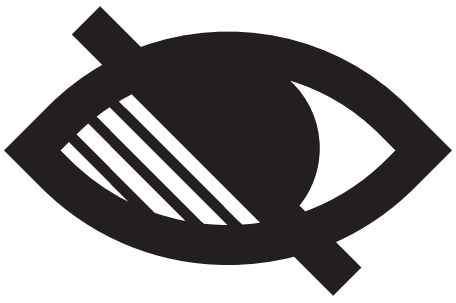
National Public Housing Museum

History Lessons
Everyday Objects from Public Housing



Large Print Guide

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Sequencing

All labels sequenced clockwise by case from the entrance of room

Intro Case

History Lessons:
Everyday Objects From Public Housing

Look closely and learn about stories of home, filled with joy, hope, heartbreaks, and dreams deferred. The objects and labels brought together in this exhibit span the entire history of public housing in the United States.

"What is an object that tells a story of home in public housing?"

The National Public Housing Museum leads workshops with public housing residents and their families around the country each year to answer this question. Some of these objects are shown in this gallery and are rotated regularly.

Special thanks to the writers and organizers who make this project possible.

Lecciones De Historia:
Objetos Cotidianos De Las Viviendas Sociales

Observa con atención y descubre historias sobre el hogar, llenas de alegría, esperanza, desengaños y sueños aplazados. Los objetos y las etiquetas que se reúnen en esta exposición abarcan toda la historia de la vivienda pública en Estados Unidos.

"¿Qué objeto cuenta una historia sobre el hogar en la vivienda pública?"

El National Public Housing Museum organiza cada año talleres con residentes de viviendas públicas y sus familias en todo el país para responder a esta pregunta. Algunos de estos objetos se muestran en esta galería y se van rotando periódicamente.

Un agradecimiento especial a los escritores y organizadores que hacen posible este proyecto.

This wallpaper fragment was recovered from the Jane Addams Homes. It is colorful evidence of some of the lives that once inhabited this building

El fragmento de papel tapiz fue recuperado de los Jane Addams Homes. Son una colorida muestra de las vidas que transcurrieron alguna vez en este edificio.

History Lesson

By Natasha Trethewey

I am four in this photograph, standing
on a wide strip of Mississippi beach,
my hands on the flowered hips

of a bright bikini. My toes dig in,
curl around wet sand. The sun cuts
the rippling Gulf in flashes with each

tidal rush. Minnows dart at my feet
glinting like switchblades. I am alone
except for my grandmother, other side

of the camera, telling me how to pose.
It is 1970, two years after they opened
the rest of this beach to us,

forty years since the photograph
where she stood on a narrow plot
of sand marked colored, smiling,

her hands on the flowered hips
of a cotton meal-sack dress.

Natasha Trethewey, "History Lesson" from Domestic Work. Copyright © 1998, 2000 by Natasha Trethewey. Used with the permission of The Permissions Company, LLC on behalf of Graywolf Press, Minneapolis, Minnesota, graywolfpress.org.

I keep things in the back of my closet too — things I don't want to ever leave behind

Julia deBettencourt

I've opened your closet dozens of times. No one has
asked me to open it for a long time, and the door sticks.
I pull out an old vacuum cleaner, a shoeshine kit, and
countless pressed handkerchiefs.

At the top right, near the back, sits a box with your
writing on it.

I know this dress by heart.
Its double-stitched seams, its fingerless gloves,
its eyelet fabric.
Your mother Sonia hand-stitched it in your
family's apartment.
I know because you told me.

I know your story by heart.
You and Bernie met as two kids from the neighborhood
when everything seemed possible.
You studied genetics at the University of Chicago in the
1940s on a full scholarship, typed tax returns after
all the kids were in bed, traveled to Brazil, Mexico, China,
New Zealand, attended a party with the Prince of
Wales and talked about architecture.
I know how you wished you could have stayed with me
a little while longer.

I know you by heart.
How you loved words, a good piece of dark chocolate.
Your stubbornness and generosity,
that you hummed the melodies under your breath during concerts,
the power of your expertly raised eyebrow.
I know because you passed them on to me.

I keep things in the back of my closet too —
things I don't want to ever leave behind.

I tuck your dress next to my baby blanket that you mended dozens of times, the ticket stubs from the plays we saw together in London, and the silk scarves that still smell faintly like your house.

