



THE ALEXANDRIA ORAL HISTORY CENTER  
OFFICE OF HISTORIC ALEXANDRIA  
CITY OF ALEXANDRIA



# Oral History Interview

with

## Miracle Gross

**Interviewer:** Naeem Scott

**Narrator:** Miracle Gross

**Location of Interview:**

Alexandria City High School, 3330 King St, Alexandria, VA 22302

**Date of Interview:** May 22, 2023

**Transcriber:** Michele Cawley, PhD

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### Summary:

*Miracle Gross reflects on her experience on her experiences while on the Alexandria City Remembrance Programs pilgrimage to Mobile, Alabama, to honor Joseph McCoy and Benjamin Thomas.*

### Notes:

*This interview was conducted by a student from Alexandria City High School, Naeem Scott. This interview was part of Student Experience Week in the Spring of 2023, where a select group of students served as interns for the Office of Historic Alexandria for 2 weeks. Students from Alexandria City High School were trained in oral history practices and then conducted their own interviews. This is one interview from this project.*

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<b>General</b>	Alexandria Community Remembrance Project; High School; Racism; Oppression; Black Student Union
<b>People</b>	Mr. Shabazz; Kimberle Crenshaw; Miss Jones
<b>Places</b>	Alexandria City High School

**Naeem Scott** [00:00:00] Okay. Hello? Who am I here with?

**Miracle Gross** [00:00:08] My name is Miracle Grove. I'm 18 years old. Today is May 22nd, 2023. And we are recording live from Alexandria City High School.

**Naeem Scott** [00:00:21] Okay. Thank you very much. Miracle. Our first question is, what did you think before going into the pilgrimage? The pilgrimage.

**Miracle Gross** [00:00:32] So I didn't know much about the I didn't know much about the museums or the places in Alabama that the BSU, TMA or theater would be going to. So I thought it would be very similar to the African-American Museum in D.C.. But I will say that the museums and the places that y'all visited during the trip were clearly a lot more transformative. While all history is important, I think that the museums that you all visited especially were very heavy and had very transparent information. So, yes, I didn't know much, but I wasn't expecting what it was.

**Naeem Scott** [00:01:21] My bad. I just remembered that you did not go on the pilgrimage. Okay. So, can you describe your history in Alexandria? Your history in Alexandria.

**Naeem Scott** [00:01:33] Oh. So I lived in Alexandria pretty much all my life. Um, and my mother has worked in ACS pretty much all my life as well. And my dad has worked for the city all of my life before he retired during COVID year. So I've always been very active in the community through Girl Scouts and just activism panels. But as far as my impact on the community and Alexandria's impact on me. I would say it didn't really start until my 10th grade year when I joined the Black Union and I got involved in the push for the name change. Just continuing the work of the BSU and the black community in Alexandria City. From there, fight for Roys Hunney. But, yeah, I think. As far as my impact on Alexandria's history, the name change I hold very near and dear to my heart. Although some people don't take it as seriously as others, I'll always carry that with me because it's most definitely changed the trajectory of my life as far as the process to get the name change and the result of the outcome.

**Naeem Scott** [00:02:49] Thank you. Could you please sort of explain your role in the Black Student Union and what the mission is?

**Miracle Gross** [00:02:58] So I am the president of the Black Student Union and I have hold this, held the title for the past two years. As far as our mission is to amplify black student voices and create a sense of solidarity amongst the African diaspora at Alexandria City High School and the community. And really across the nation, we really push for collective action and the teaching of thorough and thoughtful knowledge of history, black history and culture. And this year, I think that our vision for the most part was to create a group, to create a group of students that were ready to be about that action, to do the work, to show up every week, to plan, to organize and to learn. So as a graduating senior, I'm very confident that our underclassmen will carry on the mission as well.

