

Maryland Beats W. Va.; Virginia, Va

Weather

Today: Partly sunny, mild.
High 77. Low 56. Wind 8-16 mph.
Monday: Sunny. High 75.
Low 55. Wind northwest 8-16 mph.
Yesterday: Temp. range: 69-88.
AQI: N/A. Details on Page B2.

The Washington

117TH YEAR ... No. 287 ..

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 18, 1994

ROSA LEE'S STORY

POVERTY AND SURVIVAL IN WASHINGTON

In 1932, in the midst of the Great Depression, Rosa Lee Cunningham's grandparents and parents gave up their North Carolina sharecropping life for an uncertain journey north.

Unable to survive on a rural Maryland farm, they abandoned the countryside for the nation's capital.

Rosa Lee is the link between past and present, between a world that has disappeared and the one that her children and grandchildren face today in Washington.

Her life spans a half-century of hardship in blighted neighborhoods not far from the majestic

buildings where policy-makers have largely failed in periodic efforts to break the cycle of poverty that has trapped her and so many other Americans for so long. Many of Rosa Lee's relatives, including

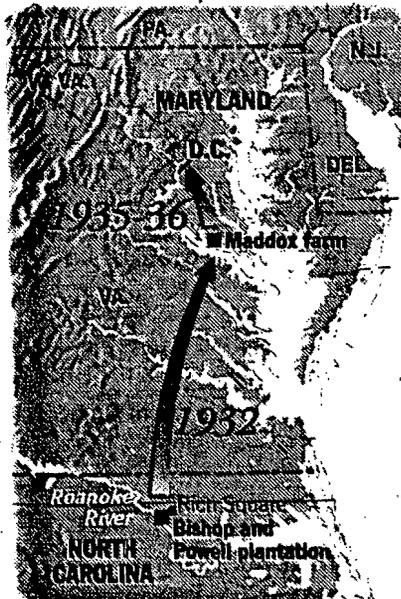
two of her eight children, managed to overcome the obstacles they faced and secure footholds in the mainstream of

American society; their relative success makes her story all the more important to understand.

Rosa Lee talks about her experience in ways that are sometimes discomfiting and disturbing. She wants it told anyway. "Maybe I can help somebody not follow in my footsteps," she told Washington Post reporter Leon Dash in giving him permission to chronicle her life.

Her story—the choices she had and the choices she made — offers a chance to

understand what statistics only suggest: the interconnections of racism, poverty, illiteracy, drug abuse and crime, and why these conditions often persist from generation to generation.



PHOTOCOPY
PRESERVATION

'It's been rough. Lord knows, it's been rough!'

ROSA LEE, From A1

Lee's calls for help, whether it's to take in a grandchild suddenly left homeless because his mother has gone to jail or to help Rosa Lee with one of her many medical emergencies.

My interviews with Rosa Lee and her family grew out of a reporting project exploring the interrelationships among racism, poverty, illiteracy, drug use and crime, and why these problems sometimes persist from generation to generation. I first met her in 1988 in the D.C. jail, where she was serving seven months for selling heroin; a jail counselor who was aware of my project had suggested that I talk to her. "She was arrested for selling drugs to feed three of her grand-children," he told me.

As Rosa Lee answered my initial questions, it was apparent that her life was an intricate tapestry, each thread reflecting issues that have absorbed and frustrated experts on urban poverty for years. She grew up poor on the fringes of Capitol Hill, the daughter of North Carolina sharecroppers. At 13, after getting pregnant, she dropped out of school without learning to read. At 16, she married to get away from her mother. Within months, she moved back to her mother's after her husband began to beat her. Most of the men she met, including the five who fathered her children, came from the same poor D.C. neighborhoods where she lived; some of her pregnancies were the result of a desperate but futile attempt to hold on to the men.

She raised her children by herself, supporting them as best she could by waitressing in nightclubs, selling drugs, shoplifting and working as a prostitute. Uncertainty and instability became a fact of everyday life: Since 1950, when Bobby was born, Rosa Lee has moved 18 times, always within the District of Columbia, twice to shelters for the homeless. Since 1951, when she was first arrested for stealing, she has gone to jail 12 times, serving a total of five years for theft or drug convictions. Now, some of her children were cycling through the D.C. prison system, repeating the pattern set by their mother.

The more I learned about Rosa Lee and her family, the more I felt that spending time with her offered a chance to get beyond the stereotypical notions that seem to dominate discussions about poverty in America. Some friends and colleagues doubted that I would learn much that was new. But I had written extensively about the District's poorest communities since the late 1960s and had found that I learned the most by forgetting what I thought I knew and immersing myself in the subject as deeply as I could.

Poverty is a phenomenon that has devastated Americans of all races, in rural and urban communities, but it has disproportionately affected black Americans living in the nation's inner cities. As someone who grew up in a black middle-class family in Harlem in New York, I have always been perplexed by the differing outcomes of African Americans who had migrated in massive numbers in the first half of this century from fields of rural poverty in the South to cities across America, looking for factory jobs and a better life. How is it, I won-

dered, that many children and grandchildren from migrant families had prospered against considerable odds while some, like Rosa Lee, had become mired in lives marked by persistent poverty, drug abuse, petty and violent crime and periodic imprisonment?

All of them carried out of the South the debilitating history of racial oppression and segregation. Once in the city, they still faced pervasive racial barriers in employment, housing and education. Many managed to overcome these roadblocks, while others remained locked in desperate circumstances. Why did Rosa Lee and six of her children take one path, while her sons Alvin and Eric took another?

When I asked Rosa Lee for permission to spend time with her and write about her life, she was eager to cooperate. "I'm not saying I'm going to change," she told me. "But maybe I can help somebody not follow in my footsteps if they read my life story. There have been some good times. Some real good times. But it's also been rough. Lord knows, it's been rough!"

I told her I was skeptical that her story would reach those who might follow in her footsteps.

"That's all right," she said. "You never know who you may help. You write it like I tell it."

Her children were more wary, but they eventually agreed to talk with me too. So in the fall of 1990, two years after we first met, I began to make regular visits to her apartment. It was the beginning of a relationship unlike any other in my 27 years as a Washington Post reporter.

CHAPTER ONE

A Survival Network

Rosa Lee and I are sitting on a couch in her living room on this warm Sept. 5 morning in 1990, trying to decide what to do. Bobby has left us alone to talk; Patty has gone back to her bedroom, and Ducky is still asleep on the other sofa. I had planned to take Rosa Lee to the methadone clinic and then to a restaurant so I can interview her for several hours in relative quiet. Rosa Lee has other ideas.

She wants to go to the Pepco office so she can talk to someone about restoring the electricity; it's been off since June 12 because Rosa Lee has fallen behind in her payments. Patty has been cooking meals on a neighbor's stove, and she's tired of bringing the food back and forth. And now that summer's almost over, it will be getting dark sooner and they will need the lamps again.

Rosa Lee pulls from her purse a set of tattered, rolled-up papers, slips off the rubber band and leafs through them. They are her most important papers—her apartment lease, medical records, Medicaid documents and bills of all sorts. Rosa Lee hands me the pile. I find the electric bill, and we drive to the Pepco office on Martin Luther King Jr. Avenue SE.

Rosa Lee is eager for me to come with her. My suit and tie, she believes, might give her greater authority with the bureaucracy. I tell her that I'm a reporter and can't get involved in her affairs. But I see from her puzzled expression that she doesn't understand what I'm talking about.

It's hard to imagine Rosa Lee having trouble getting someone's attention if she wants to. She has learned how to bring smiles or tears to her long, handsome face whenever it's necessary. Her hips are broader than they once were, but her 145 pounds settle easily on her 5-foot-1-inch frame, and she likes to boast that her narrow waist still turns heads. Her hands are firm and strong, the result of washing countless baskets of laundry on a scrub board when she was a child.

I wait in my car while she goes inside. Half an hour later, she comes out with a Pepco employee. Rosa Lee has told her that a "Mr. Dash" is waiting outside. And the somewhat exasperated clerk tells me that Rosa Lee doesn't understand the bill. The clerk explains the situation: Rosa Lee owed \$528 when the electricity was cut off. She had applied for emergency aid, and the D.C. Emergency Energy Office had paid \$150 and the D.C. Department of Human Services had paid \$238, but Rosa Lee needed to pay half of the remaining \$140 to get the electricity back on.

Rosa Lee says she doesn't have \$70. We drive downtown to the D.C. Energy Office, but an official there says Rosa Lee isn't eligible for another emergency grant until 1991.

Over lunch at a Chinese restaurant, another crisis emerges. Rosa Lee needs a refill for medication she's been taking and she can't find her Medicaid identification card, which allows her to pay 50 cents for a prescription.

Suddenly, she begins to cry.

Through her tears, she tells me that she has the AIDS virus, HIV. So do Patty and Bobby. Rosa Lee says she doesn't remember exactly when she found out—six months ago, maybe longer. So far, she says, none of them has the disease.

She doesn't know for certain how they got the virus. But they fit the profile of those most at risk for HIV: All three have shared needles while injecting heroin. And all three have engaged in prostitution.

"Why didn't you tell me you were HIV-positive?" I ask.

"I was afraid to tell you," she says. "Because I felt you wouldn't come around me."

No, I assure her, I have no intention of staying away. She seems relieved.

Several questions pop into my head: Is she still shooting heroin? Are Patty and Bobby taking precautions with their sex partners? But Rosa Lee is so wound up, so emotional that I decide to save them for another day.

We drive to a pharmacy in Northeast, where the pharmacist knows her and has a record of her Medicaid card. He agrees to fill Rosa Lee's prescription for AZT, a medication that sometimes delays the onset of AIDS. A monthly supply of 100 pills costs \$147.95, so

PHOTOCOPY
PRESERVATION

she could not possibly afford them without Medicaid. She shares them with Patty, who has let her own Medicaid eligibility lapse.

When we finally return to Rosa Lee's apartment late in the afternoon, she asks me to look through her papers to see if she is behind in her rent. I realize that she is drawing me into her survival network, but I offer to sort the thick sheaf of papers at home.

The next night, I return them, divided into oversized envelopes with bold, printed capital letters to help Rosa Lee recognize the words: WELFARE, MEDICAL, RENT, PATTY, BIRTH CERTIFICATES, and so on.

Patty, Rosa Lee and I sit on the bed in Rosa Lee's bedroom. A crucifix is on a table next to her bed; often, when she is upset, she holds the crucifix close to her chest as she prays for relief or forgiveness.

Patty points to an envelope marked RICHARD. "What does that say?"

"Don't you know your own brother's name?" Rosa Lee says in disbelief.

Patty shrugs. Her reading skills, it turns out, are no better than Rosa Lee's.

They decide to draw up a plan to straighten out their tangled finances, and they ask me to write it down. Patty, who hasn't received welfare or Medicaid benefits for eight years, will reapply. Rosa Lee's situation is more complicated. She has been receiving \$350 a month in welfare and \$280 a month in food stamps for herself and two of her grandchildren; now that her daughter is out of jail and caring for her own children, Rosa Lee will lose some of that income. So she's going to find out if she's eligible for other assistance.

It sounds good, but it's impossible to ignore this fact: Welfare payments and food stamps don't begin to account for all the money that comes and goes in the apartment.

CHAPTER TWO

The Torn Photo

"Mr. Dash," Rosa Lee says one day in early October 1990. "Why is it I can't find a place with no drugs?"

She is standing in her living room, her hands spread in a gesture of frustration and resignation, her voice competing with the sound of an afternoon soap opera on television.

Within a week of moving into a federally subsidized housing complex in Washington Highlands in March 1990, Rosa Lee ran into several drug dealers she had known for years. As broken ties were renewed, heroin and cocaine began to flow into her newly renovated apartment, just as they had flowed into her apartment on Blaine Street NE in 1989 and into various apartments on Clifton Street NW for years before that.

In recent months, she tells me, she has cut back her drug use to an

occasional "speedball," a mixture of heroin and cocaine that she lets Patty inject into her hand. "The dope [heroin] I don't need," she says. "It's that 'caine. The 'caine gives you a rush. It stays with you a little while, and it makes you want more. You want that rush again. If I go get a \$10 bag of 'caine and shoot it all by itself, ZOOM!"

She says these infrequent lapses don't make her an addict, but I don't think she's being candid with herself. For the first time since I became a regular visitor six weeks ago, her eyelids have drooped noticeably during our conversations and she constantly rubs the backs of her swollen hands. When I ask her about these symptoms, she insists she hasn't gone back to full-time drug use.

By now, Rosa Lee is comfortable with me, putting up with my tape recorder and agreeing to let a Washington Post photographer, Lucian Perkins, accompany me on some of my visits. Her background could not be more different from mine: When Rosa Lee was struggling to take care of eight children in the early 1960s, I was a teenager attending high school in Manhattan. When she was serving her first prison term for theft in 1966, I was earning a college degree at Howard University and working for The Post as an intern. When she was selling heroin on the streets of Northwest Washington in the mid-1970s, I was writing about the devastating effects of heroin trafficking on some of those same streets.

She doesn't understand why I ask so many questions about her childhood and her family, but she does her best to remember details that are important to me but not to her. She knows that her grandparents, Thadeous and Lugenia Lawrence, picked cotton in North Carolina before coming north sometime in the mid-1930s, but she doesn't know much else.

In fact, she has no keepsakes, no mementos, no record of her parents or her grandparents—except for a single black-and-white photograph of her mother and grandmother that somehow has survived over the years. When I first saw it, it was lying loose atop a bureau in Rosa Lee's bedroom, unframed and unprotected, its edges torn, its emulsion cracking.

Her mother, Rosetta Lawrence Wright, dominates the photo, much as she seems to have dominated Rosa Lee in her youth. Rosetta is sitting on a chair that is too small for her large body, dressed in what appears to be a white uniform, probably something she wore in her job as a domestic worker. She dwarfs her own mother, Lugenia, who is sitting in an overstuffed flower-print chair that seems to swallow her slight, almost frail body.

The memory of her mother, who died in 1979, stirs feelings of anger in Rosa Lee, not tenderness. There was the time, Rosa Lee remembers, when her mother accused her of stealing a welfare check out of the mailbox. Rosa Lee was about 9. She ran to her grandmother's house, a block away. "She came around to my grandmother's house and whupped me. I mean really whupped me! . . . The next morning the mailman brought the check. My mother didn't say nothing. She just got mad at the mailman."

Most of Rosetta's other children don't share Rosa Lee's view of their mother. They remember her as a woman working hard to keep

her family together under difficult conditions. "She taught me, 'If you want something, work for it!'" said Jay Roland Wright, one of Rosa Lee's seven brothers. "I've always lived by that."

Jay Wright is 15 years younger than Rosa Lee; her memories go back before he was born. As a little girl, she says, she became devoted to her father, Earl Wright, an alcoholic who died when Rosa Lee was 12. Her father doted on her, but he also took his fists to Rosetta, much as Rosetta took hers to Rosa Lee. "He'd go upside her head, bam, all the time. He'd be drunk. She'd take it dead out on me. I never did nothing. I was too scared."

We look again at the photo. Rosa Lee has no idea when it was taken or why she has it. She knows only that her mother and grandmother are sitting on the screened-in back porch of her grandmother's house at 204 17th St. NE and that her grandmother bought the house in the early 1960s.

This seems curious. Buying property is a sign of prosperity, not poverty. How had Lugenia Lawrence scraped together enough money to become a homeowner? And why, two generations later, was her granddaughter Rosa Lee a permanent resident of public housing, with drug dealers never far from her door?

CHAPTER THREE

Sharecropping Days

Ben Wright is Rosa Lee's older brother. He also is the family historian.

"You have to ask Ben," Rosa Lee would say to my questions about her parents and grandparents. "Ben is the one who knows about that."

For years Ben had organized family reunions, large gatherings that brought together descendants of the Lawrences and the Wrights, four generations that trace their roots to fertile farmland along the northern bank of the Roanoke River in eastern North Carolina and the tenant sharecropping system that served as the backbone of Southern agriculture until World War II.

The reunions brought together relatives from up and down the East Coast. Branches of the family have put down roots in New Jersey, Philadelphia as well as Washington, and many have secured a foothold in working-class and middle-class communities. Rosa Lee had little in common with these more successful relatives, so after attending two reunions in the 1960s, she stopped going.

She kept in touch with Ben, but their relationship had soured in recent years. When I asked Rosa Lee why, she was uncharacteristically vague, hinting that it was Ben's fault. Later, Ben told me that there was nothing vague about their falling-out: He told her that he would never set foot in her apartment as long as she was dealing drugs.

See ROSA LEE, A34, Col. 1

She has just one memento of her mother

ROSA LEE, From A33

When Rosa Lee was jailed in New York on a theft charge in 1964, Ben bailed her out. But when she started shooting heroin, he drew the line. Ben's world—good job, steady income, retirement benefits—had no place for Rosa Lee.

So when Rosa Lee and I knock on the door of a trailer at the D.C. Department of Public Works storage yard where Ben worked, I'm not sure what to expect. It is a raw, cold day, and I can feel the bite of the wind as I explain my project to Ben. He listens, looks at Rosa Lee, and then invites us to come inside to talk during his lunch break. Over the next several months, Ben and others provide bits and pieces of the family history.

Ben Wright was Rosetta and Earl Wright's first child, born on the first day of summer in 1932, the year the Great Depression forever changed the lives of the Lawrences and the Wrights. Rosetta was 15 at the time, and living with Lugenia and Thadeous on the cotton farm where they worked as sharecroppers, about four miles south of the market town of Rich Square, N.C.

Thadeous was the second generation of Lawrences to sharecrop on the property, known as the Bishop and Powell plantation. By the time Rosetta became a teenager, she had already helped with several cotton crops. The countless hours she spent in the fields changed her body and shaped her soul, and taught her the importance of discipline and stamina. She developed quick, powerful arms and a tough, stern demeanor—a younger version of the grim, brooding woman in the photograph in Rosa Lee's bedroom.

There is no available record on the Lawrence "share" in 1932, no way to know whether the family earned enough to repay the white landowner for the money he had advanced them over the course of the year. According to family lore, Thadeous had a hidden source of income that kept the family from falling into debt: a moonshine still that he kept going even after the family moved up north. "My grandmother said my grandfather did a lot of bootlegging," said Ben.

Many sharecroppers, however, remained perpetually in debt, unable to make their share, yoked to the same landowner year after year. Most could not read or write, add or subtract, so they had no way to challenge the landowner's tally at harvest time. It was a harsh life, made even harsher by the effect the Depression was having on the cotton farms around Rich Square. The price of cotton dropped from \$500 a bale to \$25 a bale. Joe Purvis, who owned the land where the Lawrences were farming, was forced to close down the farm after the 1932 harvest. So when a Maryland tobacco farmer came through Rich Square looking for sharecroppers, the Lawrences decided to leave their friends and relatives and the land they knew so well.

They packed their meager belongings and headed with their four children to Maddox's farm in St. Mary's County, Md. Rosetta, her infant son Ben and her new husband, Earl Wright, joined the Lawrences on the journey north.

Ben and his brother, Joe Louis Wright, vividly remember the stories that his mother and grandmother told them about their harsh life in Southern Maryland. They had almost no money. Meals frequently consisted of whatever they could pick or trap. "They were eating a lot of muskrat and watercress," Joe Louis said. Watercress grew abundantly in the clear springs nearby, and muskrat was then a popular Southern Maryland dish that the family never got used to. "My mother would say, if she ever got a job and made any money, she was never going to eat another muskrat," Joe Louis said. "Had to eat it, because that's all they could trap."

After the 1935 tobacco harvest, like thousands of other sharecroppers during the 1930s and 1940s, Rosetta and Earl Wright gave up rural life and headed for the city. The Lawrences stayed behind with 3-year-old Ben, afraid that the boy might starve if his parents couldn't find work in Washington. Within a year, they too moved to the District. Their sharecropping days were over.

CHAPTER FOUR

Segregated City

Washington in the 1930s was not a land of opportunity for black migrants from the South, especially poor sharecroppers. It was a segregated city, but within the black community was a well-established and educated middle class that traced its roots to the freed slaves who stayed here after the Civil War. Over the years, these local black families had built an extensive network of churches, schools, theaters and other institutions. It wasn't a closed society, but neither did it reach out to embrace the rural migrants.

Some of the more fortunate newcomers had friends or family here to help them through the resettlement. Others, like the Lawrences and Wrights, were on their own. Finding a job, any job, was a challenge. Most of the government jobs then open to blacks—the clerks and messengers and cafeteria workers—went to middle-class blacks who had connections or education. "Those jobs were very competitive," Portia James, the chief researcher at the Anacostia Museum, said when I asked her to put the family's history into perspective.

"Those weren't considered regular working-class jobs. Those were considered highly desirable jobs."

Like hundreds of other rural black women who migrated to Washington, Rosetta became a domestic worker. Earl found work as a cement finisher for a paving company. This fit a familiar pattern, according to Elizabeth Clark-Lewis, a Howard University professor who has interviewed domestic workers in her study of the period. "The middle class was not standing waiting for these people with open arms," Clark-Lewis said. "Very few men could come in and get a government job." For most poor, rural women, she said, "domestic work was the reality."

Thadeous and Lugenia found work too, but it was Thadeous's bootlegging that kept the family afloat. He would disappear for several months at a time; only later did Ben learn that he was going to North Carolina to tend the still.

Rosetta and Earl settled in the neighborhood just north of the Navy Yard, within a mile of the Capitol, renting a series of houses that had outdoor toilets and no electricity. Rosa Lee remembers the smell of the kerosene lamps they lighted each night. As the family grew—Rosetta gave birth to 22 children, 11 of whom died before reaching adulthood—Rosa Lee became accustomed to bedrooms crammed with too many people and living rooms with no place for private conversations.

Ben has no way to prove it, but he's certain that Thadeous's moonshine sales provided the money that enabled Thadeous and Lugenia to become homeowners. The house in the photo, the one on 17th Street NE, turned out to be the third of three houses owned by the Lawrence family.

Thadeous and Lugenia bought their first property, a decaying two-story, wood-frame house on the outskirts of Capitol Hill, for \$1,400 in 1949. Four years later, they bought a second house nearby for \$8,000. The seller gave them a mortgage so they could make the purchase.

The first house went to Rosetta; two years later, however, the city condemned the property and Rosetta's family had to move.

Thadeous died a few years later. Lugenia lived in the second house until the city claimed it for the Southwest Expressway, paying her \$11,500 in compensation. She bought the third house, and when she died in 1985, she owned it free of debt. An appraiser estimated its value at \$56,000.

In her will, Lugenia directed that the house be sold and the proceeds divided among five grandchildren. Rosa Lee was not among them. I asked her why. "Because I was an addict when she died," she said, and Lugenia was determined not to squander this asset that had taken a lifetime to build.

The house wasn't sold immediately. Instead, the grandchildren decided to use it as collateral to borrow \$55,000, which was divided among the five grandchildren after expenses. That satisfied the conditions of the will, and left one granddaughter with the house, a monthly mortgage payment and a place to live.

But it didn't work out as planned. Within a few months, the granddaughter fell behind on the mortgage payments. In late 1987, Lawan Wright, Rosa Lee's youngest sister, moved in after serving a two-month sentence for drug dealing. For the next two months, Lawan says, she used the house to sell crack.

The mortgage holders decided to foreclose. So in February 1988, Lugenia Lawrence's house passed out of the family's hands for good.

CHAPTER FIVE

Emergency

It is Wednesday afternoon, Nov. 28, 1990, and Rosa Lee is stretched out on a bed in emergency room 63 at Howard University Hospital, telling me about the seizure that has landed her there. Actually, she's not telling me much, because she blacked out and she can't remember exactly what happened.

The room is cool, and she has pulled the blankets up to her chest, exposing only the shoulders of her white hospital gown and her drawn, tired face. She looks awful.

This is her second seizure in two days, her third in six months. The doctors don't know the cause of the seizures, so they have been putting Rosa Lee through a series of tests, which don't bother her nearly as much as the telephone calls from Patty and Ducky to settle minor squabbles. "Why are they worrying me, Mr. Dash, while I'm in the hospital?" she says.

The doctors suspect that Rosa Lee's drug use has something to do with triggering the seizures. On Monday afternoon, Rosa Lee and Patty shared a "billy" of heroin—a small bag that sells for about \$20. Immediately afterward, she had a mild seizure that sent her to the emergency room but didn't require a hospital stay. Still, she seemed shaken enough by the experience that I thought she would stay away from heroin for a while.

Not shaken enough.

On Tuesday afternoon, she and Patty bought another heroin billy at an "oilin' joint" for heroin addicts on Georgia Avenue. Patty gave herself a hit, then Rosa Lee. As they went outside to hail a taxi, Rosa Lee suddenly went limp and her eyes rolled back in her head.

Patty struggled to keep Rosa Lee from falling, and heard a man shouting from across the street. It was Alvin, her brother. He was on duty, driving a Metrobus north on Georgia Avenue, when he saw Patty trying to hold Rosa Lee. "Get Momma to the hospital," he yelled from the driver's window of his packed bus.

Patty, still high from the heroin, maneuvered Rosa Lee into a taxi. At the hospital, Rosa Lee's doctor, Winston Frederick, was furious. "If you suffer another one of these seizures, we may not be able to bring you back," she remembers him saying.

When she goes home on Dec. 10, she vows to herself that her heroin days are over. But home is still the same apartment in Washington Highlands in Southeast, where Bobby, Patty and Ducky spend much of their time in pursuit of their next high.

CHAPTER SIX

Rosa Lee's Christmas

"Boy, what a night," Rosa Lee says, settling into the front seat of my car on Christmas morning 1990 for a trip to the methadone clinic.

Recovering drug addicts don't get holidays off. If Rosa Lee wants her daily dose of methadone, she still has to make the cross-town trek from her apartment in Southeast to the clinic on N Street NE, not far from the Capitol. On the best of days, it's a 30-minute trip requiring two buses; the holiday bus schedule makes it an uncertain journey that can last more than an hour. She's still weak from her hospital stay, so I have offered her a ride.

When I arrive at 8:30 a.m., Rosa Lee is ready as usual, but everyone else is asleep, including her grandchildren. Unopened gifts lay waiting under an artificial tree decorated with plastic yellow garlands, candy canes and colored glass bulbs. Patty is stretched out on a living room couch, her left forearm bandaged in white gauze.

As we drive through the deserted streets, Rosa Lee explains why everyone's so exhausted.

It all started with Ducky's paycheck. Late in the afternoon, Ducky brought home \$270 from his job at Kentucky Fried Chicken, giving \$150 to Rosa Lee for his share of the rent, food, cable TV and utilities and left to buy crack with the rest of the money.

Ducky owed Patty \$20, so Rosa Lee gave it to her, setting off a chain reaction that lasted all night long. Patty spent the \$20 on crack, smoked it and wanted more. She begged Rosa Lee for another \$20.

"I just gave her \$10," Rosa Lee says.

As soon as the \$10 was gone, Patty was pleading for more. Instead of saying no, Rosa Lee asked Patty to buy her some ice cream and handed over another \$20.

A few hours later, Patty returned with one of her regular "tricks"—men who trade her drugs for sex. Selling sex provides Patty with a steady source of drugs, and other things seem secondary, including the risk of spreading the AIDS virus.

The "trick" prepared a mix of powdered cocaine in Rosa Lee's bedroom, gave himself a hit and offered some to Rosa Lee. She said no. "I didn't even hesitate, Mr. Dash," she says. "I was so proud of myself."

After Patty left, Rosa Lee fell asleep with the TV set on. About 2 a.m., she heard someone banging on the door. It was Patty's boyfriend, Howard, demanding to know where Patty was. Rosa Lee didn't know.

At 6 a.m., Ducky woke Rosa Lee to say that Howard and Patty were fighting in the hallway. Ducky pulled Patty, strung out from smoking crack and drinking liquor, into Rosa Lee's apartment. Patty's left forearm was bleeding. She told Rosa Lee that she had cut herself with a knife during an argument in Howard's apartment.

Two paramedics arrived and bandaged Patty's arm. Moaning that she still loved Howard, she cried herself to sleep as Rosa Lee held her.

As I drop Rosa Lee off at her apartment, I try not to think about what awaits her inside.

"Merry Christmas, Rosa Lee," I say softly as she opens the car door. "I'll see you next week."

"Merry Christmas, Mr. Dash."

About This Series

This series of articles grew out of Washington Post reporter Leon Dash's reporting on the interrelationships of racism, poverty, illiteracy, drug use and crime, and why these problems sometimes persist from generation to generation. The series was edited by Steve Luxenberg, The Post's assistant managing editor for special projects. The articles will be published daily through Sunday, Sept. 25, and The Post welcomes readers' written comments or phone calls. If you wish to leave a recorded comment, please call Post-Haste at 334-9000, Category 4646.

Stealing Became A Way of Life For Rosa Lee

Second of eight articles

By Leon Dash
Washington Post Staff Writer

Rosa Lee Cunningham guided her 10-year-old grandson through the narrow aisles of the Oxon Hill thrift shop, past the crowded racks of secondhand pants and shirts, stopping finally at the row of children's jackets and winter coats.

The boy picked out a mock flight jacket, with a big number on the back and a price tag stapled to the collar.

"If you want it," Rosa Lee said, "then you're going to have to help me get it."

"Okay, grandmama," the boy said nervously. "But do it in a way that I won't get caught."

Like a skilled teacher instructing a new student, the 54-year-old Rosa Lee told the boy what to do.

