

Biographical Description for The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Howard Simmons

PERSON

Simmons, Howard, 1943-

Alternative Names: Howard Simmons;

Life Dates: June 11, 1943-

Place of Birth: Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA

Residence: Oak Park, IL

Work: Oak Park, IL

Occupations: Photographer

Biographical Note

Commercial photographer and photojournalist Howard Simmons was born on June 11, 1943 in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. His mother, Lillian, was a day worker from South Carolina while his father, Luther, was a contractor from Pennsylvania. Simmons and his older sister Margaret were often moving around as children. In 1961, Simmons graduated from Westinghouse High School in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Immediately after graduation, Simmons enlisted in the U.S. Air Force where he played French horn with Air Force service bands until 1966. While serving, he became interested in photography and began photographing arrangements he would make with various materials from the barracks.

In 1966, Simmons began working for Gateway Studios as a photo lab technician with the desire to become a commercial photographer. The following year, he compiled a portfolio and presented it to Ebony magazine where John Johnson hired him as a staff photographer. With Ebony, Simmons covered Reverend Martin Luther King Jr.'s funeral in Atlanta and Coretta Scott King's subsequent rally in Washington D.C. In 1968, friend Bob Black told Simmons the Chicago Sun-Times was hiring so Simmons joined the staff doing photojournalism until 1976. In 1973, Simmons, John White, Ovie Carter, and Bob Black created the exhibit "Through The Eyes of Blackness" which displayed the everyday life of blacks.

In 1976, Simmons left the paper to become a self-employed commercial photographer. He did advertisements for Coca Cola, McDonalds, Sears, Folgers, Amoco, Kelloggs and others traveling as far as Zimbabwe and Paris. In 1980, Simmons shot the first cover for Black Family magazine and in 1983, he bought a building in Chicago and

turned it into what became his favorite commercial photography studio. Simmons work is showcased on his website, HowardSimmonsPhotography.com, opened in 2009.

Simmons is married to Marva E. Simmons and together they have three children: Robbin L. Mugnaini, Tracey L. McGhee, and Christie R. Edwards.

Howard Simmons was interviewed by The HistoryMakers on May 25, 2010.

Related Entries

Westinghouse Academy [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

Crescent Elementary School [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

Madison Elementary School [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

Gateway Studios [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1966 to 1967]

Photo lab technician

Ebony Magazine [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1967 to 1968]

Staff photographer

Chicago Sun-Times [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1968 to 1976]

Staff photographer

U.S. Air Force [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1976 to ?]

French hornist

Judge Studio [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from ? to ?]

Apprentice