

**University of Maryland  
Oral History Project  
Interview with Ron Minor  
Conducted on August 5, 2022 by Annabelle Smith**

**AS:** My name is Annabelle Smith and I am an oral historian at History Associates, Inc. in Rockville, Maryland. Today's date is Friday, August 5, 2022. And I am speaking with Ron Minor for the Special Collections in Media and Culture, a unit within the Special Collections and University Archives at R. Lee Hornbake Special Collections Library at the University of Maryland. This interview is part of a larger donation to the Special Collections in Media and Culture centered on the contributions of Joseph "Tex" Gathings III to radio and television broadcasting. Mr. Minor, can you please state your name and spell it?

**RM:** Ronald F. Minor. R-O-N-A-L-D F. M-I-N-O-R

**AS:** Thank you. Can you please describe how were you introduced to Mr. Gathings?

**RM:** Well, you're going back a long ways. I actually heard him when I was a kid on WOOK. I always was interested in radio as a kid in DC. And I met Tex at the, maybe forty years later I met him at a gathering of broadcasters. And not knowing that he lived like less than a half a mile from me. So I would see him at the food store all the time. And we got to talking and what have you. And I myself wanted to do a documentary. And I'm sorry I didn't get a chance to do something on him before he passed away. But that's how I met

him. I didn't really work with him when I was at WOOK. But that's how I met him through public broadcasting.

**AS:** And what was your first impression of Mr. Gathings?

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**RM:** Well, number one, he was so articulate. And his voice was so unique. Even back then, I didn't know if he was white or Black. But he was just unique in terms of his delivery and the way he came across. He was just like a true gentleman in terms of radio. So I just think this guy's led the way for hundreds of deejays in the DMV. He was one of the top guys out there. I just admired him so much. And you know, when you listen to radio, you always think how the guy looks or lady looks or whatever. And he was the total opposite of what I thought he'd look like when I heard his voice. But he really was a true gentleman.

**AS:** And I know you touched on it briefly, but are you familiar with any of Mr. Gathings' radio shows on WOOK AM radio?

**RM:** Well, yeah. I mean, like I say, goes back a long ways, but absolutely. I just thought that he came across so well that even as a kid I could understand what he was saying and how he dealt with the public. Not knowing, as I said, later in life that I would work at the same station that he worked at. Again, I didn't know him at that point. But yeah, his radio work was just impeccable.

**AS:** Was there any certain type of music or news story that stuck out to you while listening to any of those shows?

**RM:** No, I can't recall. That's been a long time. I really can't recall. All I remember is his unique voice. He had a very unique voice. And if I walked away from the radio and was in another room, I could tell that's who that was.

**AS:** All right. Do you remember, or are you familiar with any of Mr. Gathings' television broadcasts?

04:42

**RM:** No, again, like I said, at that time I was not in the business. And I really didn't watch that much TV. So no, I really couldn't talk on that because I didn't know too much about it.

**AS:** What about the television broadcast Teenarama?

**RM:** Oh, yes. That was, that was also a long time ago. But yeah, I used to watch that also in black and white. And that was unique for the DMV also, because I think that was probably one of the first shows really out there other than American Bandstand.

**AS:** Can you share any stories about your experience watching the show? And how did it make you feel?

**RM:** Well, it was very enjoyable to watch Blacks dancing and having a good time to the latest songs that were out at that time. And you knew some of the people on that show that you probably went to school with. Now I didn't, because I went to an all-boys school. But in my neighborhood, I knew a couple of people and used to see them on the broadcast. It just made you feel good and you would turn on the TV and oh, that's so and so and that's so and so. And then when you'd see them later that day. You know, I watched, whatever. Yeah. But I remember that. But it's been so long ago.

**AS:** In your opinion, how did Teenarama impact the culture of DC's community at that time?

06:31

**RM:** Well, I mean, I think it brought a lot of people close together in terms of being on that show. Because everybody probably wants to be on that show. I don't think anybody back in those days did not want to go on Teenarama. You know, to dance. I mean because a lot of, back then a lot of hand dancing. So I mean, you had professionals out there, almost, want to be on that show. But it had a great impact on the Washington area. Being that it was local. And I do think, I think it was live at that time.

**AS:** And again, in your opinion, how did the broadcast reflect the larger DC culture during this period?

**RM:** Well, I can't really say how it affected the DC culture. Like I said, it played the music of today. And it brought people together that wanted to be on the show. Because you had various schools in the area and kids that really danced very well that would want to come

on the show. It was almost like a competition. You know, and you had maybe Roosevelt, Bert Coolidge and so on and so on. I think that brought the community together of a bunch of teenagers trying to get on that show.

**AS:** That's wonderful. Did you happen to know Mr. Gathings during his time at Federal City College?

08:21

**RM:** No. I knew he was there. But no, I didn't really know him at that time. No, I didn't.

**AS:** That's perfectly fine. In your opinion, can you speak to how Mr. Gathings personally impacted the communities of the DC Metro area?

**RM:** Well, I think he led the way for, like I said, a lot of local deejays who probably really looked up to him and probably I would say for being one of the first on the air. He was a true gentleman. I mean, I didn't know him in later life, like I said. He was a true gentleman and very pleasant to talk with. That's what I liked about him. Even you thought that, a lot of folks you hear on the radio, when they're off air, they don't sound the same way. But he sounded the same way on the air as he did off the air. And he was a true gentleman all around. Because I think he would talk to anybody. I mean, you knew him, you saw him somewhere or whatever, you went up to him, he would sit there and hold a conversation with you. And it made folks feel good that, you know, "Oh, I was talking to Tex the other day," and this, that and the other, it was just a great feeling. I think it made people feel good.

**AS:** Wonderful. In your opinion, how did Mr. Gathings help to change the face or voice of public television and radio?

