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DONALD E. LACY, JR. PERFORMING AT LAUGHS UNLIMITED ION 2014

“Uncle Donald”

PART ONE

BY PRATHER JACKSON

Editor’s note: Donald E. Lacy, Jr. is a renaissance man who grew up in the midst of the Civil Rights struggle that for many Americans, still exists today. He is a classically trained actor with mentors that included radio impresario Joe Rudolph, Dr. Angela Davis and many others. Mr. Lacy has honed his craft as an actor and comedian. He has appeared in a host of

theater ensembles, and television shows, including BET’s Comic View, and films directed by Taylor Hackford and Francis Ford Coppola. His passionate crusade to pay homage to his beloved 16 year old daughter was ultimately acknowledged in a visit to the White House where he met First Lady Hillary Clinton. This is the first of a 2-part interview.



HW: I have to say, you are a very strong individual, and it appears that your talent and your passion comes thru with your One Man Show, Color Struck, tell me about Donald Lacy.

DL: Well where do I begin? I am originally from Oakland, California. I always knew I wanted to be in show business. My sister likes to tell the story that when I was 4 years old. I directed a show in our garage for the neighborhood kids and the parents. She is still incredulous that both she and my other sister had to audition to be in the show.

I guess they thought they could just get a pass. In fact my mom used to call me Cecil B. De Mille when I was young because I was directing shows. We were charging the parents 25 cents to see the shows and eat hot dogs and snacks. Oakland, at the time, was a very nurturing environment, and like I said I had always wanted to be in show biz. But I decided to go to college because no one in my family, at that point, had ever graduated from college and I promised my mom and dad and family that I would go to college. Once there, I studied Theater and Black Studies. I ended up getting a degree in both of those subjects.



As an artist, my # 1 goal is always to be entertaining. But, at the same time, I always try to address what is going on in our world to try to make it a better place, especially considering the seriousness of our times. I have always taken pride in being an artist of consciousness.

HW: Living in the Bay Area in Oakland you had a lot of very influential individuals who lived there during the time, of your formative training. Tell me about some of your influences.

DL: Oh my God, Oakland back in the day was like the music hub. Sly and the Family Stone, Larry Graham, Tower of Power and later the tradition continued with Tony! Toni! Tone!,

Digital Underground and En Vogue. Also during that time, the Black Panther Party For Self Defense was very influential. At that time, like now, there was a problem in the City of Oakland that I talk about in my One Man Show, Color Struck. It deals with police abuse, police brutality and murder. Back in those days, the Black Panther Party had a headquarters down the street from my house. I would ride my bike there and get the free lunches. Just seeing those guys with the big afros and the "I'm Black and I'm Proud" and "Black is Beautiful" signs, gave you a



CONGRESSWOMAN BARBARA LEE, CONGRESSMAN JOHN LEWIS, ELLIHU HARRIS FORMER MAYOR OF OAKLAND BARBARA LEE AND DONALD E. LACY AT IN OAKLAND IN 2014.

HW: Tell me a little about some of the contemporary projects that you are involved with. Tell me about Color Struck. How did that begin?

DL: Color Struck is a one-man show that examines institutionalized racism in America, and the need for more diversity and inclusion. Color Struck uses comedy, drama, visuals, music and movement to tell my life experiences as a light skinned Black man growing up at the height of the black consciousness movement. When I was a kindergartner, because I was a lighter skinned Black boy, a young kid, told me I was not colored (we were called colored back then). I got into a shouting match with this kid. I remember we almost got into a fight on the playground and I ran off and told my mother somebody said I wasn't colored. I had become aware of that because almost everyone else in my family was of a darker persuasion. It was something that I was confronted with everyday. When I got to San Francisco State University, I had the privilege and honor of being educated by Dr. Angela Davis, Dr. Wade Nobles, Dr. Richard King, Dr. Raye Richardson and others. I realized that a lot of the racial issues that I had to deal with from my own people, including my skin color and hair texture, were due to institutionalized racism. I didn't realize it but the piece was brewing in my consciousness. I joined Campo Santo one of San Francisco's best theater companies, around 1999 and started writing Color Struck. A friend of mine, Sean San Jose, came to see my stand up and he said, "a lot of your jokes are about race. You should do a One Man Show." So I did Color Struck as a 30-minute show and presented it at The Intersection for the Arts. I continued to develop Color Struck as full length piece and in 2007, I premiered it at the National Black Theater Festival and the response was overwhelmingly positive. In fact, before that I had previewed it in Oakland and Congresswoman, Barbara Lee saw the show and love it. She invited me to perform Color Struck during the Congressional Black Caucus in Washington,