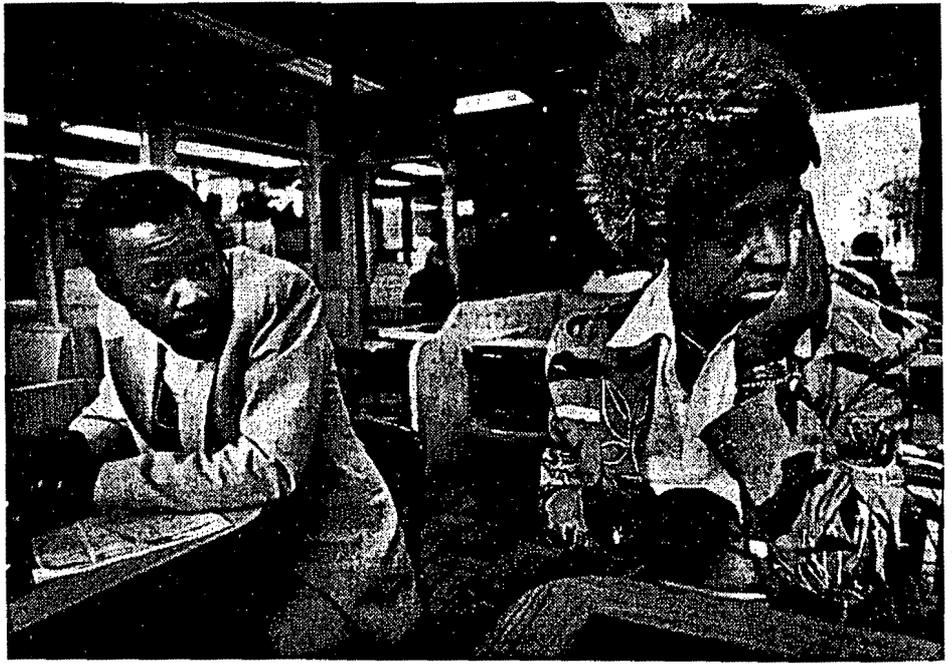
"Pretend you're trying it on. Don't look up! Don't look around! Don't laugh like it's some kind of joke! Just put it on. Let Grandma see how you look."

The boy slipped off his old coat and put on the new one. It was too big. Rosa Lee whispered, "Now put the other one back on, over it." She pushed down the new jacket's collar so that it was hidden.

"What do I do now?" the boy asked.

"Just walk on out the door," Rosa Lee said. "It's your coat."

Four days later, Rosa Lee is recounting this episode for me, re-creating the dialogue by changing her voice to distinguish between herself and her grandson. It is January 1991, and it has been five months since she agreed to let me spend time with her as part of a



BY LUCIAN PERLINO—THE WASHINGTON POST

THE RIGHT PRICE: In a Northeast Washington fast-food restaurant in March 1992, Rosa Lee Cunningham and her son Ducky disagree over what price to charge for shirts and sweaters Ducky had stolen. Stealing has been a way to supplement the family's income.

reporting project on how several generations of one Washington family have lived with poverty, crime and drug abuse.

By now, I have spent enough time with her that her shoplifting exploits no longer surprise me. One day before Christmas, Rosa Lee was searching for something in a large shopping bag in her bedroom and dumped the contents onto the bed. Out spilled dozens of bottles of expensive men's cologne and women's perfume, as well as leather gloves with their \$60 price

tags still attached. She leaves the tags on when she sells the goods to prove that the merchandise is new.

"Did you get all this in one trip?" I ask.

"Oh, no," she says. "This is a couple of weeks' worth."

In Rosa Lee's younger years especially, shoplifting was a major source of income, supplementing her welfare payments and the money she made during 15 years of waitressing at various nightclubs. She had eight

See ROSA LEE, A8, Col. 1

ROSA LEE, From A1

children to feed and clothe; stealing, she says, helped her to survive. Later on, when she became a heroin addict in the mid-1970s, she paid for her drug habit through her shoplifting.

She stole from clothing stores, drugstores, grocery stores, stuffing the items inside the torn liner of her winter coat or slipping them into the oversized black leather purse that she carries wherever she goes. Her favorite targets were the department stores. One of her older brothers, Joe Louis Wright, joked with me one day that Rosa Lee "owned a piece" of Hecht's and had put Lansburgh's out of business. "Man, she would get coats, silk dresses," he recalled. "She got me a mohair suit. Black. Three-piece. I don't know how the hell she'd get them out of there."

Her stealing has caused divisions and hard feelings in her family, and is one reason why Rosa Lee has strained relationships with several of her brothers and sisters. They see Rosa Lee's stealing as an extreme and unjustified reaction to their impoverished upbringing. Two of her six sons, Alvin and Eric, always have refused to participate in any of their mother's illegal activities; today, they are the only two of Rosa Lee's eight children who don't have prison records.

Rosa Lee has served eight short prison terms for various kinds of stealing during the past 40 years, dating to the early 1950s. Her longest stay was eight months for trying to steal a fur coat from a Maryland department store in 1965. She says that she went to prison rehabilitation programs each time but that none had much of an effect on her. "I attended those programs so it would look good on my record when I went before the parole board," she says.

Nothing seems to deter her from shoplifting, not even the specter of another jail term. On the day that she stole her grandson's coat, she was awaiting sentencing in D.C. Superior Court after pleading guilty in November 1990 to stealing bedsheets from the downtown Hecht's store.

"I'm just trying to survive," she says.

CHAPTER ONE

A Day in Court

Rosa Lee had chosen her clothes carefully when she appeared two months earlier before Commissioner John Treanor on Nov. 13, 1990. She wanted to look as poor as possible to draw his sympathy.

She had worn an ill-fitting winter coat, gray wool overalls and a white wool hat pulled back to show her graying hair. She had removed her upper dental plate, giving her a toothless look when she smiled. "My homey look," she called it. "No lipstick. No earrings. No nothing!"

Her lawyer's statements that day matched her downtrodden look. Rosa Lee's life was a mess, he told Treanor. She was addicted to heroin, a habit she had developed in 1975. She had the HIV virus. She was caring for three grandchildren because their mother was in jail.

Rosa Lee told Treanor that she was trying hard to turn herself around. She was taking methadone every day to control her heroin addiction and had turned again to the church. "I got baptized Sunday, me and my three grandchildren," she said, her voice breaking. "And I'm asking you from the bottom of my heart, give me a chance to prove that I'm taking my baptize seriously, 'cause I know I might not have much longer."

Tears ran down her cheeks. "I'm asking you for a chance, please," she begged Treanor. "I know I have a long record."

Rosa Lee was stretching the truth. Yes, she had been baptized, and yes, she was taking methadone. But no, she wasn't caring for her grandchildren alone. Their mother's jail term had ended several months earlier, and she had returned to Rosa Lee's two-bedroom apartment to take care of the children, with help from Rosa Lee.

Treanor hadn't seemed moved by Rosa Lee's tearful performance. He glowered at her, and Rosa Lee braced for the lecture she knew was coming. Both had played these roles before.

"Every time you pump yourself full of drugs and spend money to do it," he said, "you're stealing from your grandchildren. You're stealing food from their plates, clothes from their backs, and you're certainly jeopardizing their future. You're going to be one of the youngest dead grandmothers in town. And you're going to have three children that will be put up for adoption or going out to some home or some junior village or someplace."

That had been Rosa Lee's opening. "Can I prove to you that my life has changed?"

"Yeah, you can prove it to me, very simply," Treanor answered. "You can stay away from dope. Now I'll make a bargain with you. . . . You come back here the end of January and tell me what you've been

doing, and then we'll think about it. But you're looking at jail time. You're looking at a cemetery."

Rosa Lee had won. Stay out of trouble until January, Treanor had suggested, and she would stay out of jail.

Rosa Lee came over to me, her cheeks still tear-stained but her face aglow.

"Was I good?" she asked.

"Yeah," I said, startled at her boldness.

"Thank you," she said, smiling.

CHAPTER TWO

Transformation

When she returns for sentencing on Jan. 22, 1991, a transformed Rosa Lee stands before Treanor. She looks good. She has a clean report from the methadone clinic. She seems to have done everything Treanor has asked.

She usually dresses well, but I think she has outdone herself today: two-piece, white-and-gray cotton knit suit, tan leather boots, tan pocketbook.

"What would you like to say, Mrs. Cunningham?" Treanor says.

"Well, your honor, I know I haven't been a good person. I know it," she begins.

Treanor cuts her off. His demeanor is softer, his words more sympathetic than in November. "Wait a minute, now. Why do you say that? . . . You're taking care of those three grandchildren, isn't that right?"

"Yes, sir," Rosa Lee says, keeping up the pretense.

"All right," he says. "Now you've raised one family, and now you have another one."

"Yes, sir," she says.

"Which is really too much to ask of anybody. So I don't think you should sell yourself short. You're doing the Lord's work. Your daughter's in jail for drugs, right?"

"Yes, sir," Rosa Lee says.

"And you have or have had a bad drug problem yourself."

"Yes, sir."

Then Treanor launches into another lecture about drugs. He doesn't ask Rosa Lee why she steals. "You steal to support your habit," he says. "It's as plain as the nose on your face."

But it isn't that plain. Rosa Lee began stealing long before she became a drug addict.

Finally, Treanor announces his decision: no jail. Instead, he gives her a suspended sentence and one year of probation with drug counseling.

"Now, don't you come back here," he says.

CHAPTER THREE

Lunch Money

Rosa Lee sometimes puts on a public mask, the way she wants the world to see her. She fudges a little, omits a little there, even when she is trying to be candid about her behavior. By her account, her stealing started when she was a teenager. It was an older brother, Ben Wright, who told me that Rosa Lee's stealing started when she was 9 years old. Her target: the lunch money that her fourth-grade classmates at the District's Giddings Elementary School kept in their desks.

"Jesus, Ben!" Rosa Lee shouts when I ask her about it.

"What's the matter?" I say. "You said I could interview Ben."

It is a late afternoon in January, not long after her court appearance. We are talking in my car, which is parked outside Rosa Lee's apartment. We watch the teenage crack dealers come and go, making their rounds of the low-income housing complex in Washington Highlands, a Southeast Washington neighborhood near the D.C.-Prince George's County line. Rosa Lee's grandson and granddaughter are playing nearby on a patch of dirt where the grass has been worn away. The sun is beginning to sink behind the buildings as she tells me about her first theft.

The year was 1946, and Giddings's imposing red-brick building at Third and G streets SE was a bustling part of the District's then-segregated education system. The school, now an adult education center, served black children living in Capitol Hill neighborhoods; some, like Rosa Lee, came from poor sharecropping families who had moved to Washington during the Depression, and they did not have the new clothes and spending money that their better-off classmates did.

Rosa Lee's father, Earl Wright, was an alcoholic who worked for a paving contractor until drinking became the primary activity in his

life. He died of liver disease just after Rosa Lee turned 12. Her mother, Rosetta Lawrence Wright, brought in most of the family's money, working as a domestic on Capitol Hill during the day and selling dinners from the family's kitchen in the evening, always for cash so the welfare officials wouldn't know about the additional income. They lived in a rented house in the 800 block of Third Street SE that had no electricity and no indoor toilets.

Other girls came to school with change to buy "brownie-thins"—penny-a-piece cookies that the Giddings teachers sold with the free milk at lunch. Rosa Lee's family was too poor to spare even a few pennies. She knew it was wrong to steal from her classmates' desks, she says. But she couldn't stand being poor, either.

Rosa Lee soon found that she had plenty of opportunities to steal, if she were daring enough. Selling the Afro-American newspaper door-to-door on Tuesday and Thursday evenings during the summer of 1948, when she was 11, gave her a chance to slip into neighborhood row houses and rifle through the pocketbooks that women often left on their dining room tables. Washington was a safer place in those days, and Rosa Lee discovered that many families would leave their front screen doors unlatched while they chatted in their back yards, trying to cool off on hot summer nights.

In the fall, she found a new source of money: the coatroom at Mount Joy Baptist Church, a nearby church where her family had worshiped for many years. She had started ushering during Sunday services and was assigned to help in the coatroom. She noticed congregation members often left money in their coat pockets. "I felt like if they wanted [the money], they wouldn't have left it in their damn pocket," she said.

Rosa Lee said she would wait until the "singing and praying" started before going to the racks of coats, patting the pockets and listening for the jingle of coins. Once in a great while she would find dollar bills.

Her coatroom thefts continued undetected until one Sunday, when Mount Joy's minister, the Rev. Raymond M. Randall, announced to the astonished congregation that someone had stolen several dollars from a member's coat pocket during the previous Sunday's service. Randall offered forgiveness and asked the culprit to come forward. If the thief was hungry, the minister said, the church would try to help.

Rosa Lee could not bring herself to confess in front of her mother, her family and her friends. "My mother would have **KILLED ME!** Do you hear me? **KILLED ME!**" she shouted at me as she recalled the scene. "And who is going to go up there and tell him that you're hungry? That would only embarrass the hell out of you!"

For the next few weeks, she stayed away from church. When she returned to her ushering duties, she was careful to steal only change. She often did not know what to do with the money she stole. Her immediate needs were small and simple: 35 cents for the Saturday movie matinee at the old Atlas Theater on H Street NE, or a dime for the snow cones that she loved. She gave away small amounts to brothers and sisters and friends, but never enough to attract her mother's attention.

Rosa Lee hid her stolen coins from her mother. "I would roll it up in a stocking," she said, and put the stocking under a rug, or under her mattress or in her underwear.

Forty years later, Rosa Lee still hides her money every night—not from her mother, but from her five drug-addicted children. Sometimes she goes to bed with a wad of bills stuffed into her sock. "If I don't hide it, they'd steal it," she said.

CHAPTER FOUR

Out of Style

If Rosa Lee felt bad about not having a few pennies to buy cookies in fourth grade, she felt even worse about not having a stylish wardrobe to match those of her friends in seventh grade. She hated the secondhand clothes that her mother bought for her; they were almost always out of style.

Rosa Lee already felt at a disadvantage in attracting boys, and thought fashionable clothes might help. "I was dark-skinned," she said. "I wasn't like the girls with long hair and light skin. The boys always went for them."

One morning, a girlfriend lent Rosa Lee a new gray skirt with "two pockets on the hip," one of the newest fashions. "My mother would never buy me one," Rosa Lee told me, her voice still smoldering with resentment. Rosa Lee loved how she looked in it.

During lunch, the girlfriend asked Rosa Lee in front of some classmates to share her 35-cent meal. "I wouldn't give it to her," Rosa Lee said. "I was hungry!"

The girlfriend blurted out, "I didn't say that when you borrowed my skirt!"

Rosa Lee's classmates howled with laughter at her embarrassment. As she retells the story, I can see that time has not healed her wound. Her voice hardens, her eyes narrow, her expression conveys the raw power of the memory. "That hurt," Rosa Lee says. "I thought, 'God, this will never happen again to me.'"

Days later Rosa Lee walked into a five-and-dime store in the 600 block of Pennsylvania Avenue SE. She picked out a gray skirt and a white lace blouse, folded them into two tight bundles, slipped them under the skirt she was wearing and slowly made her way out of the store. As she turned the corner, she crushed the skirt and blouse to her chest in glee.

She hid the skirt and blouse from her mother. Emboldened, Rosa Lee branched out to other stores in the Capitol Hill area. "I was determined to have what other girls had," she said.

At a party in early 1950, she met a light-skinned boy who was attracting attention from the other girls. And Rosa Lee wanted to impress her friends by getting his attention; she enjoyed the other girls' envious looks when he asked to walk her home.

She thought having sex would cement their relationship. She became pregnant. "I haven't seen him since," she said.

When school officials found out she was pregnant, they told her she would have to leave school until the baby was born. She never went back. In November 1950, she gave birth to Bobby, naming him Robert Earl Wright.

Not long after Bobby was born, Rosa Lee decided to dress for church in one of her stolen outfits. She knew it was risky, but she was tired of wearing hand-me-downs when the other ushers usually came in stylish clothes. As soon as her mother spotted the gray pleated skirt, she confronted Rosa Lee.

"Where did you get this from?" Rosetta demanded.

"I stole it out of a store. Please don't make me take it back to the store, Momma!"

Rosetta was furious. "I ain't going to say nothing to you now because you told the truth, but don't bring nothing else in here that you've been stealing! DO YOU HEAR ME?"

"Yes, ma'am," said Rosa Lee, trembling as she waited for her mother to hit her.

But her mother just said: "Put it on. Let's see what you look like in it."

CHAPTER FIVE

The Stolen Scarf

Rosa Lee ignored Rosetta's order to stop shoplifting. Whenever her mother questioned her about some new item, Rosa Lee just denied that she stole it. "My mother would tell me, 'Stop that lying,' and then let it go," Rosa Lee said.

But a judge wasn't so kind when Rosa Lee was caught shoplifting a few months later at a downtown department store, her first arrest. He sent her to a facility for juveniles for 19 days in early 1951. But the lesson seemed lost on the 15-year-old Rosa Lee; after her release, she went right back to shoplifting.

When Rosa Lee was away, her mother cared for 1-year-old Bobby. Rosetta, who had her first child at age 15 in North Carolina, had accepted Rosa Lee's first pregnancy, but she was angry because Rosa Lee was pregnant again. The father was another teenager in the neighborhood. "What do you think you doing, bringing all these babies in here?" Rosa Lee remembers her mother saying.

Rosetta demanded that Rosa Lee have an abortion, but Rosa Lee wasn't about to let her mother tell her what to do—about babies, or shoplifting, or anything else.

Anxious to win her mother's affection, Rosa Lee decided to steal something for Rosetta. One day after Rosetta came home from work, Rosa Lee took a multicolored, cotton scarf from under her coat and handed it to her mother.

Rosetta took the scarf, turned it over in her hands and looked questioningly at her daughter. Rosa Lee waved both her hands, a sign to her mother not to ask where she had gotten the scarf.

Her mother didn't. "Rose, I NEVER had something like this!"

Rosetta threw her arms around Rosa Lee. "She grabbed me, and I grabbed her," Rosa Lee recalls. "I couldn't believe it!"

But the stolen scarf, and other stolen gifts that followed, did not bring Rosa Lee the close relationship that she wanted. Rosa Lee says her mother didn't like her shoplifting and continued to badger her about it. The tension between them was always there, waiting to explode. One day, when Rosa Lee was 22 and raising five children in an apartment next door to her mother's, it did.

Rosa Lee and a neighbor had a shouting match after the neighbor had

hit one of Rosa Lee's children. When Rosetta heard about it, she was angry. She stormed into Rosa Lee's home.

"She told me that all I am is a troublemaker," Rosa Lee recalled. "I told her that [the neighbor] shouldn't have hit my child. Momma said, 'You nothing but a damn nuisance,' and pow, right in my mouth."

Rosetta's blow left her daughter with one visible legacy of their relationship: an upper denture to replace the front teeth that Rosetta knocked out.

It also left a lasting impression on Bobby, who saw the confrontation. He was 8. "It was spooky," he told me. "Ain't nobody supposed to beat up Mom. As much as she went to get food for us and clothes for us. I don't care who it was."

CHAPTER SIX

'We Started Grabbing'

On the balmy Thursday night of April 4, 1968, a few hours after the assassination of civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr., looting and arson erupted in several of the District's major commercial corridors, overwhelming the city's police force.

Rosa Lee watched as looters carried bags, boxes and portable televisions past the ramshackle house she was renting at 149 L St. SE.

"Where ya'll get that stuff?" Rosa Lee called out from her porch. "H Street," folks shouted.

Rosa Lee, 31 at the time, had a vague idea of King's efforts to improve life for African Americans. Still, the destruction did not disturb her. She did not believe the torching and trashing of businesses had any connection to her. The shops, she said, were run by "greedy" merchants who gouged customers and took "whatever little money I had."

So when her son Bobby, then 17, drove up in a Buick that Rosa Lee instinctively knew had been stolen, she didn't hesitate.

She turned to her seven other children and said, "All right! Who wants to go?" As usual, Alvin and Eric, then 15 and 12, held back.

On H Street, Rosa Lee said, "everybody was grabbing everything they could get their hands on. We started grabbing too. Didn't know what we were taking. Just grabbing, grabbing, grabbing."

The next day, when the looting began again, Rosa Lee kept her children at home. "We already had so much stuff," she said. "There was no need to go out."

CHAPTER SEVEN

Shopping for Bread

"Mr. Dash," Rosa Lee says as I am driving her to her apartment in February 1991, "stop at that High's so I can get a loaf of bread."

I glance at her, and she knows what I'm thinking. "I'm not doing any shoplifting," she says.

I have told Rosa Lee that I cannot be a party in any way to her shoplifting. So when we pull into the parking lot at High's, she makes a big show of leaving her oversized black bag on the seat. Wallet in hand, she heads for the store.

Fifteen minutes go by. My feet are getting numb from the cold, so I decide to see why she's taking so long. Her head is visible above the display counter of canned goods. She is putting something into a large brown paper bag, too busy to notice I've come inside the small store.

"ROSA LEE!" I shout.

She jumps at the sound of her name. She spots me standing near the smudged glass door. She crumples the top of the bag and walks toward me. I feel her cold anger as she breezes past.

"That's the last time I wait for you outside of a store!" I yell as we talk to the car. "You told me you weren't going to steal anything!"

She fires back, her words coming out in a steamy vapor from the old. "I'm trying to feed my family and I don't have any money. We're just trying to survive!"

"That's dead!" I say. "Save that for the judges at Superior Court. You just threw away several hundred dollars buying dope and crack for your children."

"You know so goddamn much!" she snaps as I start the car. "I ought to go upside your head!"

"You threaten to go upside my head' every other day," I say.

She laughs, and the tension evaporates. She shows me what's in her bag: a loaf of bread that she bought, and the items she stole—two cans of spray starch and a can of baked beans.

I am angry with Rosa Lee for violating my trust, and I am angry with myself. The incident is a lesson to me: Why did I think that she would behave differently around me?

CHAPTER EIGHT

Second Thoughts

A few weeks after the shoplifting incident at High's, Rosa Lee and I are talking in her apartment. After spending so much time with her, I realize I don't always ask the questions that need to be asked.

"Rosa Lee," I say, "there's something I want to work out with you about how you look at the world."

I remind her of the time she took her granddaughter to steal a coat. They were on their way to church, but Rosa Lee thought the girl's coat looked ragged, so they went to the thrift shop to shoplift.

Rosa Lee nods. "How do you put those two together?" I say. "One Sunday going to church to be baptized, and the next Sunday going to shoplift a coat?"

"I don't know," she says. "I didn't like to take her to church with that dirty-looking coat."

"But how do you take her out stealing then?" I say.

She protests that the thrift shop's white owner takes advantage of his customers, who are mostly black. "I don't understand how a thrift shop can charge so much for things," she says. "Do you know that he charges \$8.95 for stuff that don't cost that much brand-new?"

"That's a rationalization, and it doesn't dance," I say.

That night, I am surprised to find a message from Rosa Lee on my answering machine in the newsroom, telling me that she had had "second thoughts" about taking her grandchildren to shoplift. The next day, she explains. "You gave me something to think about," she says. She told her grandchildren that our conversation had made her see that it was wrong to steal coats for them.

Her granddaughter immediately went to the closet and got the pink coat that Rosa Lee had helped her steal.

"What you want me to do with the coat?" she asked Rosa Lee.

"Keep it. Keep the coat. But we're not going to do any more stealing," Rosa Lee replied.

"Are you going to stick to that?" her granddaughter asked.

"So help me to God," Rosa Lee said. "I'm going to stick to that."

Rosa Lee looks at me, waiting for my reaction. I study her face. She isn't promising never to shoplift again, only that she won't involve the children. Nonetheless, she seems sincere.

"You have a powerful influence on those children," I say. "I know it," she says.

About This Series

In 1932, in the midst of the Great Depression, Rosa Lee Cunningham's grandparents and parents gave up their North Carolina sharecropping life for an uncertain journey north. Rosa Lee is the link between past and present, between a world that has disappeared and the one that her children and grandchildren face today in Washington. Her life spans a half-century of hardship in blighted neighborhoods not far from the majestic buildings where policy-makers have largely failed in periodic efforts to break the cycle of poverty that has trapped her and so many other Americans.

Many of Rosa Lee's relatives, including two of her eight children, managed to secure footholds in the mainstream of American society; their relative success makes it all the more important to try to understand Rosa Lee's life. Although her story is discomfiting and disturbing, she wants it told. "Maybe I can help somebody not follow in my footsteps," she says. That story—of the choices she had and the choices she made—offers a chance to understand what statistics only suggest: the interconnections of racism, poverty, illiteracy, drug abuse and crime, and why these conditions persist.

The series, edited by Steve Luxenberg, The Post's assistant managing editor for special projects, will run through Sunday, Sept. 25. The Post welcomes readers' written comments or phone calls. If you wish to leave a recorded comment, please call PostHaste at 334-9000, Category 4646.

Tuesday, Sept. 20, 1994

Rosa Lee Pays a Heavy Toll for Illiteracy

Third of eight articles

By Leon Dash
Washington Post Staff Writer

Rosa Lee Cunningham is so weak she cannot get out of bed. I cradle one of her limp arms while Richard Cunningham, 36, one of her eight children, grips the other. Gently, we lift her up and support her as she tries to stand. She rocks unsteadily, groaning and whimpering from the exertion. We slowly lean her back against a tall wooden chest of drawers to brace her, but she slumps against it, banging the chest into the wall. We hastily return her to bed.

It is clear she needs immediate medical attention. I tell Richard that I am taking

Rosa Lee to the Howard University Hospital emergency room. "An excellent idea," Richard declares.

Later that morning—Tuesday, March 12, 1991—doctors began searching for the cause of her dangerously weak condition. The next afternoon, with Rosa Lee resting comfortably in Room 5N9, the mystery unraveled.

Rosa Lee was a victim, it turned out, of her inability to read.

The first clue came from a blood test. It showed that she was overdosing on Dilantin, a medication that helps prevent seizures. She had twice the recommended level in her system.

She had been taking Dilantin only a few weeks. Doctors had prescribed it for her after another seizure—her fourth since the

fall of 1990—had landed her in Greater Southeast Community Hospital. When they sent her home, they gave her a written schedule of the four medications she was to take each day. Under Dilantin, it said "100 mgs 3Xdaily."

"The nurse didn't ask me if I could read the instructions," Rosa Lee said. "I wouldn't have told her if she had asked."

Rosa Lee didn't know that "100 mgs" meant 100 milligrams, or that she was supposed to take one 100-milligram tablet three times a day. She thought she could take more than one pill if she wanted, as long as she took them three times a day. "Sometimes I would take two of them," she said.

It became an unending cycle: The extra
See ROSA LEE, A8, Col. 1



BY LUCIAN PERKINS—THE WASHINGTON POST

CHANCY: For Rosa Lee, who can't read, taking medication can be risky.

She vowed never to reveal her secret

ROSA LEE, From A1

Dilantin doses made her feel disoriented and weak; as she grew weaker, she would add another pill, thinking it would make her feel better.

"I didn't know, Mr. Dash," she said, her voice reflecting pain and embarrassment. "I was trying to get well."

CHAPTER ONE

Breaking the Code

Rosa Lee cannot read these words I have written about her life. She is aware that I planned to use intimate details from her past and present for this series of articles about how several generations of one Washington family have lived with poverty, drug abuse and illiteracy. We have spent hours discussing what I intended to write. But she will have to rely on someone else's eyes to find out just what I have written.

She can recognize certain words—enough to fool strangers—but the newspaper itself is like a long string of indecipherable code: Here's a word she knows, and here's another, but together they make no sense.

She often asks me to break the code for her. One 1991 morning at McDonald's on New York Avenue NE, where we often have breakfast after her daily visit to the methadone clinic nearby, she asks me to explain a letter she has received from the D.C. public housing agency.

She rifles through a rolled-up sheaf of tattered papers she always carries in her pocketbook, scrutinizing each piece of paper for the housing agency's recognizable letterhead. The bulky stack is her portable filing cabinet, the place where she keeps all her documents, some dating back years. She never throws anything away, because she can't read well enough to decide what she needs and what she can discard.

Finally, she finds what she is looking for and hands it to me.

"This is the wrong letter," I say.

"No, it isn't!" she retorts. "Read the letter. It's from public housing!"

I shake my head and point to the date at the top of the letter: 1989. "This refers to public housing you lived in on Blaine Street NE two years ago," I say, "not to the application you have filed for a new apartment."

"Are you sure, Mr. Dash? Read it and make sure."

"This is not the letter. I've read it. In fact, you can throw this away."

"Don't you dare!" she says, snatching it. "I might need it."

It is infuriating that someone with such a sharp and quick mind is shut out from much of the world around her. She cannot find an unfamiliar street on a D.C. map, but she skillfully navigates the complicated bureaucracy of D.C. public housing, repeatedly securing apartments for herself and her family ahead of other applicants on the waiting list. Balancing a checkbook is out of the question, but she successfully handled large sums of money when she was dealing drugs in the 1970s and 1980s, satisfying customers and suppliers not known for patience.

She tries to hide her illiteracy by going on the offensive. Anyone spelling a name for her is ordered to slow down while she prints each letter in big, blocky capitals. Sometimes, she casually hands over pen and paper and asks the person to write it for her, as if she were too busy to be bothered. She's so good at covering up her illiteracy that I find myself forgetting that she can't even read the few words on a medicine bottle label.

On the afternoon after her release from the hospital—a blustery March day that makes us welcome the warmth of her apartment—Rosa Lee and I are sitting on the plaid couch in her living room. The hospital has given her a new prescription schedule, and she has asked me to help her take the medicine correctly this time.

I pick up one of the amber-colored plastic containers. "This is the phenobarbital. I noticed they reduced the amount down to 30 milligrams. When you left Greater Southeast, they had you up to 60 milligrams."

I shake several into my hand. "Now, do you recognize this tablet? What do you see it as?"

Rosa Lee squints at it. "The little white pill. That's the kind that makes me drowsy."

I print "little white pill" on a sheet of paper and hold up a different pill. "Tell me what you see this pill as. This is the Dilantin."

"Is that one of the seizure pills?"

"Yes."

"A white and orange pill," she says. "That's the one I took so many of."

"Right," I say. "That's what made you sick." I write "white and orange" on the list.

"Now this one," I say, displaying a folic acid tablet that she takes as part of her HIV treatment.

Rosa Lee studies it. "Little white pill," she says tentatively.

"No, no, no. That's the phenobarbital. This pill is the yellow pill. Here, look at it again."

"The yellow pill," she repeats, staring at the tablet.

"All right," I say, moving on to the last container. "This is the retrovir, the AZT. This is for your condition of being HIV-positive. Now, you tell me how you see this pill."

"My blue and white."

I show Rosa Lee what I am writing.

"Okay," she says, "but please put the p.m. and the a.m. for me."

"I am. Now read this to me."

She reads each word slowly, carefully, like a rock climber ascending a cliff. "Little white pill: 8 a.m., 1 p.m. and 6 p.m. The white and orange pill: 8 a.m., 1 p.m. and 6 p.m. The yellow pill: 8 a.m."

