

Project Points

What is Honored in A Country Will Be Cultivated There. — Plato

“Keeping you informed, connected and empowered.”

We request BBOD Project members and alumni to keep us informed of personal and professional changes and achievements in your life. This includes promotions, births, anniversaries, vacations, social events, degrees, awards, major transitions of close family members and awards.

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A meritocracy is a system in which the people who are the luckiest in the field and genetic endowment, luckiest in terms of family support, encouragement and probably income, luckiest in their education and career opportunities and luckiest in so many ways difficult to enumerate — these are the folks who reap the largest rewards.

The only way for a putative meritocracy to hope to pass ethical muster, to be considered fair, is if those who are the luckiest in all respects to have the greatest responsibility to work hard, to contribute to the betterment of the world and to share their luck with others.—Ben. S. Bernanke

The unfortunate thing about being ahead of your time is that finally people finally realize you were right... They say it was obvious all along.

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The Leader in Ideas and Actions!

Comments From BBOD Members, Friends and Supporters

The Newsletter is great. Thanks for keeping us informed. —*Joya Dunbar*

Thank you Marvin! And, as always, I appreciate the support of you and Roberta - *Laya Gavin*

What a great newsletter! The articles were outstanding and I particularly enjoyed the one, “Who does your hair?” I am taking swimming lessons and need hair help. —*Gloria Wyatt*

It is great to see Ginger Spencer selected for one of the Forty Leaders Under 40 by the Phoenix Business Journal. She is a phenomenal woman. —*Channel Rowe*

To have three of your members selected for the “Forty Under 40 Leaders” by the Phoenix Business Journal is such an honor for BBOD Project. Keep up the great work! - *Gloria Wyatt*

The selection of three BBOD Project members for the Business Journal “Forty Under 40” is very impressive. —*Richard Stern*

The story of the Ralstons is tremendous. It shows perseverance and residency. —*Darren Chapman*

I really enjoyed reading the story about “The Ralstons.” It is a nice touch from BBOD Project to read this wonderful couple’s life and business trajectory. —*Loretta Cheeks*

Thanks for inviting me to the luncheon with Congresswoman Kyrsten Sinema. I have always been a great supporter of hers. The food was great and the luncheon guests superb. —*Judy Berry*

You do a lot of good work for the community. —*Ernie Garfield*

A ship is safe in the harbor, but that is not what a ship is built for. —*William H. Shedd*

Abundancy

BBOD Project Members Building Great Communities and Reaping Abundant Rewards

Elaine Birks Mitchell, and her husband Johnny, were featured in the Arizona Republic and selected to receive the East Valley NAACP Humanitarian Award.

Steven Zachary, Zachary Law Group, named one of the Top 100 Trial Lawyers by the National Trial Lawyers Association. This reflects his 25 years of legal expertise in Arizona and Minnesota.

Edward T. Howard and his wife LaRue are chairing the Scottsdale Center for the Performing Arts Gala on Saturday, December 7, 2013 featuring Natalie Cole. Ed is on the Board of Trustees of the Scottsdale Cultural Council, the parent organization of the SCPA. BBOD Project members on the committee are Ora Fant, Benjamin Montgomery and Sylvia McDowell.

Kerwin Brown named Father of the Year by the American Diabetes Association and the Father’s Day Council.

Quintin Boyce, Ed. D. named Principal of the Phoenix Union Bioscience High School.

Ora Fant elected to the board of Esperanza

Andre H. Merrett has joined the Law Firm of Sacks Tierney, PV

Jerry Oliver, Sr. elected president of the Rotary 100.

Melvin Jones elected to the board and named Vice President of the Phoenix Therapy Matters.

Carla-Risha Wright promoted to senior sales manager at the Ritz Carlton Phoenix.

Erica Alexander has started a book club.

Shehara L. Smallwood received the Zeke McIntyre Pioneer Award from Edward Jones in recognition of her high achievements.

Tamika Curry Smith recognized as one of the 50 Most Influential Women in Arizona by Arizona Business Magazine.

Gregory Winfree, JD, has been nominated by President Obama to become the Administrator of Research and Innovative Technology Administration in the US Department of Transportation.