HILLARY CLINTON AND DONALD E. LACY AT THE WHITE HOUSE IN 1999.

real sense of pride. Oakland back then was the best black city on the planet. There was about a 10-mile stretch of predominately black-owned businesses from Downtown Oakland to the San Leandro border. There was a strong sense of community. There were other races there but everyone kind of co-existed.

But probably my biggest influence were my parents. After school we would have to do chores and homework and then they would give us a book assignment. As a matter of fact, I remember my first book was Black Boy by Richard Wright and the second book was Manchild in the Promised Land, by Claude Brown. We would get 2-3 weeks to read the book and then we would have to give a report. I was taught to always stay informed. I try to do that in my art.



LOVELIFE PEACE MARCH JANUARY 24, 1998 OVER 2000 PEOPLE ATTENDED

DC. in 2008 and 2009. I have been touring the piece since 2007, mostly on college campuses around the country. The beauty of it is that after the show I engage the audience in post-performance discussions about race and racism in America. Because of the entertaining aspect of the show people feel relaxed and comfortable enough to discuss the issues raised in the play. Which is something we don't want to do, particularly in this country. And if you look around, with what's going on in the world today, America has become more racially polarized than ever, especially since the election of Barack Obama. And part of the problem I feel is, we have not talked about race as decent intelligent human beings. No yelling, shouting and

pointing fingers, but discussing it. You know it's the big 3000 pound elephant in the room that no one wants to talk about. The real enjoyment for me comes from watching people of all ages, religions and cultures discuss race. The caveat being, how can we try as human beings, regardless of color or religious background, to move forward?

HW: I would be remiss if I did not pay homage to your daughter. And in doing so, tell me a little about how she has inspired you throughout these years.

DL: Wow thank you for that question. Well, she first inspired me on January 24, 1981. The day before, her mom and I had



LOESHE



ANTI VIOLENCE RALLY IN FRONT OF CITY HALL
AFTER OSCAR GRANT SHOOTING

just come from the doctor who said the baby was at least 3 weeks away. But later that night, at 3 in the morning, she went into labor. I had just gotten on the freeway. I delivered her in the car, while I was driving and we were still on the freeway. In fact, I was pulling on her head with one hand and holding the steering wheel with the other hand. I pulled and pulled and when she came out to her shoulders she literally dove onto the floor of the car and made a splat. At that very moment, on the radio, 'Isn't She Lovely' by Stevie Wonder began playing.

She was really a gift from God. I gave her the name LoEshe. Her name is Ibo and Nigerian and means "love life". And it isn't lost upon me that the meaning of her name and her spirit is what's

missing in the world today. She was just a wonderful young lady. She was very boisterous, she had a personality times 10 and everyone loved her. The other kids would flock around her like moths to a light. She was a conflict resolution mediator at her high school. I remember her advisers and teachers telling me she that was the only one who could navigate all of the races and bring them together whenever there was a dispute between black and white or black and brown or Pacific-Islander or whomever. That's just who she was and her name really described her. A few weeks before she was murdered, her friend, a 17 year old kid named James Valery, who also lived in the neighborhood, was killed. She was very moved and upset by his killing and said, "I want to do something." She said she wanted me to help her write a play to honor her friend and speak out against violence. I just remembered that I grabbed, kissed and hugged her and said, "I am so proud of you." And I was moved to tears. Even though she was grieving, she was still strong and passionate about doing something positive about his murder. A couple of months later she was coming home from her job at McDonald's waiting at the bus stop with her childhood friend. A young man, who they knew from the neighborhood saw them at the bus stop and gave them a ride. My daughter was sitting behind the driver. The girls didn't know that he had a beef with someone earlier that day and they were following his car. So after he stopped, around the corner from her house 4 people walked up to the car shooting at him. He ducked and some of the gunfire hit her and she died instantly.