Annette Risberg

Jane Addams Homes, Chicago, IL, 1937 – 1947

Annette passed away in 2022.

But his mind was always on the Dance, the I'n Lo'n Schka

Susan Shannon

We are Osage, my father and I
We both went into our tribe's Elder Housing in the same month
Same year
At 90-years-old his mind had begun to wander just a little bit
But his mind was always on the Dance, the I'n Lo'n Schka,
Thus his mind was on his dance clothes, his Osage clothes
He was carrying around his otterhide in a paper bag to be mended
His mind was fixated on that so quietly, I stole it away
Out of sight and thus out of his mind
As I hung it in my closet I admired the beauty of it
The beadwork medallions made by his aunts
The ribbonwork siding also made by his aunts
The love they felt for him was so apparent in the details of their work
All these things I remember
All these things I feel
Now it's just me here and his otterhide
Village – this is not just "Housing"
It's the new continuation of our Tribal lives
Community by blood is strong indeed.

Susan Shannon

Deer Clan (Dah)

Osage Senior Housing, Pawhuska, OK, 2024-present

Center Case

...the flood of memories is just incredible

Justice Sonia Sotomayor

This is the community I grew up in, and the flood of memories is just incredible. I was 3 years old when I moved here. The Bronxdale Houses sprawled over three large city blocks: twenty-eight buildings, each seven stories tall with eight apartments to a floor. My mother saw the projects as a safer, cleaner, brighter alternative to the decaying tenement where we had lived. My grandmother Abuelita, however, saw this move as a venture into far and alien territory, el jurutungo viejo for all practical purposes. My mother should never had made us move, she said, because in the old neighborhood there was life on the streets and family nearby; in the projects we were isolated. In the long run, the whole family would follow us, and the Bronxdale Houses would borrow a little of the old neighborhood's warmth, but when my mother insisted on making the move, we were pioneers.

Through reading, I escaped the bad parts of my life in the South Bronx. I would run to the library whenever I could and needed a place to hide, and through books, I got to travel the world and the universe. It, to me, was a passport out of my childhood, and it remains a way, through the power of words, to change the world. If you can move people through words to do things they might not otherwise be inclined to do, to deliver passion that they might not otherwise have, to get them to step up and want to do more, all of that, I believe, is motivated by the power of words.

U.S. Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor

Bronxdale Houses (renamed the Sotomayor Houses in her honor), Bronx, NY, 1957–1972

Our cord was so long that we could take the phone from room to room.

Marie Stephen

I moved into the Amsterdam Housing in January of 1969 with my son and newborn daughter. At that time, there were many pay telephones around. However, due to income, not many people could afford to have their own telephones in their apartments.

My husband made sure we were able to have our own telephone. It was a mustard yellow rotary wall telephone. Our telephone was from Western Bell. It was a simple necessity, because we had two small children in our apartment. We hung our telephone on the wall between the living room, the dining room, and the kitchen. Our cord was so long that we could take the phone from room to room. No matter how hard it was economically, we managed to keep our telephone. We also kept the same telephone number for all these years. As you can see, this telephone was very important to my family. Everyone that I know from back then to now still knows my telephone number by heart.

Being in housing has taught me a valuable lesson. That is, I must appreciate the small things and the people who live in housing make it a community! There is nothing wrong with living in housing. You must learn to make the best of it!

Marie Stephen

Amsterdam Houses, New York City, NY, 1982 – present

This is the story of my dog Sugar, and how she saved my life

Jerry “Arkansas” Charles Birch

When this happened, I can’t explain it. But it’s real. This is the story of my dog, Sugar, and how she saved my life.

I got Sugar from a friend when she was two months old. She was so small, I could hold her in my hand. My friend Linda went home to her family to visit and I was left with a puppy to take care of and housebreak. Being from Arkansas, I knew how to do that. I talked to Linda every day about cleaning up behind Sugar. I was getting tired of doing it. The dog had to go.

I remember turning on the gas stove in Cuney Homes to cook some hot dogs, went back into the living room, and fell asleep. I was training Sugar to let me know when she had to go outside. I was giving this dog away if she messed in this apartment again. I can remember Sugar barking at me to take her outside. The dog bit my leg, which was hanging off the couch. Once I got my thoughts together, I was in my apartment, which was full of gas.

The smell was loud. The smell was unbearable. My head was spinning from the fumes. The stove didn’t light. This small dog named Sugar woke me up and saved my life. I will tell this to anyone. Sugar saved my life, and she knows she did.

