

# KUNHARDT **FILM** / FOUNDATION

LESLIE PARKS BAILEY INTERVIEW  
*A CHOICE OF WEAPONS: INSPIRED BY GORDON PARKS*  
KUNHARDT FILM FOUNDATION

**Leslie Parks Bailey**  
**Daughter of Gordon Parks**  
**Interviewed by John Maggio**  
**Total Running Time: 1 hour 1 minute and 29 seconds**

START TC: 01:00:00:00

MATTHEW HENDERSON:

Leslie Parks Bailey interview, take one marker.

ON SCREEN TEXT:

Leslie Parks Bailey

Daughter of Gordon Parks

## **Gordon Parks as a father**

01:00:27:04

LESLIE PARKS:

Well, my mother was much younger. She was twenty three when they got married, and I believe he was forty nine. So that, you know, she was the same age as my brothers and sisters... you know, my half brothers and sisters. So, we just had a big age gap and so he spent a lot of time not understanding me

and I spent a lot of time not understanding him I mean, you know and... I was rebellious and-- but the thing is he was a rebel, too. So, it's just like two rebels fighting one another was, you know, when I look back at it was very interesting and I guess over the past few years I was going through a lot of photographs and documents that I had, you know, just in boxes and I found letters from him to me when I was a teenager...

01:01:28:20

LESLIE PARKS:

You know about the color of my hair and the clothes I was wearing and just the choices I was making and, you know, it was just this very conservative voice from a person who wasn't very conservative if you think about it, you know. Like he was a complete (Inaudible) rebel. He just did whatever he could do to keep afloat. Yeah.

01:01:57:03

LESLIE PARKS:

And I don't think I ever really talked about this. You know, I went to Hackley private school in Westchester, New York and I played field hockey and lacrosse and he came to my last lacrosse game of my senior year. But you know, he loved it. And he brought his camera. So, I have these photographs of me playing lacrosse and jumping in the air and you know just running. So you know, he saw me, but he wasn't always there. He was working, and traveling, and you know that was kind of also... you know, he wasn't hands on. Um, and

I think he came from an age when dads didn't go to those kinds of things... they were at work. And so I don't think in his mind it was the priority. He paid for the school. He paid for the clothes. He paid child support. You know? So he was doing his job. But it would have been nice if he had come a little bit sooner to one of those games, but I was happy that he made it, you know.

01:03:10:02

LESLIE PARKS:

And I have friends who said, you know, who met him when I was in high school and he came to the game and they're like "I remember when your dad came to that game, and I remember that he showed up in this Jaguar and he was wearing you know a suit, and he was just so handsome and you know, elegant and polite to us". And so, that's just the way he was, you know.

01:03:40:23

LESLIE PARKS:

But you know, there were a lot, you know-- at that school there were a lot of famous people's children or you know politicians' children, so you know it was just everybody knew who everybody was. Um. But the thing is is that a lot of those people now, when they see his, you know that I grew up with, when they see his work, they'll send me a message like-- or "I went to a show and I saw your dad's work and I was thinking about you." Or even some of them, they still live in Westchester, and they'll go to the foundation and see

his work, or they didn't even know it was there and they're happy to come across it.

01:04:19:06

LESLIE PARKS:

You know, so. Yeah, it's nice that these... The people I grew up with know who he is and expose their children to his work so yeah you know...it's happening.

01:04:35:20

LESLIE PARKS:

He definitely would catch people's attention, you know, and I guess... you know it was like fighting for time with him. If I was visiting him and we would be walking on first avenue or something like that, somebody would recognize him and he would never not stop to talk to someone. He would always give them attention and listen to what they had to say to him and you know, admiration. Um... So that could be difficult. You know, you're this child-- I have a weekend and I'm sharing it with strangers on the street. Um... but you know... that's the way he was, you know, he wanted to see everyone who appreciated him and give them a chance to talk to him.

### **How her parents met**

01:05:35:00

LESLIE PARKS:

My grandfather was a painter, an artist; he did cartoons for Playboy and um Esquire. He developed Esky, you know. the mascot Esky. He developed that character and he lived in Westchester in Elmsford. Um, and they lived a very, he and my grandmother, lived a very fancy life. They had a butler, and you know she had a garden where they grew their own vegetables and they had all these dogs, and they had these big parties, and my father went to photograph them. I can't remember for which magazine, and my mother was probably five or six. So... he took these pictures for the article and I have the article somewhere, you know, I have all of this stuff. And he-- that's when they met...when he took their picture when she was five or six years old.