I interrupt. "You only take that once."

"Once. Okay. Blue and white pill: 8 a.m., 2 p.m. and 8 p.m."

"Right," I say. "Now, will that work for you?"

"Yes," she says.

Rosa Lee taped the list to the wall outside her bedroom so that her grandchildren, who read better than she does, could help her. As her strength returned and she spent more time away from home again, she stuck it in her pocketbook. After several weeks, she memorized the routine and the list became just one more out-of-date item in her portable filing cabinet.

CHAPTER TWO

The Lessons Learned

Rosa Lee has no trouble remembering when she began hiding her illiteracy.

It was 1953, and she was 16 years old, separated from her husband of a few months and raising three children in her mother's house near Capitol Hill. It was the last place she wanted to be. Living in Rosetta Wright's house meant living by Rosetta Wright's rules, and those rules were choking Rosa Lee.

Rosetta and her family had come to Washington in 1935, seeking refuge from their harsh lives as sharecroppers in North Carolina and Maryland. Her husband, Earl Wright, worked intermittently on construction jobs until his death in 1948, but Rosetta's domestic work brought in money more regularly.

Just as Rosetta's mother had prepared her to be a sharecropper, Rosetta schooled Rosa Lee in domestic work. Long before Rosa Lee turned 10, her mother taught her to scrub laundry on a washboard, to wash a floor so it shined, to make a bed so it looked crisp and neat. Rosa Lee's apartment is a monument to those lessons; no matter how many people are living there, it is always tidy and well organized.

As the oldest girl, Rosa Lee was expected to do laundry for every-

one in the house; by the time she was in the third grade, she was spending hours at the scrub board every week, washing sweaters and shirts for her parents and their 11 children. "My mother didn't ask me did I have my homework done," Rosa Lee said. "School wasn't important to her, and it wasn't important to me."

Rosa Lee remembers asking her mother why she had to do so many chores. Her mother told her, "You're going to find out. This is the only kind of job we can find for black people."

Rosa Lee isn't sure how she made it as far in school as she did. Each year, she was promoted to the next grade, despite her reading problems. In the seventh grade, not long after her 13th birthday, Rosa Lee became pregnant and was forced to drop out of school. She was supposed to return after the baby was born, but she had a second child at 15 and then, at 16, she married the father of her third child.

Rosetta had insisted that Rosa Lee marry 20-year-old Albert Cunningham. Rosa Lee didn't love Albert, but she was thrilled anyway. Marriage meant she could leave her mother's house forever. Four months later she was back; her husband beat her after he found out that Rosa Lee had been sleeping with a neighborhood boy. Rosetta told Rosa Lee to come home.

Those few months of independence made it hard for Rosa Lee to return. She and her mother argued often about Rosa Lee's welfare checks; Rosa Lee wanted the money to come to her, but Rosetta said she was too young. "What are you going to do with it?" Rosa Lee remembers her mother saying. "You don't even know how to pour piss out of a boot."

Rosa Lee craved her mother's love and affection, but she also feared her. She looked at her mother's broad back and powerful hands, and could think only about how to avoid the stinging slaps Rosetta often delivered during their arguments. Forty years later, she has almost nothing good to say about her mother. "My mother classified me as very dumb," Rosa Lee told me one day. "It was almost as if she was making fun of me."

Rosa Lee saw public housing as her escape. With the help of friends, and without telling her mother, she found her way to the public housing agency one afternoon.

She asked a clerk there for help, telling him that she could not fill out the application by herself. The memory of his sneer still causes her mouth to tighten and her voice to thicken. "Back in those days, they didn't give you any sympathy when you said you couldn't read," she said. "It was like, 'So what? It ain't my fault.'"

Humiliated, she trudged back to her mother's house. She vowed never again to reveal her illiteracy to someone she didn't know.

"Can you read?" she asked her then-current boyfriend that day. Of course he could read. Couldn't she?

No, Rosa Lee said defiantly. She sat next to him, brooding silently, while he filled out the application to switch the welfare payments.

The showdown with Rosetta came four days later.

Rosa Lee was relaxing on the front porch, feeling good that she had completed her chores for the day, when she felt Rosetta's strong fingers jab her in the shoulder.

"Why didn't you tell me that you went and applied for welfare?" Rosetta demanded.

Rosa Lee had forgotten to check the mailbox. Now it was too late. She decided it was time to stand up to her mother. "I wanted to get me and my kids out of your hair," she remembers saying. "It seems like my kids were getting on your nerves."

Her mother's questions were tinged with anger: Who helped her? How did she know where to send it?

"I got somebody to help me! You wouldn't help me!" Rosa Lee retorted.

"Who are you talking to like that?" Rosetta said in the tone that Rosa Lee knew so well.

"Momma," Rosa Lee pleaded, "you would not help me fill it out."

"How am I going to help you fill it out when I can't even read myself?" Rosetta shouted.

Rosa Lee was stunned. "Why didn't you tell me you couldn't read?"
" 'Cause it wasn't none of your damn business!" Rosetta said.

CHAPTER THREE

'She Was Teaching!'

The first-grade classroom that welcomed 6-year-old Rosa Lee Cunningham in the fall of 1942 was a long way from the kind of school that Rosetta Wright had attended 20 years earlier in rural North Carolina.

Rosetta's school year didn't begin in September and end in June. It was geared to the rhythms of the cotton fields; from the spring through the fall, the sharecroppers had to work the crop, leaving the winter months as the primary time for school. The harvest came first, the classroom second.

The white landowners had no interest in encouraging the black sharecroppers to send their children to school. Education was a threat to the sharecropping system that dominated much of North Carolina and the South when Rosetta was growing up in the 1920s; sharecroppers who could read and write might take their labor elsewhere. Rosetta's parents, Thadeous and Lugenia Lawrence, had no formal education; Rosetta went to school, but when she reached puberty, she went to work full-time in the fields.

There was one similarity between the schools that Rosetta and Rosa Lee attended: Both were part of segregated school systems.

Rosa Lee's difficulty with reading and writing began in first grade, soon after she enrolled at Giddings Elementary at Third and G streets SE. She does not remember getting any special help from her teachers. "If you didn't learn it, you just didn't learn it," she said.

Then one morning at the beginning of fourth grade in 1947, she saw that school could be something more than a place of frustration.

She was talking with a girlfriend in her girlfriend's classroom when the teacher appeared and shut the door before Rosa Lee could leave. Trapped, Rosa Lee decided to take a seat rather than draw attention to herself. Besides, she was curious about the teacher, Miss Whitehead; Rosa Lee had heard Miss Whitehead did things differently in her second-floor classroom.

Within a few hours, Rosa Lee felt as if she had stumbled into a new school. On the first floor, where Rosa Lee had always been assigned, she and her classmates rotated among four classrooms every day. But Miss Whitehead's students stayed all day in the same classroom, and Miss Whitehead handled all the subjects.

On the first floor, the teachers seemed to spend a lot of time in the hall, talking to each other, while Rosa Lee and her first-floor classmates played "and meddled with each other." By contrast, Miss Whitehead's class seemed calm, orderly and exciting.

For three straight days, Rosa Lee climbed the stairs to Miss Whitehead's classroom and sat there, undetected. For the first time in her life, she found school fascinating. "She was teaching!" she told me. "She made you feel like you were learning something." Rosa Lee planned to stay upstairs forever.

Why weren't the children downstairs taught like that, she asked her girlfriend? The friend told her that the first-floor class was an "ungraded class for slow learners."

No one had told Rosa Lee that she was "a slow learner." She remembers angrily cutting her friend off.

It seems difficult to believe, but Rosa Lee went unnoticed in the class for three days. On the fourth day, she raised her hand to ask a question. Miss Whitehead appeared to notice her for the first time. She asked Rosa Lee to stay behind during recess.

After the other students left, Miss Whitehead asked Rosa Lee where she was supposed to be, and then told her that she would have to return to her assigned classroom.

"But I like the way you teach up here," Rosa Lee said. "Why won't you let me come up here?"

"You're not supposed to be up here," she remembers Miss Whitehead saying. "You're supposed to be downstairs."

"Why?" Rosa Lee asked.

"Because you're a slow learner!" Miss Whitehead replied.

Rosa Lee retreated to the first floor. Her teacher, who seemed not to have missed her, told Rosa Lee never to go upstairs again.

Later that school year, Rosa Lee began skipping school frequently. On many mornings, she left the house as if she were going to school, but she spent the day roaming the streets of Capitol Hill instead. Despite her unexplained absences, she was promoted to the fifth and sixth grades.

In the spring of 1949, after being held back twice, Rosa Lee was called to the principal's office. It was the end of her sixth-grade year, and a school official told her she would be allowed to graduate to junior high. "She told me I was being passed on account of my age," Rosa Lee said, "not because I had passed any of my classes."

CHAPTER FOUR

'Read It for Me'

Forty-three years later, on a January morning in 1992, Rosa Lee is fretting over her telephone bill. She stares at the eight pages, trying to figure out how her bill could be \$241 when her monthly service costs \$15.38.

She thrusts the bill into my hands. "Read it for me, Mr. Dash," she says, her lower lip trembling as it always does when she's upset.

As we talk, Ronnie, Ducky and Richard are in the living room. They are watching a movie on cable, which Rosa Lee had installed for them. Patty is asleep on the couch. None of them is working at the moment, and no one is helping to pay the \$64 monthly rent, the electricity and phone bills, or the cable.

Rosa Lee has the only steady income, not all of which is legal. She receives \$437 a month from the Supplemental Security Income program for the disabled poor; the government considers her disabled because her medical problems and lack of skills limit her job prospects. The rest of her money comes from selling shoplifted goods.

Money never lasts long in the Cunningham household, so when the phone bill arrived in late December, Rosa Lee was frantic. The words on the first page—"Message Units" and "Federally Ordered Subscriber Line Charge"—meant nothing to her. The subsequent pages, each showing totals and subtotals, confused her even more. She can't add or subtract, so she couldn't check the numbers, much as her sharecropping grandparents could not check the landowner's math when he added up their "share" after each harvest.

She put the bill aside. Three days after Christmas, the phone company disconnected the line. When her disability check came after New Year's, Rosa Lee paid \$140 and the service was restored. But with \$101 unpaid, Rosa Lee is worried.

I wasn't eager to get caught up in her personal affairs again. I suggested she call her son, Alvin, who is literate and willing to help when his mother calls. Alvin and his brother, Eric—who live on their own—are the only two of Rosa Lee's children who have never used drugs.

"NO, NO, NO," Rosa Lee screamed at me, tears trickling down her face. "Alvin's going to be angry and fuss at me for letting these grown-ass children live off of me! No! You've got to help me! You've got to call the phone company. If I call them, I'll only get flustered, and they'll find out I can't read. These bills are kicking my butt, and I'm not getting any help to pay them. PLEASE? PLEASE?"

"Okay, okay, okay," I reply, my head pounding, "but they won't be able to hear me if you're crying."

I scan the bill, which shows a balance of \$137 from November, and quickly notice several problems.

Someone has been making calls to "900" numbers that charge \$4 a minute for sexually explicit conversations. After checking with Rosa Lee, I ask the C&P billing office to put a block on the line that would prevent any more calls to 900 numbers.

There also are 38 calls to directory assistance at a cost of \$9.88. That made sense: No one in the house can read well enough to use

the printed phone book, so everyone uses directory assistance to find phone numbers.

And there are 511 "message units" for local calls outside the District—to phone numbers in Maryland and Virginia. This is a mystery: Rosa Lee, who didn't realize that she had to pay extra for such calls, says she doesn't know who might be making so many calls.

As I get an explanation of the bill from C&P, I look at Rosa Lee accusingly. The 511 "message units" were all calls to the *same* number in Prince George's County. This was on top of 340 calls made to that number in November. What is going on? I ask.

Rosa Lee looks both surprised and sheepish. She had been letting a young woman down the hall use the phone to call her boyfriend in Prince George's County. The woman's phone had been disconnected for several months. But Rosa Lee had no idea the woman had been making so many calls.

It didn't make sense. Why would the woman call her boyfriend 511 times in one month, nearly 20 calls a day? And how did she do it without Rosa Lee's knowledge?

The answer, it turned out, was drugs. The woman's boyfriend was a crack dealer, and the woman was relaying orders for neighborhood customers. She made most of the calls early in the day, when Rosa Lee was out. One of Rosa Lee's children would let her in.

Rosa Lee is upset that the woman has taken advantage of her. But she is reluctant to cut off her use of the phone.

"What?" I say. "Why?"

"Sometimes I need some bread," Rosa Lee says. "Sometimes I need some sugar, or something . . . and I ask her to get it for me."

When Rosa Lee's arthritic knee is too painful to walk to the store, she would rather send the woman than one of her children. "They spend my money on crack and don't come back with my change or my food," Rosa Lee says.

I get up to leave. "NO!" she shouts. "Don't leave! Stay with me a little while!"

She picks up the large brass crucifix that she keeps on top of her television, clasping it to her chest.

"I need somebody to stand by me!" she says, her voice reverberating off the walls and into the second-floor hallway outside. "I don't have nobody. I don't have nobody. I can't do it by myself."

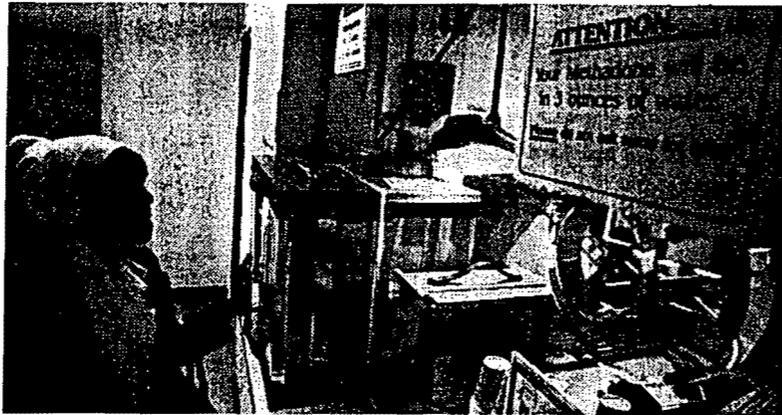
About This Series

In 1932, in the midst of the Great Depression, Rosa Lee Cunningham's grandparents and parents gave up their North Carolina sharecropping life for an uncertain journey north. Rosa Lee is the link between past and present, between a world that has disappeared and the one that her children and grandchildren face today in Washington. Her life spans a half-century of hardship in blighted neighborhoods not far from the majestic buildings where policy-makers have largely failed in periodic efforts to break the cycle of poverty.

Many of Rosa Lee's relatives, including two of her eight children, managed to secure footholds in the mainstream of American society; their relative success makes it all the more important to try to understand Rosa Lee's life. Although her story is discomfiting and disturbing, she wants it told. "Maybe I can help somebody not follow in my footsteps," she says. That story—of the choices she had and the choices she made—offers a chance to understand what statistics only suggest: the interconnections of racism, poverty, illiteracy, drug abuse and crime, and why these conditions persist.

The series, edited by Steve Luxenberg, *The Post's* assistant managing editor for special projects, began Sunday, Sept. 18 and will run through Sunday, Sept. 25. *The Post* welcomes readers' written comments or phone calls. If you wish to leave a recorded comment, please call PostHaste at 334-9000, Category 4646.

She Wrestles With Recovery in a Changing Drug Culture



BY LUCIAN PERDIS—THE WASHINGTON POST

THE CLINIC: *Rosa Lee Cunningham receives her daily dose of methadone.*

Fourth of eight articles

By Leon Dash
Washington Post Staff Writer

A crowd is milling around the bank of aluminum mailboxes that sits on a grassy island outside Rosa Lee Cunningham's apartment building. The midday sun is warm on this spring day in 1992, and my car window is open as Rosa Lee and I pull into the parking lot.

"Has the mailman come yet?" Rosa Lee shouts to her neighbors.

"No," comes the reply.

Ordinarily, the mailman's whereabouts don't generate much interest at the Southeast Washington housing complex where Rosa Lee lives. But today is the first

of the month, the day when government checks are due to arrive.

Standing off to the side, surveying the scene, is a group of teenage boys who sell crack cocaine in the Washington Highlands neighborhood that surrounds the federally subsidized complex. They too are waiting for the mailman. As soon as the checks are cashed, they will begin their rounds, making new sales and collecting old debts.

Even before Rosa Lee reaches the door to her second-floor apartment, it flies open. Her 34-year-old daughter, Patty, sticks out her head. "Momma, have the checks come yet?" Patty says urgently in a loud voice.

"Patty, you don't have to shout," Rosa Lee says. "You know the checks don't come until 1 o'clock."

We step into the living room and the
See ROSA LEE, A16, Col. 1

reason for Patty's nervousness becomes clear: Seated on the couch are two teenage crack dealers, known to me only as Two-Two and Man. Between them is Ducky, 32, another of Rosa Lee's eight children. All three are staring at the television, watching an afternoon soap opera.

Two-Two and Man have come to collect from Patty and Ducky. The teenagers know they have a better chance of getting their money if they show up early, before Rosa Lee and Patty have cashed their checks. I have seen this ritual many times since I began spending several days a week with Rosa Lee to learn how several generations of one family have lived with poverty, crime and drugs. Even so, Two-Two and Man barely acknowledge my presence.

Rosa Lee greets them. The boys nod, their facial expressions masks of cool indifference. They are dressed in hip-hop style: oversized jeans, baggy shirts, expensive sneakers and baseball caps. Rosa Lee has asked Two-Two and Man several times not to sell crack to Patty and Ducky on credit, but they ignore her. I once asked her why. "Because they know Momma is going to bail her children out," she says.

There is no hint of sarcasm or irony in Rosa Lee's voice, just a simple statement of fact by someone trapped in a drug culture she helped perpetuate. For years she sold heroin to addicts who would do almost anything for a fix; now her own children beg her for money to feed their habits. She herself is a recovering heroin addict who didn't quit until the fall of 1990, when an injection sent her into a life-threatening seizure. But Patty and Ducky haven't quit, nor have three of her other children.

It's the kind of environment that sociologist William J. Wilson has studied in his work on urban neighborhoods that have become dominated by what Wilson calls "a concentration of poverty." Wilson said it is "extremely difficult" for family members living in close quarters with drug users to come away unscathed. Rosa Lee and her family, he told me, reflect "the effects of living in neighborhoods that are overwhelmingly impoverished with all the opportunities for illegal activities, with limited opportunities for conventional activity."

Illegal activity swirls around Rosa Lee every day. She resents having to protect her adult children from drug dealers, but she always comes to their rescue. With some pride, she tells me about the time she saved Patty and Ducky from Two-Two's wrath.

It was Labor Day weekend in 1991. The checks had come early, on Friday and Saturday, because Sept. 1 fell on a Sunday. Before Two-Two and Man could find Patty, she had cashed her \$252 welfare check and spent it all in a few hours. She paid Rosa Lee the \$100 that she had borrowed for crack the month before, paid off several of the other dealers who found her first and then spent the rest on more crack.

So when Two-Two showed up Saturday afternoon to collect \$30 from her, \$80 from Ducky and \$150 from Patty's boyfriend, Patty hid in Rosa Lee's bedroom and Ducky hid in the hall closet. "I want my goddamn money," Two-Two yelled, banging his fist on Rosa Lee's apartment door. "Mama Rose, I don't mean no harm. If we let them go, everybody will think they can do it. Would you rather I knock on the door or do you want me to knock them on their ass?"

Rosa Lee knew Two-Two and Man meant business. Though she called them "young'uns," they were tougher and less patient than many of the dealers she knew in the 1970s and 1980s, when she made a living selling heroin in Northwest Washington.

She didn't want to pay them out of her \$422 monthly disability check. "I didn't see any way to make it through the month if I paid all my bills and paid off their debts too," she told me.

"All of a sudden," she said, "my mind started working." She decided to become a crack seller, just for the weekend. She asked Two-Two to introduce her to a crack supplier.

"What can I make with \$300?" Rosa Lee asked the supplier, a man in his late twenties.

"You can double it," he said. Later that evening, Rosa Lee handed over \$300 in return for 30 plastic bags of crack, each containing one "\$20 rock." She then sent Patty and Ducky to round up customers.

As the supplier prepared the packages, Rosa Lee's 14-year-old granddaughter walked in. She understood immediately. "I don't want you to go back to jail, grandma," she told Rosa Lee.

Buyers trooped up to Rosa Lee's apartment until 5 a.m. She sold some bags at a discount and gave in to Patty's and Ducky's pleas for free samples. When it was all over, she hadn't made enough to cover her \$300 outlay. She ended up paying off the debts out of her own funds.

"I could have made more if I hadn't given Ducky something now and then, and Patty something now and then," she said.

Exhausted from being awake all night, she washed up and got ready for church.

Since that weekend, Two-Two and Man have looked to Rosa Lee whenever Patty or Ducky can't pay up. This particular afternoon is no different. The mailman finally arrives, Rosa Lee agrees to cover the debts, the checks are cashed at a nearby liquor store and the money changes hands.

As soon as Two-Two and Man leave, Patty and Ducky are off in search of more crack.

CHAPTER ONE

'Mama Rose'

At 8:15 one January morning in 1992, Rosa Lee slams the brown metal door to her one-bedroom apartment and walks slowly down the stairs to meet the government-run van for the six-mile ride to the city methadone clinic.

She steps out into a biting wind, but is glad to leave her crowded apartment. Inside, her sons Richard, Ronnie and Ducky are asleep on makeshift beds in the living room. Patty is in Rosa Lee's double bed, which they have been sharing for weeks.

Rosa Lee looks forward to this part of her day. At the methadone clinic, she sees old friends she has known since she lived at Clifton Terrace in the 1970s and early 1980s. They greet her with affection.

"Hi ya doing, Mama Rose?"

"Ya' looking good, Mama Rose."

"Nice to see you, Mama Rose."

"Mama Rose" is what they called her at Clifton Terrace. She likes the name and the respect it implies. She drifts to the back of a line that stretches down the corridor toward a counter encased in plexiglass. A sign on the plexiglass sets the rules: "Attention . . . Your methadone will be in 3 ounces of water. Please do not ask the nurse for less." Some patients believe the methadone works better if less diluted.

The line moves forward methodically, dozens of people from different neighborhoods and different backgrounds, all bound together by their addiction. Behind the glass, the nurse measures out the blood-red methadone into a plastic cup, places it on a revolving tray, then spins it so the patient can take the cup through the opening. The patients receive different doses, depending on their weight and how much they need to effectively curb their craving for heroin.

The nurse measures out Rosa Lee's dosage. Following the rules, Rosa Lee drinks it down as a nurse watches. The glass between them doesn't encourage conversation. The transaction over, Rosa Lee heads for the door.

On many weekday mornings, I meet her outside at the clinic, a modern two-story coffee-colored building at 33 N St. NE, and we ride two blocks to the McDonald's on New York Avenue NE.

The McDonald's is Rosa Lee's preferred spot for breakfast. She spends several hours there each day, chatting with other patients from the methadone clinic and "regulars" who hang out there. Her routine is the same: She orders Cheerios or the breakfast special of pancakes, sausage and scrambled eggs.

This particular morning, she settles on Cheerios. She tears open seven packages of sugar, dumps them in her coffee and then rips open several more and empties them onto her cereal. She can't stand to eat anything until she drinks her methadone, so this is her first food of the day.

A woman approaches. She hands Rosa Lee \$3 in a folded lump.

"More Darvon sales?" I ask.

"Yeah," Rosa Lee says.

Darvon is a prescription painkiller that some methadone patients use for a cheap high. They like Xanax, a prescription tranquilizer, even more. Rosa Lee often has a supply of Darvon and Xanax to sell. She was prescribed both drugs after she injured her back slightly in a bus accident in August 1991. She has used the injury as an excuse for getting refills. As a Medicaid patient, she pays just 50 cents for the 60 pills that come in each prescription. She resells Darvon at \$1 a pill and Xanax at \$2.

She can't refill them too often without drawing suspicion, so it's of something that brings in a lot of money. But it gives her a certain stature with the McDonald's crowd.

Some days, she will bring in clothes that she has shoplifted to sell or give away. One time, she brought a toddler-sized yellow sweat suit that her sons stole in a burglary; she gave it away to a homeless woman who was there with her 3-year-old daughter. "I just felt guilty ying to sell it to her," she told me.

A few months after I began visiting Rosa Lee regularly in the fall of 1990, she told me that several of her McDonald's buddies couldn't understand why she was allowing me to write about her. "They told me, 'Stay away from reporters. They put people's business in the reet.'"

I smiled and told her it was true. "We're nosy and intrusive. I want ur permission to follow you for a long time. There will be many vs when I will ask you about the same thing over and over again. I then come back months later and ask you again. You might end cussing me out."

She laughed. "That's all right. You look like you could handle it."

Our relationship has evolved from those early days. I have tried to nain an impartial observer, but, inevitably, I have become a vital t of her life. Sometimes I am her driver, ferrying her to the meth-

adone clinic or the welfare office. Sometimes I am her translator, helping her to decipher paperwork that baffles her because she can't read. More often, I am her confidante, listening to her painful re-criminations about her life and her children.

Staying at arm's length is difficult. My refusals don't deter her from trying to get me involved.

"Mr. Dash," she says, tilting her head and softening her voice, "tell me, what should I do?"

"I'm not in it, Rose." I'll say.

"I'm not in it, Rose," she mimics. "Why do you always say that? I need your help. I don't have anyone else to talk to."

That's why she enjoys her McDonald's visits. There, she can escape her problems for a while. One day, as she ranted about her children's drug habits, she broke down in tears about how trapped she felt.

"Mr. Dash," she said, "I don't have no friends. The only friends you know I got is up there."

"At McDonald's?"

"McDonald's. That's all. And they're not what you call friends, but that's all I got."

CHAPTER TWO

The Cocoa Club

Most of the McDonald's crowd is a generation younger than Rosa Lee. Once in a while, though, she runs into one of her old heroin customers from the days when she waited tables at the Cocoa Club, a nightclub that once operated at the corner of Eighth and H streets NE. "That's way back," she says. "Not too many alive from those days."

"Those days" were the 1950s and 1960s. In the world that Rosa Lee knows, in the neighborhoods where she grew up, in the places where she raised her children, on the streets where she once bought and sold drugs, there are many people whose lives ended too early, cut short by too much heroin or too much alcohol or just simply too much misfortune.

One day at McDonald's, Rosa Lee pulls an old photograph out of her pocketbook. It is a Polaroid, and it shows a younger Rosa Lee, in her early thirties, dressed in a sleek black outfit, with matching pants and top. Behind her is the dance floor of the Cocoa Club.

The photo was taken sometime in the late 1960s by a regular customer at the club. Rosa Lee had run into the man recently, and he remembered the photo. He ran home to get it, and insisted that Rosa Lee keep it.

It is the only photo I have ever seen of Rosa Lee at this age; she looks smashing and vibrant. She looks as if she belongs.

She never planned to work at the club. As a teenager in the early and mid-1950s, Rosa Lee often went with her girlfriends to the Cocoa Club to dance and drink. The club's owner noticed her and asked her if she wanted to wait tables. It was her first job. She was 20, and had just given birth to Eric, her fifth child. The year was 1956.

The pay was good, and it was in cash, so she could hide it from the welfare office. She worked at night, leaving her mother to take care of her children. It was fun and exciting. There was live music and flashy customers.

One was a heroin dealer. Soon after she started working at the club, he took her aside and offered her a chance to make a little extra money: If she would sell heroin to customers that he sent her way, she could keep \$25 of every \$100 she sold.

She concealed the heroin, which was contained in small capsules, inside her bra. The capsules sold for \$1 each, and customers usually bought three. "Friday nights was when I would sell them," recalled Rosa Lee. "Friday nights, I would sell hundreds in there. The owner never knew I was selling heroin, but he was always asking me why my tables would be full with customers when the other tables were empty. I told him, 'Cause I take care of my customers!'"

The heroin business, she said, was nothing like the crack business today. She never treated her customers the way Two-Two and Man now treat Patty and Ducky. She thought of herself as several cuts above the "jugglers," the dealers who sold their heroin on the streets. She was a high-class dealer with high-class customers; they paid promptly and in cash.

She resisted the temptation to take a hit herself. She saw the powerful grip that heroin held on her customers, and it frightened her. Besides, she couldn't afford a heroin habit. By 1961, she had eight children to support. She took a second job at another H Street nightclub, the 821 Club, as a "shake dancer"—slang for strip tease. Soon, she was engaging in prostitution with club customers.

"The men would ask if they could take me home," Rosa Lee said. "I'd come right out with it. 'Yeah, you can take me home. I got eight children at home. We need some money for food!'"

She also picked up additional things by shoplifting: shoes for little Patty, pants for one of the boys. She was caught occasionally, but the

judge always gave her probation and sent her home. Then, in October 1965, her luck ran out.

She was arrested as she tried to steal an expensive coat from a Maryland department store. Two security guards spotted her as she went to the coat rack, took off her raggedy brown wool coat, slipped into the plush new coat and hung the old one in its place.

She pleaded guilty. On Christmas Eve, the judge sentenced her to a year in prison.

Her mother was sitting in the first row of spectator seats. "You're not going to forget this!" yelled Rosetta Wright, waving her right forefinger at Rosa Lee's face. "You hear me? Leaving all those god-damn children! You're not going to forget this!"

CHAPTER THREE

'Are You Doing It?'

Rosetta took care of Rosa Lee's children for the eight months that Rosa Lee spent in jail, but Rosa Lee felt little gratitude. The tension between them was as bad as ever. Rosetta told the welfare office that Rosa Lee's prison term showed she was an unfit mother; this convinced Rosa Lee that Rosetta would like nothing better than to have custody of the children and the welfare payments that came with them. Their battles only deepened Rosa Lee's resolve to retrieve her children and move away from her mother's apartment as quickly as she could.

After her release, she returned to her waitress job at the Cocoa Club and resumed her heroin sales. Within a few months, she found a one-bedroom apartment on Bates Street NW, near North Capitol Street. It was small and roach-infested, but it meant that she was no longer under her mother's thumb.