They say dogs can see spirits. The Cuney Homes used to be an army base and probably just about everybody over here can tell you about things they've seen and heard. Late at night, she'll be in the corner staring at the ceiling. Cold air passes me every time I watch her, and she always looks right at me when this happens. I can't explain it, but it's real. We have a different bond. Me and my dog are so close, it's unreal.

Jerry "Arkansas" Charles Birch

Cuney Homes, Houston, TX, 2019 – present

I make it how my grandmother did...

Varita Bean

When I was very young, my grandmother taught me how to cook, clean, wash clothes, shop, run a house, and babysit. All of these things helped me become a well-rounded person.

When I came to Cuney Homes, the things I was taught helped me be a good friend and neighbor. I have cooked meals to share with my neighbors and the children around me. My grandmother cooked cornbread in a small, cast iron skillet, which was passed on to me. Now I use that same skillet—and my grandmother's recipe—to make cornbread and share it with my Cuney Homes friends and family. I make it how my grandmother did, stirring bacon grease and bacon into the batter, and baking it until the bread is crunchy.

Varita Bean

Cuney Homes, Houston, TX, 2007 – present

The winters were brutally cold in Colorado
Todd Byers

My grandma was from Grayhorse on the Osage Nation reservation. She married my grandpa who was from Wakita, OK, and they moved to Wichita, KS, for work. My mother was born there. When she was in first grade, her teacher had a very big heart. She and her husband gifted mom this sarape blanket nearly 70 years ago.

My dad was raised in Wichita and joined the army as soon as he was of age. A friend in the Army invited him to come visit his family on a farm in Troy, KS. That's where he met my mom. They married in 1946. My five brothers and I had good parents, but we didn't have a lot of money. Looking for better work, my dad moved us to Colorado. The winters were brutally cold in Colorado. I have so many childhood memories of huddling under the blanket to stay warm. After my dad died, the blanket came to symbolize him. My mom later gave the blanket to me, which meant the world to me. Now that my mother is gone, the blanket has come to symbolize both of my parents.

Two of my brothers and I have closed the family circle and returned home to the Osage Nation where I live in Senior Housing. I don't use the blanket anymore. I keep it in a safe place now. But every once in a while, I pull the blanket out. I can still feel the warmth of my parents' love in the blanket.

Todd Byers

Gentle Sky Clan (Tsisho Wash Da Keh)

Osage Senior Housing, Pawhuska, OK, 2022-2025

....I think about what she must have seen.
Liz Thompson

Now, I think about how she saw the world—how she was able to make so much from so little. I never felt poor... never, ever. As I became an adult, I realized that love was absolutely all it took to make me feel like I was enough. And it was because of the environment that she created for us. And let me tell you, she was the Master of Love.

So, when I think about her glasses, I think about what she must have seen. I think about all the things she had to deal with, while still being able to see what her kids needed most: a house full of love.

I think about my five siblings and what incredible human beings they are— I'm not talking about average incredible. I'm talking about incredible. And it all goes back to her and my dad. And while alcoholism robbed me of knowing the dad that my brothers and sisters knew, I sure knew the mom that they knew.

She was born 1924 and raised in Chicago on Warren Boulevard. She was an only child raised by her mom and dad, Ethel and George. Her mom worked outside the home and was very, very feisty. Her grandma was her primary caregiver. Gaga. Although she saw me born, I don't have memories of Gaga, but I'm told she was also very feisty. Her dad was gone most of the time, trying to provide a good life for his family. He was a love bucket, and my mom most

likely got her superpower from him. But she got different pieces of herself from many different places.

One particular story of her makes me smile. When I was pregnant with our second child, I remember sharing a deep concern with her. "Mom, I'm scared because there is no way I can love the child in my belly as much as I love my son that I have right now. I am terrified, Mom, that I can't split my love." She looked at me, smiled, and said, "Oh no, no, no, sugar, don't worry about that. That's not what happens. You'll just grow a whole new heart." And when she said that, my entire being exhaled. Her simple, yet profound, explanation of what actually happens was EXACTLY what I needed to hear in that moment.

Because remember: I'm the youngest of six. And I tell you that's how she loved us— each ONE of us felt like she loved us special. She made us feel like she had a whole heart for every one of us.

A unique heart. And we were each special and enough… in her eyes.