01:06:31:12

LESLIE PARKS:

And then... my grandparents moved to Switzerland in nineteen... hm when my mother graduated from high school, so I think that was around 1957, 1958 and she didn't go to school there but she started modeling, and then she came back here to work for Ebony and... I guess Ebony and...what's...I can't remember the name of the agency... Ford. Ford agency for Eileen Ford. She was one of the first Black models for Eileen Ford. And I guess that's how-- you know, he was doing fashion, shooting fashion and that's how they got together, I think. I don't know the entire story. I also have a letter from my grandfather when, yeah, they decided to get married. That was very interesting.

01:07:29:11

LESLIE PARKS:

Um, my brothers and sisters went to White Plains High School and my mother went to Hastings High. And so, you know, they all were in Jack and Jill together and went to parties together, so they all knew one another and I believe Sally and Vivian, who was my grandmother, we're friends and so, yeah. It wasn't good. It wasn't good. It was a very interesting, angry, "I'm gonna kill you" letter. With my-- you know, I'm gonna get my shotgun, but it didn't happen that way. At the end when my grandfather, after my grandmother died, he came back to New York and my father, he was ill as well, and he lived with my mother and us before he passed, yeah so.

### **Marriage to Elizabeth Campbell**

01:08:30:04

LESLIE PARKS:

My grandfather worked at night a lot so like during the day he wasn't available, and so I think maybe that was part of the attraction that someone was seeing her and, you know, seeing her beauty. And just... I guess, you know, taking her seriously. And I think she was trying to prove something to somebody and she did. And I don't, you know... I think my father liked having a young beautiful wife at that period, you know, because she was quite phenomenal at that time, and she still is when you meet her, you'll see. She is a piece of work. And so... and she's fun, you know, she's fun. She likes to cook,

she likes to-- she was very good enter-- and still is good at entertaining um... and so I think it was nice for him to have her on his arm for a while, yeah.

01:09:27:07

LESLIE PARKS:

I mean, they divorced when I was very young. So, you know, and they stayed amicable through the divorce and my growing up. There, you know, it was-- if I got in trouble... we went to the Plaza Hotel to the oak room and we would have a conver-- all three of us would have, you know, a serious conversation. Um, but... You know, I don't know what she saw in him. I mean, I know what I-- I know what people see in him and I think that that's part of it. But I think, maybe it's what he saw in her that she wasn't getting from somewhere else from, you know, her parents were-- you know, they liked to party like she just kind of, you know, grew up on her own. You were talking about these upper middle class people, they would have parties a lot.

01:10:26:17

LESLIE PARKS:

And there'd be very interesting people and Elizabeth Ann would be in our bedroom and then, you know, he would work all night and, you know, my... my grandmother had the things that she did so I think-- I think she was a lonely person, you know, growing up. But I'm not- I'm not sure. That's just my thing and I think there was something about him seeing her... as a person, as a woman that really-- that's what got her.

**Marriage to Sally Alvis**

01:11:07:01

LESLIE PARKS:

She was always very sweet to me. Um... You know, I grew up with her- her grandson, Alan, who lives in Finland and we're still very close. So... she was a presence, you know. I knew who she was um, and when she got older, I guess she kind of didn't know who I-- you know, I grew up I wasn't little Leslie anymore uh... but yeah. She was-- and you know, Tony and Gordon and David, you know, I always was in touch with. I mean Gordon died when I was twelve, but you know, I still speak to David. My mother still speaks to David and Tony you know, I spoke to her up until her death. You know during the holidays.

01:11:58:05

LESLIE PARKS:

I think there are a lot of things I don't know. But we were close, you know. David, I don't talk to him as often as I used to, but you know, that's just the way things kind of happen. Life happens. Um, so... you know, the family is getting smaller.

**Gordon Parks, Jr.'s death**

01:12:30:23

LESLIE PARKS:

I remember hearing my mother scream. I was at home at 15 Adams Place, and I heard the scream, and I was upstairs in my room and I was getting ready for school and I came downstairs and my mother had gotten the phone call. And then... I don't--I can't remember if I went to school but then I remember we went to dad's house. I went with my mother and my step father, and we stayed there; in his house all three of us for about two days. And so, you know, that's a testament to how close they were even though they were no longer together. Um, that you can bring your new husband in and stay, you know, during this time to help you grieve.

01:13:25:09

LESLIE PARKS:

You know, je just-- not everybody would do something like that. And so you know... it was interesting.

01:13:34:10

LESLIE PARKS:

I think there were tears. I think also um... he tried to stay very strong. Like I think he was staying strong for everybody else. Um, and I don't think I really saw the sadness of that until later in his life, you know, and even when he was getting closer to leaving us, that's when I really saw the tenderness and his sadness or his disappointment with things that maybe he thought he should

have done or shouldn't have done with his children. Um, what he could have done better. But, he couldn't, at that point, even vocalize it, but you could feel it in the room. You know, it's just the person changes and you become the caregiver and so... that's where, you know, you see-- that's where I saw the sorrow, 'cause he was always, you know, in charge and in control. And so that, you know, it was there for sure. Yeah.