Mr & Mrs Tophas Anderson celebrate his selection as one of the Forty Under 40 Leaders at a reception by the Phoenix Business Journal.

In every person who comes near you look for what is good and strong, honor that; try to imitate it and your faults will drop off like dead leaves when time comes. —*John Ruskin*

Mr. George Burnett, President, Northcentral University, Board: Cott Corporation & Circle Graphics

Dr. Charles R. Campbell Outstanding Alumna: Tamika Curry Smith

Dr. Lincoln J. Ragsdale Outstanding Director Award: Tony Finley

Living Legend Award: Edward Howard

Admission: BBOD Members and Alumni – Free
Others - \$55.00 each

The Invisible Line

Three American Families and the Secret Journey from Black to White

Daniel J. Sharfstein

In *The Invisible Line*, Daniel Sharfstein follows three families, the Gibsons, Spencers, and Walls, as they transition from black to white, focusing on a few dynamic characters in each family’s past. Over time, these three families include Southern aristocrats, self-sufficient farmers, members of the black urban elite, mountain folk who forge their living directly from the land, congressmen, Union and Confederate war heroes, lawyers, abolitionists and slavery apologists, wealthy and poor. All of whom had an African ancestor buried in their past. We encounter individuals who faced their internal prejudice before and after learning that they had African ancestry, and those whose status as white was so stable, they neither knew nor had to face the internal conflict of sharing ancestry with people they sought to oppress.

Through Sharfstein’s work we see how American communities sometimes protected their own status as white by accepting and protecting people whose ancestry was questionable if they could pass for Western European and offered some measure of social stability. When questions of race emerged for the Spencers and Gibsons, their status as white was important to enough people who counted on them—through marriage, business arrangements, or for leadership—to defend. Despite contestations that even played out in court, they prevailed in maintaining their identity as white. Through these discussions, we also witness how different states came up with and changed their rules about what made a person black.

Of the three, the Walls provide the clearest sense of the emotion and reasoning behind making the transition from black to white because Sharfstein could establish very clear lines of ancestry: slave owner Stephen Wall had 5 children by three of his slaves. The generation of grand-children that followed made a distinct choice to become white. In contrast, the Gibsons and the Spencers had already become blurred by the time they are sufficient records to explore their lives in detail. By the time of the Civil War, the Spencers and Gibsons were so solidly identified as white that family members fought for the Confederates. The Walls, who were still black at the time, fought for the Union.

What is further compelling about the Walls’ story is that Stephen Wall’s children, after he sent them north and helped fund their education, became prominent abolitionists and civil rights activists. One daughter, named for Danish Queen Caroline Matilda, married John Langston Mercer, the first black congressman from Virginia and founder of the Howard University Law School. Wall’s own son, Orindatus Simon Bolivar Wall (known as O.S.B. Wall) became the first black man to be commissioned as Captain in the Regular US Army. In Washington D.C., O.S.B. Wall became a prominent attorney and a justice of the peace, among other visible roles. The Walls and the Gibsons became the stuff of African-American legend in D.C. Their households were host to Washington’s black elite and, despite career highs and lows, the Walls enjoyed considerable social standing among the black community. During the height of O.S.B. Wall’s career, one of his white relatives working for a DC politician came over for dinner and left truly impressed by the family’s success. This Wall was ridiculed by white family members at home for expressing his thoughts on how highly cultured the black Walls were.

And yet, with parents, aunts and uncles who fought feverishly for the rights of African descendants, the pressures of the post-reconstruction period was too much for the next generation of Walls to persist in maintaining a black identity. They began making the transition from black to white long after their parents’ death. Sharfstein closely follows the saga of Stephen Wall’s grandson named for the plantation-owning sire of the previous generation. Stephen’s transition to white doesn’t go smoothly. His oldest daughter is kicked out of school once it was discovered that she was a Wall, not a Wall as her parents had entered in the school registry. The family changed their names and moved frequently to escape exposure by trackers who might know the Wall family’s name in DC. Stephen Wall often teeters on the edge of losing his job. Perhaps because of this uncertainty, Stephen’s son Roscoe becomes unstable and violent, and is ultimately hanged for rape. Roscoe’s son Thomas Murphy, alive today, struggles with prejudice that was only exacerbated by discovery of his father’s African ancestry.