Virginia Hortense Smith Watson, Cabrini-Green, Chicago, IL, 1952 – 1998

Liz Thompson, Cabrini-Green, Chicago, IL, 1963 – 1986

Virginia passed away in 1998

Bobbie Townsend

Lake Park Place, 4048 South Lake Park Avenue, Chicago, IL, 1978 – present

This picture is going to be famous

Bobbie Townsend

I first met Barack Obama when he taught a 12-week class about community organizing at the Centers for New Horizons. This photo was taken in 2007 at the Monumental Baptist Church, 729 E. Oakwood Boulevard. At that time I didn't have a camera phone. When I saw Barack, I went to my car, and got my throwaway camera. I heard that Oprah wanted him to run for president. I raised my hand at the question-and-answer and asked, "Are you going to run for president?" He dissed me and said, "Next question." He wouldn't answer. I took the camera to Walgreens and had the photo enlarged. My girlfriend saw it and said, "Give me that picture. This picture is going to be famous." So she went to Walgreens and had it enlarged. Later, we were crying when they were at the lakefront. I didn't go down there because of the crowds.

This picture means a lot to me. I would say I made about 100 prints and gave them away to my friends and people I met. He looks so young with black hair. Barack had the sort of personality that made you feel comfortable and important.

A unique heart. And we were each special and enough... in her eyes.

Far Case

I thought we did a beautiful job

Eugene J. Clark

In 1960–61, I was one of the guys who delivered brick to build the Stateway Gardens housing project. I was called a brick cartage helper. I worked with the truck driver. Brick used to come loose in a boxcar. We had to band the brick in bundles, put them on the truck, and deliver them to the job site. The driver and I got a reputation. We could strap and band and bundle and deliver 25,000 bricks a day to all the buildings. We did that for a year and a half until they got the Stateway Gardens built. Now it's gone.

I thought we did a beautiful job. In fact, I thought all those projects were well built.

I became a brick and stone mason in 1967. Before 1966, if you were black you could work for the union if you had a union card, but you could not get an apprenticeship in Chicago and receive training. You had to go down south and come back with a union card in your hand and then transfer to the Chicago union. It took me seven years to actually become a brick mason. I wanted to be a brick mason because it paid more money than any other job involving bricks: cartage, pushing the wheelbarrow, digging holes, and labor. I started learning bricklaying because I wanted to learn how to build a house. Naturally, I didn't know that laying bricks was such a small part of it.

I worked up until 2002. And, of course, that wasn't the end of it. You are always picking up work and messing around. As a matter of fact, I didn't really stop working until about a year ago.

That's when I really started hurting. Those bricks seemed to be getting heavier.

Eugene Clark

Ida B. Wells Homes, Chicago, IL, 1946 – 1948

Dearborn Homes, Chicago, IL, 1949 – 1956

4030 South Park Avenue, Chicago, IL, 1995 – present

She helps me stay grounded. She is my true north.

Dana Bear

My mother, Angela Tallchief, passed away unexpectedly on November 1, 1997. I was sixteen, and this cutout is one of the few tangible memories I have. Throughout the years, this piece has graced my living spaces, from the time I became a young mother living in income-based housing to moving my children to tribal housing to be closer to home, as she watched over me.

She often sits on my desk as I write essays to complete college courses or while I work to help friends form non-profits and oversee grants, or on my work table, where I create beautiful jewelry and gallery pieces. The presence of Angela's image serves as a reminder of what home means. She helps me stay grounded. She is my true north. She brings endless inspiration to my creative process. Her legacy of beauty and grace continues to inform my designs. She watched over me when I beaded toe shoes to be gifted to Misty Copeland and when I made collections of long earrings with porcupine quills and beads in the style she often wore in her youth.

Angela Tallchief was honored as Head Lady Dancer and Tulsa Powwow Princess by the Tulsa Indian Club in 1973. Her aunt, Maria Tallchief, crowned her for the occasion, while both of Angela's parents, my grandparents, beamed with pride.

This cutout image of Angela serves as an enduring reminder of the love held for a first daughter. Her father was so proud of her title that he arranged several photography sessions to honor his only daughter. This cutout was created as a gift for family and friends in celebration of the occasion. Growing up, it always rested on a mantle or shelf in our living room.

Today, it serves as a reminder of my first home: Angela.

