

"OUR PART OF TOWN," THE INSIDE STORY OF BAYVIEW HUNTERS POINT

Publishers' note: "Our Part of Town," performed July 30 and 31 at the Bayview Opera House, signaled the beginning of an African American cultural renaissance. The play took six months of research and rehearsal and a bridging of the generation gap between community leaders and teenagers. Extraordinary talent was evident on both sides of the gap. "Our Part of Town" was just too good not to share with the whole community, so the New Bayview is presenting the script in segments. Enjoy!

Part 5

Narrator Vivian Wiley: Along with the struggles for welfare rights, there were community leaders fighting for improved housing. Mrs. Ethel Garlington is here tonight to tell the story of the Hunters Point Delegation's trip to Washington D.C. to get a workable housing program approved for "Our Part of Town."

[Mrs. Garlington spoke without a script. This is a transcript made from the videotape of the performance. The only thing omitted is the laughter that nearly drowned out her voice. She had the capacity audience rolling in the aisles. The story she tells is backed up by clippings reproduced in a book entitled "Our Part of Town" available at the performances. The clippings are of San Francisco Examiner articles written in May 1970 by staff reporter Donald Canter, who accompanied the Hunters Point Delegation on their fateful journey to Washington.]

Mrs. Garlington: I am so tired. I just got in from Washington D.C. We've been fighting, fighting for a whole week trying to get that workable program passed for our condos, town houses and things to sit up there on Our Part of Town.

You know I went to Washington. But, before I left, Justin Herman, the executive director for the Redevelopment Agency, and Joseph Alioto, who was our Mayor, they went to Washington and they couldn't get the money. So they came on back to the community and they told us they couldn't get the money. We said, "Well, just send some of us community people, we'll go get the money." They said, "Yes, we will send you." So they sent 14 of us.

But before we left here (you know we had really been organizing out here in Bayview Hunters Point), we organized ourselves and called ourselves the Hunters Point Delegation. So after doing that, then we called Phil Burton, there in Washington, he was our Congressman you know. So we had him to set up all the appointments for us.

After that, we were getting ready to leave. So we had one more thing to do. We took our own newsman with us, Don Canter from the Examin-

er, and he took his typewriter along with us. So we went on to Washington, and when we got there, the first place we went was to Phil Burton's office.

When we got to his office, his little secretary told us, "Congressman Burton's not here, he's at a meeting." We said, "Where?" She said, "He's at a meeting at the House of Representatives." So we said, "Well, call him. Tell him the Hunters Point Delegation is here." She said, "I'm sorry I can't call him." We said, "Well show us where the House of Representatives is, we'll go get him." So she showed us and we went.

We went to the House of Representatives, and walked on in the door. And they were sitting around the table having their big meeting. When we busted in the door everybody turned around wondering, who in the world are those people? Okay, Phil happened to turn around and look and when he saw us he jumped out of that chair like a flea had stubbed him, and he ran back there to us.

He took us out to the corridor and he showed us where this big man, who we went there to see — you know, that "big man" from HUD, the big man that holds the purse for all this money we were trying to get to put all those houses up on the hill. So he showed us where it was. So here all 14 of us go. We all go on down to the office. So when we get there, it was nobody in the office. So we all just sat around in the office to wait. And in a few minutes, honey in a few minutes, here comes a little Black guy in there. He comes in, "I'm Mr. So & So, and I am your Representative." We said, "Unh unh, naw, we didn't come this far. You better get out of here and go and find him." What can one black person tell another black person that he don't already know. So we all sat around in the room waiting for this little guy, 'cause he ran out of there.

Ms. Westbrook — I'm sure a lot of you know Ms. Westbrook, don't you; she's a kind of heavy set lady — so she went and sat at this big man's desk and put her feet up on top of the desk. And in a few minutes, here comes this big man whom we went to see. He came in. So, when he came in I guess he thought we were going to jump up. We just continued to sit there and he was looking all around.

So you know us in Hunters Point, we said, "We are taxpayers, we bought these chairs." And we sat there. So



Ethel Garlington and Joey Smith enjoy "Our Part of Town"

Ms. Westbrook continued to sit at his desk with her feet up on the desk. And honey, so the man had to talk to us standing up.

Then, guess what he did. He had forgot that we were the Hunters Point Delegation. He started to talk down to us and talking like he didn't want to get the workable program passed for us. Boy, what did he do that for? Child, honey, we jumped on him with both feet. We got to raising so much hell there with this man. I'm on my high blood pills and I'm supposed to take one pill a day; but this man made me so upset and so excited I started popping pills.

I'm telling you, before I knew anything my tongue fell down in the bottom of my mouth and I couldn't talk and I turned to Ms. Westbrook and I said, "Westbrook, I had a stroke." Ms. Westbrook said, "Girl, what you say?" I said, "I done had a stroke." She said, "You done had a stroke?" I said, "Uh huh." Ms. Westbrook said, "Is there a doctor in the House?"