Sharfstein’s novelistic style of writing keeps this dense historical narrative compelling. However, he swerves between families through time, making it difficult to remember the cast of characters and their relationships. I narrative have preferred a less intricately woven, but direct telling each family’s story individually.

REVIEWED BY: Kenja Hassan is a Washington, DC native whose father is white and her mother is black. She earned a BA and an MA in religious studies, respectively from Princeton University and Arizona State University. She is employed in the public affairs department of a major research university.

Where is She Now?

Lorua Yee is now the Executive Vice President and General Manager for the Transportation Business at Interject Ventures and a member of their executive team, located in Bellevue, Washington.

Dondrell Swanson—Great weather and I have extended family here.

Renaldo Fowler—Love the mountains and the outdoors.

Penny Wright—Great location for destination travels, the arts, amazing restaurants, Desert Zoo and hiking.

Christopher Houck—very clean city, good diversity, wonderful parks, skiing, fresh air and the deserts and mountains.

Vanessa Bruce—The red mountains, amazing sunsets and near Sedona.

Beverly Muhammad—great fall and winter weather, diversity of outdoor activities, great place for senior citizens to stay active.

Opportunecion G. Henderson—opportunities to grow—not a mature city.

Tiffany Denninger—as a native, I love everything about Phoenix and the surrounding lakes and mountains... and soon we’ll have anything to say about it!

Phoenix Conservatory School of Music Executive Director, Regina Nixon (left) and Board Member Jewel West (right) pose with Krystal Banfield, Dean, Berkeley City Music Pre-college Program at the Berkeley School of Music. Two PCM students received five weeks scholarships to the school’s summer program.

On August 19, 2013 — BBOD Project members met with Congresswoman Kyrsten Sinema and her staff at a luncheon at The Arrogant Butcher in Downtown Phoenix.

State Bar of Arizona members at the *Baltimore Resort* are (left to right) Marvin E. Perry, Roberta Dawson-Perry, Former Minnesota Justice and NFL, Great Alan Page, and Arizona State Bar Executive Director John Phelps. Mr. & Mrs. Perry were guests of Mr. Phelps. Mr. Perry previously served on the State Bar Board of Governors as a public member.

Denise M. Blommel, Attorney 480-425-7272 denise@azlaborlaw.com www.azlaborlaw.com Representing Employees and Employers Strengthening Employee-Employer relationships through training and mediation F 480-425-7274 / 7272 E. Indian School Rd., Ste 206 / Scot. AZ 85251

Shehara Smallwood accepting a check for over \$3,900.00 from Gerry Johnson at Unity Church in Moon Valley for Phoenix Conservatory of Music.

Profile... THE RALSTONS: A LOVE STORY THROUGH TRIUMPHS AND TRAGEDIES

By Paula P. Moore

When you think about a husband wife team—two people who truly have each other’s backs, you have to think about Jerome “Jay” and Kimberly “Kim” Ralston. They are inseparable. They believe in each other. They believe in a life plan that involves totally planning and deciding every aspect of their lives and their children’s lives. This plan has worked for the couple from the inception to the present day.

Jay and Kim have been married since 1987. Their mission has been to establish themselves as successful entrepreneurs in their careers and finances. Their present goal is to leave a solid legacy for their two children, Josh and Mariah. They have explored many professions along the way from the cleaning service industry to real estate to the publishing business.

There have been many ups and downs...many challenges, many successes, along the way. Through it all, they have survived. They continue to work their plans and they continue their climb. Their most recent accomplishment is the publication of their first book, for entrepreneurs, written jointly with a friend and close associate, Carol Arkley.

“Kim and I wrote this ‘Rough Around the Edges’ to tell our story and encourage others to never give up, try many different avenues to achieve their personal dreams,” Jay says.

There have been many successes along the way. The Ralston’s say their two children, Josh and Mariah head the list. Josh is currently an accomplished track star at Grand Canyon University. He is a freshman. He is majoring in business management. Mariah is a junior at Hamilton High School, where she is also building her own winning reputation as a track star. The Ralston’s beam when talking about their children.