Dana Bear

Buffalo Bull Face Clan (Tsedoka Intseh)

Delaware Tribal Housing, Bartlesville, OK, 2018-2025

I can remember their apartment always smelled like bananas — one of my favorite smells to this day

Daniel Anderson

I was born and raised in Manhattanville Housing Projects. My family was one of the first in our building. We lived on the 9th floor. Back then, the projects were a step up from the tenements. The new buildings were filled with working families trying to make ends meet. It was a weekly thing to get together with our 9th floor neighbors for food and music, and the adults had a drink or two or three. Fun times to be had watching the grownups interact and get a little loud—what else were weekends for?

Two of the neighbors I got to know best were Mr.Ernest and his wife, Ms. Ella. My godparents. They looked out for me in the afternoon, so Momma could get some rest for her night shift job. I can remember their apartment always smelled like bananas—one of my favorite smells to this day.

In 1969 my godfather, Mr. Ernest, gifted me a pair of my baby shoes.The shoes were already mine, but my godfather transformed them. He painted them bronze, put my name on them, and mounted them on wooden bookends. I don't recall ever getting a gift so beautiful in my then long seven years of life. The day he brought them over, I watched my siblings' jealous looks with glee as Momma placed the shoes on our fake fireplace where they stayed, on display, admired by many. A symbol of the love often shown to me in the Projects.

Daniel Anderson

Manhattanville Houses, New York City, NY, 1962 – 1989

Oh, one of these days I'm gonna get that mixer!

David Butler

That's how I'd always know when the holidays was on. My mom and my grandmother — they would get up at 3 o'clock in the morning and the first noise you'd hear was the clicking and clacking of the rolling pin and the hand mixer.

My grandma was always cooking for us. We were a big family, and my grandma didn't go a year without baking each one of us a birthday cake. She stayed in the kitchen. Making shrimp chop suey, meat loaf, and collard greens with turnip greens.

My grandmother moved to the First Ward when her baby daughter passed on. She had to take care of ten grandkids. My grandmother had the biggest garden in the First Ward. She had kale, which lots of people just now talking about what kale is. We've been knowing what kale is since way back yonder.

Now, the way my mom and grandmother cooked — they never used measuring cups. They measured with humming. They would hum an old tune. Different little songs, and we'd be in there humming with them. I do that now myself.

The first thing I learned to cook with my grandmother was mashed potatoes. Once she baked potatoes and they cooled, I was the one in the high chair, peeling the skins. My oldest brother, he had the mixer. And I was thinking,

Oh, one of these days I'm gonna get that mixer!

My grandmother did most of the cooking, because my mom worked. When she'd come home, she was the lesson woman when I got homework. When my mom passed, I gave up everything except a few things. And the mixer and the rolling pin were some of those few. My mom got sick and I couldn't take care of her rent and my rent, and so we moved her into Cuney Homes. I didn't know I was gonna get sick and move here, too. Oh, my God. Thank the Lord for the housing development.

When family come over, we have a Sunday dinner, and I do most of the cooking. I only use the hand mixer on the meringue when I make my lemon pies. That mixer makes a beautiful meringue. That's the only thing I use it for. And when I'm done, I wash it off and put it up in a side drawer in my kitchen. I thank God I have some things to remember my mother and grandmother by, and I can pass them on to my nieces and nephews, because I was not able to have children myself.

June Marie Butler, Cuney Homes, Houston, TX, 2001

David Butler, Cuney Homes, Houston, TX, 1988 – present

June Marie passed away in 2001.

...Grandpa Bigheart's house was burned down during the Reign of Terror

Florence Bigheart Tranum

My great-grandfather, James Bigheart, was born in 1835. He was principal Chief of the Osage Nation from 1875-1906. My grandmother saved the beaver hat when Grandpa Bigheart's house was burned down during the Reign of Terror. I was probably twelve years old at the time. I think the beaver hat was up on a shelf, all by itself, in her living room.

The hat is close to two hundred years old. My great-grandfather Bigheart put conch shells and German silver on the hat. A little turtle with symbols on the back is carved from bone. The feathers, which are also made of bone, resemble an eagle. The Bighearts are Eagle clan and the Little Chief clan. The bear symbol is also made out of bone as is the buffalo symbol, which has the head and then the heart on the buffalo's side. The beaver hide came from either Missouri or Kansas. I've never seen a beaver hat with a long tail except this one. I inherited the beaver hat, along with my grandmother's jewelry, after her last husband died.