Finally the doctor came. The doctor gave me a shot in the shoulder and I waited for a few minutes, I waited to see what the shot was going to do. After a while, the shot raised my tongue up and it started wagging, and Ms. Whitfield — Ms. Whitfield is a little lady; she is smaller than I am — boy, that lady, she told that man some things his mother has never told him. I mean she raised so much sand with this man, talking to this man about the program, till her fingers got stiff. She couldn't close her hands and she couldn't open her hands. They just stayed like that.

Then, Ms. Westbrook started to do her number — boy, you know she's got a

heavy voice — and honey, when she raised in on that man, she really raised sand with him. When she got through, you know what happened? She fell out in the floor.

Finally, we had to call Phil Burton. And he sent the ambulance over to get us. The ambulance took us to the hospital. When we got to the hospital, a little Chinese doctor met us in the room, and he told Ms. Westbrook to get up on the table. So big shot me, I happened to look over at the treatment table. You know, every time you go to the doctor, they tell you to get up on the table to be examined.

I looked over there and saw a black oil cloth on the table. And I said, "Unh unh, she can't get up there!" So the doctor said, "Well, why?" And I said, "Honey, where we came from, when we go to the doctor, the nurse always puts a white sheet on the table or she puts a white piece of paper on there," I said, "and that's done after each patient." I said, "You don't get up on the bed after anybody. You put a clean piece of paper on every time a patient gets there." He said, "Well, we don't do that here." I said, "Well then, honey, you don't wait on us. No."

So, then I looked around the room and I saw all these people sitting around, some with busted lips, some with black eyes. So I said to this doctor, "Is this a charity hospital." He said "yes." I said, "Well, sure enough, you're not gonna wait on us. No. We don't go to no charity hospitals."

Then we had to call ol' Phil Burton again. They called Phil Burton and he sent another ambulance to get us, okay. They took us over to this beautiful hospital. I mean it was really nice. I think they call it

Mrs. Garlington

[This poem, along with other writings, sculpture, and paintings inspired by the stories of Bayview Hunters Point community elders, were created by school children as part of the project that brought young and old together to produce "Our Part of Town."]

Art is her soul.
Literature is her heart.
Mathematics is her wisdom.
History is her memory.
Science is her life.
Music is her dream.
Politics is her god.

— Irene Qi

the Walter Reed Hospital, where the President and the Congressmen and all those big shots go. Well, we were big celebrities from Hunters Point. So, I'm telling you, we got in the hospital and they gave us A-1 service. We had good service. So then we left after we got treated.

When we got back to the hotel, we had raised so much sand, they didn't know what to do with us. That was the first time anything like that had happened to them. They never had nobody from Hunters Point there before, and they didn't know how we act. So anyway, when we got back to our hotel rooms, they had beautiful flowers in each of our rooms and a bowl of fruit and everything, and it was really nice.

The next day, Phil says, "I'm gonna take all of you to lunch, all right?" So the next day we went to lunch. We're still in the HUD Building, the Federal Building. So we went in this beautiful dining room, and it had beautiful chandeliers, where the big shot President and all of them go to have lunch. So here Ms. Big Shot goes again. I says to my group, "I don't want to see a one of you order a hamburger. I want you to order the highest thing on the menu." And that we did. I tell you, they had a big lunch bill on their hands.

We left the restaurant and we went back to our hotel and we went to our rooms. And I'm telling you, we were so tired, we had worked and cussed so much that we were really tired. And Don Canter was so busy typing this stuff out that the typewriter was just smoking.

After a while, here comes this big man who we beat up, remember? He called and told us the workable program has passed, and boy, that was a happy time. We got millions of

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dollars to put those condos and town houses you see up in Hunters Point, in Our Part of Town.

So, okay, we're on the plane now. We're on our way back to San Francisco. We were so tired. So, when we got to San Francisco and landed here, the stewardess came back there and she said everybody can get off the plane except for the Hunters Point Delegation. We said, uh oh. We didn't go to jail in Washington, so I guess they must have the FBI waiting for us.

After everybody had gotten off, then the stewardess came back in and she said the Hunters Point Delegation can get off. So we braced ourselves because we were on our way to jail. We braced ourselves getting ready to go to jail. Here we go, off into the terminal. They had people all standing around the gate. You couldn't hardly get through the doors, all these travelers, they were wondering, who and what in the world is this coming in here?

And Justin Herman and the Mayor had decorated this entrance along there. They had it decorated so pretty with flowers and a great big sign up on the wall that said, "WELCOME HOME, HUNTERS POINT DELEGATION." When we got to the entrance