01:14:45:03

LESLIE PARKS:

I mean, Gordon, Jr... I just remember he had this, I can't remember what color it was, VW Bug and when I saw that car coming to the house, I would get very excited. And he was all-- you know, he always had a smile. And he always had like some sort of something for me so that was exciting, and just his- his laughter. I remember his laughter and his smile. And he was, you know, just like a ver- he was a very tender person. Um, and I remember he was also sharp. You know... denim... nice denim jacket and jeans and, you know, he might have a silk scarf tied around his neck and some cool boots. And, you know, awesome frames. And so... you know, he got that from Dad. We all get our little pieces of flare from him, yeah. So, but it was, you know, it was just a tragic thing that happened, um.

01:15:51:05

LESLIE PARKS:

He was working on a film in Nairobi, um, and so he was coming back. My sister in law, Leslie, her name is Leslie also, um she was about to give birth to their son Gordon III, and he was getting on a plane-- a small-- he got on a small plane I guess to get to a bigger plane to come home, and the plane went down. And I think three or four other people died in the crash. And so it was, you know, just coming home for the birth of your child. Um, and I think, you know, that really affected my dad, um, because he helped raise Gordon III and did everything he could to help take care of him... for his entire life, yeah. It's, you know, it's just we have these tragedies, um, but he always did the right thing. He always did the right thing for his grandchildren, for his children.

01:16:53:04

LESLIE PARKS:

Um, you know, I mean that's the way he was raised by his mother who he lost at a very young age. I think he was fourteen when she died. So... you know, he just had this kind of "I want to keep my family together," but also he worked so hard that sometimes he forgot how to do that. So, it was usually a monetary or like a scolding in a letter. Like the presence was there even if the person wasn't there, yeah.

### **Gordon Parks' affairs**

01:17:36:05

LESLIE PARKS:

You know, at a certain age I also was like you just come to expect it. Like there might be one person here and then you go over here on a trip or something and there's another person. But it's just something that I don't think I really understood until now. Um, and that's ok. That's ok. You know, he was human. He's a human being, so.

01:18:06:17

LESLIE PARKS:

But, you know, everybody seemed to pull it together and get along. I mean, even after um he and Gene split, you know, we would go on vacations with Gene's family, and she was with somebody else and he was with somebody else and we would still come together for like Christmas or Easter or-- I mean, I don't know if I could ever do that. I don't think I've ever done that with my ex husband, but... it just says a lot about who they were. I don't know, maybe they were trying to prove something to one another now that I think about it, but they did it. And they did it well with, you know, not-- no fighting. If there was fighting, I didn't see it, um. And yeah, till the end.

01:18:59:22

LESLIE PARKS:

Even my mother's last husband, he and my dad became very close. And he was there when dad died, Milton, his name is Milton Moskowitz. And he, you know, it's just-- it's funny what people can do and how they can come

together under, you know-- it just--I don't know how they released it, but they did. And some- and maybe they did it for the kids. I'm hoping they did.

01:19:33:04

LESLIE PARKS:

You know, no matter what I always-- I always loved him and I know that he loved me and, you know, I didn't have the pain that he might have inflicted on these-- on my mother and my step mother, and Sally. And maybe it's because they had children together, um... but also, you know, he did choose strong women. Uh, Gene was very str-- you know, still is an amazingly strong person. My mother, you know, she... she- she's strong, you know. Her... she... early in her life she had tragedy, I mean her mother... was... I guess committed suicide when she was six months old. So, she grew up with a step mother, but that mother was her mother and raised her and so I know that she has things, abandonment issues, but she still holds it together when she needs to, and I think Sally was also a very strong person, you know, from what I remember of her.

01:20:45:05

LESLIE PARKS:

Um, so I think it's just inner strength, and you know also... I think they all had his number. They knew his tricks and they knew things about him that... I don't know if they could use it against him, but they're just like, you know, "Not today, buddy" kind of you know? I know you. So... and I think, you know,

like yeah, you're great and you do all of these great things and you're fantastic, but not with me. You know, I know you, I know who you are, I know what you're capable of. So... I think that's all part of love, though. You know, it's just... It's great... That they could all still sit together in one room, yeah.

01:21:41:02

LESLIE PARKS:

I mean, there was a chase 'til the end, you know, there really was. Um... it's funny because even just... women were... I don't know what it was because he was my dad. So, I mean you know, I know about attraction and-- but like these women would just come up to him and their eyes would open and, you know, he just was-- he was a smooth operator. You know, he just smelled good, he was dressed well, his hair was always right um... his voice was always smooth, he knew how to play the piano, he knew where-- when and where to light a candle. He had his, you know, in the kitchen he had this little meal that he cooked for romance. Yeah, so he, like, he had it all going. You know? He knew- he knew what to do. So, yeah.