I was born 100 years after my great-grandfather in 1935. I've lived in senior housing in Pawhuska for twenty years and I have hats all over the house. I keep the beaver hat in the closet on my hat racks. I don't wear the beaver hat – it's a man's hat.

I chose this object because I'm so proud to be James Bigheart's great-granddaughter. The beaver hat represents him. He is the only person who has ever worn the hat.

Florence Bigheart Tranum

Gentle Sky Clan (Tsisho Wash Da Keh)

Osage Senior Housing, Pawhuska, OK, 2004-present

This tie slide, worn for decades, returns me to a space without time or place

Aaron Usrey

The tie slide of my grandad, George Tallchief, Chief of the Osage Nation in the 1980's, is a component of his formal traditional In-Lon-Schka dance raiment. This vestment embodies him in my earliest memory and being – from Eagle feather, worn in the head roach, down to buckskin leggings and moccasins of Wahzhazhe leather. The soft tactile feel, worn so much and often.

As a child, I rested on his knee of leather leggings, in his Golden Glove boxers' arms and hands so large. These hands, not gnarled, but creased as if an Atlas highway map, from decades of boxing, wrestling, wrangling horses and calf roping, seemed able to strangle the world. At the same time, they could clasp it in gentle, tender comfort and protection. These were the hands I held from my birth until his death, always there, whether physically or in sense memory. I still do.

As this child, resting on his knee, burying my face in the rustic aroma of Mennen aftershave, cigar smoke and strength, I was safe. This tie slide, worn for decades, returns me to a space without time or place. As I hold this slide, I am also held and being held by Grandad, because to me, he is the essence of home.

Aaron Usrey

Buffalo Bull Face Clan (Tsedoka Intseh)

Osage Senior Housing, Fairfax, OK, 2022-present

Side Wall & Case

We don’t have that sense of community anymore because there are so many rules

Juanita Stevenson

This garden hose was used to water plants at the Julia C. Lathrop Homes.

From 1985 to the early 2000s, almost two dozen residents of Lathrop cultivated gardens behind their rowhouses. They grew collard greens, mustard greens, lettuce, tomatoes, bell peppers, hot peppers, dill peppers, and rutabagas. At the end of the growing season, resident Georgia Blankenship used to award the best garden.

Juanita Stevenson, who moved into her apartment at 2625 N. Hoyne Avenue exactly 35 years ago, treasures those days. “Misty, moist memories.”

The gardens were abandoned when the Damen Avenue Bridge was built in back of some of the townhouses. After that, the Lathrop property management company told gardeners to remove their fences, according to Stevenson, because they looked too tacky. “Who wants to grow a garden with no enclosure?” she wonders.

Things have changed since Stevenson moved into her apartment at 2625 N. Hoyne Avenue exactly 35 years ago. “We don’t have that sense of community anymore because

there are so many rules and regulations. Everybody is watching everyone else. Many people have started to move out."

But one resident, Connie Marzullo, has persevered. She still grows prized tomatoes—and shares them with Stevenson and other residents. "We are all family here in one way or another. We touch each other's lives in so many ways."

Juanita Stevenson

Robert Taylor Homes, Chicago, IL, 1969 – 1972

Julia C. Lathrop Homes, Chicago, IL, 1983 – 2026

Juanita Stevenson transitioned in 2026.

When I won, I wanted more

Lee Roy Murphy

I'm the second person who ever won this belt. I got it when I won the Cruiserweight boxing title in 1984. It means a lot to me. How many people get a world title belt? In order to get that, you've got to earn it to be a champion. And I earned it. It wasn't easy. We were fighting

15 rounds then. Now they fight 12 rounds.

My first belt got stolen. I worked for the Cook County sheriff and I got lazy that day. I left it in the trunk of my car. I lived in Hyde Park at the time. I was working two jobs, and I was tired.

I got this belt last year. They presented it to me at the Hall of Fame dinner. I was shocked. It means a lot. It shows that I've made progress in life; I went somewhere. I did something that some people can never do. People die to be a world champion. When I won, I wanted more.

But sometimes you have to slow down or greed will get to you. I place it in the back of the closet here. I don't have a wall to put it on. I probably will donate it to Wendell Phillips

High School. I'm in the Hall of Fame there. They have a big, old picture of me. This will look good there.

