



# BENNIE LOIS CLARK-SINGLETON

“When I grew up in Richmond we could walk down the streets without fear. There was nothing to be afraid of except your parents getting you if you did something wrong. In the early days there was lots of undeveloped land. Many of the new arrivals were from the south, so Richmond was really a country town.

The first week my family arrived in Richmond, we all slept in the same room. There was no place to live because there were so many new people. Somehow my father acquired a trailer in North Richmond and we lived there until we moved to the Harbor Gate housing project. Harbor Gate was built during the war where Marina Bay is now. Once the war was over, the Housing Authority tore the projects down and people had to find places to live again. Some moved to surrounding areas, some moved back to the south, but many remained in Richmond.

After I married my husband, I wanted to purchase a house in Richmond but ran into problems. White-only covenants restricted us to certain areas. Where were black people to live? We could live in South Richmond or North Richmond, and then they built Parchester Village for us. Primarily we could live in the areas where we lived when we were in the projects, and the white people had everything else.

I said, ‘Let me get out of this prejudiced town,’ and my husband, my children, and I moved to Los Angeles. I found Los Angeles to be worse than Richmond in its segregation, but we stayed there almost 10 years. Then we moved back to Richmond.

When we came back, things had really changed. I noticed people not working, kids not in school and standing on corners. There were lots of one-



parent families. The morals had changed and I don't know why. Even the churches changed, with fewer people attending them.

The Richmond that we have today is so different from when I was a girl. Today people appear to be afraid of each other and don't speak to each other as they pass on the streets. People are afraid to walk down the streets and sometimes afraid to drive down certain streets. It is as though the family has just disappeared. In the old family, if I was seen doing something wrong, anyone knowing me could tell my parents. I would suffer the consequences of my actions. Now people just don't want to get involved.

Things are starting to change. I remember during the sixties when the youth took over this country and President Kennedy was elected. It seems that as we become adults we forget how we are supposed to treat each other. Then the youth come along and say, ‘Hey, that is not right.’ I like that; I really like that. Now the youth are at it again. I felt this movement with President Kennedy and I now feel it with Obama today.”