**Naeem Scott** [00:03:53] Thank you. And what got you into the Black Student Union?

**Miracle Gross** [00:03:58] So, after the murder of George Floyd in March of 2020, the Selah Club, which was serving every living being at heart, had a racial reconciliation event at the school. And the two co-presidents were Virginia and Josephina. And Josephina at the time was the current president

of Selah, not the current, the former president of the Black Student Union. And during the event, we sat in the circles and we kind of shared our perspectives and ideas on different situations, such as opinions on defunding the police or just tearing down the whole police force, demolishing the police. And I think that she was fairly impressed with my answers. And she chased after my car after the event ended and asked me if I wanted to be on the executive team for the Black City Union. And I was a fan girl of Ophenia, so of course I said yes, and I was put on the team as a sophomore representative. I had no idea what I was getting myself into, but I was excited. And it's really history from there. I was surrounded by a great group of young black women who were unapologetically black and made black decisions and were just unapologetic about it. And that really also changed the trajectory of my life and how I view myself and how I view how the world views me. So I'm really appreciative of that. And then my junior year, once we got back in person, I started working very closely with Mr. Shabazz. I knew that he was the person I needed to be a mentor to me, kind of like a school uncle to teach me not only what it meant to be a leader, but to be a black leader. So I spent almost all of my lunches my junior year in Shabazz classroom just asking questions, learning, sharing stories, and just really creating the sense of being a lifetime learner. And I brushed up upon those skills for my senior year, and I'm really just glad that I got the chance to be a part of the Black Student Union and be President of the Black Student Union as well.

**Naeem Scott** [00:06:19] Yes. Congratulations and thank you. Can you please tell us a little bit about your background and your upbringing?

**Miracle Gross** [00:06:28] Yeah. So, Adison, I've lived in Alexandria for most of my life, but my family is originally from the South. My father is from Calvert County, Maryland, which is pretty much countryside Maryland. It's really close to southeast D.C., right across the bridge. But, he was raised in southern values. My mother is from a small town in North Carolina called Chadburns, right outside of Fayetteville and Wible. So she was also raised on those same southern values. And they met in the 1990's. They were married in 2000 and then they had me in 2005 after my mother was told that she would never have children due to kidney failure and Lupus. And then they had me, which is why my name is Miracle and I was raised in the city, but I was always raised in a household with pretty much southern values, backgrounds and ideals. I will say that going to a public school in the city, especially high school, I went to a public middle school, a public elementary school has impacted me. So yes, I have a my ways are city sometimes, but my values are pretty southern. But I also, some of those same southern values I had to denounce because my parents didn't know any better, know that some of their ideas that they were raising me upon were, just overall harmful in some ways. So I'm glad that while they raised me on southern values, I got to experience life in the city because it opened me to, open my eyes to new perspectives, new ways of life. Seeing how other people live their life is not always the same. Because being from small towns in the south, everybody is pretty much the same, the same life, the same thing. And the city really sets you apart from that. So I'm really appreciative of them choosing Alexandria and choosing to raise me here as well. And I can't thank my parents enough for them being supportive of my every step, even when I've been indecisive of almost everything, from driving me to sports practices, to performances, bringing supplies to the school when I needed, dealing with mental breakdowns, I'm just really thankful that I've had parents who supported me every step of the way.

**Naeem Scott** [00:08:55] Thank you very much. Could you describe the important individuals and moments in your life that have shaped your understanding of racism and oppression?

**Miracle Gross** [00:09:06] Well, I was, I would say the first two have to be my parents. Another something else you get out of being raised in the south is experience with a lot of racial hatred. So, for example, my dad went to one of the first desegregated schools, high schools in Maryland. So he's the oldest of six children. So he was always protecting his younger siblings from any type of racism that got too physical. So I think him sharing stories about that really opened my eyes as a young child, just understanding that the dominant culture here does not view you as equal. My mother was raised in a predominately black town, but, you know, racism is everywhere. So, she recalls like nights where the KKK was marching in her backyard. So learning that racism is real, racial hatred is real, oppressive tactics are real. Scare tactics based on racial hatred is real. I learned that at a very young age as well. So as far as defining experience, learning about experiences, about racism and oppression, I would have to thank my parents for that, for opening my eyes at an early age. And I appreciate that because I'm not oblivious to racism and I never have been. I've always seen color. I've never been one of those people that I don't see color because not seeing color is actively erasing the experiences that black people and other marginalized people in marginalized communities experience. So I've always seen color. As far as learning about racism and oppression and learning how to fight against it. I have to thank Mr. Shabazz, who is the Black Student Union advisor who has also been my teacher for the past year. As I said, during Junior year, he was one of my mentors, but during my Senior year I actually chose to take two of his classes because I trusted that he was a good educator and a good teacher, and I was completely right in trusting him. He teaches his students not only how to recognize justice, but how to do justice and how to fight back against oppression. And he also exposes us to multiple viewpoints so that we're also not oblivious to the issues of racism and oppression and equity in this country. So I most definitely thank him as well.