“Josh and Mariah are both focused and they understand, even at a young age, that it takes lots of hard work to get anywhere or anything in life,” Jay says.

Again their lives have many highs and many lows. Jay is quick to tell you about the vacant auto dealership they bought in Detroit and made it a beautiful, elegant headquarters for the cleaning business and its 250 employees. Later, they sold the 10,000 square foot facility to move to Arizona and start fresh, in 2002.

“Being an entrepreneur, means being resilient and not afraid to go in a new direction....There have been many changes in our lives...and many challenges, like Kim’s discovery of having multiple sclerosis (MS)” Jay says.

“Kim was in a car accident and during an exam she was diagnosed. We continue to tackle this disease. It hasn’t stopped us, but has made us think about the important things in life...each other...our family...our lives together,” he continues.

Kim has an indomitable spirit. She’s quick to tell you MS is a battle, but she’s even quicker to tell you...now she has time to work on some writing projects that have been in her mind for many years.

“I want to inspire people...I want to let people know that no matter what happens in life, it’s all about attitude. We have had financial, family, business and medical challenges throughout, our lives, she said.

“You seize the moment, do your best, and never give up,” she adds.

“Once I remember we had \$11 between the two of us, and that was it,” she says with a serious face.

“There were times, when our assets were frozen, we had to go through probate, we had a business partner sell out, basically we had to rob Peter to pay Paul, we constantly had to reinvent ourselves...and we did it,” Jay says.

The Ralstons believe in diversification. Their advice to future entrepreneurs is to have multiple streams of income. They are quick to say they have real estate, janitorial services, publishing projects, and many other ideas for creating wealth. They encourage people to think big and not box themselves into only one source.

Jay says he was raised by his mother alone. He did not have a relationship with his birth dad. So he had to create his own identity. Doing that throughout his early years made him stronger today.

“It’s a blessing I’m not a criminal. When I was 18 I changed my name and started my own legacy. You can’t worry about your circumstances, or worry if you were born out of wedlock, think about what you want in life, and then get after it,” he says.

Currently, the Ralstons continue to work their custodial business as well as their real estate projects. Jay says his goal now is to buy right, fix up and sell homes and properties, so that he can establish a firm financial foundation for the family’s future. Meanwhile, Kim continues to focus on healing and management of MS...while continuing to write, and assist Jay as needed. She says the family support faith has been a mainstay and the Ralston’s spiritual journey has been remarkable.

“I had a Christian store in Detroit, Glory of God, filled with Bibles, literature, African-American dolls, and other religious items.

We donated many items to a mission in Sudan. The holy spirit has been a constant in our lives,” she says.

The Ralstons are ready for the future...they embrace change and through it all, they have picked themselves up and continue in the game. Jay continues as a realtor in the state of Arizona as well as a business owner of his facilities’ maintenance company. He sees the light at the end of the tunnel, and he’s prepared to lease rental properties or make other career adjustments until the real estate market returns to profitability. Jay says he will do whatever it takes, to keep his family afloat.

“Diary of a Janitor,” which deals with his 21 years of experience in the service industry.

Together they are committed to each other...their children and their future.

“Jay and I experienced success and wealth in our early twenties. We rode the gravy train for many, many years. We had all the material things we wanted or desired. We have always had God in our lives. His grace has kept an saved us,” she says.

As she continues to battle MS, her faith remains strong. “We love the Lord, and no matter what happens, we will continue to push forward with a great attitude and perseverance. We are not victims, but victors!”

Are we to look at cherry blossoms only in full bloom, the moon only when it is cloudless? In all things, it is the beginnings and the ends that are interesting. —Yoshida Kenko

Something which we think is impossible now is not impossible now. —Judge Baker Motley

Reflections submitted by

We lost Dr. John Edwards, a long time ASU Professor and Civic Leader. He was a member of our first BBOD Project cohorts.

Rick Moody, Distinguished Author, ABR, GRE, CNE, AIRWELFA, CERN, FE08, Member of MBE Society

A man, after he brushed off the dust and chips of his life, will have left only that hard clean question: Was it good or evil? Have I done well or evil? —John Steinbeck

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