I am still devastated and shocked. Some days are better than others but that night was the worst night of my life. I was actually at the Improv Night Club in LA when I got the 911 page on October 20, 1997 from my wife. My initial response was that I wanted revenge. I started making all types of calls and people were calling me saying that they knew who it was. I was on the phone all that night. My mentor, Joe Rudolph, who started KPOO Radio discouraged me from doing "something stupid" that I would regret. My grandmother, Mother Pearl Franklin who lived to be almost 102, was the last person I talked to into the wee hours of the morning. She assured me that "what the devil intended for evil, God would turn to good." Right at that moment, I remembered that my daughter said she wanted to do something positive. I decided, although I still had to work on forgiveness and letting go of my anger, that the best way that I could honor my daughter's memory was to carry out her wishes. The Love Life Foundation was her idea. We organized a march to the spot were she was slain, and had over 2000 people come out, including City Councilmen



CALIFORNIA-HAWAII STATE CONFERENCE NAACP



CALIFORNIA HAWAII NAACP STATE CONVENTION, OCTOBER 24, 2015 PERFORMING COLOR STRUCK .



AFTER SCHOOL PROGRAM GRADUATION AND RADIO BROADCAST.



COMMUNITY MEMBERS AT CITY HALL OCTOBER 20, 2015 17 ANNIVERSARY OF LOESHE'S MURDER ASKING OAKLAND CITY COUNCIL TO PUT THE WORDS LOVE LIFE ON ALL ENTERING OAKLAND SIGNS.



AFTER SCHOOL PROGRAM GRADUATION AND RADIO BROADCAST.

and Jerry Brown before he was elected Mayor of Oakland. Congresswoman Barbara Lee, who is such a beautiful person was also present at the march. My daughter was not involved with any criminal activity, and her murder really touched a nerve in the community. On her birthday, we marched from the spot where she was slain thru the neighborhood where the killers were from. I have since written a feature film script about this called "Love Life." Today, it seems we can just turn on the television and watch the news and see that we are just killing people for no reason like what happened in France and San Bernardino recently.

I feel no matter what I do for the rest of my life, I am going to be trumpeting her name, her spirit, Love Life. In fact, the City of Oakland is going to honor her and all victims of violence by putting the words "Love Life" on the "Entering Oakland" signs. While I lost one I've gained thousands of young people who affectionately refer to me as "Uncle Donald"

Most human beings are good. We just have to remind ourselves that life is precious.

HW: Do you have any other projects that you wish to mention?



1999 CAST OF LEGACY FOR LOESHE' A PLAY WRITTEN WITH HIGHS SCHOOL STUDENTS FORM 4 DIFFERENT OAKLAND HIGH SCHOOLS THAT I DIRECTED.

Thank you for asking that question Romeo N Juliet Gettin' Busy is a full length feature film that I have written and I will be directing. It is a hip hop musical comedy that is based on Shakespeare's classic tale but updated and takes place in Oakland. Its a fun ride with music that looks at true love of 2 teenagers who are from families who are sworn enemies. The film is Executive Produced by Lumiere Entertainment/Red Star Pony.

The Executive Producers are Chris Savino and Giovanni Jackson. Romeo N Juliet Gettin' Busy is the first of a 3 picture deal I have with Lumiere Entertainment/Red Star Pony. One of the other films will be "LoveLife", which details the roller coaster ride of my daughter's birth in a moving car and untimely death at 16 years of age. And the journey I go on after her death which lead me to the White House. It's really remarkable how Chris Savino and I have reconnected to do these film projects, Chris represented Oakland Comedian/Actor Mark Curry when I did a guest starring role on Hangin' Wit Mr. Cooper in 1997. Now here we are years later and Chris is packaging and financing films that I have written and will be directing. Chris is a very smart guy with tons of experience and he and I hit it off immediately when we got back together at the end of 2013. Chris read my scripts and committed right away to making the films happen. Its a great relationship that I feel blessed to be a part of.



ON THE SET OF SHORT FILM I WROTE AND DIRECTED CALLED RECYCLE WOMAN IN 2011 WITH DP SVEN WEIDERHOLDT.



RADIO TRAINING PROGRAM WITH INMATES FROM SAN FRANCISCO COUNTY JAIL IN 2014.