Lee Roy Murphy

Robert Taylor Homes, Chicago, IL, 1972–1983

...once again I wrap myself in my shawl and dance around the drum during our In'lonschka ceremonies

Jan Tallchief

Throughout my 81 seasons, my dance shawl has always been a part of me. The shawl is an essential component for women in our Osage culture, representing home, family, culture, beauty, and love. My shawl embraces me in these values and beliefs when I wrap it around my body and dance.

During my adult life and career, I traveled extensively as a school counselor. Years spent as an itinerant school counselor in "bush" Alaska, in tiny villages of 200, to Anchorage, the largest city, to Barrow, the northernmost town where it is dark five months out of the year, I carried my shawl with me. When working overseas in Kazakhstan, my shawl was with me, providing me with a sense of home, peace, and protection.

My father, former Chief George Eves Tallchief, also had a sense of adventure, traveling widely throughout his life and career as an oil rig hand, boxer, bull rider, principal, teacher, and coach. Having been raised in boarding schools with his five brothers, he finally returned home to the Osage Nation to serve his people as Chief. Fortunately, at this stage of my life, I am also blessed to be able to return home to "The Osage" where I live in the Osage Nation's Senior Housing. It is a beautiful feeling to live here in Fairfax, and participate in our Osage customs, where once again I wrap myself in my shawl and dance around the drum during our In'lonschka ceremonies.

Jan Tallchief

Buffalo Bull Face Clan (Tsedoka Intseh)

Osage Senior Housing, Fairfax, OK, 2021-present

I see the sweat of cotton pickers in my grandfather's cap

Maria Moon

In my Grandfather's eyes
Gentle dove like
Wrinkle hidden behind temples
Folded secrets coiled into thoughts never spoken
And I can only see what I know
The life of my Grandfather
The times of...
Writer's block halfway through this poem
Cuz I know you wanna hear sweet things
Blossoms from Birmingham Alabama
Stanzas painted by Watuzi fingers
Ain't pick flowers but from calloused
hands that picked cotton
No roses red, no violets blue
Shrubs and thorns leaving scars on nubs
When the reality changes, this poem will change about
black bodies broken, belittled and bowed
My Grandfather, son of a slave
Still was proud
He migrated to Chicago with
Pocketed trauma and pain in his cuffs
Tears under creases in his elbow

Flashbacks replaced his dreams
And he became a walking torment
I see the the sweat of cotton pickers
in my Grandfather's cap
A tired, sad, proud black man
Your journey is not forgotten by me
You are not an animal
You are more than 1/3rd
You are a man
You are no nigger
And that's all you were holding in
All you carried
And all you wanted the world to know

Willie Moon, Henry Horner Homes, Chicago, IL, 1960–1983

Maria Moon, Henry Horner Homes, Chicago, IL, 1978–1992

Willie passed away in 1983

The dish was a way to feel close to my mother

Deborah Smith

We moved into the Ida B. Wells in 1967. The holidays were always a time when everyone was in the kitchen, slicing, chopping, and rinsing the vegetables to add to pots and pans on the stove. It was a beautiful bonding experience. This Pyrex dish was usually used to make rice pudding or bread pudding. I didn't eat either but the dish and I were bonded together. When my mother died, I wanted that bond to continue. The dish was a way to feel close to my mother.

Deborah Smith

Ida B. Wells Extension, Chicago, IL, 1967 – 1972; 1975 – 1981

Morning at an Osage home

Dave Evans

When I was three years old, my parents brought us to

Osage land, filled with family, cousins, still in 1949, scarred by war.

We brothers, filled our days with exploration, small puppies,

Silent horseback rides, guided by quiet warrior cousins,

By our "Morning at an Osage home"!

Joe Don Brave, an Osage/Cherokee artist, created

My feeling, in colors, styled native ways.

Elders, children, workers, warriors, women,

Cousins, ranchers, students, all natives,

Sharing the 'Morning at an Osage home"!

Our days on the Osage, remembered, as I aged, stayed still

In my thoughts. My wife and children were hard and unwilling,

To see or share my native family, my native history,

On unrewarding green plains, or see the wealth below.

“No”, to my “Morning at an Osage home”

Grown and past, my family gone. Now I see, enjoy,

This quiet place of history, filled again with shaggy beasts!

My return, with expectations, Covid coughs, and hope,

Was greeted by welcoming people and a neighbor in a bathrobe.

Showing my way to “Morning at an Osage home”!