**RM:** Well, I guess by being the first and showing that it worked, he made other folks want to do the same thing. In terms of myself, I wanted to, at that time being a kid, you know, you don't know what you want to do. Never knowing I was going to end up in broadcasting, and even working there as a young fellow, I just think that he led the way and opened up a lot of doors for a lot of us to get into the business. Because he, you know, he set a whole pattern for what you had to do and how it works to be part of the broadcasting industry. He was just an outstanding guy and I think he was definitely a role model for a lot of us.

11:12

**AS:** And just to build off of that a little more, in your opinion, how did Mr. Gathings help make the field of public broadcasting more accessible and open for minorities?

**RM:** Well, I think that would be, if you were a guy interested in the business, you would want to, like I always told my kids if you see somebody doing something, go talk to them. He would be the guy that you would want to go talk to. And he would tell you exactly what you need to do to get into the business. And I'm quite sure he's helped a lot of folk get into the business, not even knowing that they want to even get into the business. You know, through his classes at the school and through his just general knowledge of

broadcasting itself. Because when he got in, I'm quite sure it was totally different than it is now. So yeah, he's a pioneer. I mean, no question. He was the man.

**AS:** And what do you feel are some of the lasting impacts that Mr. Gathings has had on public broadcasting?

**RM:** Well, I think his knowledge of the business and the way he came across on the air left a lot of folks wondering. Again, if you didn't know him and you were to listen to him on the radio, you didn't know whether he was Black or white. That's number one. But once you found out this was a Black man, you scratched your head and go, wow. Like I said, he had a very unique voice. He came across so well on the radio. He was undeniable. A pioneer.

13:27

**AS:** Do you feel that Mr. Gathings' career and legacy has impacted your career or aspirations in any way? And if so, how?

**RM:** Absolutely. I worked at the WOOK Radio in the '70s. And then I went from radio and I worked at NBC for thirty-seven years. So, absolutely. It was, well, not seeing him but listening to him when I was a kid probably left something in my brain or whatever that that's what I wanted to do. And not knowing that I really wanted to be in broadcasting, but it happened. So, yeah. He was part of it. Yeah, definitely. He was part of it.

**AS:** Was there anything that Mr. Gathings' career or just knowing him personally taught you that you have used in your own career?

**RM:** Yeah, I think so. I basically, you know, when I meet folks and I tell them what I used to do, because I'm retired, they want to talk about, "Oh, wow! So you know so and so and you've done this." Yeah. And I tell them all the things I've done and places I've gone and what have you like that. And I think that's helped others to kind of say well, if he can do it, I can do it. You know? And I think that's probably what Tex did in terms of his career coming up. He probably led the way for a lot, as I said, a lot of people to get into broadcasting.

15:11

**AS:** And do you think Mr. Gathings' work in public broadcasting is being continued today? And if so, how?

**RM:** Not as much, I think. The business is totally different now than it was back then. It's more commercial. Let's face it. It's about money. How much money can you make? So back then in the day when Tex was on the air doing his thing, I don't think commercials were that much. I don't even remember commercials back then. I mean, I'm probably sure they had them, because that pays the bills. But I don't remember that many commercials back in the day. He was more talking to the people. And it was a local, you know, go somewhere in the city, he would mention that. Or if he was emceeding somewhere, he would mention that or whatever. But the business has definitely changed since he was doing it. Absolutely.



**AS:** Understandable. To the best of your ability, how would you describe Mr. Gathings' legacy? And do you think it has changed over time?

**RM:** Well, he had an impact on, well, I can say me. For sure. But I know he's touched hundreds or maybe even thousands of other people that we don't even know of. Because again, he was the first. I mean, you know, you can't, I can't be where I am today if there wasn't a first. You know, I got in the business in 1970. And it was kind of rough then, but not as rough as it is probably right now to get in the business. And yes, his legacy, I mean, oh, yeah. He left a heck of a legacy. I mean, you mention the name Tex Gathings, I mean, automatically I mean, people of my generation know exactly who you're talking about.

17:39

**AS:** That's really special. My last question is just very broad. Would you be willing to share any stories about your interactions with Mr. Gathings as you knew him?

**RM:** Well, funny you should mentioned that, I went to the food mart down here where I lived. And I ran into him. Well, that's when his health was failing a little bit. But I mean, he was doing pretty good. And I walked up to him, I said, "Mr. Gathings, how you doing?" You know. And he turned around with that gorgeous voice, "Hi, I'm fine, thank you. How are you?" And I got to tell him who I was and who I am and he said, "Oh," Washingtonian. Oh, yeah. And I said, "I used to listen to you all the time when you were at WOOK Radio. And now I work at NBC." And we got to talking. And we were

standing in the aisle of the grocery store, just talking away. And he was just, I guess he was thrilled that somebody recognized him. Because I think a lot of times people, you know, famous people or whatever, and they don't go up to them and say anything. But once I saw him in the store, I knew exactly who he was. And I went up and talked to him and we had a long conversation in the grocery store. And then from that time, I would see him all the time and just walk up to him and say, "Hey, Mr. Gathings, how you doing? Ron Minor." "Yeah, Ron." You know, just chit chat and chit chat. I mean, what a great guy. What a great guy. And I'm glad I had the opportunity to actually meet him and hear him. And for all he has inspired today. And I can't thank him enough.

**AS:** That is truly a special relationship. Mr. Minor, that's all the questions I had for you today. Is there anything you would like to share before I stop recording?

**RM:** Well, again, like I said, this guy led the way in broadcasting for a lot of folks. And personally, I'd like to thank him. I know he's up in heaven probably doing the news or something up there, you know? But what a wonderful guy. That's all I can say. he was a true gem. And he will be missed.

**AS:** All right.

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[End Interview.]