### **Gordon Parks' relationship with Gloria Vanderbilt**

01:22:58:03

LESLIE PARKS:

I didn't learn about it until later in life. I knew that they were very good friends and, you know, she used to throw parties for him. I remember her

eightieth birthday party that she had for him, and I think I was about fifteen or sixteen when that happened and then, you know, after the party my mother said “Well you know. You know they had a relationship”. And I was just like “What? What are you talking about?” and she said “Yeah, they used to be together,” and then, you know, I read about it and they were very close. So you know, I knew that there was something special there, yeah. And she was always very sweet to me.

01:23:41:17

LESLIE PARKS:

You know, I’ve read that, you know, they were gonna-- they thought about trying to get married and then he was just like-- I think he didn’t want to do that to her. He didn’t want her... put under, you know, some sort of scrutiny, pain, just you know, just being not accepted. So I think he loved-- I think he really loved her. I remember reading that, um. But they had, you know, they had this incredible relationship up until he died and I remember her speaking at the funeral and saying, you know, “Gordon loved everybody, but he really loved a lot of women.” And so, you know, it was a sweet relationship.

***Life Magazine***

01:24:39:16

LESLIE PARKS:

I mean, he worked up until he couldn't work anymore. He was taking photographs in the apartment, you know. On just-- he would lay out something on the table and put the cam-- you know put the camera in a certain direction so that, you know... because he couldn't go into his studio anymore. Um, so I think being creative was just something he couldn't help doing. And I think it got... you know, it got better at the end, you know, he started moving in different directions, but just even with, you know, composing music... it started with photography and then moving into film and you know there was always a push from someone who believed that he could do it because there were-- I think there were times when- when he would begin something that he didn't think he could do it. You know, just he would try something, but he wasn't sure how it was going to work and then he just fell into it, and it happened. And then he just-- the fear was kind of gone.

**Tenacity**

01:25:54:00

LESLIE PARKS:

I think it came from his mother. I remember him saying to me that his mother, you know, he was having problems in school and his teachers telling him "Well, you should become a porter or..." You know, "work in some sort of service. You're not going to get a desk job. You're not going to be a lawyer.

You're not going to be a doctor." And his mother said to him and I think it was-- I think she always said to him "Anything anybody else can do, you can do. Don't let anybody tell you you can't do something. You can do it". And so I think he really took that to heart. And somehow when things were very hard after she died, I think- I think he held that with him, within himself. And I think... it's what kept him going you know, and I think maybe if she had died later in life maybe that message wouldn't have, you know, stuck with him or resonated, you know.

01:27:05:15

LESLIE PARKS:

He would have taken a job or not finished school or-- I mean, he didn't finish school, but you know life would have turned out differently for him so... you know those words and just the event of her leaving him really I think instilled something in him that... it's like I have to keep moving. I have to survive you know.

### **Discrimination & violence**

01:27:39:17

LESLIE PARKS:

I think that he was angry about it, and I think he needed the world to see... to see it. And he would do anything, he would put himself in very dangerous positions to document it. Um, and... like I guess... I don't know if that was a

mission, it was just-- he would find these people, and he would, you know, he would not-- he would live with them. He wouldn't bring his camera in the beginning, and then he would kind of hold it to the side, and then he would, you know, take a moment maybe when they didn't even know he was- he was taking their photograph, but he gained their trust and he showed them that he was willing to be in a place with them where it wasn't so safe or it wasn't too warm, or there were roaches and rats scattering around, you know. Um, and he just wasn't showing up with his camera saying, you know "Hey. Let's take some pictures right now," like he lived with these people so that they could understand him and he could understand them. And that's what you have to do, you know. So, I don't know how he understood that but he did.

01:29:06:15

LESLIE PARKS:

I think, you know... it's funny, when people ask me what it was like to be Gordon Parks' daughter and they still ask me this, and I say "well, you know, he was my father." So I saw him as a father before I saw him as the artist or the Renaissance man or, you know, like... he was dad. And that's um... It's- it's hard to explain, you know. But even, you know, my step children... my husband now you know he's an artist and people recognize him, and we get stopped in the street and I'm like "Oh gosh, here we go again". But that's part of his stopping in the street and talking to people when they admire you is part of that you know. It's just- I think it's a sensitivity and... It's an acknowledgement of "I see you" and that's what his work is all about, "I see".

**Gordon Parks' work**

01:30:20:09

LESLIE PARKS:

Uh, I really loved the Charwoman, the American gothic; that's my favorite...it just--

JOHN MAGGIO:

What do you love about it?

LESLIE PARKS:

I mean it just says...it just says everything you know. Um... It shows the struggle and then if you know the story, the background story then it's just you know, it's just this terrible story, but you know she's again surviving and doing what she has to do to provide for her grandchildren. I think her daughter had died.