Dave Evans

Gentle Sky Clan (Tsisho Wash Da Keh)

Osage Senior Housing, Pawhuska, OK, 2022-present

Beautiful Orchid

Li Hong Cui

When I moved into Ravenswood I raised it
with my kid.
This orchid flower blooms seasonally,
When I saw it bloom, I felt serenity.
Spring had come once again,
It brought me to nature, I can't complain.
With the watering pot I used,
It grew up beautifully too.
It is now 21 years old,
It lives in my home.

Li Hong Cui

Ravenswood Homes, New York City, NY, 2014 – present

We were moving on up and improving, from the tenements to the projects

Ursula Burns

When we moved to Baruch Housing, I was ten years old. Me and my mother, my brother and sister, and my cousin Napoleon — we moved everything, and we had to do it quickly because when we told the landlord we were moving, he rushed us out.

We had no car, so we carried all of our belongings over to Baruch. Six blocks back and forth. You know the song "Moving On Up"? We were moving on up and improving, from the tenements to the projects. The tenements were hellacious.

Baruch was built in the 1950s. I believe that the housing projects were first established with good intentions, but the way they actually functioned was far different. By the time we moved in, in the 70s, the buildings were neglected by the city. The families who lived there were poor, trapped, underserved. The physical infrastructure fell into disrepair and the services were few.

My mom immigrated to New York from Panama. She practiced Catholicism and held novenas in our apartment with her friends. She didn't go to church much, but we kids went regularly. My brother, my sister, and I went on to Catholic schools. My mother saved up for the tuition for us from her side income of cleaning.

One of my mother's prized possessions was a rosary made of faux ivory: a gift from my Aunt Mel and Uncle Robby. Uncle Robby was a member of the Air Force, and he and my aunt lived in Greece. They brought the rosary from Italy and gave it to my mother along with a framed, mirrored image of Christ. The image was an optical illusion made from pieces of Venetian glass. If you looked at it straight on, you saw Christ, but from other angles, you'd also see the Virgin Mary or God.

My mother hung the rosary on the wall of our front hallway at Baruch Housing— just one of the ways she provided continuity for me and my siblings. She died when she was 49. I was 25. It was a shock. After my mother died, the rosary moved with my family from New York City to Rochester to Connecticut to London. I may eventually move it to my home in Florida, but for now, it's in my apartment in New York, in my bedroom, on the credenza.

Olga Burns, Bernard M. Baruch Houses, New York City, NY, 1970–1982

Ursula Burns, Bernard M. Baruch Houses, New York City, NY, 1970–1982

Olga Burns passed away in 1982.

I developed a one-handed jump shot and was one of the first players in the Chicago area to shoot a shot like this

Ned Lufrano

I grew up in the Jane Addams Project. My family and I lived at 1206 W. Roosevelt Road from 1938 until 1952, from the time I was six years old until the age of twenty. My two brothers and I went to Riis Grammar School, which was located one block over, on Throop Street.

Life in the Project was very pleasant. I have only good memories of my life there. Our family and all the others there were very poor, but we didn't know it, because we were all the same. My life consisted of playing with friends and school.

I went to Marshall High School on Chicago's West Side. I would take the Roosevelt Road streetcar to Kedzie Avenue. And then another streetcar 12 blocks from Kedzie to Fifth Avenue. My high school years were filled with friendships and basketball.

The Marshall basketball teams in those years were the best in the city. From 1939 to 1944, the Marshall Juniors won 98 straight games: a record that has never been broken. I decided to try out for the team, although I had never played basketball before entering high school. I was cut from the tryouts four times my freshmen year. I practiced all summer and then was cut from the tryouts two more times my sophomore year, before finally making the team toward the end of the season.

During the summers between my freshman and sophomore years, I worked as a Kitchen Police (KP) at Camp Henry Horner. I finished my work each morning and then played basketball the rest of the day. I developed a one-handed jump shot and was one of the first players in the Chicago area to shoot a shot like this. The next two years were very good for me and for the Marshall teams. We did not lose a game in the West Section and I led the West Section in scoring these two years. In my four years at Marshall High School we played for the City Championship three times, winning once and losing twice.

I am 89 years old and have had a wonderful life. My wife Joan and I have been married for 59 years. Our two sons and their families are healthy and happy, and the best is yet to come.

Ned Lufrano

Jane Addams Homes, Chicago, IL, 1938 – 1952