The children, especially the older ones, remember these years as a time of constant turmoil. Between 1966 and 1968, they moved four times before ending up in a public housing complex in the Marshall Heights area of Southeast Washington. The apartments had one thing in common: All were located in areas known for illegal drug activity.

Heroin was available to anyone who wanted it, including teenagers. In 1967, Ronnie became the first of Rosa Lee's children to try it. He was 15 and in the seventh grade.

As he remembers it now, his best friend offered him a capsule at a party, suggesting that Ronnie snort the whitish powder. He had been searching for something that would give him more confidence, help him to overcome his fear of girls and to control an embarrassing stammer that took over whenever he was under stress.

"I tried some," Ronnie said. "It stopped my stammering." Within a few months, he and his new girlfriend were "skinpopping" the drug in their arms.

He tried hard to hide his addiction from Rosa Lee, but there was a trail of evidence: He needed money to pay for his habit, so he would sell household items or steal from Rosa Lee's purse. He skipped school often and finally just dropped out in the eighth grade.

Rosa Lee didn't connect any of this to a heroin habit. She had never paid much attention to her children's performance in school, much as Rosetta had never paid much attention to hers. Then, one day in 1969, she found empty heroin capsules and syringes in Ronnie's room.

"Are you doing it?" she asked him in a soft voice.

"Yeah," Ronnie said, ashamed. "You want me to get out?"

Rosa Lee shook her head. Ronnie was surprised by what she said next.

"She told me, just like she told me when I started smoking cigarettes, 'You got to take care of your own habits!'"

CHAPTER FOUR

'Get Outta Bed!'

In the neighborhood where Rosa Lee lived in the late 1960s, word got around that she had heroin to sell. Addicts flocked to her apartment on 57th Place SE, a long street that ends in a cul-de-sac near the Prince George's County line. Some were hanging on her door before the sun rose.

"Some of them would be shaking," Rosa Lee told me. "Some said their stomachs hurt. Some said their backs hurt. And they were always begging, begging, begging. They did not have the full price. I'd sell to them at a discount because I couldn't stand the begging and sniffling and wiping their noses. . . . I wanted them to come back. They'd pay full price when they came back that afternoon, after they had a chance to steal something or hustle up some money."

She sometimes let them use her bedroom to inject the drug. Her youngest children often were getting ready for school, so Rosa Lee told her customers to make sure the door was closed.

"After a few minutes, they come out of there completely changed," she said. "They were relaxed, not worried about anything. They'd tell me how good the dope made them feel. I was curious about what dope could do for me, if I could feel good all day. . . . But I was still too scared to try it."

It wasn't long before police also heard about Rosa Lee's business. That's when the raids began.

One night in 1969, the police battered down the door and the children woke up to find officers, their guns drawn, waving flashlights and shouting. "Get outta bed! Get outta bed!" Rosa Lee's youngest daughter, then 8, remembers she was so afraid that she wet her bed.

The police never found anything. Rosa Lee kept her stash at a friend's house nearby. But the raids continued, sometimes as often as once a month.

The younger children had no idea why the police kept breaking down the door. But the older children knew too well what was going on. "They raided us so often," Ronnie said. "We were so hot."

CHAPTER FIVE

Rosa Lee's First Hit

Rosa Lee's first drug use started with her desire to lose weight. It was 1973, and the family was living in a four-bedroom apartment at Clifton Terrace. The police had battered the door at the 57th Place apartment so many times that D.C. housing officials grew weary of fixing it. In the summer of 1972, they ordered Rosa Lee to move. Rosa Lee said she gave \$100 to someone in authority and her name went to the top of the waiting list at Clifton Terrace.

One day, Rosa Lee found out that Lucky, a close friend, was regularly injecting something called "bam," the street name for Preludin, an amphetamine-like stimulant. Lucky told her that bam helped reduce her weight by curbing her appetite.

Bam didn't frighten Rosa Lee the way heroin did. Lucky had been using it for months, and Rosa Lee hadn't noticed any change in Lucky's behavior.

Rosa Lee's weight had been creeping up. She asked Lucky for a hit. "Lucky wouldn't hit me," she said.

Rosa Lee asked one of Ronnie's girlfriends if she knew anything about bam. The friend, a school-crossing guard at nearby Eugene Meyer Elementary School, told Rosa Lee that she used bam in the morning before she went to her post.

Every morning for the next year, the woman brought bam to Rosa Lee's apartment. In the pre-dawn darkness, she would prepare the solution and inject Rosa Lee and herself.

"I liked the feeling," Rosa Lee said. "I could feel it all in my stomach. That's the first thing that shrinks. Your stomach. I would go the WHOLE DAY without eating, with a WHOLE lot of energy! I would clean up the whole house. Nothing was clean enough. I'd take two or three baths. I was on top of everything. In three weeks, I lost about 20 pounds."

By 1975, two more of her children had joined Ronnie as drug users. Bobby, then 25, began smoking opium while serving in the Army in Vietnam. And Patty, who had watched Ronnie shoot up when she was 11, became a regular user when she was 17.

Rosa Lee had plenty of opportunities to try something stronger than bam, but she still resisted. Then, at her 39th birthday party, she gave in.

It had been a difficult month. She was going through a breakup of a three-year relationship. At her party, all she could do was cry. Patty suggested "a shot of dope" might help her get over her pain.

After that October night in 1975, mother and daughter became daily heroin users. Rosa Lee was never able to inject herself. If Patty or Ronnie or Bobby weren't available, she went to a Clifton Terrace "oilin' joint," and paid \$3 for someone to give her a hit.

For 19 years, she had resisted the lure of the drug she sold. Now, she fell to the same depths as the addicts who had knocked on her door and begged for a fix: Her eyes were red and watery. Her stomach hurt when the heroin wore off. Her body quaked and shivered as it waited for the next hit.

Over the next 15 years, nothing motivated her to stop. In 1983, she survived a misplaced injection that caused a bone in her neck to become infected, and went right back to using heroin. In 1988, she learned that she, Bobby and Patty had HIV, the virus that causes AIDS. She continued to shoot up. Then a series of seizures nearly killed her in the fall of 1990, and a doctor warned her that her next injection might be her last.

Now her life is a daily struggle to stay on methadone and stay away from the drug use that spins around her. Mostly, she succeeds. There is no evidence that she took a single hit in all of 1991; she was doing so well that the clinic invited her to speak to a group of addicts about her experience. That's why I am startled one day in early 1992 to notice that the back of her left hand is swollen and red. It looks like the traces of "skinpopping," a method of injecting heroin.

"What are you looking at?" she demands, hiding her hands in the folds of her winter coat.

"I'm looking at your swollen left hand," I say.

CHAPTER SIX

'Would It Kill Me?'

Rosa Lee isn't pleased that I have noticed the tell-tale sign of heroin use, but she decides to tell me the story anyway.

Earlier in the week, she had been sitting in McDonald's with several of her methadone buddies. Everyone was chattering excitedly about the Christmas gifts they had received from their children. Everyone except Rosa Lee.

Most of Rosa Lee's children hadn't given her anything. "I couldn't say a word," Rosa Lee told me. "I just sat there and looked, and before I knew it, I went into the bathroom and started crying."

To cheer her up, one of her friends suggested they share a "billy" or two of heroin, the quarter-teaspoon package commonly sold on the streets of Washington. Ordinarily, Rosa Lee would have dismissed the idea. Not this time.

She wondered if it would be dangerous. "What would happen if I did some?" she asked her friend. "Would it kill me?" Her friend told her not to worry. Rosa Lee decided to risk it.

As soon as Patty heard about the plan, she was eager to join in. It would be like old times: Patty would give Rosa Lee the hit, then hit herself. Patty and the friend went looking for a neighborhood dealer.

A short while later, Patty sat on Rosa Lee's bed and stuck the needle in the back of Rosa Lee's hand.

"Momma, can you feel it?" Patty whispered.

Rosa Lee shook her head.

Patty was worried about giving Rosa Lee too much at once. She remembered Rosa Lee's first seizure, and the panic she felt as Rosa Lee's eyes rolled back in her head.

"Are you ready to take it all?" Patty asked.

"If you stay here with me," Rosa Lee said.

Patty pushed the rest of the milky liquid into Rosa Lee's vein. Rosa Lee waited for the familiar rush. But it never came. The methadone seemed to be blocking the high.

"I didn't feel anything I used to feel," she tells me.

"Why did you take a chance on dying?"

She wriggles uncomfortably in her seat. "I didn't see it that way, taking a chance on dying. I thought I might have a seizure, but I didn't think I was taking a chance on dying."

I remind her of the doctor's warning. She mutters something and averts her eyes. We spar for a few minutes, and it becomes clear that the conversation is going nowhere. She completes my next question before I can finish it.

"You really don't have a . . . ?" I begin.

"A good reason for why I took it?" she said. "No, I really don't."

About This Series

In 1932, in the midst of the Great Depression, Rosa Lee Cunningham's grandparents and parents gave up their North Carolina sharecropping life for an uncertain journey north. Rosa Lee is the link between past and present, between a world that has disappeared and the one that her children and grandchildren face today in Washington. Her life spans a half-century of hardship in blighted neighborhoods not far from the majestic buildings where policy-makers have largely failed in periodic efforts to break the cycle of poverty.

Many of Rosa Lee's relatives, including two of her eight children, managed to secure footholds in the mainstream of American society; their relative success makes it all the more important to try to understand Rosa Lee's life. Although her story is discomfiting and disturbing, she wants it told. "Maybe I can help somebody not follow in my footsteps," she says. That story—of the choices she had and the choices she made—offers a chance to understand what statistics only suggest: the interconnections of racism, poverty, illiteracy, drug abuse and crime, and why these conditions persist.

The series, edited by Steve Luxenberg, The Post's assistant managing editor for special projects, began Sunday, Sept. 18 and will run through Sunday, Sept. 25. The Post welcomes readers' written comments or phone calls. If you wish to leave a recorded comment, please call PostHaste at 334-9000, Category 4646.

March 19, 1991, p. A1, 1991



BY LUCIAN PERKINS—THE WASHINGTON POST

A LIGHT MOMENT: Eric Wright jokes with his mother, Rosa Lee Cunningham.

Two Sons Surmounted the Hurdles

Fifth of eight articles

By Leon Dash
Washington Post Staff Writer

Eric Wright hung up the telephone in his Prince George's County apartment and cursed out loud. He couldn't decide what angered him more—that his 33-year-old brother Ducky was badgering his mother again for money to buy crack cocaine or that his mother was calling him once more to eject Ducky from her apartment.

As Eric, then 35, drove his white Jeep through the suburbs toward his mother's apartment in the District, he steeled himself for the impending confrontation. He didn't mind getting involved. It just didn't do any good. No matter what he said, no matter what he did, nothing seemed to change.

Of Rosa Lee Cunningham's eight children, only Eric and his older brother Alvin have never used drugs. They are the only ones who have never been in prison. Both have worked for most of their adult

lives, and they have taken care of themselves and their families. Both are Army veterans; both have worked primarily in government jobs since leaving the military 20 years ago.

As adults, they have defined themselves in ways that set them apart from the rest of the family. Eric has maintained a lifelong passion for music, hosting occasional talent shows and hiring himself out as a disc jockey for local parties. Alvin and his wife saved enough money to buy a comfortable two-story red-brick bungalow in a middle-class neighborhood. He is the only one of Rosa Lee's children who owns his own home.

Both men have made it through rough passages—both were teenage fathers and dropped out of school—but neither one let those events knock him off the path to responsible adulthood. "Ducky reminds me of myself at one time," Eric told me, "but I caught myself."

His mother's phone call on this June night in 1991 was just another reminder of what Eric had worked

See ROSA LEE, A10, Col. 1

so hard to escape. By the time he reached Rosa Lee's apartment in the low-income neighborhood of Washington Highlands, he was steaming. He strode into the living room and stood in front of Ducky, who was lounging on the couch after a nightlong crack binge.

"You've got to go," Eric shouted.

"This is Momma's house," Ducky said. "I ain't got to go nowhere!"

"You're going out of here!" Eric said heatedly. Ducky looked at Rosa Lee. She refused to intervene, so Ducky rose from the sofa with a resigned shrug, shoved some clothes in a plastic bag and left.

Still smoldering, Eric turned to Rosa Lee. Recalling the scene for me later, Eric said that he felt Rosa Lee was playing the victim to win his sympathy. But he had no sympathy for her at that moment, only anger—the same anger that has burned within him since he was 5 years old and learned that he was wearing clothes shoplifted by his mother.

"You never instilled any kind of values in us that were worth anything!" he raged at her.

"What do you mean, Cheetah?" she remembers shouting, using the nickname she gave him as a little boy because of his tree-climbing skills. "I'm not a good mother!"

Eric shouted louder. "You never made it a point to see that we went to school! The things that you have taught us is that manipulating is good, if you can do it. Stealing is good, if you can do it and get away with it. Using someone is good, if you can get away with it."

But Rosa Lee gave as good as she got, shouting louder still that she had taught all her children "to survive!"

Eric stormed off. He had heard it all too many times. Survival was always his mother's excuse. Well, he didn't buy it. He had survived too—without resorting to drug dealing, prostitution or stealing.

CHAPTER ONE

Motivating Forces

On a spring night in 1991, not long before Eric's confrontation with Rosa Lee, Alvin Cunningham is struggling to explain why he, like Eric, had turned out differently from his brothers and sisters.

We are sitting at his kitchen table in his Northwest Washington home. A lawn service tends the grass; an alarm system protects the house. He and his wife have government jobs; Alvin drives a bus for Metro, where he's worked since 1981. It's the kind of stability that was missing from Alvin's childhood; Rosa Lee moved the family nine times before he turned 16.

Alvin leans back in his chair, contemplating his response. His face is small and angular, and he looks much younger than 38. He is self-effacing and slow to anger. When he loses his temper—as he sometimes does when he visits Rosa Lee's apartment and finds his sister Patty or his brother Ducky engaged in drug activity—everyone knows it is best to scatter.

"It's not very complicated," he said finally. "For one, I don't like drugs because I saw what they could do to you."

I press him to say more, but he's not given to long, introspective statements. Initially he didn't want to be interviewed. Eric too was unwilling at first. Not only would my questions open some painful and personal chapters that they would rather forget, but they were concerned about being associated with the family's troubled history.

As they learned more about my efforts to understand how poverty, criminal recidivism and drug abuse had affected their family, they concluded that there was some value in discussing the contrast between their lives and those of their brothers and sisters.

Over the course of several interviews, it slowly became clear that Alvin and Eric began to set themselves apart from the family during their first years of elementary school. It was not something they coordinated. Nevertheless, both somehow came to recognize that they had real alternatives within their reach, that they had the power to make something of themselves if they didn't give up.

Their reactions to their upbringing became motivating forces in their lives. For Alvin, it was the shame and humiliation that he felt as a young boy; for Eric, it was the anger and disgust that he has carried to adulthood. At critical points, they benefited from an outsider's intervention—a teacher in Alvin's case, a social worker in Eric's.

By the time they reached their late teens, both decided that separation was the best way out. Alvin joined the Army at 18, married the mother of the daughter he had fathered at 16, received his high school general equivalency degree and took some college courses. He has been steadily employed since his discharge from the Army 17 years ago. Divorced from his first wife in 1978, he has since remarried.

Eric followed Alvin into the Army, spent a year in the Job Corps learning the fine points of wallpapering and then tried to make a living as a singer. When that didn't work out, he bounced from one job to another before landing a contract as a street sweeper with the District's Public Works Department. He worked his way up, earning

several promotions and pay raises; he learned to operate heavy equipment and secured a good job at the District's Blue Plains Treatment Plant. Then in 1992, he was laid off because of the District's financial woes. Since then, he has taken several temporary jobs while looking for something permanent.

He has raised his son on his own; his rocky relationship with the boy's mother ended in 1982, when he discovered that she was using heroin—and that Rosa Lee had introduced her to the drug. Eric has never forgiven his mother for that. "She would do things that made me turn totally away from her," he told me.

In their family, drug abuse has become the dividing wall that no one can scale. Alvin and Eric don't spend holidays with their brothers, and neither one can remember the last time that Bobby, Ronnie, Richard or Ducky came to their homes for a visit. If they see each other at all, it is usually when Alvin or Eric comes to straighten out a problem at Rosa Lee's apartment.

Rosa Lee can't explain the different outcomes for her children. "I didn't do anything more for them than I did for any of my other children," she said during one of our many interviews on the subject. "They always acted different, like they were shamed by it all. Even when they were little."

Alvin, in particular, showed his independence early, she said. "There wasn't any what you call 'role model' for him to copy," she said. "His father only came around a couple of times when he was a boy, and Alvin didn't see him again until he was an adult. No, he just sort of grew up like he did all by himself."

CHAPTER TWO

Young Alvin

Alvin Cunningham heard the horn of the green "welfare truck" and bolted out the back door of his mother's apartment as fast as his 8-year-old legs would carry him. Whenever the flatbed truck arrived at the public housing complex for its monthly distribution of food, Alvin would make himself scarce.

Alvin still remembers the contents of those bags: tins of canned meat and corned beef, rice, powdered eggs, cheese and pinto beans, along with other bulk items. Rosa Lee saw these staples as a godsend in her daily struggle to feed her eight children, including a baby girl born just a few months earlier. Alvin saw the handouts as an embarrassment.

His brothers and uncles noticed his tendency to disappear when it came time to unload the surplus goods that the government gave to poor families. They assumed he was avoiding work. "He was embarrassed?" Eric said. "All these years, I thought he refused to go to the truck because he was lazy!"

"Sometimes I did go," Alvin said. "But it would bother me. I HATED it!"

It annoyed Alvin that the truck's driver beeped his horn when he pulled into the small courtyard near the side-by-side apartments where Alvin's mother and grandmother were raising their families in 1961. Alvin had a crush on a girl who lived across the courtyard; she was a year older than Alvin and a grade ahead of him at Richardson Elementary School. Both her parents had jobs, and although they still qualified for public housing, they made enough money that they didn't receive any surplus food. He was afraid the girl would shun him if she saw him carrying the sealed bags into his home.

Alvin didn't understand why the family needed to take the free food. His mother was working every night, waiting tables at the nightclubs on H Street, and she often came back in the afternoon with new clothes for the family. "We had the best of shoes," he remembers. "Foot-Joys. She picked up expensive things for us. On Sunday or Easter, we looked real nice. Extra nice! It never dawned on me that she was shoplifting."

Rosa Lee didn't know what to make of her third-born son. Even as a toddler, he had behaved differently from his older brothers. He would follow her around the apartment, observing everything she did. If she stopped to do something, he sat nearby and watched. Some of Rosa Lee's friends noticed his quiet behavior; Alvin overheard them telling Rosa Lee that he would grow up to be a "good person." He liked the sound of that.

He didn't like the things he overheard at school. Some of his better-off classmates at Richardson Elementary, where he was a third-grader in early 1961, made fun of children from "the 'jects"—the Lincoln Heights public housing community where Alvin's family lived.

Alvin managed to escape much of this "jone'in," or teasing. Maybe it was because he didn't respond to the taunts; maybe it was because he befriended some of the boys who lived in the private homes along nearby East Capitol Street NE. Whatever the reason, the things he saw and heard while visiting his new friends opened his eyes to a new way of life.

He took a close look at the well-kept furniture at his friends' homes, comparing it with the worn secondhand furniture at his own.

His friends had a bedroom and a bed all to themselves; he shared a bed with one, sometimes two of his brothers.

Alvin made other comparisons. His friends' parents were teachers, office secretaries, Post Office clerks; his mother left her children at night to wait tables at nightclubs. His friends' families ate their meals at a dining room table set with flatware; his family's meals were haphazard at best.

"You look at the way they were living and you knew there was a difference," Alvin told me. "You'd see that difference. That's what I picked up on, and I started to pick up on that more and more."

CHAPTER THREE

Young Eric

Eric has never had Alvin's quiet temperament, not even as a little boy. "I was a bad-ass child!" he says. "You couldn't make me do nothing!"

He says this with the conviction of a man who knows himself and the forces that shaped him. We are seated at his new dining room table; the shiny black top gives the room a sleek, modern look. Eric leans forward as he speaks, making sure the tape recorder catches his words. "I remember my mother saying I wasn't going to be nothing!" he thunders.

He is unaware of how often he raises his voice when he talks about Rosa Lee. "My mother makes me feel like I owe her something, and I don't think I owe her anything!" he says. He focuses mostly on her mistakes; he's too angry to see any of the obstacles she faced.

Evictions forced Rosa Lee to move the family in 1961 and 1962, and Eric attended three schools for kindergarten, first and second grades. He fell behind; some days, he didn't go to school at all.

Soon after the family moved to Ninth and F streets NE in the fall of 1961, the principal at nearby Goding Elementary School spotted Rosa Lee's children playing in the street one day during school hours. Rosa Lee hadn't enrolled them yet. The principal knocked on Rosa Lee's door and told her, "It's not permitted to let your kids run around without being in school." She registered them the next day. Eric was assigned to second grade and Alvin to fourth.

Halfway through elementary school, Eric told one of his teachers that he was having trouble learning to read. He remembers the teacher telling him, "Don't worry, you'll get it in the next grade."

Rosa Lee wasn't much help. She had dropped out of school in the seventh grade and couldn't read well enough to help her children with their school work. On many days, she wasn't home when Eric and the other children returned from school, so she wasn't there to check on their homework.

Eric often found himself the target of taunts at school. Rosa Lee was selling some of her shoplifted goods to the parents of Eric's classmates. Word got around. "Your momma steals!" he remembers some of his new classmates yelling.

Eric couldn't shrug off the teasing as easily as Alvin. "I fought quite a bit," he said. "I fought boys, girls. It didn't matter. If they were too big, I'd throw bricks at them."

Worst of all, he suspected the taunts were true. "My mother would leave the house empty-handed in the morning and come back with four shopping bags of anything you can name," he said. "Clothing. Appliances. Curtains."

One day, he remembers saying to Rosa Lee, "People say that you're stealing stuff."

Rosa Lee didn't deny it.

"Why do you do that?" he asked.

"So you can eat!" his mother said.

"But Ma, we're eating every day!" he said.

Rosa Lee said her welfare check was too little to feed and clothe all eight of them, but that didn't satisfy Eric. "I just never understood why she had to do that, but I think I was really affected the older I got," he says now. "I really started feeling and knowing the meaning of embarrassment."

CHAPTER FOUR

Disillusionment

Amid the constant turmoil, Bobby represented stability and order. Rosa Lee often left her oldest son in charge when she went out, and he did his best to make sure the children did the dishes and went to sleep at assigned hours. Although Bobby was just 13, Alvin and Eric saw him as the father they never had.

That began to change in 1964. Police caught Bobby breaking into a drugstore at 11th Street and Constitution Avenue NE. He was sent off to the city's institution for juvenile delinquents on Mount Olivet Road NE. At the time, Alvin and Eric didn't know that Bobby and

several of his friends had been burglarizing stores and schools for months.

A schoolmate taught Bobby how to break into stores. "The first store we got was Circle Music, if you remember that on 11th and H," Bobby told me during an interview at Lorton prison, where he has served several sentences for theft and parole violations since 1974. "I went in there from the roof and got about two or three thousand dollars worth of musical equipment. Lord knows I didn't know what to do with it. . . . I took it back up to my Mom and said, 'We'll have some money now!'"

The family was living in a row house at 11th and C streets NE, along with Rosa Lee's mother, Rosetta, and nine of her children—19 people in all. Rosa Lee was looking over the equipment in the basement when Rosetta appeared on the stairs.

Rosetta immediately understood the scene. She kicked off one of her slippers, grabbed it and smacked Bobby on his backside. She screamed at Rosa Lee to get the stolen equipment out of the house.

That night, Rosa Lee passed the word to several musicians at the club. They bought everything for \$275. Bobby remembers that Rosa Lee gave him \$200. It was the most money he had ever seen. He gave her \$50 and split the remainder with two friends who had helped in the burglary. Over the next several years, he broke into more than a dozen stores, schools and churches.

Then, six months after Alvin's 12th birthday, Rosa Lee was arrested for stealing a coat from a Montgomery Ward's in Prince George's County and jailed in a Maryland prison for eight months. Upon her release, she collected her children from her mother and began a series of moves that took the family to five apartments over the next three years.

Finally, in 1968, the family settled into a two-story apartment on 57th Place SE, part of the sprawling public housing complex in Marshall Heights near the District-Maryland line. Alvin enrolled at Evans Junior High School, where he met a teacher who saw something in Alvin—and he set about to help Alvin see it too.

CHAPTER FIVE

Alvin's Friend

Gartrell Franklin remembers the exact date that he met Alvin—Nov. 1, 1968, Franklin's first day as a history teacher in the D.C. public schools.

Both were newcomers to Evans Junior High School, an imposing red-brick building on East Capitol Street in Southeast Washington. Gartrell was 23, fresh from Howard University and bursting with energy and idealism. Alvin was 15, an eighth-grade transfer.

Alvin wasn't Franklin's best student that first year. But Franklin was drawn to him. "He seemed more mature than children his age," Franklin recalled as we talked about Alvin at Franklin's suburban Maryland home. They have been friends now for 25 years. "He would ask you things after class. Students didn't normally do that."

Just as the 8-year-old Alvin studied the differences between his life and that of his middle-class friends, now the teenager Alvin soaked up the guidance and friendship of Gartrell Franklin. His conversations with Franklin revolved around black history and the black consciousness movement that had gotten started in the 1960s. Franklin organized an after-school Black History Awareness group; Alvin joined and brought along three of his friends.

It was an exciting and difficult time to be young and black in America. Six months earlier, civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr. had been assassinated. His death sparked civil disorders in many major cities, including Washington. Stores were looted, buildings burned.

Only a month before King's death, a presidential commission had issued its findings on similar disturbances the previous summer in Newark, Detroit and other cities. The commission's conclusion was stark. "Our nation is moving toward two societies, one black, one white—separate and unequal," its final report stated. "Discrimination and segregation have long permeated much of American life; they now threaten the future of every American."

In this atmosphere, Franklin preached against drugs and pushed Alvin and his friends to make something of themselves. Alvin remembers Franklin saying over and over: "Get that education. You need that education!" Franklin was the first person in his life to emphasize the importance of education, Alvin said.

The boys regarded Franklin as more than just a teacher. "He said all the things that a father, if he were there, would say and do," Alvin said. None of the boys had much, if any, contact with their father.

The boys wanted to know everything they could about every black leader, living or dead, in America. The boys even visited Franklin at home on Saturday afternoons. They talked about the Black Panthers, Malcolm X and the Nation of Islam and King's Poor People's Campaign. They hung on Franklin's every word, Alvin said.

He listened to Franklin because he was educated and forceful. "He always carried paperwork around with him," Alvin said. "He looked like a professor. Upright! Strong!"

Then, on a spring night in 1969, Alvin put his future in jeopardy.

that they didn't give up became more and humiliat and disgust y benefited fr A social wor teens, both d ned the Arm xered at 16, d took some a discharge fr in 1978, be spent a year and then tr out, he bou m street e

Bobby invited him along on a school burglary; for reasons he can no longer fathom, Alvin said yes.

Alvin waited outside while Bobby and another boy broke into the school. In the still night air, he heard the wail of a police siren. Someone had spotted them. Bobby and his friend emerged from the building, empty-handed, and they all ran.

Alvin eluded the police by hiding in the bushes of a nearby back yard, where he found himself face-to-face with a startled German shepherd. Even in his terror, he was angry at himself. He hadn't stolen anything. He hadn't even gone into the building. Yet here he was, fleeing the police. "I knew I would have been charged if the police would have caught us," Alvin said. "From then on, I knew I had to make a drastic change in my life to stay away from this atmosphere."

CHAPTER SIX

Eric's Mentor

The 1968-69 school year also marked a turning point for 12-year-old Eric.

Until then, Eric had found school an exercise in frustration and anxiety. He prayed every day that teachers wouldn't ask him to read aloud. If they did, he would create a diversion "by saying something smart and getting in trouble." He often ended up in the principal's office.

Then he transferred to Shadd Elementary, where he met sixth-grade teacher Hank Wilson. "He worked with you all the way to the point that you could understand what he was teaching," Eric said.

Eric confided in Wilson that he had trouble with reading and spelling. Wilson gave Eric special exercises to create sentences using the words Eric knew. When Eric accomplished the task, Wilson took him out for pizza as a reward.

Wilson told Eric that the exercise demonstrated that Eric had an aptitude for learning. No other teacher had ever said that. "I felt great about myself," Eric said, his voice still reflecting his excitement 25 years later. "I even went to school! I'd get up early and go to school!"

Eric's sudden enthusiasm for school ended when he graduated from Shadd and entered seventh grade at Evans Junior High School. No teacher encouraged him or worked with him as Wilson had the year before. He remembers being placed in an ungraded class with unruly, slower learners. He stopped going to school, and Rosa Lee didn't intervene.

About this time, social worker Nancy H. McAllister walked into his life. She came to Rosa Lee's apartment one morning to check on 15-year-old Richard, who had just returned home after three weeks at the juvenile detention center for burglarizing a Marshall Heights home.

As a frequent visitor to Washington's poorest neighborhoods, McAllister wasn't surprised to find several of Rosa Lee's children at home during school hours. "For three or four families on that street at that time, school was not a priority," McAllister told me during an interview. "The children knew that their parents wouldn't bother them too much if they didn't get up."

McAllister asked Eric why he wasn't in school.

"He came out with some flimsy excuse," McAllister recalled.

Then Rosa Lee chimed in. "They won't listen to me. I try to get them up. Maybe you could do something."

McAllister did not believe Rosa Lee's protestations. She sent Eric back to Evans Junior High that afternoon.

Eric latched onto her as a mentor, frequently dropping by her office at Shadd, his former elementary school. She gave him books; he eventually told her that he had trouble reading them. She arranged for him to be tested and found the results significant: They showed that Eric had no apparent learning disabilities.

She persuaded him to accept tutoring on Saturdays. Over the next 18 months, she drove him to the tutor's house. Gradually his reading improved, although it never became easy for him. Still, McAllister was pleased.

It wasn't McAllister's job to keep up with Eric. She did that on her own. She saw something in him—a strength of character—that she wanted to preserve. But she was fighting against forces outside of her control.