01:30:57:20

LESLIE PARKS:

And just keeping the family together. And so it's just-- it's more than just a photograph, it's the story behind it. Um, I've always loved the Flavio series. I

mean, he went in there and, again, the family-- he got the family's trust and then, you know, he took it upon himself to get this child help for his asthma and brought him to the states and took him from his family, and then you know they- *Life*... all of these donations started coming in and they built a new house for them and you know it's just... who does that? You know, who does that? I mean that's that kind of thing-- I don't think I could even do something like that. Like I can barely, you know, take care of my family on a regular basis but-- that's not true, but it's you know, it's a lot. And to care that much you know, you can take a picture and walk away or you can throw yourself into it and that's what- that's what he did. You know, he found out the story.

**Ella Watson**

01:32:17:13

LESLIE PARKS:

She was an older woman, um, you know, .maybe at this point she shouldn't have even been working, but I think her husband died, her daughter died, she had grandchildren that she had to take care of, um, and so she was cleaning this government building every night. Like she would go in, she would take care of the children during the day and she would, I don't know how many floors or how many offices she had to clean, but you know, that's kind of at

that point in time that's the story for a lot of people. You know, like work, work and maybe it was her second job.

01:32:54:21

LESLIE PARKS:

I don't remember the whole story, but it's just- it was a tragic story. And it's also like the story of the Fontanelles, you know, that's another one where they were just-- the kids-- there's a picture of one of the children crying because they don't have any food, and just you know, there's nothing they could do, and then the husband would come home drunk so the food money was being-- you know, he was drinking it and there were four or five kids in the house and there was no heat and there were, you know, mice and rats running across the floor, and broken windows, and so it was just... and he would be- he would sit there with them. And it's incre- it's incredible. He wanted to show the American public and the world what was going on. And so, you know, he says that his weapon was his camera against these sorts of things and, you know, I think he wanted-- he didn't wanna hate, you know. He may not have wanted to love everybody, but he didn't want to hate, he wanted to just go past that, go beyond it and show the injustice, yeah.

### **Muhammad Ali**

01:34:29:03

LESLIE PARKS:

I met him a few times um... and you know, he was another person who would just like when he walked in the room, the whole room would turn and the focus would be on him and... You know, I just think his life was, you know, incredible. Just a person who, you know, wanted to tackle injustice and was like "I'm not doing- It's not my fight. I'm not going to war for you". Um, and he just had this will that was so powerful and incredible, yeah. So- but the photographs that, you know, just of this young person training and finding his way with new wealth, and you know my father took him to London and they went to Civil Row, and they bought all these suits and you know that kind of you know... those are the kinds of things he would do like "Come on. We're gonna get you some real suits. We're not going to buy anything off the rack." Like if you're the champ of the world, you're gonna look nice. Um, so. Yeah, it was just... he just knew how to find... the softspots of these- these people. Whether they were famous or just weren't even seen, you know, he saw them.

**Malcolm X**

01:36:06:10

LESLIE PARKS:

He trusted him and he didn't trust many people. So yeah, I don't know, you know, Dad had this thing where he could just... he could do it. He could gain that trust, um... and also he was very soft spoken and just kind of intense and you know, always promised that he would never take a photograph of you

that would make you look-- not make you look bad but just show you in your most vulnerable space. Like there was a fight where Ali lost and he was in a fetal position and Dad had the camera in his hand, and he didn't take the picture. You know? Like there's a time for the photograph and then there's a time where it's a real human moment that everyone has, and you- but you don't wanna rip down that person's image or what people see in them or you know... You wanna humanize them, but you don't want to... I don't know... take that away from them or embarrass them.

01:36:26:09

LESLIE PARKS:

And I think he knew that- like where the line was. Like no, I can't do that. Like I want to, but can't do it, yeah.

### **Gordon Parks' style**

01:37:43:18

LESLIE PARKS:

I think- cause he did. I mean, there was a moment, you know, that my hair was purple and he's like "What are you doing?" I'm like I'm doing what I'm doing. Um, and I think you know... for peop- I think at a cert- when he was younger for people to see him, you had to be put together or you couldn't like you know. Your hair had to be combed, your shirt had to be buttoned, you had to be wearing the right thing. And I think that was a lot-- a big part of it and I

think also you know when he didn't have anything, you know, there was a hole here and a hole-- And he's probably said to himself I will never live like this again. And so... and he, you know, he saw the beauty in things you know, like he did go to Civil Row to buy suits. Like he didn't buy suits off the rack. He liked tailoring; he liked things to fit him well. I think it was all part of his presentation, and also if that guy can get a suit from Civil Row why can't I? You know. Or why can't I wear an ascot and why can't I you know, wear very nice cufflinks and, you know, beautiful shoes and drive a cool car and just be cool?