**Naeem Scott** [00:11:46] Thank you. Very insightful. Speaking more about Alexandria, what changes do you want to see in the city of Alexandria when it comes to dealing with institutional racism?

**Miracle Gross** [00:12:05] I would like to see the school district search for and employ more black teachers. I know they, or at least I think that you have to pick from what you have. However, I don't feel the ACS takes the steps to search for and employ black educators, which is just as important as hiring white educators. When you have black students at a high school, middle school, elementary school, and they're being taught by the dominant culture only they are being educated with the ideas, opinions, possibly values of the dominant culture unless they are just so strongly rooted in their blackness. So I think that's important. I also think it's important on the basis of representation. I stopped having black teachers once I got to high school. I went to a predominantly black middle school, a predominately black elementary school. And once I got to high school, I remember completely changing my career path from teaching because basically because I didn't have any black teachers. So I was like, okay, maybe this is not for me. So I ventured into psychiatry, psychology, physician assistant but taking Mr. Shabazz's classes have really made me realize how important black education is to the black mind, and that some of us young, gifted and black students and children have to choose to be black educators because we should be the ones who are teaching our future kids and our future nieces and nephews and the future of black America.

**Naeem Scott** [00:13:58] Thank you. Could you describe any important individuals or moments in your life that have shaped your values and politics?

**Miracle Gross** [00:14:17] I would like to give a shout out to my dual enrollment entrepreneurship teacher, Ms. Lewis, for shaping my values during my Senior year and preparing me to go into the

outside world as a young black woman. Being young, being black and being a woman all at the same time is like a trifecta of oppression, not even to be funny. The way those intersections work and affect you and the world can be so hard at times. And unless you, unless you experience the same thing, then it can be hard to understand at times. At times, which also leaves you feeling alone. And then on top of that, you have to deal with stereotypes of being a strong black woman and people thinking that surviving is synonymous to overcoming. So it gets really hard. And I think that Ms. Lewis has been one of the only young black teachers, young black woman teachers who have understood that, embraced that and have taught her students, not just her young black female students, but all of her students, how to overcome that. I would also like to thank her for just teaching is how to how to be young ladies, and how to stay young, and how to be financially ready to go out into the world, and teaching us how to or why we should have our own. As a black woman, we find ourselves often having to share everything with the world or in better words, having to set ourselves on fire to keep other people warm. And I really appreciate Ms. Lewis, because she taught us the importance of having your own. So I appreciate her.

**Naeem Scott** [00:16:13] Thank you very much, Miracle. And speaking more about black women, when did you become aware of the different intersectionality that you belong to and how have you embraced them?

**Miracle Gross** [00:16:27] Well, I would say during the name change, the Black Student Union Executive team faced a lot of backlash from some other social groups or community groups in Alexandria, for kind of not really taking the credit, but continuing the lead on the push for the name change. They thought that ironically, they thought that we were being performative. Some people thought that our approach to the name change was too aggressive and that to me, is no surprise. However, it did make me aware of my intersection of being black and a woman, getting on social media and seeing you and your team being called angry black women and black women this. black women that, and that opened my eyes because the words black and women were always in the same sentence everytime it was an offensive comment. So that most definitely opened my eyes to that. However, I will say my real awareness for intersectionality started my Senior year. I took Mr. Shabazz's class, Global Majority Studies and we learned about black feminism and why it exists and how black women have to, in my opinion, have their own because they are excluded from the modern feminism movement. And that is actually where I ended up writing one of my research papers on for this year. So I will say most definitely my complete awareness of my personal intersections started in my Senior year because I began to understand why intersectionality is a thing and how it affects the black woman and just all the layers of intersection. Although the term intersectionality, coined by Kimberle Crenshaw, started off as the intersection between race and gender in the modern day, there are so many layers to intersectionality, such as financial class, sexual orientation, etc. So then even starting to learning all those things as well. I'm young, I'm black, I'm a young, black woman. My family is pretty much middle class. I'm pansexual. So there's a lot of, there's a lot of layers to intersectionality. And I'm very glad that I was made aware of that because it teaches me how to continue to maneuver through life unapologetically, while also spreading awareness about intersectionality and why it exists and why it's important.