One force was sexual activity. In the spring of 1970, Eric learned that he was about to become a father. He was 14—the same age as Rosa Lee when she gave birth to Bobby. As soon as the pregnant girl's mother told him, he went to Rosa Lee. "My mother had no problem with it," Eric said. "Alvin had already gotten someone pregnant."

Alvin's daughter and Eric's son were born about 10 months apart. Eric now thought of himself as a father and too "grown" to go to junior high. McAllister implored him to stay in school, but Eric had made up his mind. Alvin already had dropped out; at the end of the school year, he quit too.

He passed the time by hanging out on 57th Place. Three female

prostitutes who lived near Rosa Lee's apartment offered him a deal: Would Eric like to work for them, procuring customers? Eric agreed.

"I used to set them up with old guys," he said, his voice conveying a tone of wonderment at his own behavior. "I didn't fully understand what I was doing. They liked me because they said I did not treat them badly."

After several weeks, he bragged to McAllister about what he had been doing. He was not prepared for the blistering lecture that followed. He doesn't remember her exact words, but he remembers how humiliated he felt. "She just said, 'What do you think you are doing!'" He stopped working for the prostitutes soon after.

Eric and McAllister have stayed in touch. Eric credits her and Hank Wilson with steering him away from a life of crime. "I was on my way" to jail, he said. "They showed me a better way of living. They showed me the positive side of life. I already had the negative. They showed me what was possible if I just cared about myself."

CHAPTER SEVEN

'That's My Son!'

On a July afternoon in 1991, Alvin and I are talking at his house, reflecting on all that has happened to his family in the last 20 years. He and Eric went into the Army after their 18th birthdays, served two-year stints and came back to Washington to find the family in the grip of drug addiction.

"I didn't let drugs grab me," he says softly. "They were there. My friends were using drugs: I'd seen them shoot needles into their arms. Heroin. Cocaine. See, I was around it. I've seen them wrap a belt around their arms and pump the veins up. I saw it. I ignored it. I couldn't see myself doing it. My friends respected me. They would say, 'He don't do it!'"

He is pleased that Rosa Lee, after years of heroin, has enrolled in a methadone treatment program and is sticking to it. Like Eric, he is tired of Rosa Lee's calls for help, tired of rushing over to her apartment to act as a referee in a game that never ends, tired of holding money for her so that Ducky or Patty or Richard won't be able to get their hands on it.

There is a story that Eric tells about the divergent paths that he and Alvin took from the rest of the family. It happened in 1982, while Eric was working briefly as a D.C. correctional officer.

Getting the job made him feel good. Not only had he established himself as a law-abiding citizen, he was now being entrusted with the responsibility of guarding those who had taken the path he had avoided. "I felt great," he said. "I was in the government!"

He was assigned to one of the Lorton prisons, but he often picked up additional money by taking an overtime shift at the understaffed D.C. jail. One night, he saw Rosa Lee. She was locked up on a shoplifting charge.

She spotted Eric in his navy blue uniform and shouted out excitedly to the other prisoners.

"That's my son!" she said in a voice filled with pride, as Eric stood by, embarrassed. "That's my son!"

About This Series

In 1932, in the midst of the Great Depression, Rosa Lee Cunningham's grandparents and parents gave up their North Carolina sharecropping life for an uncertain journey north. Rosa Lee is the link between past and present, between a world that has disappeared and the one that her children and grandchildren face today in Washington. Her life spans a half-century of hardship in blighted neighborhoods not far from the majestic buildings where policy-makers have largely failed in periodic efforts to break the cycle of poverty.

Many of Rosa Lee's relatives, including two of her eight children, managed to secure footholds in the mainstream of American society; their relative success makes it all the more important to try to understand Rosa Lee's life. Although her story is disconcerting and disturbing, she wants it told. "Maybe I can help somebody not follow in my footsteps," she says. That story—of the choices she had and the choices she made—offers a chance to understand what statistics only suggest: the interconnections of racism, poverty, illiteracy, drug abuse and crime, and why these conditions persist.

The series, edited by Steve Luxenberg, The Post's assistant managing editor for special projects, began Sunday, Sept. 18 and will run through Sunday, Sept. 25. The Post welcomes readers' written comments or phone calls. If you wish to leave a recorded comment, please call PostHaste at 202-334-9000, Category 4646.

Daughter Travels the Same Troubled Path as Rosa Lee



BY LUCIAN PERKINS—THE WASHINGTON POST

AN EMBRACE: *Patty Cunningham, who has spent much of her adulthood living with her mother, Rosa Lee, gives her a hug.*

Sixth of eight articles

By Leon Dash
Washington Post Staff Writer

Patty Cunningham is sitting up in her mother's bed, dressed in her mother's white nightgown and surrounded by her mother's belongings. At 34, she is very much Rosa Lee Cunningham's little girl. Rosa Lee bustles around the bedroom, straightening this and dusting that, although the room is as clean as ever. Patty's feeling much better today than she did yesterday, when she ran out of money and went into heroin withdrawal. Yesterday was a day to forget, a day of sweating, watery eyes and a runny nose. When Patty awoke this mild morning, June 16, 1992, she was ready to face the world again. Later on, she hopes, her friend Steve Priester will give her money that she can use to buy drugs.

Priester is lounging in a chair, listening as I interview Patty. He is one of Patty's three "boyfriends," as she calls them. They've known each other for about nine months, ever since he moved into an apartment on the ground floor. When Priester's roommate kicked him out in December 1991, Patty invited him to stay with her for several weeks in Rosa Lee's one-bedroom apartment.

Patty knows little about him, except that he is 57 and comes from West Virginia. He receives some sort of monthly check, which he is eager to spend on her. In some ways, their relationship is simple enough: She sleeps with him, he gives her money. That is Patty's relationship with many of the men she brings to Rosa Lee's apartment.

But Priester wants more than sex. He tells Rosa Lee that he loves her daughter and that he intends to break Patty of her drug habit. His declarations seem odd because he knows that his money ends up financing Patty's drug use. Still, his concern for her seems genuine.

More than once, Rosa Lee has complained to Patty about her prostitution. She can't understand why Patty, who is carrying the AIDS virus, makes no attempt to protect herself or anyone else. Patty doesn't tell anyone that she is HIV-positive, and it angers Rosa Lee that Priester and one of Patty's other boyfriends don't know.

Rosa Lee engaged in prostitution herself when she was younger, before anyone ever heard of AIDS. She did it, she said, primarily to feed her children, not her drug habit. There is a difference, she said. Now, at 56, it kills her to see her daughter travel this road.

"Patty makes me so shamed," Rosa

See ROSA LEE, A12, Col. 1



Patty's ties to her mother run deep

ROSA LEE, From A1

Lee said one day. "I tell her, 'When you go outside, Patty, don't you feel those people talking about you? Don't you feel it?'"

And what does Patty say? I asked.

Rosa Lee's lower lip trembled, the way it always does when she is upset. "She says, 'Momma, don't get mad at me. Ain't that the way you did it?'"

CHAPTER ONE

Meeting Patty

"You're going to have to take off that damn tie and jacket before we go in there," Rosa Lee said as I parked my car outside the three tan brick buildings that make up Clifton Terrace, the federally subsidized housing complex.

That was fine with me. It was a hot, humid Sunday afternoon in May 1988, and my shirt was already soaked. We had come to Clifton Terrace to look for Patty; Rosa Lee had offered to introduce her to me.

I had known Rosa Lee for five months at that point. Our relationship consisted of several lengthy interviews at the D.C. jail, where she told me in detail about her family. She was serving seven months for possession of heroin; I was interviewing the jail's officers and inmates about drug trafficking inside the jail. She was eager to share her story, and I was interested in learning how her life had affected the lives of her eight children. We agreed to get together after her release from jail.

Rosa Lee wasn't sure of Patty's whereabouts. She had heard through the prison grapevine that Patty had turned over her Clifton Terrace apartment to several New York crack dealers, who were using it as a base of operation. In return, they were paying her \$50 a day in cash, and \$50 worth of crack.

Rosa Lee hoped that her son Ducky, who lived on the top floor of one of the Clifton Terrace buildings, could tell us where Patty was staying. The last time Rosa Lee had seen Ducky, he had been working for the same New York dealers.

Ducky answered our knock. His slight frame was swimming in a badly wrinkled pin-striped, three-piece suit. It was light green. The collar of his tan shirt was open and darkly soiled. The sag in his shoulders, the weary look in his eyes, the way he moved, all made it hard to believe he was 28 years old.

He listened warily as Rosa Lee explained that I was interested in writing about the family. He said he had just returned from church. "I'm very religious," he said. "I've been born again." As he talked about his renewed commitment to Christ, Rosa Lee shook her head as a warning to me not to believe him.

Finally, I interrupted. "Your mother has told me that you cooked powdered cocaine into crack for New York City dealers operating out of your sister Patty's apartment in this building and that you have been addicted to crack for some time now."

Ducky shot his mother a questioning, alarmed look.

"I told him everything, Ducky," Rosa Lee said, "so you can stop all that 'born again' shit."

Ducky's religious cloak fell away. He said that he and the New Yorkers had split. They had accused him of stealing some of the cocaine and beat him. Now he was trying to sell crack on his own.

Rosa Lee asked if he knew where Patty was staying.

"Pussycat's," he said.

Rosa Lee scowled. Pussycat ran an "oilin' joint" in an apartment one floor below, a place heroin users could gather in privacy and relative safety. Pussycat charged \$3 for entry. She also rented "works"—a syringe and a hypodermic needle—for \$3.

I asked Pussycat's real name. "I don't know her real name," she said brusquely. "I wish you'd stop asking me about last names and real names. People don't want you to know that. You might be setting them up to be arrested by the police or something."

Rosa Lee rapped hard on Pussycat's door. Someone opened it a crack. "Hello, Mama Rose," a man's voice said.

The door swung open. When the man saw me, he quickly began to close it. Rosa Lee stopped him.

"He's with me, Bernard," she said with quiet authority.

Bernard stood aside. Behind him, two women lay on stained, sheetless mattresses on the living room floor, their bodies limp. We had found Patty and Pussycat.

It was so hot it was hard to breathe.

"You can go into the back!" Rosa Lee commanded Bernard.

She bent down over Patty, who wore black slacks, a red shirt and no shoes. "Wake up, Patty, wake up," Rosa Lee said, slapping her face. "I want you to meet someone." Each time Rosa Lee slapped her, Patty's eyelids opened for a few seconds.

"This isn't going to work," Rosa Lee said. "You'll have to meet Patty another day."

CHAPTER TWO

A Conversation in Jail

Two months later, I finally talked with Patty. I met her at the D.C. jail, where she was being held on a drug charge. Jail meant a forced withdrawal from heroin, so I didn't know what to expect. But she seemed to be bearing up well. She had gained weight and looked nothing like the emaciated woman I had seen on that mattress.

She spoke rapidly, looking down at the chewed fingernails of her right hand as she described some painful or embarrassing incident. I was not prepared for her candor: Within the first hour, she told me that a male relative had raped her when she was 8. He threatened to hurt her if she told anyone, and the assaults continued over the years. I later confirmed her account with the relative, who agreed to discuss it as long as he was not identified.

When Patty was a teenager, several of her brothers found out about the relative's behavior and beat him soundly, they said.

The first rape happened in 1966, while Rosa Lee was in jail. When Rosa Lee was released a few months later, Patty tried to tell her about it, but she didn't know how. Looking back, she said she believes her mother should have known something was wrong, should have wondered why the man was hanging around her room. "I feel like she could have done something to stop it," Patty said.

CHAPTER THREE

The Unbreakable Bond

By the time Patty was born in January 1958, Rosa Lee already had five children, all boys. Rosa Lee named her Donna, but no one has ever called her that. When she was little, she was known as "Papoose," because Rosa Lee thought the shape of her eyes resembled those of an American Indian baby. Over time, Papoose became Patty.

When she was young, Patty had long, straight hair that Rosa Lee liked to twist into a single braid down her back. She had her mother's dark skin and her father's round, cherubic face. Otherwise, her father didn't have much of a role in her life; when he died in 1982, Patty didn't even consider attending his funeral.

Things might have turned out differently. Rosa Lee met Patty's father, David Wright, in the mid-1950s. They had a long relationship that lasted until the early 1960s, and he fathered three of Rosa Lee's children. But he never lived with the family. "Back in them days, the welfare didn't permit no man to live with you," Rosa Lee said. "That's how I lost him. We were going to try to live together, but the welfare wouldn't let us."

The man had a job, but Rosa Lee didn't see how they could make it without welfare. Eventually, the man married someone else. Occasionally, when Rosa Lee needed money, she would gather up the children and march them over to his house. If he was there—and his wife was not—he would give her \$15 or \$20.

Home during the 1960s was a succession of row houses and apartments that never had enough beds for all the children to sleep alone. The boys shared mattresses, while Patty often slept in her mother's room and, at times, the same bed. At bedtime, Patty usually had the room to herself because Rosa Lee worked nights as a waitress at the Cocoa Club and as a dancer at the 821 Club, two popular spots on H Street NE.

On many nights, Rosa Lee brought home some of the customers, who paid her for sex. Rosa Lee didn't try to hide her prostitution from the older children. Afraid that some of her customers might rob her, she enlisted the help of her oldest son, Bobby. He was 11 when she started bringing men home. She remembers telling him, "You're Momma's little man. You have to help me. I'm doing this to feed y'all!"

She would telephone ahead and instruct Bobby to meet her at the door. As soon as she entered the apartment, she demanded that the man pay the \$20 in advance. Bobby took the money and hid it. "I didn't want one of these 'tricks' trying to take the money back or something like that," she told me. "That was a rough crowd that came to those H Street clubs. It was just me and my kids in that house!"

Bobby didn't challenge his mother's explanation. "I didn't see it as having anything to do with sex," he told me. "It was all about making money to feed us. It was all about us surviving as a family."

Survival is a word that Rosa Lee often uses to explain her actions, a battle-hardened shield that she puts up to fend off further discussion. "You keep talking about prostitution," she said heatedly one day. "I saw it as survival."

Rosa Lee had sex with the men in the same room where Patty often slept; from a young age, Patty learned the art of pretending to be asleep. It could have driven a wedge between mother and daughter, but those nights in the dark seemed to forge an unbreakable bond.

In 1969, when Patty was 11, one of her mother's customers made an unusual request: He asked Rosa Lee if he could have sex with Patty.

There's no way to recapture exactly what went through Rosa Lee's mind as she considered this request. It is not something that she wanted to remember or talk about. After Patty told me about it, I waited a long time before broaching the subject with Rosa Lee. When I did, she angrily denied that it ever happened and accused Patty of lying. She was sure that if I asked Patty again in her presence, Patty would admit that it was a lie.

Several months later, I gingerly raised the issue while the three of us were eating lunch.

Rosa Lee turned to Patty and waited in silence for her daughter to answer.

Patty looked her mother in the eye and named the man.

Rosa Lee began questioning Patty, as if getting more facts might help jog her memory. "How old was you, Patty?" and "Was I on drugs then?" and "Did he approach me, or did he approach you?"

"He approached you about it," Patty said calmly. "Cause I was a little girl. You asked me about it, and I said, 'Yeah, I want to help you.' Remember that? You were feeding everybody and doing it all on your own."

Rosa Lee turned toward me. There was pain in her eyes. "Okay," she said. "I just feel so shamed."

Piece by piece, the story came out. Patty said her mother asked her to have sex with the man, who was then in his mid-forties. Patty agreed. Rosa Lee told the man it would cost \$40—twice as much as she had been charging him. The man then drove Patty to his Capitol Heights home. When Patty returned, she put two \$20 bills in Rosa Lee's hand.

There were other men after that, perhaps as many as a dozen. The men offered to pay much more than Rosa Lee's usual rate, \$100 or more, amounts that made Patty's head swim. Patty said her mother always asked her if she was willing. Patty never turned her mother down. "I went with 'tricks' for my mother," she said. "I saw how hard it was for her to take care of all of us. I love my mother, so I would do it all over again. . . . At times I wanted to hate her, but I couldn't see myself doing that 'cause my mother's too sweet for that."

CHAPTER FOUR

Trouble at School

As a third-grader at Shadd Elementary School in the fall of 1969, Patty stood out for all the wrong reasons. At 11, she was three years older than most of her classmates. She couldn't read. Her attendance was spotty. She was headed for trouble, and her teachers didn't know what to do about it.

Nancy H. McAllister, a social worker who had an office at Shadd that year, tried to intervene. McAllister already knew the family. She had been assigned to work with Patty's older brother, Richard, 15; he had just returned home after serving time in a juvenile detention facility for burglary. McAllister established relationships with four of Rosa Lee's children. Eric, who was 13 when he met McAllister, credits her with helping him to make something of his life and avoid drug use and criminal behavior.

McAllister made frequent visits to Rosa Lee's apartment during the day, and she often found Patty there. Rosa Lee would tell her that Patty was sick, but McAllister didn't believe it. "I'd see her just laying around in bed," she said. "I would get her to go to school."

But what concerned McAllister most was the way Patty dressed on Fridays. "I remember being so amazed at this girl," McAllister said. "She used to come to my office in a wig. . . . She always wore tight, short skirts. At 11, she was very shapely."

McAllister asked Patty why she dressed the way she did.

"Oh, this is my evening to do my thing," McAllister remembers Patty saying.

"What thing?" McAllister asked.

"Oh, you know," is all Patty would say.

"She was really beyond her years," she said. "The kinds of things that she would talk about were not kid things." McAllister suspected something was wrong, but she had no conclusive evidence that she could report to authorities. Besides, Patty wasn't the only student whose home life seemed troubled. "The teachers probably had 10 to 12 other kids with the same kind of background. It was just overwhelming."

Rosa Lee didn't even enroll Patty in school until she was 7 or 8. The other children teased her because she couldn't read. "Girls used to do it all the time in front of boys who might like me. 'Spell cat! Spell!'"

Change the name and go backward 20 years, and it's hard to tell the difference between Patty's school record and Rosa Lee's. Both fell behind at an early age. Both began skipping school regularly. Neither one had a parent who believed education was important. Neither one learned to read by the time she dropped out.

There's one more parallel: Rosa Lee was 14 when she gave birth to Bobby, her first child. Patty was 14 when her son, Rocky, was born. And like her mother, that's also when she dropped out of school.

CHAPTER FIVE

Ties That Bind

Patty learned about drugs much the same way that she learned about sex.

She was about 11 years old. She had noticed that her older brother, Ronnie, 17, and his girlfriend would lock themselves in his room in the afternoon. Patty wondered what they were doing. One day, when she should have been at school, she hid in the bedroom closet. Ronnie and his girlfriend hurried in. They took out a bag of white powder, cooked it into a liquid and filled a hypodermic needle. Patty had a clear view through the slightly open door. "I watched Ronnie put the needle in his arm," she said.

After Ronnie had pushed the liquid into his vein, she watched as her brother's worried frown changed to a look of pleasure.

She stepped from the closet. Neither Ronnie nor his girlfriend showed any reaction until she told Ronnie she wanted to try it. "You better not," he said, "but then again, if you're going to try it, let me hit you first."

Ronnie refused to inject her that day. But, Patty told me, "I knew then, 'Well, I'm a gonna try that one day.'"

That day came in late 1973, just a few weeks before Patty's 16th birthday. Early one morning, as the gray-light of dawn seeped into the bedroom where Patty lived with her infant son, she woke up to find Rosa Lee and another woman huddled in a corner. Patty pretended to be asleep and watched.

She saw the woman prepare some sort of liquid, draw it into a hypodermic and inject Rosa Lee. Then, using the same needle, she injected herself. Patty wasn't sure what drug they were using, but she was sure that she wanted to try it.

The drug was "bam," slang for an amphetamine-like stimulant that produces a feeling of euphoria and high energy. Rosa Lee and her friend had been using bam for months. They had tried to hide it from Rosa Lee's children by shooting up early in the morning, before anyone was awake.

Patty sat up in bed, startling the two women. "I want a hit," she said.

Rosa Lee refused. "You're too young to start drugs," she said.

Patty told her mother that if she couldn't have a hit, she would find someone in the hallways of Clifton Terrace who would pay her for sex and use the money to buy the drug on her own.

As Rosa Lee tells me about this critical moment, she looks pained. She says she did too much "dirty living," that if she hadn't used drugs, her children wouldn't have either. But at the time, she felt as if she had no choice, that she had no way to stop Patty from traveling the same road she had.

"Give her a hit," she told her friend.

A year later, Patty graduated to heroin. A year after that, so did Rosa Lee. For the next 15 years, they shared heroin and needles.

Now, there is yet another tie that binds: Both are carrying the virus that causes AIDS.

CHAPTER SIX

Life With Patty

It is a July morning in 1992, and Rosa Lee has Patty on her mind.

We are having breakfast at McDonald's, as we often do after Rosa Lee's visit to the methadone clinic. Rosa Lee is upset: Her latest urine sample was "dirty"—the second time she has tested positive for heroin in recent months. One more strike and she would be required to appear before a team of counselors, who could decide to suspend her from the program.

"Mr. Dash," she says, "I can't go back to the way I used to be."

For more than a year, her urine samples had been clean; she had such a good record that a market developed for her urine among the other methadone patients. In the bathroom, someone would whisper, "Rosa Lee, you clean?" and hand over a dollar or two. The clinic didn't monitor the bathrooms closely, so the risk of getting caught was low.

Then, for some reason, she began to slip. Over the next six months, she used heroin six times. Every time, Patty was involved. Six times is not the same as a daily habit, but it's still not good enough.

Patty is part of the problem, Rosa Lee tells me. If only Patty weren't addicted to heroin, if only Patty didn't bring heroin into her apartment, if only she could get Patty into methadone treatment—if only she could do something about Patty, then she wouldn't be facing the risk of getting thrown out of the program.

She tells me that she plans to take Patty to the methadone clinic the next Monday and enroll her. Monday comes and goes, without Patty enrolling, and I hear nothing more about it.

A few weeks later, on Aug. 11, 1992, Rosa Lee is arrested for shoplifting several expensive scarves from the downtown Hecht's store. After spending a night in jail, she called the next day to tell me about it. She needed money, she said, to pay off one of Patty's drug debts. The dealer had threatened to hurt Patty.

Rosa Lee is planning to plead guilty. I remind her that the last time she appeared in court, in early 1991, the commissioner had warned her that another shoplifting charge would land her in jail for a long time.

On Sept. 2, she tells Commissioner John W. King that she is guilty. King listens intently as her criminal record is outlined—a total of 13 convictions for shoplifting and drug-related charges—and then pronounces sentence: two years probation.

Rosa Lee decides to celebrate. On the way back to her apartment in Washington Highlands, we pick up a pizza. Lucian Perkins, a Post photographer who has been working with me since the beginning of the project, arrives.

Patty is happy to hear the good news. As we eat, I notice a flurry

of activity. There's a knock at the door. It's a drug dealer who lives on the first floor. He and Rosa Lee talk quietly and the dealer leaves. I assume that Patty has persuaded Rosa Lee to buy her a bag of heroin. Sure enough, Patty brings out a metal bottle cap, mixes some powdered heroin with water in the cap, and heats it with a match. She injects herself in her abdomen.

Patty motions to Rosa Lee to lie down. To my surprise, she does. Using the same needle, Patty injects her mother in the leg. Her eyes flutter for a brief second, and our eyes meet.

Patty has allowed Lucian to photograph her before while injecting heroin, but this is the first time that he has seen Rosa Lee do it. Over my left shoulder, I can hear the whir and click of his camera. When we leave, neither Patty nor Rosa Lee say anything about what has happened, and neither do I.

When I return from a few days of vacation, there is an urgent message on my answering machine from Rosa Lee. I call her. As soon as she hears my voice, she interrupts. "I want to apologize. I know you didn't like what you saw, and I wanted you to know I'm sorry. Very sorry!"

"You don't have to apologize to me," I tell her.

"You can try that on someone else, buddy," she says. "I saw your face when Patty hit me. You were in front of me. I saw your eyes! I'll never let you see me take another hit!"

I hadn't realized I had shown any reaction, even though it was difficult for me to watch. Nor was I prepared for her apology. After all, she had told me about other slips. Why did it matter so much if I saw it rather than heard about it?

But it did matter. To Rosa Lee, it mattered a great deal.

Over the next several months, the slip-ups stopped. She began badgering Patty once more about having unprotected sex with Priestler and other men. She talked about moving again—this time to a senior citizens' housing complex—to get away from the drug traffic in her apartment.

Rosa Lee had tried to cut ties with Patty before, without much success. This time, she told me, would be different: She would make arrangements for Patty to take over her apartment; Patty would pay the \$64 rent out of her welfare check.

I asked Rosa Lee what she would do if Patty spent the money on drugs and lost the apartment.

"Mr. Dash, that's her business," she said. "I don't care."

About This Series

In 1932, in the midst of the Great Depression, Rosa Lee Cunningham's grandparents and parents gave up their North Carolina sharecropping life for an uncertain journey north. Rosa Lee is the link between past and present, between a world that has disappeared and the one that her children and grandchildren face today in Washington. Her life spans a half-century of hardship in blighted neighborhoods not far from the majestic buildings where policy-makers have largely failed in periodic efforts to break the cycle of poverty.

Many of Rosa Lee's relatives, including two of her eight children, managed to secure footholds in the mainstream of American society; their relative success makes it all the more important to try to understand Rosa Lee's life. Although her story is discomfiting and disturbing, she wants it told. "Maybe I can help somebody not follow in my footsteps," she says. That story—of the choices she had and the choices she made—offers a chance to understand what statistics only suggest: the interconnections of racism, poverty, illiteracy, drug abuse and crime, and why these conditions persist.

The series, edited by Steve Luxenberg, The Post's assistant managing editor for special projects, began Sunday, Sept. 18 and will run through Sunday, Sept. 25. The Post welcomes readers' written comments or phone calls. If you wish to leave a recorded comment, please call PostHaste at 202-334-9000, Category 4646.

Saturday, Sept. 24, 1994

ROSA LEE'S STORY
POVERTY AND SURVIVAL IN WASHINGTON

A Grandson's Problems Start Early

Seventh of eight articles

By Leon Dash
Washington Post Staff Writer

Rosa Lee Cunningham sensed that something was wrong as soon as she stepped off the A-6 bus and started to walk up Fourth Street SE. On most sunny afternoons, the drug market outside her apartment building is in full swing. But on this Saturday in June 1991, the crack dealers who usually congregate on the parking lot and sidewalks were nowhere to be seen.

Squinting in the midday sun, Rosa Lee scanned the street. To her surprise, she spotted two of her grandsons, 11 and 12 years old, standing at the entrance to the parking lot. One was looking up Fourth Street, the other down. Across the street, in a cluster of teenagers, stood another grandson, 18-year-old Junior. Rosa Lee knew that Junior occasionally sold crack, but she didn't know why his young cousins were hanging around.

"What are you doing?" she demanded of one of her grandsons.

"I got Junior's back," the 11-year-old said.

"What do you mean, 'You got Junior's back?'" Rosa Lee sputtered.

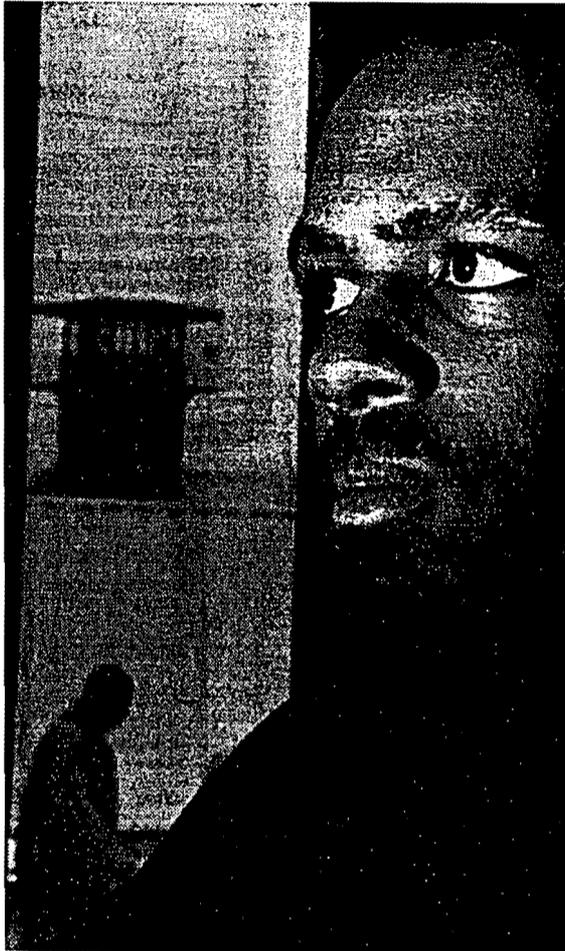
Before the boy could explain, Junior sprinted over.

"Grandma," Junior said. "They ain't doing nothing. All they doing is earning a few dollars."

"Yeah, and earning a little time in jail," Rosa Lee said.

Later, when I interviewed Junior, I found that his behavior that day was a striking example of the dangerous tests of manhood that occur on the streets of

See ROSA LEE, A12, Col. 1



BY LUCIAN PERKINS—THE WASHINGTON POST

REFLECTIONS: Rosa Lee Cunningham's grandson Junior was in Lorton prison in the spring of 1992.



'Don't let them take me!'

ROSA LEE, From A1

some Washington neighborhoods and take the lives of so many young black men.

Junior said he had paid the boys \$10 each to keep watch for a neighborhood drug dealer who had been selling crack to his mother, Patty. Junior believed the dealer was planning to kill him to settle a grudge. He told the boys to warn him if they saw the dealer's white car.

The previous day, Junior had "stepped to" the dealer. "It was a beef about my mom, at first," Junior told me. "My mom owed him money and never paid him. My mom wasn't ever going to pay him. So he said that he was going to hurt her. I said, 'Hey, if I catch you, I'm going to have to hurt you.'"

Rather than hide, Junior had decided to bring the confrontation to a head. He had to be on the street or lose face. He borrowed two guns from a friend and hid them in bushes nearby; first sign of the dealer's white car and Junior would retrieve either the .44 with the extended clip or the Tec-9, whichever was closer.