01:39:12:18

LESLIE PARKS:

Yeah, it's funny I think he was, you know... he set the precedent for what everybody's doing today. You know the bag, the sneakers, you know there was always a little something that made it special, yeah. Sunglasses, the pipe. It was- it was a curated look for sure.

### **The Jaguar**

01:39:46:10

LESLIE PARKS:

Yeah, he stopped driving it and it was just sitting in the-- and I said, "Dad what's going on with the car? I thought I was going to...". And he said "Oh, I

sold it. I got rid of it". And I said "Ok, thanks". But yeah, the Jaguar. That was the X-- I can't remember which model it was. The Austin Powers Jaguar, yeah.

01:40:08:02

LESLIE PARKS:

I mean even... you know, the way he held his pipe in his hand or if he was smoking a cigarette like it wasn't-- you know there's nothing flamboyant about it, but there was always you know, he just did it that way. Or he'd walk around with the pipe hanging out of his mouth and, you know, and then he would pack it and then there would be another one in another room and he'd repack and so I would just kind of follow him around the house sometimes. It would be very interesting because there would always be a prop to grab and use and, you know, holding the pipe in his mouth and kind of looking over his glasses at you when he's talking to you or pondering something holding onto the pipe, and scratching his chin with his other hand. It's just you know those little things I miss. But you know, they're great memories.

01:41:04:08

LESLIE PARKS:

The pipe and also his, um, cologne. He used to get it at a little drug store around the corner from his house and I can't remember the name. Whenever I smell that, something similar to that, I think about him, yeah. And then the tobacco with the-- the tobacco smell with the cologne smell kind of mixed together. Mhm, yeah for sure. Or sometimes if I hear his voice, I have a... he

has a record that he had made, and I guess he was reading one of his books. I think it was the beginning of *Choice of Weapons* and so sometimes I'll play that so I could hear his voice and it's weird to hear it resonating through the house, yeah.

**Personality**

01:41:58:22

LESLIE PARKS:

Yeah, there's definitely a toughness there. But I didn't see it that-- you know, I mean... I saw it when I decided that I wasn't- I wanted to go to cooking school. I went to the French Culinary Institute, and so he said "Well, that's all great, fun, and good but you got to prove it to me. And so, if you don't wanna go to this school anymore," the school where I was, "then you're going to have to work for a year and prove to me and, you know, live on your own. I'm not giving you anything and we'll revisit this." And so, I did it. But you know, it's just like you gotta show me you know. Like I'm not gonna give you this big chunk of money to go do this thing that I think is frivolous, and he didn't-- I think he also didn't understand because I was like "I wanna be a chef". And he thought "Oh, you want to go work in somebody's house and cook for them?" And I was like "No, I want to work in a restaurant." And he's like oh like you know, "That's mens' work."

01:42:59:07

LESLIE PARKS:

And I said “No, not anymore”. So, it took a while. So he did have a toughness. And I learned a great lesson from it that like you know, if I really wanna do this, you gotta prove it to me. It’s just not like money is— here you go, here’s your money to go do this thing that I’m not quite sure about. So, that was a good lesson. Um... And yeah I think, you know, there were moments... I remember having a few telephone arguments where, you know, he would say something to me and I would say something to him, and maybe I’d hang up and I’d get a phone call back of him saying “Did you just f\*\*kin hang up on me?” Um... So, you know, but otherwise he was very sweet and you know, he was a good father. He cared a lot.

01:43:55:14

LESLIE PARKS:

I just think, you know, I think a lot of it had to do with style. Like I was kind of into like wearing t-shirts with holes in them and combat boots, and leather jackets and, you know, he was wearing these, you know, tailored suits and his hair was always, you know, slicked back just right and I’m just walking around looking like you know, who did what. He’s just like what is going on? I mean, I even remember that I had a leather jacket and the lining was falling out of it, but I liked that and he came behind me and cut, you know, he cut off the style- my style. He’s like “That doesn’t look right. It’s a great leather jacket Leslie, but you’ve got to like, you can’t be walking around with the lining hanging out of it”. Um.

01:44:45:00

LESLIE PARKS:

I think... you know, he was really kind of- like he could- like I said, he could see people. And so he-- I don't know- he was always the same person, but you know he just- he knew how to fit in. Um... And that's not always an easy thing to do. You know? It's just... I don't think he- I think there was a point in his life where he didn't doubt himself anymore, and I don't know when that came but I know that he did have doubt but he just... and I think that's part of, you know, the whole- his armor was his- the way he presented himself. And so you know, people were attracted to that, and so it was easier for him... it was like to disarm them with that... yeah. I mean, I- I've never said it that way but you made me think about it.

01:45:43:08

LESLIE PARKS:

He was very... approachable, but also, you know, when he would walk into a room, he took note and people took notice.

