Well, there's a problem with... She worked for one of the famous, um, medical groups here and she was told she had to have a patient every 15 minutes. That's all you could spend on your patient, and you have to have so many in a day, and she said, "I can't work like that." So she left.

Preston Allen: [01:26:47] Yeah,

Barbara Haile: [01:26:49] But, you know, a lot of people came through Cal Poly and didn't stay because they just didn't feel right.

Preston Allen: [01:26:55] Yes.

Barbara Haile: [01:26:55] And and I understand that.

Preston Allen: [01:26:58] Yeah.

Barbara Haile: [01:26:59] And they're [01:27:00] all gone. So what Courtney is doing I think is needed.

Preston Allen: [01:27:04] Yes. We agree.

Barbara Haile: [01:27:05] To just, just to know that they're more here than you think. You know, you saw your kids saw three downtown. Well, there are quite a few more, you know.

Preston Allen: [01:27:14] Yes.

Barbara Haile: [01:27:14] You have to go find them and get them together. Yeah. So I think she's doing a really good job.

Preston Allen: [01:27:21] Yeah, yeah. So, so if you want to end, or we can continue to talk.

Elizabeth Sine: [01:27:26] One, last one just last question is, is there anything [01:27:30] that we didn't ask you that we should have? Or is there anything that we missed, that you want to make sure...

Barbara Haile: [01:27:35] No, no, I think I told you. Well, there's a lot of my story you didn't hear, but I told you the essential parts. Yes.

Elizabeth Sine: [01:27:41] Okay.

Barbara Haile: [01:27:42] Yeah.

Elizabeth Sine: [01:27:42] Wonderful. Well thank you. I'll go ahead and stop the recording.

Barbara Haile: [01:27:45] Okay.

Elizabeth Sine: [01:27:45] We can wrap up after that.