Word of the possible shootout had spread through the Washington Highlands neighborhood, clearing the street of all but the fearless, the foolish and the unsuspecting. But the dealer never showed up; he later decided to let Patty's debt go.

Rosa Lee didn't know any of this when she confronted her three grandsons. She knew only that the drug culture had worked its way into a third generation of her family.

CHAPTER ONE

Junior's Mask

Unlike his mother and grandmother, Junior has never used drugs. "The people who use leave their minds on the street," he tells me one day in September 1991. "I'm not going for that."

The idea scares him, just as it scared Rosa Lee when she started selling heroin in the late 1950s. For more than 19 years, Rosa Lee shunned the drug while selling it to others; when she finally tried it—at Patty's suggestion—she got as hooked as her customers. Now she is on methadone, which satisfies her craving for the drug. Patty, however, is a regular user of heroin and crack.

As a young boy living in the Clifton Terrace housing complex, Junior watched the stream of men and women come to his grandmother's apartment to buy heroin and inject it. He saw how heroin destroyed his mother. Drugs were a fact of life at Clifton Terrace, and he decided at an early age that he wanted no part of it. "I wasn't interested in drugs at all," he says. "When I heard about pot and all that, I wasn't with that. . . . I wasn't with all that smoking and getting high."

He says this matter-of-factly, as if we might be talking about yesterday's weather. It is our third interview, but I have yet to break through Junior's mask. He only lets people see as much of himself as he wants them to. If someone shouts at him, he rarely shouts back. His doelike eyes remain blank, his voice stays level, his facial expression reveals nothing.

He smiles, though, when I challenge his reputed ability as an excellent boxer and an above-average basketball player. "I don't beat up on old men," he says, offering instead to take me one-on-one in basketball "any time and any place."

Junior's controlled demeanor resembles that of the teenage "enforcers" who come by Rosa Lee's apartment once a month to demand that Patty and Ducky pay their crack debts. It is the demeanor that psychologist Richard G. Majors calls "cool pose."

Majors, a researcher at the Urban Institute, has studied the attitudes of teenage boys in poor urban communities. "The emotionlessness is nothing more than the notion of masculinity," Majors said. "These youths are obsessed with issues of pride and dignity. Never lose your cool, even when you are fighting. All they have is this cool. All they have is this mask."

Junior's uncle Ducky, one of Rosa Lee's six sons, knows better than to cross Junior. Ducky once tried to steal some of Junior's money so he could buy crack; when Junior found out, he wasted no time

in setting his uncle straight. Using boxing techniques that he learned during his years in juvenile detention, he pummeled Ducky until he had to be pulled away. As his fists flew, his face remained impassive. Afterward, he showed no sign of anger or satisfaction. Ducky may have been family, but this was business.

I don't know how extensively Junior has become involved in dealing crack. He tells me that he is working occasionally as an enforcer for some of the neighborhood's top dealers but that he isn't selling right now because his new 15-year-old girlfriend has asked him to stop. "She felt it might take me away from her," he says. "I was making money. I was making over \$600 a night."

Earlier in the week, I had suggested that we go together to see "Boyz N The Hood," the John Singleton movie about three boys growing up in south central Los Angeles. Doughboy, played by rap star Ice Cube, deals in drugs and sees no future for himself; Doughboy's brother, Ricky, has a chance at a football scholarship if poor grades and test scores don't get in his way; the third, Tre, has the brightest prospects thanks to a strict father who has raised Tre with strong values. An argument over a girl and turf ends with a gang of boys hunting down Ricky and killing him in a drive-by shooting.

Junior seemed interested in my offer, but before we could make plans to go, he saw the movie on his own. He doesn't trust me yet. I may be brown-skinned like him, but I grew up in a middle-class section of Harlem and graduated from college. I expect he'll always see me as just a middle-aged man with a graying beard and a good job.

He liked the movie, he said, because it was real. It reminded him of Clifton Terrace and Washington Highlands, the two neighborhoods he knows best. He has seen "guys bumping you just to get some attention" and then pulling out a gun.

He says he identifies more with Doughboy than with Tre. Doughboy wouldn't back down from a fight; Tre did.

"I grew up like that," he tells me. "Tre didn't. Ice Cube was like me."

CHAPTER TWO

How He Grew Up

He was born when Patty was 14. By the time he was 2, his mother was using heroin. Some days, she says, she was so high that she has a hard time remembering how she performed even the simplest tasks—changing his diaper, feeding him, getting him ready for bed.

One of Junior's earliest memories is of police breaking down the door of Rosa Lee's apartment looking for drugs. He was two months shy of his fourth birthday. "I just remember them knocking on the door," Junior says. "We all woke up. They hollered, 'Open the door or we're going to chop it down!'"

He remembers the sounds more than the sight: the sound of ax on wood, then shoes, then the shouts of the officers. One image stays with him: his grandmother, her hands cuffed behind her back, being led out of the darkened apartment. Police found 60 bags of marijuana that day in Rosa Lee's apartment. She served seven months in jail, records show.

At the time of the raid, on Aug. 18, 1976, Rosa Lee was selling heroin and marijuana from the four-bedroom apartment, where she was living with Patty, Junior and three of her other children.

By the time he was enrolled at Meyer Elementary School at age 6, Junior already had a reputation for being hard to handle. Patty says she was summoned to school several times during Junior's first-grade year because he was threatening classmates with a knife and demanding they pay him a dollar.

That same year, 1979, Patty and Junior moved into another Clifton Terrace apartment with a man she refers to as her common-law husband. His nickname was Joe Billy, and he sold heroin on 14th Street NW. Patty and Joe Billy lived together until 1985, when Joe Billy died of a stroke while in custody at the D.C. jail.

Junior has always blamed Joe Billy for his mother's heroin addiction, although he knows now that Patty had her first hit three years before she ever met Joe Billy. "He brought my mom down," Junior says. "That's why I hated him."

Junior remembers the first time that he saw Joe Billy and Patty us-

ing heroin together. They had just moved to the new apartment, and he was walking past their bedroom. He saw two needles on the dresser and Patty and Joe Billy hunched over a "bright light." They looked up, saw him and shut the door.

CHAPTER THREE

'I Can't Control Him'

By age 9, Junior had a reputation at Clifton Terrace. He hung out with the older boys in the housing complex—teenagers who had dropped out of school and already spent time in juvenile institutions. The older boys liked him, Junior says, because "I was vicious back then. I'd take you out in a minute, whether you were grown or not. 'Cause growing up around Clifton, you grew up like that. Everybody was wild around there!"

Occasionally, Junior would do something to annoy Patty and she would use her fists to let him know. "Junior mostly had his way, but when I did hit him, I was mostly high," she told me one day at Rosa Lee's apartment. "I would whale on his ass with my fists!"

To fend off her beatings, he threatened to use his knife on her. He now says his threats were justified. "She was trying to hurt me! She was using her fists. I remember she blacked my eye. That was child abuse, what she was doing. . . . That's my mom and everything, but I wasn't going to let her hurt me."

By the fall of 1982, when Junior was 10, Patty had lost what little control she had over him. He began to commit burglaries with some of his teenage friends; he shared some of his take with Patty and she used the money to support her heroin habit.

Junior was arrested six times between October 1982 and the following summer, mostly for committing robberies with a knife. Suddenly, the outside world became intensely interested in Patty, Junior and their life at Clifton Terrace.

One social worker concluded that Patty was afraid of Junior and rarely attempted to discipline him; another social worker said the 24-year-old Patty seemed to treat Junior more like a brother and did not take his delinquency seriously. Junior skipped school about half the time, missing 87 days of the 1982-83 school year.

The breaking point came at a September 1983 hearing in juvenile court.

Patty says she didn't realize until she arrived that the judge, who was aware of her drug problem, was considering taking Junior away from her. When the crucial moment came, she found herself giving up rather than fighting. "There's nothing else I can do," she remembers telling the judge. "I can't control him. Go ahead and take him."

The judge ordered a U.S. marshal to take custody of Junior, who remembers the scene vividly. "I went off," he told me. "Started cussing, throwing chairs."

A second marshal was called to help. Junior kicked at them, desperately trying to work himself free. "Momma," he cried, "don't let them take me! I'll be good!"

He turned toward Rosa Lee. "Grandma! Grandma!" Rosa Lee shrugged her shoulders in a show of helplessness.

Junior screamed obscenities as the marshals wrapped their arms around his chest and legs. Years of anger about his mother and her relationship with Joe Billy began to spill out: "You let that [expletive] MAN IN OUR HOUSE! HE MESSED UP EVERYTHING!"

CHAPTER FOUR

Exile

For the next seven years, the government was Junior's parent and the juvenile system was his home.

His first stop was the D.C. Receiving Home, where officials quickly concluded that he needed a highly structured program to help him overcome his severe educational deficiencies and emotional difficulties. He made progress during his two years there, then was sent to a foster home in Virginia. Within a few weeks, however, he was arrested on theft charges with two older boys. After his conviction in 1985, he was shipped off to a juvenile group home in Pittsburgh.

A few months after arriving in Pittsburgh, Junior ran away. Still only 13, he made his way back to Washington and showed up at Patty's Clifton Terrace apartment. After five days, Patty notified the city's human services agency. He was shipped back to Pittsburgh.

For 7 years, juvenile system was home

Twice over the next year, he came to Washington for approved visits. Both times he ended up in trouble. He was caught in a stolen car. He ran away from the counselor who was supposed to escort him on the return trip to Pittsburgh. He was arrested by police for possession of a handgun.

By the summer of 1987, the juvenile authorities decided Junior needed more discipline if he was ever going to straighten himself out. They sent him to Vision Quest, a program in rural Pennsylvania for teenage delinquents who have washed out of more conventional group homes. "We take the toughest of the tough," said Michael Noyes, a Vision Quest spokesman.

Developed in the 1970s when pressure began building to do more than just warehouse delinquents in decaying urban facilities, Vision Quest symbolizes the evolution of society's thinking about juvenile crime. The program seeks to take troubled youths out of their urban environments and teach them a new set of values in the wilderness. The teenagers learn to "master any environment," Noyes told me—and thus, the theory goes, build a sense of self-sufficiency and self-esteem that will turn their lives around.

The different quests are modeled after American Indian rites of passage, Noyes said, and are structured "to provide the opportunity for the kids to reflect on past" behaviors and future goals.

Junior had a difficult time adjusting to the strict discipline and limits. He went on 10-day hikes with no eating during the day, then spent a year on a horse-drawn wagon train quest to Florida and back, a 4,000-mile round-trip with 75 other teenagers. The trek itself is arduous, and the counselors impose a work ethic that matches. The youths work with animals, prepare meals, set and break camp, all in an effort to foster a sense of cooperation and self-discipline.

"You chop wood," Junior said. "You stay in tepees. Then you go on a quest. A quest is if you want to starve yourself for three days, you can. Hiking to meet your destiny. After the quest, you go on the train. You clean the wagon. You clean the horses. And you move, move, move. . . . When it gets cold one place you move somewhere where it is hot. In that period of time, you're suppose to change in all that time. Then you're out."

As far as he was concerned, the counselors and wagon masters had nothing but contempt for black kids like himself. "There's a lot of prejudice there," he said. "They used the word, 'nigger.' A lot of them are from Georgia, and a lot of them are from Tennessee."

He said some tobacco-chewing counselors would get so close to him that they would spray brown spittle on his face as they yelled at him. He got into a fight with a wagon master for choking him and leaving marks on his neck.

Is this a fair description of what he experienced? There's no way to know. Vision Quest officials don't think so. This much is certain: Junior completed his quests but changed little. He went back to the Pittsburgh group home in 1989 and immediately landed in trouble. He and several friends from the Pittsburgh home stole a car, went joy riding and were caught. Junior spent the next nine or 10 months in the home's "lockup," its most restrictive living quarters.

In July 1990, the home's officials decided he had been there long enough. "They gave me a bus ticket back to D.C.," Junior said.

CHAPTER FIVE

'A Nomadic Existence'

Junior and I are still getting to know each other when I hear that two police officers came to Rosa Lee's apartment complex with a warrant for his arrest. They found him in a hallway with Rosa Lee's 11-year-old grandson, handcuffed him and took him to the D.C. jail.

Two weeks later, on Feb. 25, 1992, I am interviewing him in a small conference room at the jail. He is wearing an orange jumpsuit, the standard garb for a new prisoner awaiting trial. There's an irony to the scene: I first interviewed his mother, Patty, in the jail in 1988, when she was awaiting trial on a drug charge.

Junior doesn't want to say much about the case. I know from court records that he is charged with attacking Deon Cheeks, 18, on Nov. 30, 1991, at Clifton Terrace NW. According to the records, Junior surprised Cheeks in a corridor about 11:30 p.m., stabbed him and fled with \$100 that Cheeks had in his pocket. Cheeks was treated for a cut at a hospital and sent home. Junior says he doesn't have any idea why he's been charged. He says he wasn't anywhere near Clifton Terrace that night. He remembers spending the evening at Rosa Lee's apartment in Southeast Washington.

He says he knows Cheeks—the two grew up together at Clifton

terrace in the 1970s. He says the police might be confused because he and Cheeks had a fistfight not long before the night in question.

Junior is upset because no one in his family has come to bail him out. "I don't like this," he tells me. "I have never been locked down. I've just been in group homes and Vision Quest. This is the first time I've ever been in a secure jail."

His bail had been set at \$1,000, which meant under court rules that he needed to post \$100—10 percent—to be released. He's particularly mad at his mother and her crack habit. If she wasn't so addicted to that "little nasty stuff, she could have got me out of here," he tells me.

But Junior has learned not to rely on his mother for money. If she doesn't pay her debts to an impatient crack dealer, there's no reason to expect that she is going to come up with \$100 for Junior's bail.

His lawyer tried to get the court to reduce his bail. But Judge Cheryl Long looked at Junior's juvenile record and decided that Junior was "likely to flee" before his trial.

"The defendant does not appear to be a stable member of the community," Long wrote. "He is 19 years old, has virtually no record of employment and has lived intermittently with his mother and his aunt, and with other undisclosed persons prior to his residence with his aunt. This is an extremely nomadic existence for a person of his age."

CHAPTER SIX

Reunion at the Jail

Prosecutors held Junior's case for grand jury action, which meant it would be months before he would stand trial. While he was waiting, he was transferred from the crowded jail to the Modular Facility at Lorton.

He made collect calls to Rosa Lee, pleading for help; he called so often that she stopped accepting them.

One day she hands me a letter from Junior and asks me to read it to her. The letter has capital letters and commas missing in crucial spots, an indication of Junior's writing skills. One test indicated that he reads at about a fourth-grade level, which is typical for inmates between the ages of 18 and 24, according to a Lorton study.

"Hi how is the family?" Junior wrote in a neat and legible script. "fine I hope. Me I am thinking like this. When I come out I will do good with some 'Help.' I mean I will do better with Help!"

"my mom I hope she give up coke so she can get her own apartment. you stop the coke from taking your life and you feel good. my mom needs that feeling. . . . I will make my mom see the light because here make me see it."

Then he returns to his own plight. "I hope God see to forgive me for the thing I did. . . . Love you all. God will help the ones who need Him. He will help the ones who love him so I will try and help me."

Junior's concern about his mother is still evident when I see him at the Modular Facility a few months later. It is early August, and Rosa Lee and I have come to spend a few hours with Junior and her oldest son, Bobby, who is also locked up there.

Rosa Lee embraces Bobby and reaches out to touch Junior's shoulder. Rosa Lee and Bobby, mother and son, hold each other tenderly for a long time. Bobby's thin arms rest on Rosa Lee's broad back, a stark reminder of his recent battle with pneumonia. "I had one foot in the grave," Bobby murmurs to Rosa Lee.

Doctors feared that Bobby's immune system had succumbed to full-blown AIDS. He was diagnosed in 1989; Rosa Lee and Patty also have tested positive for HIV.

Bobby and Junior listen quietly as Rosa Lee complains about Patty's crack use and her prostitution. Bobby and Junior don't say anything, but when Rosa Lee begins to make excuses for Patty's behavior, Bobby explodes. "I don't want to hear it!" he tells her.

"I'm just letting you know how far it's gone, Bobby," she snaps.

She turns to Junior. "I'm just letting you know how far it's gone, Junior. I'm sorry, but I have to tell the truth."

Bobby is worried that Patty's luck is going to run out, that one day she won't pay off her debt and someone—Patty or Rosa Lee or Junior—is going to get hurt.

"Let Patty start dealing with her problem," Bobby says, agitated.

Junior jumps in. "When I get out of here, I wish to put my mom in a program. The one where you are locked down. You can't go out."

Junior wants to have his mother committed to a psychiatric hospital. I point out that the courts can't force someone into this kind of treatment unless they are a clear danger to themselves or society.

Junior won't give up. He reminds me that Patty has tried to commit suicide several times, and that's proof that she's a danger.

"She just needs someone to pull her in," Junior says. "That's the only thing that's going to help my mom now."

CHAPTER SEVEN

'What I Have Done'

After months of saying that he knew nothing about the stabbing of Deon Cheeks, Junior pleaded guilty to the attack. On June 7, 1993, the case of *U.S. v. Rocky Lee Brown Jr.* is called for sentencing in Courtroom 210 of D.C. Superior Court. Rosa Lee, two of her grandchildren and I take a seat near the front.

"Mr. Brown, do you have anything to say before I pass sentence?" Judge John H. Bayly asks Junior.

"Yes, I do, Your Honor. I want to say I'm sorry, you know, for what I have done. . . . I'm asking you to, you know, give me a chance so that I show that I am sorry for what I have done, Your Honor."

Bayly says nothing in response. No lecture about the lure of the streets, no threats about what he might do if Junior comes back to his court on a new charge. Bayly sentences Junior to two to six years in prison, but suspends it because Junior has been locked up for 16 months awaiting trial. Then Bayly gets tough: He puts Junior on probation for three years, orders him to work 200 hours of community service, requires him to seek a job and fines him \$500.

"Does he have \$500 to pay today?" Bayly asks Junior's lawyer, Fred Sullivan.

"No, Your Honor, actually he's been on a \$1,000 bond since February of '92, unable to pay that bond, so it is going to take him a while to accumulate that kind of money."

Bayly backs off a little. "Well, I'll make the \$500 due by the third of June of 1994 in its entirety."

The prosecutor in the case, G. Michael Lennon, takes note of Junior's troubled background in telling the judge that Junior must be held accountable for his actions.

"No one could fail to recognize the problems that he had as a child and as a teenager," Lennon says, "but what's troubling is all the intervention so far appears to have very little positive effect. And I think that some of the responsibility for that has to be Mr. Brown's."

Later, I ask Junior what he thought of Lennon's remarks. Junior replies in a voice edged with anger.

"He's saying they gave me a lot of help but that I ain't respond to none of it," Junior says. "I say they didn't give me no help."

About This Series

In 1932, in the midst of the Great Depression, Rosa Lee Cunningham's grandparents and parents gave up their North Carolina sharecropping life for an uncertain journey north. Rosa Lee is the link between past and present, between a world that has disappeared and the one that her children and grandchildren face today in Washington. Her life spans a half-century of hardship in blighted neighborhoods not far from the majestic buildings where policy-makers have largely failed in periodic efforts to break the cycle of poverty.

Many of Rosa Lee's relatives, including two of her eight children, managed to secure footholds in the mainstream of American society; their relative success makes it all the more important to try to understand Rosa Lee's life. Although her story is discomfiting and disturbing, she wants it told. "Maybe I can help somebody not follow in my footsteps," she says. That story—of the choices she had and the choices she made—offers a chance to understand what statistics only suggest: the interconnections of racism, poverty, illiteracy, drug abuse and crime, and why these conditions persist.

The series, edited by Steve Luxenberg, *The Post's* assistant managing editor for special projects, began Sunday, Sept. 18 and will run through Sunday, Sept. 25. *The Post* welcomes readers' written comments or phone calls. If you wish to leave a recorded comment, please call PostHaste at 202-334-9000, Category 4646.

Sunday, Sept. 25, 1994

ROSA LEE'S STORY

POVERTY AND SURVIVAL IN WASHINGTON



BY LUCIAN PERKINS—THE WASHINGTON POST

SAYING GOODBYE: Rosa Lee holds a portrait of her son Bobby, who died of AIDS complications, as she sits in a limousine after his funeral. He had been released from prison shortly before his death.

gave her money so she wouldn't have to engage in prostitution, but the money only fed her drug habit.

Rosa Lee told me that Patty had admitted to participating in the robbery. The police had her confession on videotape. Even if Patty had no role

in the murder itself, she could expect a substantial jail term.

In the past, whenever something had gone wrong in her family, Rosa Lee always fell back on the same litany: I did the best I could. I did what I had to. I survived.

Not this time. After Patty's phone call from police headquarters, Rosa Lee didn't know what to do. Ordinarily, she would have called someone for help or consolation. During the years I have been interviewing her about the family,

See ROSA LEE, A20, Col. 1

she has called me dozens of times, seeking advice or just a shoulder to cry on. But after a sleepless night, she called no one—not even Alvin or Eric, the only two of her eight children who have never used drugs or broken the law, the only two of her children upon whom she can truly rely.

On the night when her daughter was accused of first-degree murder, Rosa Lee chose to be alone.

CHAPTER ONE

The Videotape

That same weekend, police filed a warrant in court that more fully described the murder of Steve Priester.

"On Friday, Dec. 4, 1992, at about 2 p.m.," the warrant began, "officers at the Metropolitan Police Department were called to an apartment at 425 Atlantic Street SE for a complaint of a burglary. When police entered the apartment, they discovered the lifeless body of the victim, Steve Priester, handcuffed and gagged, inside a closet of the apartment. . . . He had suffered a bullet wound to the head."

According to the warrant, police had arrested two suspects and were looking for three others. Police had learned about Priester's relationship with Patty from talking to his neighbors and that she was the last person seen with him before his death.

Ten days later, in Judge Cheryl Long's softly lit courtroom, the videotaped image of Patty Cunningham appears on a television monitor. The screen is positioned to give the judge the best view; she has to decide whether the videotape provides enough evidence to hold Patty for trial.

Patty is watching too, from the defendant's table.

On the videotape, Patty is sitting at a desk. She is wearing red slacks and a red blouse. A white scarf is tied around her head. The date and time flicker briefly, then disappear: "Dec. 4, 1992, 10:10 p.m."

A detective, identified as Det. Vivian Washington, asks Patty if she understands why her answers are being videotaped. Normally, a suspect is interviewed without a camera present and then is asked to review a typed transcript for accuracy and sign it.

"I can't read," Patty tells Washington.

As the videotape rolls, it is clear that Patty already has told her story to the police and is repeating it for the camera. She speaks rapidly and stammers repeatedly. Her account is confusing, but it provides the basic outline of how she became mixed up in the robbery scheme.

She and Priester were at Rosa Lee's apartment on Thursday night, Dec. 3, when someone knocked on the door about 10 p.m. It was Turk, a 16-year-old who lived in the building next door.

Turk said two friends were thinking about robbing Priester. They had seen Priester around the complex and knew that he spent a lot of money on Patty. Did Patty know if Priester had any money on him right now?

Patty said she went outside, where she met Turk's friends—a "tall, dark-skinned dude" and a "short, brown-skinned woman with a mole on her cheek." If Patty knew their names, she didn't use them on the videotape. She told them that Priester didn't have any money on him.

A plan was hatched to rob Priester at his apartment, where presumably he kept some cash. It would be Patty's job to let the robbers in.

Patty tells Washington that she agreed to the scheme but only because the "tall dude" had threatened to hurt her if she didn't.

About 11 p.m., she says, she walked with Priester to his apartment a few blocks away. Minutes later, there was a knock at the door. It was Turk, his two friends and another man. Patty let them in. "The tall dude gave me \$22 for opening the door," Patty says on the videotape.

And what was Priester's reaction when he saw the four come into his apartment and Patty leaving?

"He just looked at me," Patty tells Washington.

CHAPTER TWO

Life Without Patty

On New Year's Day 1993, about two weeks after Long held Patty for trial, Rosa Lee moved out of the federally subsidized apartment complex in Southeast Washington where she and Patty had been living.

Rosa Lee had been planning to move for several months, long before Patty's arrest, but her new apartment hadn't been ready until now. Rosa Lee was happy to leave; the old apartment held too many painful reminders of the deterioration of her family. It had seemed so chaotic when Patty was there; now it just seemed empty.

Her new place is a one-bedroom unit in the senior citizen's wing of a building on North Capitol Street NW; she had applied for it after one particularly bad weekend of fending off Patty's and Ducky's requests for money to buy drugs. She qualified not because of her age—she was only 56 at the time she applied—but because of her medical disability.

The new apartment still smells of fresh paint when I arrive a few weeks later for my first visit. We sit in Rosa Lee's bedroom because her son Richard is sleeping on the living room couch; he recently got out of jail, and Rosa Lee has let him stay with her.

Her bedroom television is on, as usual. It is Inauguration Day. On the screen, crowds are gathering at the Capitol to see Bill Clinton take the oath of office. Rosa Lee pays no attention. She has no interest in politics or government. She has never voted. "It's not going to make one difference in my life," she told me one day.

In her mind, white people still had all the power and they didn't care about blacks. "I wouldn't go TWO blocks to vote," she said. "I have seen too much and hasn't nothing changed. The only thing that's changed is we don't have to ride in the back of the bus."

There is almost no connection between Rosa Lee's world and the world of Washington's policy-makers and politicians. One day soon after the election, I mentioned Clinton during a conversation with Rosa Lee; she didn't seem to know his name or that an election had been held.

On the television, Clinton is making his way to the platform for the swearing-in. Rosa Lee is showing me some of Patty's letters from jail. The letters are in someone else's handwriting.

"She sounds like a child in her letters," Rosa Lee says. "All she talks about is coming home! Coming home! It's almost like she doesn't realize what she did!"

Her lower lip is trembling. "She didn't kill him! She was drunk. I know Patty when she gets drunk. She's just like a little child. I don't think I ever let her grow up."

Rosa Lee's tears run down her face in unbroken streams, soaking her white blouse.

"She wouldn't have hurt Steve," she says. "That man took care of her so good."

It would be months before we would know how the courts viewed

Patty's involvement in Priester's death. I try to divert Rosa Lee's attention. "Here comes your president." I say, pointing to the television.

"I'm not thinking about that man!" she replies.

The ceremony begins. "I do solemnly swear . . ."

Rosa Lee listens to Clinton repeat the oath, then gets up heavily from her bed and goes to the bathroom to wash her face.

CHAPTER THREE

Rosa Lee's Trip

Rosa Lee can see my excitement. It is April 1993, and I have just returned from a trip to Rich Square, N.C., to research her family's history as sharecroppers. Through census records at the courthouse, I was able to trace her ancestors back to the turn of the century. Her family tree has many branches, including several in the Rich Square area; I looked up two of Rosa Lee's relatives—cousins she didn't know—and told them about my study of Rosa Lee and her family. They gave me a message for her: Please come for a visit.

Rosa Lee has never shown much interest in her family's history, but she is eager to do something other than sit around her apartment and worry about Patty. The case seems to drag on and on. Police have arrested three more suspects, and all five have been indicted on first-degree murder charges. Patty is willing to plead guilty to lesser charges and testify against the others, but negotiations are on hold for reasons that Rosa Lee doesn't understand.

For weeks now, Patty has been calling her collect nearly every night. Frustrated at the slow pace in the case, Rosa Lee is grateful for a reason to leave town.

She had been to Rich Square only once, when she was 9, and she didn't have fond memories. She showered me with questions. Did they still live in those gray, weathered wood shacks with the rusty metal roofs? Did they have indoor plumbing, or were they still using outhouses?

I laugh. Many sharecropper shacks still stand, I tell her, but no one lives in them. They were abandoned years ago, after the sharecropping system had faded away. Her relatives, I assure her, have indoor plumbing.

In early June, on a Thursday morning, the two of us are rolling along Interstate 95 through Virginia. The methadone clinic has given Rosa Lee enough doses for a four-day trip. As we cruise along, Rosa Lee is reminiscing about Rich Square in the summer of 1945.

She is fixated on plumbing. The two-room shack where she stayed didn't have an outhouse. During the day, people walked into the nearby woods to relieve themselves, always watchful for snakes that lay in the grass. At night, the family used a tin "slop jar." Every morning, the slop jar was emptied into a freshly dug hole.

"It smelled!" recalls Rosa Lee with an upturned nose and a shudder.

The shack resembled the typical dwellings that white landowners built throughout the South for black sharecroppers. There was a front door, but no front window. In the center of the main room was a wood-burning stove. The shack's wooden planks were the only barriers to the outdoors; there was no insulation. Rosa Lee could feel the wind when it blew through the spaces between the planks.

The house had three windows, one on each side and one at the rear. Rosa Lee remembers rubbing dust and moisture from the thick, yellowed plastic in the windows so she could see outside. Glass kerosene lamps provided light at night. There were crates and boxes to sit on, but not one chair. A hand pump outside supplied water.

Joel Achenbach
WASHINGTON
Wednesdays in St
WOO
Satisfaction Guarantee

US Air Unions,
Officials Meet
On Labor Cuts
Airline Looks to Save

Big college campuses are okay for
some, but others value the sense
of community and opportunity
for involvement that can only be
realized at a small college.



Rosa Lee recalls asking her mother, "Momma, how did ya'll LIVE down here?"

She remembered Rosetta Wright looking at her with a pained expression and turning away.

CHAPTER FOUR

Forgotten Memories

We reach Rich Square in the early afternoon. As I turn into Hilda and Bud Tann's driveway, Rosa Lee stares in amazement at the large, modern tan-brick house where her cousin lives. Big Bud, as everyone calls him, answers our knock. Hilda welcomes Rosa Lee with a big hug.

Hilda, 63, is a large woman with a light-brown complexion and an infectious, high-pitched laugh. Arthritis has locked up her left hip and knee, requiring her to lean heavily on a cane or a walker—"depending on how I'm feeling," she says.

She has prepared a big dinner, and Rosa Lee and I help ourselves to chicken and dumplings and collard greens. After the meal, Hilda and Rosa Lee settle into the two overstuffed couches in the living room. I sink down in the upholstered high-back chair to listen.