*Shaft*

01:46:03:18

LESLIE PARKS:

It's funny because I was watching... I don't know for some reason the tv was on... it was ...they were playing... Will Smith, the Fresh Prince and for some reason the film *Shaft* (1971) came up and they were tal- I think they were talking about Santa Claus like Santa Claus isn't real and he said something like "Yeah, you know, my favorite movie was *Shaft*" and they're like "Well you know *Shaft* wasn't a real person, right?" He just kind of loses it. Like what do you mean? What? You know, so... *Shaft* is a really- is a big deal for a lot of people.

01:46:43:00

LESLIE PARKS:

Um... It was just one of those iconic, you know, he was just this cool guy who just could, you know, tear a room apart and, you know, could just get a woman to do whatever he needed her to do. You know just... So yeah, it was... and it was also the first time in film that you saw a Black person portrayed in that- that way. So, I think for Black people it's- it's- it's a big deal. And just you know... a lot of people were like "I love this movie. It's one of my favorite films".

01:47:27:02

LESLIE PARKS:

Yeah, I was probably five or six when they were filming. I remember being on set once you know... I remember seeing everything that was going on, and I didn't really understand it. Um, and I remember being told to be quiet. So, you

know that- But, you know, it was- it was fun to, you know, go watch Dad and see him doing his work. You know, it was always- if I ever- Whenever I had the chance to see him work, you know, he was in it. He was all about it so, yeah... it's ...you know... it's just so intense, you know.

01:48:06:16

LESLIE PARKS:

I remember, you know, people would bring magazines and say "Oh," you know, "can you have your dad sign this for me?" And I'd say, I'll see if I can do that. Um, but his- It was always pretty even to me. I didn't notice it anymore um... than just that he was Dad you know, like that's more where our relationship was because there was, you know, there was a lot of time that we didn't spend together, but when we- so when we had the time together, it was our time together, yeah. So the famous, you know- like I said, the people stopping us on the street that was always a normal thing up until the last walk we had on you know together... probably right around the corner from his apartment, you know. "Mr. Parks... it's so nice to meet you, it's so nice to see you today," yeah.

## **Hollywood**

01:49:15:19

LESLIE PARKS:

I think he liked directing. Um... I just- I think for some reason it was a little too soon, or maybe there was someone who didn't like seeing someone of color becoming so successful at that time, so they kinda pulled back on it. Um... You know I think- I think he always had plans to make films out of some of his books, um, but it just... he was always doing so many things that maybe even he may have gotten in his own way. He's over here, he's doing this, you know, he's writing a book. Like it's just- composing. So, I don't know. I mean, I would have liked to have seen more films from him, definitely. I would like to see somebody do some film with some of his work. I know that people are interested in doing- and I'm not gonna say who they are, but are interested in doing, um, a film on the Flavio story, which I think would be a fantastic story to see.

01:50:32:01

LESLIE PARKS:

So, yeah, I mean some of these stories would be great films, um, especially now. You know? Um, seeing... seeing how people... suffer in the world and we- like we just don't know anything about it. You know? We're just kinda going on in our own lives you know, walking into the Gap, Wholefoods, you know, just living our lives...our very privileged lives when people are just not doing well at all. Um, and so... it's like who's the new Gordon Parks? You know? Who's gonna take note and continue to show us what's going on? The things that we forget about. Um, I think there's a few of them. But, you know, you just gotta- gotta keep pushing forward and not doubt themselves. You

know? Somehow try and grab some of that swag and just confidence that Dad had.

***Leadbelly***

01:51:52:04

LESLIE PARKS:

Like I just don't think at that moment in time studios were ready to give a person of color that much control or that much, you know, it's just like oh, who cares. You know? Who cares about this story? And then shortly afterward- afterward, he had films like *Glory* (1989) came out, you know, these narratives but it just... and people- people would see... you know, these Black actors doing really great work, but it just took time and he might have been on the wrong end of that.

01:52:33:02

LESLIE PARKS:

I just think he was older you know, the energies where work was going. I mean I- I- I... I think if he had more time... if he had another ninety three years, he could have done it. Um, I think it really just... that's what it was because he had- he had it in him, he had so- so many ideas. So many... You know just- he would stay up until, you know, 6:00 in the morning typing. I remember when I would stay with him just hearing the typewriter going like he just never stopped working. Um, and it was incredible because, you know,

I have to go to bed at 9:30 otherwise I'm useless, but he-- and there are people who can do that, you know, like my husband does that. I'll wake up in the middle of the night and he's in the studio and he comes back and he'll sleep until, you know, 2:00 in the afternoon. It's just- it's this energy of just what an-- it's there... and the thought and the creativity is flowing you can't stop it. And- But sometimes I think it can, you know... go from over here or over there.