**Naeem Scott** [00:19:11] Thank you very much for that response. How do you deal with being in spaces with people who have opposing viewpoints? Or I guess, viewpoints differing from yours?

**Miracle Gross** [00:19:29] I, to be completely transparent. I can't say that I try to convince people otherwise because I find myself very passionate about my opinions and my viewpoints and perspectives. However, I will say that taking Mr. Shabazz's Competitive Government class has taught me how to take a side and very professionally, stand for your side. So I will say I don't think a year ago, I would be able to sit in a room or engage in conversation with people who have opposing views and perspectives of me because I just, I guess you could say I wasn't emotionally mature enough to do that. And I also think that I didn't have in some cases, like historical context, modern day context or examples to really back up what I'm saying. But I can say that now, if I am taking a side or a stance on something, and I believe in taking sides, I think we must always take a side. I think that neutrality does nothing but help the oppressor. I think that I am able to take a side and back it up. So if I'm in a conversation with people who I have opposing views with, all it takes is a little research. And research is really at our fingertips in the modern day. So if I'm taking a side on something, I just have to know why I'm backing it up and why it's important to me and in the most respectful way possible, express my perspective.

**Naeem Scott** [00:21:19] Thank you. How do you hold yourself in spaces while being a black woman and do you think that there is any deeper significance and doing anything that you do, saying anything that you do as a black woman?

**Miracle Gross** [00:21:45] Well, I was raised by it's, in my opinion, very powerful black women. So, for example, my mother and a couple of my aunties, they are part of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority Incorporated. And being raised by those women and because most of them are also from the south, being doing dishes, keeping your area clean, making your bed in the morning, being punctual, have really, have really affected, not really affected, but have carried on certain stereotypes of the black woman that black women had tried to debunk throughout the years. For example, the stereotype that all black women are welfare queens, being punctual, going to school, getting a degree, getting a good paying job can kind of help debunk those myths. And me personally, I think that's like where my family is coming from, that the world will see you as this, so you have to prove them wrong by doing this. And I always say the black women will always have to do at least 20 times more than the white woman to get the same outcome. So me being 20 minutes early to things that my white counterparts can be 10 minutes late to, even that alone is affecting the view of me to other people in the room. I think that there are some things that have been harmful to the young black man as a young black woman. I appreciate all the black women in my life, and I understand that some, a lot of them are coming from places of trauma and they don't want to do anything but help. However, I think that certain stereotypes, such as young black girls being too grown by doing certain things has most definitely affected me. And I can speak on behalf of a lot of other young black girls has also affected their mental. Because you're always trying to be cautious of things that you wear, things that you say and things that you're doing. So that number one, the world doesn't view you as older than your age. And number two so that the world doesn't try and take advantage of you. So, for example, like I couldn't wear red nails growing it, I couldn't wear rompers to middle school when I was nothing but 95 pounds because it was seen as being too grown. And I appreciate the black woman who took me under their wings. But I also see that they were also coming from places of trauma, and that's why they didn't want us to do that. Not because they were jealous and not because they were just doing the most, even though it seemed like it at the time. They were coming from places of trauma as well. Something happened to them. The world did something to them, and that's why they reacted that way. So, I most definitely think that maneuvering through the world as a black woman, yes, what you

say, what you do, affects how the world views you. But I think that black women are the most amazing thing to walk the earth. And I say move unapologetically either way.

**Naeem Scott** [00:25:29] Thank you very much. Miracle. That just about wraps up our time. Do you have any remarks or anything else you want to say? Any thoughts on.

**Miracle Gross** [00:25:41] Black On Black, I love Alexandria City High School Black Student Union. Thank you, BSU for changing my life and thank you to our advisors. Thank you to all the people who assisted with the Remembrance Project Trip. Special Shout out to Tammy, Miss Jones and the theater department and Mr. Shabazz. Bye.

**Naeem Scott** [00:25:59] Thank you so much.