Hilda tells Rosa Lee that one of the couches belonged to Rosa Lee's maternal grandmother, Lugenia Whitaker Lawrence. Lugenia was a sharecropper here until she and her family, including Rosa Lee's mother, left during the Depression. In 1985, Lugenia came back to Rich Square after 50 years in Washington and stayed with Hilda for a few months before her death at age 88.

Rosa Lee and Hilda swap tales of the family, and Rosa Lee begins to open up about her life of crime and drug addiction. I knew that Rosa Lee was nervous about revealing too much, fearing rejection. But Hilda already knows some of the story from other family members.

"You needn't worry about it now, Rosa Lee," Hilda assures her. "That's all behind you now."

"Yes, you're right," Rosa Lee says in a quiet voice. "Praise the Lord!"

They talk until the shadows darken the living room. The only light is from the television. I say goodnight and leave for my motel. Rosa Lee is so busy talking that she hardly notices.

The next morning, we pick up another relative, 90-year-old Daisy Debreaux, at her white-and-green wood-frame house and go off in search of the land that Rosa Lee's mother and grandmother once farmed. Daisy lived on the plantation until the early 1950s but hasn't been there for 40 years.

Daisy is a thin, brown-skinned woman with a head of thick, white hair. She speaks in a deliberate cadence, barely parting her lips when she smiles. When something strikes her as funny, she lets loose with a deep, body-shaking chuckle. She and Rosa Lee's maternal grandmother were first cousins.

We turn east onto the dirt-and-gravel Benthall Cook Road and head toward Bull Neck Swamp, a fertile piece of land on the north bank of the Roanoke River. Daisy sucks in her breath in surprise.

Where generations of Lawrences once toiled stood all the components of the modern farm: a two-story office, large hangers for huge farming machinery, two large gray-metal silos. No matter which way we look, there is no visible evidence of the life that Daisy once knew. "There used to be dozens of houses on both sides along here," Daisy says, pointing to fields of young cotton and tobacco.

As we walk through the cotton fields, Rosa Lee is overcome by emotion. A forgotten memory reemerges: Every day for two weeks in that summer of 1945, Rosa Lee's mother woke her before dawn and took her to the cotton field. They worked for three hours before breakfast, returned to the fields for several hours before lunch and then again in the late afternoon.

After a few days of this regimen, Rosa Lee remembers asking her mother, "Momma, why do I have to pick cotton?"

"That's what I brought you down here for," her mother said. "To show you what we've had to go through in life to take care of you and red you."

CHAPTER FIVE

A Song of Redemption

On Sunday morning, we attend services at Chapel Hill Baptist Church, founded the year after the Civil War ended. The original white, wood-frame building was replaced with a red-brick one in 1973. Three generations of Rosa Lee's ancestors belonged to the church, including her grandparents and her mother. Four generations of her living relatives are active members today.

Near the end of the two-hour service, the Rev. Franklin D. Williams invites Rosa Lee to say something to the 125 or so worshipers. He had heard about her visit from one of her relatives. Rosa Lee beams. All eyes are on her as she walks quickly to the front. She is wearing a pink, two-piece suit with a wine-colored blouse and a string of white pearls. Her red shoes match her long red fingernails.

"I was 9 years old the last time I was here," she says. Until this trip, she had not understood the difficulties that grandparents and parents had faced when they sharecropped on the nearby plantation. He has looked back over her own life, she tells them, and is not proud of much of what she has done.

"When you change the way you've been living all your life, anything is possible," she says. "I thank God for giving me another chance in life."

Rosa Lee shuts her eyes, pushes her palms together and belts out an opening verse of a gospel song she learned as a child at Mount Zion Baptist Church in Washington.

"Oh, search me, Lord!

Oh, search me, Lord

Turn the light from heaven on my soul

If you find anything that shouldn't be

Take it out and strengthen me."

Older members join in. The Rev. Williams rushes to the piano and begins to play. Even the small children, who moments before quirmed with impatience, sit transfixed. The entire congregation ways in the pews.

I sit in wonder at the power of Rosa Lee Cunningham. She steps in front of people who have never seen her before and inspires them to sing this song of redemption. I can't help but think that if circumstances had been different, if she hadn't faced so many obstacles in her life, her drive and her charisma might have created a different life for herself, her children and grandchildren.

"I want to be right.

I want to be saved.

I want to be whole."

CHAPTER SIX

Painful Delays

The investigation of Steve Priester's slaying takes a turn in Patty's favor in October 1993. Prosecutor Heidi Pasichow accepts Pat-

ty's statement that her role in the robbery was to open the door for Turk and the other three. If Patty will agree to testify against the others, Pasichow will drop the first-degree murder charges against Patty.

As plea bargains go, it's not a bad deal. Patty still faces a substantial prison term, but at least she doesn't have a life sentence hanging over her head. On Oct. 22, in Judge Long's courtroom, Patty pleads guilty to first-degree burglary and conspiracy to commit robbery. She won't be sentenced, however, until she is finished testifying. If all the defendants go to trial, that could take months.

The delay is excruciating for Rosa Lee. Whenever she sees me, she badgers me for details about the case. She thinks of little else. Then, in mid-December, a late-night telephone call gives her something else to worry about.

It is 11:45 p.m. and she has just fallen asleep. The caller is the security guard in the lobby of her apartment building. A Robert Cunningham is here, the guard says. Do you want him to come up?

Rosa Lee is confused. Bobby is supposed to be in jail. What's he doing here?

A few minutes later, she opens the door and draws back in disbelief. Standing in the hallway, dressed in a prison-issue blue cotton jumpsuit and a thin windbreaker, is a shrunken version of her oldest son.

His breathing is labored and heavy. He tells her that he has just walked from the jail, a distance of about three miles. He has been given a medical parole because he is dying of AIDS. His weight has dropped from 160 pounds to less than 100.

Two days later, Bobby collapses on Rosa Lee's bathroom floor. Rosa Lee can't lift him. She calls 911, and soon her tiny apartment is filled with paramedics and equipment. They take Bobby to Howard University Hospital, where he deteriorates quickly. When he dies on Jan. 18, 1994, he weighs 72 pounds.

Bobby is the first of Rosa Lee's children to die, and she has no money to give him a funeral. Because she is poor and Bobby has no estate, the city's Department of Human Services agrees to pay the funeral costs and, later, the cremation.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Death in the Family

Rosa Lee is standing near a lavender-colored coffin when I arrive at Frazier's Funeral Home in the 300 block of Rhode Island Avenue NW. The casket lid is closed. "I didn't want anyone to see the way he looked when he died," she whispers.

I take a seat in the second row, next to one of Bobby's cousins. Rosa Lee's son Eric comes into the parlor. He looks around the room, sees Rosa Lee in the first row then decides to sit next to me. He has never resolved his anger at his mother for the way she raised him. Several family members are late for the 11 a.m. service, so the Rev. R.E. Dinkins decides to wait a few minutes. Finally, Rosa Lee motions to Dinkins to go ahead anyway. Dinkins leads the dozen mourners in prayer, then asks anyone who wants to speak to come forward.

Richard rises. "Bobby has taken care of me and all my brothers. He had a good life, and he did the best that he could. I'll never forget him."

A female relative delivers a more pointed message.

"To the family, I would like to say, be not ashamed of your son or your brother. God had him here for some reason, some purpose in his life." She looks toward Rosa Lee. "As he sleeps away, it is time

See ROSA LEE, A22, Col. 1



ROSA LEE'S STORY

THE WASHINGTON POST

A22 SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 25, 1994

for you all to get your act together. Get your act together, acknowledge the Lord and serve Him!"

A hush falls over the room. Now it is Rosa Lee's turn.

"First, I'd like to say, thank God for giving me the strength to be and to get up here."

She pauses, then cries out: "Bobby!"

His name echoes through the silent parlor.

"I love you son," she says, "and so do your brothers and your sisters. But I know now that you are in a better place. All of us will always love you. Take care of him God, 'cause he was my oldest. Thank you."

CHAPTER EIGHT

Patty's Apology

Rosa Lee has a plan for persuading Judge Cheryl Long to release Patty on probation. The day before the sentencing, she delivers two letters to Long's chambers—one from her doctor that details her deteriorating medical condition and a personal plea that her 17-year-old granddaughter wrote for her, imploring the judge to let Patty come home to take care of her. When I remind her that she left her old apartment to get away from Patty's drug-addicted lifestyle, she waves me away.

When I pick up Rosa Lee on the afternoon of May 10, 1994, she is nervous, almost shaking. She is still weak from her latest bout with pneumonia, which put her in the hospital for two weeks, and she uses a cane to walk from my car to the courtroom.

It is close to 5 p.m. by the time Patty's case is called. Patty is brought from the lockup. She looks healthier than she has in years. Eighteen months in jail, away from regular drug use, has given her body a chance to recover. She has lost the sallow, drug-induced pallor that I remember. She sees Rosa Lee and breaks into a big smile.

I whisper to Rosa Lee that the prosecutor's recommendation could be crucial in deciding Patty's sentence. The judge will want to know if Patty has held up her end of the plea bargain.

All the defendants in the case have pleaded guilty before trial, so Patty never had to testify in open court. Prosecutor Pasichow tells Long, "I feel absolutely compelled to let the court know that she's been cooperative."

Patty's role in Priester's murder, Pasichow says, "really comes down to, in part and to a large extent, Ms. Cunningham's greed in terms of her addiction, in terms of her need for money and in terms of the type of lifestyle that, unfortunately, Ms. Cunningham was living at the time."

That doesn't excuse her actions, Pasichow says. "What she did was set in motion something that she now regrets, but something that she really could have stopped."

As prosecutor's statements go, this is a pretty mild one. Pasichow could have asked Long to sentence Patty to the maximum time in prison, but she asked only for an "appropriate" sentence.

"Ms. Cunningham," the judge finally says, "this is your opportunity to speak to the court."

Patty stands. The words rush out. She tells Long that she agreed to let the robbers into Priester's apartment only because she was afraid that they were going to hurt her. "I'm really sorry for what happened to Mr. Priester. Because I loved him too. A lot! And I ask him every night to forgive me for what happened. And if I could have changed it, I would. . . ."

"This is the first time—this is the first time that I ever been without drugs this long. And it feels really good to me. It gives me a chance to get my life together, make my life much better. So I'm asking to be put on probation."

But Long is in no mood for redemption. She is too troubled by the statement of facts on Priester's murder.

After Patty left Priester at the apartment that night, the robbers repeatedly asked Priester, "Where is the money at?" Priester pleaded with them to leave him alone. The robbers gagged him, handcuffed him and bound him at the knees and ankles with belts and ropes. All

BOBBY AND PATTY
oldest son, Bobby,
also without her
jail for her role in

four robbers took turns hitting Priester in the face with a heavy wine bottle and a brass ornament. The robbers then tied a hood tightly over his face and shot him in the head. As far as police could determine, the assailants left without finding any money in Priester's apartment.

"What they did was just completely unnecessary," Long says to Patty. "Completely unnecessary. But they did it anyway. And I think that when you decided to let them in the house and made it possible for them to get into the house, you knew that you were doing a favor for some pretty bad people. . . ."

"It's bad enough that people do this to total strangers," Long says, "but there is no real way to excuse what you did to someone who is a friend to you."

Long announces Patty's sentence: one to three years for the conspiracy conviction and seven to 21 years on the burglary conviction, to be served consecutively. She will be eligible for parole in October 1998.

"You should pay a price for what you did, and you should not basically just get off the hook simply because you and your mother are in bad health," Long says.

CHAPTER NINE

Last Words

A few hours later, we sit in my car in front of Rosa Lee's apartment building and rehash the sentencing. Rosa Lee is distraught. She wanted a chance to speak to the judge. As Patty's mother, she says, shouldn't she have had the opportunity to explain?

I had been warning her for months that Patty's lawyer might not let her say anything in court, that he might decide it would do Patty's cause more harm than good. But Rosa Lee kept rehearsing her speech, as if this were her trial, not Patty's. One day, months before Patty's sentencing, she gave me a preview of what she would say to the judge if she got a chance.

"I want to say, Judge Long, my name is Rosa Lee Cunningham. I just want to clear my conscience and my mind the way I feel about my daughter being in jail on account of I feel that I brought my child up wrong 'cause I didn't know better. I didn't know no other way. Not only Patty, all of them children.

"I don't feel too good about it, Your Honor. I never have. . . I wasn't thinking right and I wasn't thinking clearly. I just didn't want her to become hurt like me. I didn't want her to want things and couldn't get them like me. . . ."

"Your Honor, I love my children very much, but somewhere down the line, I didn't raise them right, and it is hurting the hell out of me. . . ."

It was a harsh assessment, and undoubtedly designed to elicit Long's sympathy. Yet, it was direct and honest in a way that went far beyond our first interviews six years ago.

But then, Rosa Lee's not the same woman as she was when we first met. In 1988, she still shoplifted regularly, sold heroin on the street, used heroin and cocaine frequently while sharing dirty needles with Patty. Somehow, she also was taking care of her young grandchildren because their mother was strung out on crack.

Then Rosa Lee found herself paying a heavy price for her past. She learned she was carrying the virus that causes AIDS. She suffered a series of seizures after injecting heroin. She came close to dying from an overdose of seizure medication because she couldn't read the dosage instructions. Then came Patty's arrest for murder, followed by Bobby's death. Now she spends hours praying for herself, judging herself, endlessly asking questions for which there are no easy answers. She wants more than survival at this point; she wants peace from a life with almost none.

There are many ways to look at Rosa Lee's story. Some may say that Rosa Lee is a thief, a drug addict, a failed parent, a broken woman paying for her sins. Others may see her as a victim of hopeless circumstances, born to a life of deprivation and racism.

There may be truth in both views, but neither extreme reflects the complexity of her life, or the complexity of the crisis in the nation's inner cities. Rosa Lee's story shows the immense difficulties

that await any effort to bring an end to poverty, illiteracy, drug abuse and criminal activity. In the poorest neighborhoods, white and black, these problems are knotted together; there's no way to separate the individual strings, especially in those communities overwhelmed by drug abuse. Reforming welfare doesn't stop drug trafficking; better policing doesn't end illiteracy; providing job training doesn't teach a young man or woman why it's wrong to steal.

But complex is not the same as intractable. Rosa Lee's fate was far from foreordained; her sons Alvin and Eric, both of whom rejected the lure of the street, are testament to that. So are many of her brothers and sisters. They, like many others who grew up poor, learned the importance and value of personal responsibility, and it gave them the edge they needed to invent a different way to live.

For now, Rosa Lee has adjusted to life without Bobby and Patty. Her apartment remains a haven for those children with nowhere else to go. Richard and Ronnie are staying with her; Ducky, however, is back in Lorton serving time for theft.

Rosa Lee keeps herself busy by helping to take care of the family's newest generation—her great-grandson. The baby's father is her grandson Junior, 21; the boy's mother is a 15-year-old girl, a 10th-grader at a District high school. Rosa Lee looks after the infant on weekdays so the mother can go to school. Junior can't help out; he's in jail, awaiting sentencing on new armed robbery charges.

On school days, the baby's mother meets Rosa Lee at McDonald's, near the methadone clinic. On a recent Thursday morning, she handed Rosa Lee a still-warm bottle of formula, quickly washed down a sausage sandwich with soda, kissed her son and left for school.

"You're a good-looking boy, you know that?" cooed Rosa Lee as the eight-week-old infant sucks his bottle. He finished the milk, and his eyes began to droop.

She gently rocked the baby on her lap. "He's such a beautiful baby and so easy to look after," she said, stroking his cheek as he fell asleep.

About This Series

In 1932, in the midst of the Great Depression, Rosa Lee Cunningham's grandparents and parents gave up their North Carolina sharecropping life for an uncertain journey north. Rosa Lee is the link between past and present, between a world that has disappeared and the one that her children and grandchildren face today in Washington.

Many of Rosa Lee's relatives, including two of her eight children, managed to secure footholds in the mainstream of American society; their relative success makes it all the more important to try to understand Rosa Lee's life.

Although her story is disturbing, she wanted it told. "Maybe I can help somebody not follow in my footsteps," she said. That story—of the choices she had and the choices she made—offers a chance to understand what statistics only suggest: the interconnections of racism, poverty, illiteracy, drug abuse and crime, and why these conditions persist.

The series, edited by Steve Luxenberg, The Post's assistant managing editor for special projects, ends today. Since the series began last Sunday, The Post has received more than 3,000 telephone calls from readers. Readers who wish to leave a recorded comment can call PostHaste at 202-334-9000, Category 4646 until Tuesday at midnight, when the number will be discontinued.

Many callers have asked about organizations that work with troubled families. A partial listing appears on Page A23.

ROSA LEE'S STORY

ORGANIZATIONS THAT CAN HELP

The following is a partial list of organizations in the Washington metropolitan area that offer social services. Several are umbrella agencies that could provide referrals to neighborhood-based organizations. The white pages of the 1994-95 District of Columbia telephone book also lists community services on Pages 41 and 42.

GENERAL INFORMATION:

- **D.C. Hotline**, 202-223-2255
Provides information on free or low-cost services relating to mental health, housing, financial assistance, medical treatment, social services and support groups.
- **Self-Help Clearing House**, 703-941-5465
A project of the Mental Health Association, Self-Help Clearing House is connected with more than 18,000 support groups in the D.C. area.

AIDS/HIV SERVICES:

- **National AIDS Hotline**, 1-800-342-AIDS
- **Whitman-Walker Clinic** (main facility), 1407 S St., NW, 202-797-3500
A comprehensive outpatient AIDS service organization in the D.C. area.

SUBSTANCE ABUSE:

- **Alcoholics Anonymous**, 202-966-9115 in the District and Maryland, 703-281-7501 in Northern Virginia
- **Cocaine Anonymous**, 202-726-1717
- **Cocaine Hotline**: 1-800-COCAINE.
A 24-hour national information service.
- **Narcotics Anonymous**, 202-399-5316
- **National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information**, 1-800-SAY-NO-TO
- **National Federation of Parents for Drug-Free Youth**, 1-800-554-KIDS
- **National Institute on Drug Abuse Hotline**, 1-800-662-HELP
- **WACADA** (Washington Area Council on Alcohol & Drug Abuse), 202-783-1300.
A hotline for drug- and alcohol-related concerns.
- **Alanon/Alateen**, 202-882-1334 in the District and Maryland, 703-241-2011 in Northern Virginia.
Support groups for friends and families coping with alcoholism.
- **Naranon**, 301-876-4316
Support groups for families of drug addicts.

LITERACY GROUPS:

Local governments offer literacy classes through adult education programs. Contact them or these umbrella agencies for information:

- **Literacy Volunteers of America**, 1325 W St., NW, 202-387-1772
- **Washington Literacy Council**, 1799 Swan St., NW, 202-398-9029

MENTORING GROUPS:

- **Big Brothers of National Capital Area**, 301-587-0021
- **Big Sisters of the Washington Metro Area Inc.**, 202-244-1012
- **Boys and Girls Clubs of Greater Washington**, 301-587-4315
- **Concerned Black Men Inc.**, 202-783-5414

VOLUNTEER GROUPS:

- **Arlington County Volunteer Office**, 703-358-3222
- **Fairfax County Volunteer Action Center**, 703-246-3460
- **Greater D.C. Cares**, 1201 New York Ave. NW, 202-289-7378
Connects volunteers with community-based service organizations.
- **Montgomery County Volunteer Service**, 301-217-4949
- **Prince George's County Voluntary Action Center**, 301-699-2800

THE WASHINGTON POST

VIRGINIA TECH presents
3 MAJOR SHORT COURSES . . .

Week of Sept. 26 '94

Rosa Lee Cunningham's Story

THE RECENT eight-part series on the life of Rosa Lee Cunningham by Post reporter Leon Dash, based on years of observation and interviews, was an extraordinary journalistic achievement. But it was also a deeply disturbing and lacerating portrayal of a District family—a mother, her children and grandchildren—wasted in an environment in which drugs, AIDS, crime, hustling and time behind bars were the common and acceptable experience. This was, as well, an environment in which public assistance meant to help them—and, no doubt, in some part derived from taxes on working people not much better off than they—was habitually squandered on more drugs. Judging from the thousands of responses received thus far, most readers say the series has left them with a better understanding of the strong ties between marginal education, welfare dependency, chronic joblessness, drug abuse and criminal recidivism, and how—as in Rosa Lee Cunningham's case—those conditions can persist from generation to generation, in part as a consequence of societal failure, in part as a consequence of personal failure. That was what the series set out to accomplish.

A smaller but significant number of readers, however, have been clearly incensed by what they have read. To them, eight consecutive days of front-page stories about intergenerational deterioration in a District family perpetuates racist stereotypes of African Americans and plays into the hands of those who would have government retreat from its social responsibilities. There is always a chance that will happen in this kind of journalistic enterprise. But those seeking to use this series to support their racial prejudices will have to look for comfort somewhere else.

Rosa Lee Cunningham's personal story is not representative of all African Americans. While her grandparents and parents shared the experience of the millions of African Americans who migrated from the South to urban areas several decades ago, most children of migrant families did not end up like Rosa Lee. But then, neither did most of her 11

siblings. Likewise, there are thousands of District women on welfare and Medicaid; most don't lead lives like Rosa Lee's. They don't steal or teach their children and grandchildren to rip-off others. They don't prostitute themselves or their daughters. They don't sell or do drugs, or harbor criminals or teach their children to lie. They haven't gone to jail 12 times, or served years behind bars for theft and drug abuse. They aren't HIV positive. To conclude from this series that Rosa Lee's life is the way the poor live is to seriously misread and mistake what has been written. And yet there is much to learn from the series.

Within the nation's capital, as in inner cities across the nation, there are plenty of Rosa Lee Cunninghams—and people like her daughter, Patty, her sons Bobby (who died), Ducky and Richard, and her grandson, Junior—who are the real stories behind the hard-core drug, crime and social welfare statistics we read or hear about. The next time a discussion gets started on the devastating impact of crack cocaine on families or a community, or the failure of prisons and juvenile facilities to rehabilitate repeat offenders, or school systems that callously push through and then push out students who can't read their own names, or the next time you hear talk about secret sins of child sexual abuse or the power of the family (or the interdependence of the pathological)—think of Rosa Lee Cunningham, her children and grandchildren. But don't stop there.

Think, too, of her two sons Alvin and Eric, who set themselves apart from the family and turned the other way. There are other Alvins and Erics who need to know they have choices, that there is something better than hustling and manipulation of others within their reach, that life, despite it all, can be better. The series showed that Alvin and Eric were helped by the intervention of teachers and mentors who could channel their remarkable and stubborn will to free themselves—and now their own families—from the terrible cycle of dependency and desolation in which the rest of their siblings were caught. In that there is surely a lesson.

Saturday, Oct. 1, 1994

BY LUCIAN PERKINS—THE WASHINGTON POST

'Rosa Lee's Story'

As many of your readers have indicated (Ombudsman, Sept. 25), I, too, fail to see the reason or need for your paper to write about Rosa Lee Cunningham's life [front page, Sept. 18-25]. It has no newsworthy value and perpetuates the negativity that your paper has been accused of, especially about its coverage of the African American community. While you may have printed 11 positive stories in the past six weeks, none received the magnitude of coverage as Cunningham's.

In all likelihood, the article will not deter anyone headed down the path Cunningham followed because these individuals are generally not readers of your paper. Nor will it result in legislation or additional funds for programs and resources to help people like Cunningham make wiser choices in their lives. And, last, most people, like me, will not understand how and why Cunningham felt she had to make the choices she did "to survive."

—Marilyn Mitchell

Leon Dash's series on Rosa Lee Cunningham did more to harm the image of poor black people than anything I have read in a long time. I tried desperately to find some redeeming quality about Rosa Lee throughout most of the series. Whatever hope I had was gone when I read that she actually sold her daughter into prostitution at the age of 11 under the guise of needing money to feed her children. Rosa Lee is a morally bankrupt individual who refuses to take responsibility for her actions even to this day. She perpetuates the stereotypes that so many black people have worked so hard to erase. There are numerous poor people who would never resort to theft, drug using and selling and prostitution as a way of life.

The image of poor blacks would be much better served with more articles such as Dorothy Gilliam's Sept. 24 account on Shavar Jeffries. Here is a young man who has faced more adversity than Rosa Lee, yet he not only survived but is striving for excellence in all that he does. That story deserved to be on the front page.

—Rita A. Still

Your series "Rosa Lee's Story" was powerful—a story that needed to be told. I could hardly wait until the next installment.

I am a 53-year-old black male, about

Rosa Lee's age. I have a son and six siblings in California, and I plan to share this series with them. I can see in this series why, I believe, that four of us have been modestly successful and why my two brothers have had problems in their lives—one is in prison for using and selling drugs and the other is in and out of jail for the same reasons. The verdict is still out on my younger, college-educated sister.

I have a master's degree from UCLA and am a Department of the Army civilian who has attained the grade of GS/GM-14 and retired as a lieutenant colonel from the Army Reserves after more than seven years on active duty. But we all came from a background similar to Rosa Lee's. I want Rosa Lee to know that her story will make a difference in how my grandson and my siblings' grandchildren are raised.

—Hollis E. Barnes

Leon Dash is to be congratulated for his eight-part series on Rosa Lee and her family. It gave readers a painful look at how poverty, drug use and crime can devastate a family. Eight children is more than any single mother should be expected to be able to discipline, supervise, nourish and educate. How I wish Rosa Lee had known about Planned Parenthood and its subsidized birth control services, AIDS prevention and abortion facilities. I was disappointed that it was not listed with the organizations that can help at the end of the final essay on Sept. 25. Planned Parenthood clinics in the District and in Virginia and Maryland are listed in the telephone directories.

—Sarah G. Epstein

Reading Rosa Lee's "memoirs" shows me what a stupid life I have led. Why did I work and slave so hard to make a living when I could have had the easy life—stealing, selling drugs and working the numerous social welfare systems as detailed in the articles.

Too late for me at 82, but younger types may well be inclined to take a tip from Rosa and live off us taxpaying suckers. And if such a life is interrupted occasionally by a rest period in the hoosegow, so what? Society pays for that also.

No doubt deep thinkers like psychologists and social reformers will think of even more ways to throw money at social ills such as those portrayed here. They will never realize that they are part of the

problem, not the solution. Ever since Roosevelt, we have been throwing money at the poverty-stricken. The able-bodied take the money and work the system for even more.

When will we realize that there are millions of Rosas out there and that we don't do them or society any good by letting them produce successive generations to follow in their footsteps?

—Joseph L. Hudson

Thou shalt not steal. Most law-abiding citizens live by this motto. Rosa Lee does not. Leon Dash's articles seem to disregard this societal norm and in fact glamorize the art of shoplifting. As I read about Rosa Lee's efforts to support her drug habit and her successful ploy to stay out of jail, I became ill. This woman should not have been given a page and a half of print each day to flaunt her illegal activities.

If the original intent of Dash's series was to deter future thieves, the result so far has not been achieved. Only twice in the first article did a negative word appear concerning the ramifications of stealing. I hope Washington's impressionable youths do not read this series; if they do, the District's crime rate will soar.

I recognize the plight of the poor and sympathize with their struggles in life. But many welfare programs and organizations (i.e., Salvation Army) exist and are willing to chip in if an honest job does not bring in enough cash. Rosa Lee's situation is not uncommon. People strive to overcome every day. But some do not resort to crime. A hard-working, honorable woman should have been chosen as the subject of this series. Her triumphs and failures would have earned a reader's respect and touched his/her heart. Unfortunately, Rosa Lee deserves no respect.

—Annette Jurkonie

To describe Rosa Lee Cunningham's story as "discomforting and disturbing"—as Steve Luxenberg does in a postscript to each article—is a tremendous understatement. One must read the entire series to grasp the full depth of the Cunninghams' depravity. To me, the most abhorrent example (of which there were many) was in the Sept. 23 article in which Rosa Lee admits to recruiting her 11-year-old daughter to join her in prostitution. Rosa Lee excuses her actions by claiming that

she did whatever it took to ensure her family's survival. To the contrary, Leon Dash's account of Rosa Lee demonstrates that she did whatever it took to feed her base proclivities, regardless of the immeasurable cost to the children who depended upon her. Moreover, she imbued most of her offspring with the same sense of indifference to familial and societal responsibilities.

Luxenberg notes the articles' focus on the interconnections of racism, poverty, illiteracy, drug abuse and crime. An obvious addition to that list is our failing welfare system. Rosa Lee and her family clearly have received an abundance of our government's generosity in the form of welfare checks, food, subsidized housing, free or discounted medical care and medication, job training etc. Indeed, it would be interesting to calculate the sum that we have spent on this family so far. Despite and perhaps because of all these welfare programs, only two of Rosa Lee's children lifted themselves out of the deepening pit that their mother burrowed.

Those two succeeded because they perceived the difference between right and wrong, understood that they would define themselves every day by the choices they made, and accepted responsibility for their actions. In contrast, Rosa Lee and her dysfunctional children choose to seek instant gratification regardless of the cost to themselves and others.

The series leaves me convinced that the current welfare system breeds and perpetuates this self-defeating conduct. At some point, we must say, "You have enough money for drugs (as well as other so-called 'necessities' such as television and long-distance phone service); you obviously don't need our money for food, clothing and rent!" By cutting off the exploiters and reevaluating how we distribute charity, funds could be redeployed to people who may truly need and appreciate the assistance.

In the final article, Dash leans too heavily on the concept of redemption. That Rosa Lee regrets her ways toward the end of life and sings in church (once!) is hardly the work of a redeemer. Redemption is a process of actively correcting past wrongs, and nothing in the final article indicates that Rosa Lee is doing anything to pay back the community for what she took or to save her children from the disastrous lifestyle that they learned from her.

—Kenneth Ryan

Sunday, Oct. 2, 1994

BY FRANCES JETTER FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

ROSA LEE & ME

What One Family Told Me—and America—About the Urban Crisis

By Leon Dash

FOR FOUR intense years, I followed Rosa Lee Cunningham, her children and five of her estimated 32 grandchildren. I became absorbed by Rosa Lee's story—and deeply troubled. I also realized that the series that followed—on the intergenerational nature of underclass poverty, crime and drug use in one family—would disturb and anger some readers.