01:53:51:21

LESLIE PARKS:

Um, I think... you know it's funny I think he also had like these very blue moments where he would get very depressed and... you know because of the things that he'd seen, and it overt- you know, it would overtake him and I don't know if it blocked creativity, but it was there. Um, but, you know, like I said until the end he was- he was working.

### **Periods of depression**

01:54:30:01

LESLIE PARKS:

He would become quiet; he would kind of go inside. Um, you know... he wouldn't be very expressive, he would just kind of be very thoughtful or also, you know he had a reel where he would play, you know, different music and so you could kind of tell what kind of mood he- if you came into the

apartment- what kind of mood he was in depending on what music was playing. Like... I think you know... he would play Marvin Gaye's album What's Going- the album, *What's Going On?* And that like, you would- I would come in and that thing... it would be playing twenty four hours a day and it would be playing, it would just- it never changed and then it- it would change and go to classical music, and but you would just be kind of in this- you'd be in the reel with Dad and, you know, he would be happy one day, you know like...

01:55:28:01

LESLIE PARKS:

And then if Marvin Gaye was playing, you know, his mind was on something... somewhere. Yeah... it was interesting. You're like "Oh man. I love this album but I don't want to hear it the whole time I'm here, it's just gonna keep playing and playing and playing. He's in a place." Yeah.

### **Last days**

01:55:51:23

LESLIE PARKS:

He had- he had cancer. Um, it's interesting because I- I was in uh... I was in California visiting my mother and I got a telephone call that he had fallen, you know, it was in the summer and I guess at this point he was ninety two and... He went to the supermarket, and it- it was super hot... and I guess he was

dehydrated... he hadn't been outside a couple- a couple of days so I guess he had fallen and they took him to the hospital... and that was like- that was the beginning of the end, you know, then he came home and we had a nurse there, and I would come and I would cook him meals once a week and I would go visit... I would sit and eat with him. And I- My son was probably...

01:56:43:06

LESLIE PARKS:

I can't remember... how old he was, but you know I would bring the kids and you know, we would spend time together and just slowly he couldn't get out of bed and he couldn't eat solid food anymore. So it was just kind of the reversal you know, becoming the caregiver. Um, and that was hard like I don't wish that on anyone. Um... But he, you know, he- at the end I know that there were a lot of things he couldn't say, but you could see it in his eyes like he knew that there was love there and, you know, that was important and my sister and my brother were both there when he passed. It was- it was- it was good to be able to have that experience with him. And to know that he died in the place that he loved you know, 860 United Nations Plaza. That was, you know, home base. So you know, it was great um... to see him be where he wanted to be... where he moved on.

01:58:02:17

LESLIE PARKS:

Um, yeah. I don't know, stories... I have some but you know they're just- they're just... I know that he wanted me to be a great skier, this is a story, and- and Gene told me this story. Um, and we used to go to Vale every Christmas and um... spring break and he was at a lesson- he was on a chair lift with his instructor and he saw this kid flying down the hill. And he was like "Wow! That kid is just mottoring down the hill. I wish Leslie could ski that way some day." And the instructor says "That is Leslie! That's your daughter". And so you know... I hope I made him happy and proud that day. Yeah. Um, that's the story. You know, there's a lot of stories but I think that's- I think that's my favorite.

01:59:13:06

LESLIE PARKS:

When I would chef at different restaurants, he would- he would come... you know, and visit me and you know, turn the restaurant upside down and... you know, whenever I would get a uh... a review, the... the food critic would always like to mention that I was Gordon Parks' daughter. So after we would get reviewed... you know whatever restaurant it was, the restaurant would always seem to get a little busier after... after the review, but yeah... I was like great, thanks. It could be about the food and you know I don't think I really had any bad reviews, but the Gordon Parks mention helped things quite often, yeah.

02:00:01:13

LESLIE PARKS:

But he, yeah, he enjoyed it, he liked– and he liked to say that he taught me everything I knew about cooking. And I said “Well, you paid for it. So, maybe you did.” Yeah

**Divorce from Genevieve Young**

02:00:21:18

LESLIE PARKS:

I didn't know they were broken up until I came to the house and somebody else was living there with him, and you just kind of– you know, that- that was dad... He just kind of like rolled with the punches and you form a new relationship, and you hope that that relationship lasts... um, or not. And so there were a few other people after that, but Gene and I, you know... Gene and I are still close. She, you know, is very interested and helpful with my- with my children. When I come to visit, she and I will sit down and have lunch and talk about Dad and I'll bring one of the boys with me if they're around and, you know... I mean that's- that's what he could do for people you know just keep them. Other people can walk away and say you know I don't care about that kid anymore, I'm done. I'm done with that family and that's never happened with anybody he was with.

END TC: 02:01:29:04