Although the great majority of responses were positive, it did not surprise me that many of those the series angered most are middle-class African Americans. They felt that The Washington Post, by devoting eight days to a three-generational family of welfare-dependent petty criminals, had given this growing urban crisis the wrong kind of attention. Why, many asked, didn't I write a "positive" story about the many honest single black mothers whose children went on to lives of American success and achievement?

The answer is simple. Stories about successful individuals who have overcome societal barriers

Leon Dash is a member of The Washington Post's special projects reporting unit.

have a place in journalism, but these individuals and families are not part of the crisis in urban America. I was interested in writing about the crisis. Every one of us should be alerted to it. I wanted readers to be uncomfortable and alarmed.

Others feel the same way—Ronald B. Mincy, for example. Ron Mincy is himself a "positive" success story of an African-American man who overcame tremendous odds. He and his two brothers were raised by their single mother in the South Bronx in the Patterson public housing project, not far from the East Harlem neighborhood where I grew up. An expert on urban poverty, Mincy earned a doctorate in economics from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. He, his wife and two sons live in Harlem today out of a commitment to making a change where change is most needed.

Mincy also believes the crisis of poverty and crime in our cities needs to be written about in a way that people can understand it. He understands that this problem is growing not receding.

Every evening Mincy leaves his Ford Foundation office in mid-Manhattan and travels north four miles into a large swath of real estate with rows of boarded-up and deteriorated 19th century tene-

ments. Nearing his West 122nd Street home, Mincy passes through a street-corner drug market brazenly operated by the newest male generation of Harlem's underclass.

"As I round the corner, there are drug deals happening on the corner," says Mincy. The kids attending the nearby junior high school "are coming in and out of that all the time."

This scene is replicated on street corners in every major city in America. The adolescent drug sellers and their destitute adult clients are just the observable symptoms of continuing inner-city decay. This decay is intricately interwoven with other dead-end ingredients of life within America's bottom tier of poverty: adolescent childbearing, child abuse and neglect, foster care, dropping out of school, welfare dependence, single parenthood, chronic unemployment and neighborhood crime and violence.

"In most cases, there is not a father in [these] households," said Mincy. "There is not even a positive older brother! That is a situation that is tragic. It is an intergenerational thing."

Reams of poverty statistics cross Mincy's desk

See ROSA LEE, C3, Col. 1

Rosa Lee's Story: The Readers React

In response to Leon Dash's series, "Rosa Lee's Story," the Washington Post received more than 4,600 phone calls to a special line set up to allow readers to leave recorded comments. About half of the callers approved of the publication of the story while about a quarter were critical of the Post for running it. Another 20 percent of the callers offered observations that were neither critical nor supportive; the remainder offered judgments that were both positive and negative. This was not a scientific survey of reader reaction. Here is a sampling of the comments:

It was an extremely well-done article and extremely interesting. Each day I waited for the next installment of the story. Right under our noses, there are people who are living this way. The type of life they led is completely foreign to me, unlike anything I've ever read. My suggestion to The Post would be to do an article about another family that came from similar background. My great grandparents were sharecroppers and came to Washington in 1946 from South Carolina. Our lives were not at all like Rosa Lee's. No one went to jail, nobody on drugs, everybody's working, everybody got an education. I think we should see the other side of this story.

—Gwendolyn Aughtry, Landover, Md.

I am tired of reading stories about black people and poverty. When are you going to do a story about a white person who moved from Appalachia and is still in a trailer park three generations later? This is an old story, a tired story. We're waiting to see the story of the two children who made it into middle and working class . . . so a child who's in high school, struggling to get out of that circumstance understands what positive steps can be made. This is why people hate The Post.

—Cecelie Counts-Blakey, Northeast Washington

I don't understand why The Washington Post is trying to engender support or sympathy for this woman. Her problems don't have anything to do with racism, she's a drug addict. She's enabling her children to become drug addicts. The only thing that poverty has to do with it is that it allows her to use government money to support her drug habit and her children's drug habits.

—Denise Kellogg, Arlington

I am a 52-year-old black woman who has gone through some of the same things that Rosa Lee Cunningham did. I've been keeping up with the story all week. It has touched me so deeply, the things that she has endured. I started having children at 15 and it has been a struggle with raising them. I've never taken any drugs, but I was abused and I can relate to so many things that she went through. It just moved me. I'm praying for Rosa Lee.

—Minnie Barnes, Northeast Washington

I thought it was truly excellent. I am an upper white class, middle class, let's say, girl, used to be a very pretty girl, and I am a heroin addict. I'm on methadone now. And reading your story really breaks my heart. I am so impressed with this I'm cutting it out and taking it to the clinic tomorrow to hang up because no one seems to understand and I think that you somehow in your heart do.

—Candace Ricks, Crownsville, Md.

All people face problems, the question is how do they solve their problems. This is where the black church should have come in and helped these people, if not initially when they came to Washington, then when they got on drugs. When people leave rural areas to go to the city it seems like they leave religion out of their lives. This exodus is a point that I think should be developed.

—A. Mills, Upper Marlboro

[Dash] doesn't seem to explain . . . how the racist structure of our society allows a situation like this to happen in the first place. The information on her life so far is beginning to show how poverty and education impacted them—but not racism. But it's The Washington Post so I wouldn't expect that part. So I hope that, unlike in most Post stories, you will work hard explaining how the racial structure has impacted on their lives and given them the number of choices that they had and didn't let them benefit fully from the contributions they have made.

—Wayne Young, Southeast Washington

As a black person I find this story very troubling but I guess it's kind of necessary to tell this story. It's very interesting and very compelling.

—Alan Patterson, Columbia, Md.

I really sincerely hope that other people are as angered at this person's justification for all of her irresponsible behavior as I am. This is disgusting. My parents were poor Oklahoma farm kids that worked and never stole and never took anything and never did drugs. My father came from a family of alcoholics and he himself battled with it but still managed to hold down a job and

Rosa Lee & Me

ROSA LEE, From C1

every week, but the tales that drive his search for solutions are the stories he reads every day in newspapers. A Washington Post story about a 14-year-old boy who anticipates dying by age 17 still haunts him.

This, Mincy says, is "usually the only picture" the public gets. But he argues that in reading the life stories of Rosa Lee Cunningham and her family, some readers "will realize that in addition to sort of being horrifying, this is also tragic. Some will be struck by a sort of compassion" for the growing number of persons trapped in patterns of repeated criminal behavior.

That's why I wrote about Rosa Lee Cunningham. Ron Mincy and other experts say that, among those living in extreme poverty, her family is not unique. Consider the statistics:

- In the past generation, America's urban underclass population has tripled in size—to an estimated 2.7 million persons (according to Urban Institute studies): By the time of the 1990 census, the underclass was growing at a rate of 8 percent per decade. America's history of racial discrimination has had a disproportionate impact on black Americans, who make up 57 percent of the underclass. Whites and Hispanics compose 20 percent each. The remaining 3 percent is made up of Asians and Native Americans.

- Members of families like Rosa Lee's, in which criminal behavior is "a continuation from generation to generation" make up 15 to 20 percent of Washington's prison population of about 10,000, says Jasper Ormond, who directs Washington's substance abuse treatment for inmates. Ormond estimates that this population is "responsible for 60 to 75 percent of the criminal activity."

"That's why it's such a significant group to focus on."

educate two kids. My sister and I have never been in a kind of trouble. This woman is simply irresponsible . . . It's not a black thing. It's an irresponsible thing.

—Janice Dodd, Arlington, Va.

I'm the executive director of the House of Ruth. I'm greatly impressed with Mr. Dash's reporting. I think we have a lot in common in terms of the experiences we all shared, and what Rosa Lee's story exemplifies in a of the women we're seeing. I thought it was extremely in-depth with a lot of warmth.

—Christel Nichols, Northeast Washington

As an African American woman who was born in North and educated in the South in college I was moved by it that I almost cried. It's one of the best history lessons ever. It should be published in every history book across America.

—Erica Simpson, Hyattsville, Md.

I know as an African-American woman, I feel eyes on me in stores, and this story I think perpetuates a myth—that if I come in with my kids and a diaper bag I'm going to steal something. Also, if you're going to write a story about poverty, why don't you talk about the flip side, the great number of people who work more than one job to try and take care of their families. I know that's how it was in my family . . . So, congratulations on perpetuating a myth.

—Susan Smith, Annandale, Va.

I'm glad The Post has done something in-depth about poverty and racism and abuse. My only concern is I wish the underlying causes could be explored, the why more so than the what. Leon Dash is to be commended, but he needs to look at a little further.

—John L. Moore, Northwest Washington

I'm a divorced young black female. Too often this type of stuff goes on in the black community. . . . People think I'm a very strict parent when it comes to my children, but stories like this cause me to be even more strict . . . It just baffles me to find out how people turn out like this . . . Apparently they didn't have a vision or hope . . . in life. Without a vision, you suffer.

—Doris Rainey, Laurel, Md.

It's one of the most poignant, emotional experiences I've gone through in reading. I read all kinds of articles and books . . . but this one just kept drawing me in. Any journalist who takes six years needs to be listened to, I think. I don't understand how some of her children did turn out all right. That's the real heroism.

—Ruth Worthen, Roslyn, Va.

I'm a middle aged, white housewife in suburban Virginia and I think this has been a really interesting article to read. Being a person that sometimes judges people without thinking, I was able to stop and see a different perspective—to not be so quick to judge the lifestyles of people. It's hard to imagine people living like that but when you describe the circumstances around the decisions they made, it just shines a different light on it.

—Dobbie Miller, Sterling, Va.

I didn't like the articles because the recurrent message was that society is at fault, as in so many of these types of articles. The series glosses over individual responsibility. My grandmother was a slave—the term was serf in Russia.

says Ormond, a clinical psychologist. "Poverty is the underlying force. Crime has been seen as a way out of [poverty]."

- Half of Lorton's prison population can be classified as criminal recidivist—men and women repeatedly arrested for new crimes a short time after being paroled. The average inmate is between 18 and 24, grew up in the city's poorest neighborhoods and reads just above the third grade level.

- One measure of underclass growth is teenage childbearing in poor urban communities. Nationally, the teenage birthrate in 1991 of 94.4 children per 1,000 girls 8-19 years of age "was higher than in any year since 1972," according to the National Center for Health Statistics. The rates for teenagers ages 15-17, stable at 1-33 births per 1,000 mothers between 1977 and 1986, "have risen sharply since, by 3 to 8 percent annually."

Washington's teenage birthrate in 1990 rose to 87 babies born for every 1,000 teenage girls from a rate of 70 babies born to every 1,000 teenagers 10 years earlier. In 1976, which includes parts of Anacostia and Capitol Hill, 15 percent of households live in poverty. There, the teenage birthrate more than doubled to 139 babies born to every 1,000 girls ages 14 to 19 compared to a birthrate of 63 a decade earlier. Wards 7 (far Northeast Washington) and 8 (far Southeast Washington) have the highest percentage of households in poverty—18 percent and 26 percent, respectively. Their increases in birthrates were 95 percent and 73 percent, respectively. Foster care is becoming increasingly dominated by minority children, because African American and Hispanic children are entering and being retained in foster care at higher rates than whites. Moreover, increasing numbers of physically and sexually abused children from poor urban communities are ending up in foster care, which is safe haven.

In the decade since 1982, the number of children in foster care nationwide has climbed from 260,000 to 2,000—a 70 percent increase, according to Toshio

sua—and she came here as a teenager and worked in a shoe factory all of her life. She never learned to read and write in any language. Her husband worked in a shoe factory all of his life and they managed to squirrel away money and raise their children. She made sure that her children took advantage of the educational opportunities here. That's the key to escaping poverty. The lack of education and the values system in poor families, that's the common denominator that keeps the poor poor. It's not society, it's broken value systems within families.

—Annemarie Brown, Falls Church, Va.

I'm a judge in Superior Court. I've been reading your story about Rosa Lee. I've been assigned to a drug court here now for almost three years. I am so caught by your capturing the essence of what this whole problem is. I think this is a story that deserves a Pulitzer Prize . . . This is the kind of thing that may actually change some people's lives, if they take it to heart.

—Bruce Beaudin, Northwest Washington

It's a phenomenal story, one of the best things I've ever seen in the newspaper. It tells what the real story is and how people get trapped in these cycles. Getting out is not quite as easy as comfortable middle class folks like me have been led to believe. Mr. Dash was very even-handed—neither overly sympathetic nor overly harsh.

—Maria Wheeler, Ashburn, Va.

I'm concerned that you don't make it clear enough that Rosa Lee isn't typical of most women on welfare and that most women on welfare don't commit crimes and do drugs. You risk perpetuating a stereotype unfairly.

—Susan Manning, Wheaton, Md.

As a black person who started out in the ghetto and now lives rather comfortably in the suburbs, I have a huge sense of guilt and of obligation, for people like her whom nobody seems able to help. Someone should do a cost-benefit study of her and her children, the cost from all sources, that goes to maintain Rosa Lee and how much positive is coming out of that. The point being, as Jesse Jackson says, that it may cost us more money to keep people in jail than it ever does to educate them and keep them out. Maybe that's not all of the solution but at least if the Caucasian public would understand that locking up people . . . may not be the best public policy.

—Calvin Young, Fairfax Station, Va.

Being an African-American male and 37 years of age, I keep getting negative images of African-American people in the newspaper. This disturbs me. It's on the front page, I'm not learning anything from it, I don't see where the racism has perpetuated the drug use or the illiteracy of the family and I think that they perpetuated it themselves. I think that the story should have been more geared to the children who made a success of their lives, how they were able to escape, what people could learn from them and how they got around the poverty.

—Anthony Frizzell, Northeast Washington

This is a deeply moving series . . . the American 20th century version of Oliver Twist.

—Ken Kerle, Northwest Washington

The thing that impressed me most about the series

Tatara, director of research for the American Public Welfare Association. For 1993, Tatara forecast another 5 percent increase (to 464,000 children) when all the figures are in.

"There is no single answer to account for" the increase, says Tatara. But after 1986, he adds, "parental drug abuse" caused by the crack cocaine epidemic "is one factor" in children being taken away from their parents and placed in foster care.

"You also find a lot of [child abuse] in the foster care system," says the Ford Foundation's Mincy. "The number of black children in foster care is extremely high, and they tend to remain in foster care because of the low rates of adoption. One of the real dirty little secrets of the foster care system is that those children are often victims of rape."

In Washington, the number of children in foster care jumped from 1,760 youngsters in 1992 to 2,218 by last June—an increase of 26 percent, according to Human Services Department spokesman Larry Brown.

"Rosa Lee's Story: Poverty and Survival in Washington" ran from Sept. 18 through last Sunday. It told how the repeated imprisonment of Rosa Lee, six of her eight children and a 21-year-old grandson had no effect on their willingness to engage in new crime. Two teenage grandsons have begun dealing drugs, even though they've seen their 21-year-old cousin go in and out of prison.

Like successful African Americans, families like Rosa Lee's are not difficult to find. At the start of the project, I interviewed 20 men and 20 women, heads and members of recidivist families in Washington's jail, called the Central Detention Facility. Every family contained the same histories of drug abuse, repeated imprisonment, chronic unemployment and marginal educations extending over three generations. I selected four families to follow. From this small group, I gradually focused on Rosa Lee's family alone. Just keeping up with three living generations in her family occupied me full

was the two success stories of Rosa Lee's children—the two that made it. And what really helped them was the intervention of two people in their lives—one was a social worker and one was teacher—and the other children did not have exposures to people that could help them and act as role models. It seems to me that all the resources that we spend on crime prevention and drug prevention, we really need to be spending on children.

—Donna Labadie, Gaithersburg, Md.

As an African American and an honors graduate of Stanford University, I'm totally disgusted with this article because you're reinforcing every negative stereotype about African Americans. I think it would have been in your best interest if you had focused on heart transplant surgeons or business people, people doing volunteer work in the community, and run an eight-part series on them, something positive instead of something so negative. I think that the editor, Steve Luxenberg, should be horsewhipped. This is frustrating and it is untimely especially with all the racial division in this community.

—Kim Metters, Arlington, Va.

It's a sham, this article about this woman who should have been in jail, who should have been incarcerated a long time ago, who's now teaching the third generation to steal. I think it's a shame that the guy who wrote this article made her out to be a hero. She's a fine example of what society has to look forward to. I don't know that you're not partially culpable as an accessory for some of her thieving.

—Thomas A. Stallone, Bethesda, Md.

I appreciate you writing the story on Rosa Lee. She is my aunt. I don't know too much about my fraternal family because of the breakup of my family, the lack of closeness and unity after my grandmother's death. My grandmother, Rosetta Wright, was a strong loving woman who did everything to keep her family together and I loved her for it. I am a young African American, and it's interesting that I never knew this about this side of my family.

—Ms. Wright, Prince Georges County, Md.

I have mixed feelings about this story. When I read this story, I think: Why is The Post spotlighting this family instead of spotlighting African-American families who have made it? It makes me wonder what's going on with The Post. Because of the climate in D.C., if you walk down the street and you're black, everyone thinks you're a criminal. I come from a family of 11, have been in and out of prison. I have a master's degree and make over \$51,000 a year. The question you ask, you want to know why in some families in D.C., some people make it and some people don't. It's elementary—you want to.

—Conice Washington, Laurel, Md.

Never before has a newspaper article affected me in such a way. This past week, I feel like Rosa Lee has become a part of my life, and it's so easy for us to disregard a person in Rosa Lee's situation. But because of these articles, I've become much more compassionate to the circumstances of such despair. We are losing generations, and I hope that Rosa Lee's story will make a difference in educating others in her situation, and more importantly, changing the way America regards such people.

—Toni-Marie Chieffalo, Northwest Washington

I think the series is really . . . educational in terms of showing exactly how messed up the family can be. By going into a lot of detail, instead of just making generalizations, you can see the inner workings of this family and how the cycle repeats itself. I think it's useful especially because it seems like there is a racial divide in the city, that a lot of people don't understand the issues that the poor face and don't understand why Marion Barry got re-elected. The white people basically are just clueless about what poverty really is . . .

—Gail McGrew, Silver Spring, Md.

I read all eight installments before I called because I didn't want to make a hasty judgment. My concern is that I think everyone has this image of the African-American community. I would like to see an eight-part series devoted to something equally positive that's going on in the African-American community. I would like to see struggles of middle class people who go to work every day, who work hard, who practice Christian values, who raise their children, whose kids don't end up on drugs and who go on to raise normal, stable families where education and Christianity is the cornerstone of family living.

—Yvette Lewis, Silver Spring, Md.

When I first began to read the story, I had a different opinion altogether. But at the end of the story, my opinion had really changed. I think Rosa Lee is a very brave woman, she's been through hell. I pray for her, her daughter Patty and all her children. If there's anything I could do for her, I would. I am constantly praying for her to keep the faith that she will overcome and everything will work out with the help of God. The Post would be doing the public a favor if they ran more stories like this.

—Doretha Parks, Northeast Washington.

time for four years. Above all, I realized that most recidivists, men and women, become parents as teenagers, but that we never hear about what happens to their offspring as the parents cycle through repeated incarcerations. I wanted to know what these children face as their parents are sent off to jail.

Among the callers who complained about the series, there were those who said the articles were "racist" because they perpetuate American stereotypes about blacks living on welfare and engaging in criminal enterprises.

In fact, the stories were about human poverty at the underclass level. Tragically, many families caught in these circumstances and having a restricted vision of what their opportunities are make the same bad choices as Rosa Lee did. Many more do not.

People often asked me, "What is the solution?" There isn't one clear answer—the many problems in families like Rosa Lee's are too intertwined. The third-grade reading levels of Washington's criminals, however, do offer one clue: They tell us when the criminals stopped learning.

Intensive work with children in the first six years of elementary school can begin to make a difference. Many of these prisoners went on to junior high school without the academic foundation to do junior high-level work much less be able to function academically at the high school level.

These men and women are not stupid. They know they do not have the academic skills to be employable in the American job market; they see crime as an alternative source of income.

Of course, providing a basic education won't save all of them. But it will give many more of them an avenue into stable employment and conventional American life. After that, you can see the connections just as you can see the connections to a life of crime—and society should see why it needs to make sure they acquire that basic ability. There are, after all, very few high school graduates in prison.

The Rosa Lee Story ...

Richard Cohen

Of Rosa Lee Cunningham's eight children, five have different fathers and all but two have been to jail. Cunningham herself, a 57-year-old grandmother, has been a prostitute, thief, drug pusher and drug addict. As a parent, she has been an imperfect mentor. She never cared if her children did their homework or even if they attended school. But she did instruct them—and some of her 32 grandchildren—in the craft of shoplifting. For three generations, Rosa Lee's family has been feeding the jails.

Cunningham's life was recently chronicled in a Post series, and her story had me in the throes of mood swings: Sometimes I wanted to take Cunningham into my arms and say, "Oh, you poor woman." At other times, I wanted to punish her in some way. To put it mildly, she made me furious.

What's to be done with someone like Cunningham? The woman's close to amoral. Stealing, scams and rip-offs have almost always been the way she made money.

She's been an incompetent mother and only fleetingly a wife. While she exhibits a certain canniness, she conducts her life in a self-destructive manner—drug addiction (she's now on methadone) being only part of it. She rips off the public and in turn she's ripped off by some of her own children. They steal from her, using what money they earn—and what the government provides the family—to buy drugs. Cunningham herself is HIV positive.

There are two ways to see Cunningham. The first is to say that here is a woman who is the sum total and consequence of racism and poverty so severe that it has left her outside the main culture. In other words, she is a victim—and we owe her. The other is to wonder whether what we feel we owe her—the various welfare programs that help sustain her—has not

crippled her and made things worse for society in general. Cunningham, after all, is not some statistical rarity. She's all too typical a member of the criminal and dysfunctional underclass that lives, more or less, on our buck.

Among other things, she lives in publicly subsidized housing (\$120 a

Even after she confessed to crime after crime on page one of The Post, nobody from government dropped by her home to enforce the law.

month in rent) and has dipped in and out of various public assistance programs—welfare, food stamps, Medicaid, emergency grants of one sort or another and a Social Security program for the disabled that now gives her \$437 a month.

Much of her money has gone for illegal drugs for her or her children. Under Medicaid, for instance, she pays 50 cents for 60 pills of either Darvon or Xanax and re-sells them for either \$1 or \$2 to methadone patients who use them for a cheap high. She may be illiterate, but she's something of an entrepreneur.

It's hard to know what to do with Cunningham and, by implication, others like her. But I do know that Cunningham has been a thief—she says she no longer steals—and the money she took is ours. It's our welfare payment and our public housing. It's our Medicaid and food stamps.

The money for these and other programs comes from our tax dollars. We're all getting ripped off and no one is doing anything about it. A week after the Post series concluded I asked the series' author, Leon Dash, if Rosa Lee had been visited by a single federal or local agency. Not one, Dash said, and he speaks to Cunningham on a daily basis.

When Sen. Daniel Patrick Moynihan (D-N.Y.) coined the phrase "defining deviancy down," he could have had Rosa Lee Cunningham in mind. Aside from the shoplifting, for which she was convicted 12 times for a total of five years in jail, the rest of Cunningham's illegal activities elicit a virtual shrug from officialdom—a case of crimes becoming so ordinary they are no longer treated as crimes.

Even after she confessed to crime after crime on page one of The Washington Post, even after her children were photographed using drugs, not a single member of the vast city-federal bureaucracy dropped by her home to enforce the law. Deviancy, of which Rosa Lee is the virtual personification, has not just been defined down, it has been defined out of existence.

Of course, government agencies—from the cops to welfare workers—are hard-pressed—and Rosa Lee is not a violent criminal. But if government cannot enforce its laws, it cannot then enforce morality—become the parent that, in many respects, Cunningham has never been. The practical difference between indifference and permission becomes blurred and government itself becomes discredited.

This is what's happened to welfare and associated programs. You can blame Rosa Lee—and she is hardly blameless—but you can blame government as well. Like Rosa Lee, it has its own morality—and in this case it amounts to none at all.

... Is Anybody Listening?

Richard Harwood

American journalists have rarely enjoyed great public esteem. They have been stereotyped over the years as political hacks, itinerant drunks, sob sisters and propagandists, the kind of people who—like Charles Colson of the Nixon gang in the White House—exhibit a willingness to run over their grandmothers in search of a story.

Their social standing, as a rule, has been as marginal as their economic condition. Washington is one of the few exceptions to that rule. But its journalists have image problems of their own. They are often seen as affluent and arrogant insiders and, like the city's politicians, are regarded with considerable cynicism and distrust.

But also like the politicians, we have been sustained by faith in the idea that what we do matters. In that sense, we are idealists. We believe that in gathering and presenting the news honestly and fairly we perform a public service. We think that democracy can't work without access to the information citizens need to govern themselves. That's what we try to do. That's what presumably gives our vocation moral standing and rationalizes the privileges we enjoy under the First Amendment.

Whether this idea has broad public acceptance has been debatable for years. A lot of evidence has accumulated that in certain circumstances—wars, national security affairs and invasions of privacy, for example—the people want the press controlled by the government. If a constitutional convention were held today, would the First Amendment survive in its present form? There is fear within the news business that it might not. A recent poll taken for Time magazine and CNN reports that 83 percent of adult Americans think the press has acquired "too much influence on government." We are at the top of that list along with "the wealthy" and "large corporations."

Last week we were given a glimpse of a poll suggesting that journalists themselves are not entirely convinced

that their role in American life is vital. Only a third of them "strongly agree" with the statement: "Without journalism the public wouldn't know what to support." A quarter of the journalists disagree with the statement "strongly" or "somewhat." Only 9 percent of the politicians "strongly agree" with the statement, and more than half of them disagree in whole or in part. Surprisingly, the public "strongly agrees" with the statement slightly more than journalism's practitioners: 34 to 32 percent.

These numbers are contained in a report on "Politicians and the News Media," prepared by the Freedom Forum's First Amendment Center at Vanderbilt University. The report is to be released on Oct. 12 at the annual meeting of the Associated Press Managing Editors Association. The report's elaboration on its findings will be made public then.

There are several possible explanations for the lukewarm attitudes of journalists toward the work they do.

It may be that many of us have always been skeptical that we are indispensable to society and the workings of democracy and that our attitudes toward our work have changed very little.

It may be that we feel a sense of displacement as other media erode our audiences. A majority of Americans say they now get most of their news from television. And there are other competitors. In the New York Review of Books, the journalist Thomas Edsall writes:

"For the past two years, Rush Limbaugh III has done more to shape the tone of national political discussion than any member of the House and Senate, than any Cabinet appointee, than the chairmen of both the Democratic and Republican parties or the anchors of the major network news broadcasts."

In the election for president in 1992, it was widely conceded in the press that Bill Clinton's victory owed more to

cable television, including MTV and to talk shows, than to the traditional media.

We may have become disenchanted with the increasing acceptance of "tabloidism" as an acceptable journalistic form. More than 30 cable and network programs fill both daytime and primetime hours with lurid tales from the netherworld, the supermarkets are full of newspapers in the same genre, and the establishment press has begun to find this fare tempting. The media orgy over the O. J. Simpson case resumes this week. Is that what idealistic news people want to be associated with?

Yet another discouraging factor for reporters and editors may be a sense of futility about their work. We provide ample information on which voters can act, but as often as not they ignore us or misinterpret what we are doing. Over the past 18 months, the electorate has been inundated with information about health care reform; instead of action we have gotten legislative gridlock.

The Post has just concluded a stunning sociological report on the interconnections between poverty, crime, ignorance and dependence. Four years of work went into it, and it is certain to become a major work of reference for future studies of the American underclasses. The author is a brilliant black journalist who wrote with great sympathy, compassion and understanding about the black family of Rosa Lee Cunningham.

The series has been highly praised, according to The Post's ombudsman, but has also brought down on The Post charges of racism for perpetuating "the notion that black people are a problem."

The conjunction of these developments—erosion of audience, a sense of ineffectuality etc.—is all in the day's work, of course, but provides no answers or reassurances for people in the news business who have begun to wonder what it is all about.

Sideshow on the Schools

THE HOUSE is scheduled to take up today a conference report on a bill extending the basic forms of federal aid to elementary and secondary education. Congress has been working on the legislation for more than a year; without it, administration officials say they can't fund the federal programs next school year. But Republicans, rather than let it pass, are threatening to offer stogy amendments having to do with either school prayer or what the authors describe as the homosexual "lifestyle."

The threatened amendments have nothing to do with the central purpose of the legislation. The basic goal of the federal programs is to provide compensatory education to the poor. The prayer and homosexuality issues have nonetheless been much debated in both houses. They are among the many reasons this bill, the passage of which should have been relatively routine, has taken so long.

The conference report contains provisions on

both subjects. The proscriptions are moderate. They seek to avoid putting federal officials in the position of policing decisions by local authorities on questions as sensitive as these. You might think that such deference to local wishes would appeal to Republicans. Not so. The amendments would have federal officials making sure that local districts did nothing to interfere with constitutionally permissible prayer nor did anything to suggest that homosexuality represented a "positive lifestyle." Failure to comply would mean loss of federal funds.

The alternative, of course, would be to leave these decisions to local officials and the courts, where they belong. The Republicans keep complaining that they are shut out of serious governance in the House. Then a moment of governance arises, and they posture instead. They ought to back off and let this mostly uninspired but necessary measure pass.

Rosa Lee Cunningham's Story

THE RECENT eight-part series on the life of Rosa Lee Cunningham by Post reporter Leon Dash, based on years of observation and interviews, was an extraordinary journalistic achievement. But it was also a deeply disturbing and lacerating portrayal of a District family—a mother, her children and grandchildren—wasted in an environment in which drugs, AIDS, crime, hustling and time behind bars were the common and acceptable experience. This was, as well, an environment in which public assistance meant to help them—and, no doubt, in some part derived from taxes on working people not much better off than they—was habitually squandered on more drugs. Judging from the thousands of responses received thus far, most readers say the series has left them with a better understanding of the strong ties between marginal education, welfare dependency, chronic joblessness, drug abuse and criminal recidivism, and how—as in Rosa Lee Cunningham's case—those conditions can persist from generation to generation, in part as a consequence of societal failure, in part as a consequence of personal failure. That was what the series set out to accomplish.

A smaller but significant number of readers, however, have been clearly incensed by what they have read. To them, eight consecutive days of front-page stories about intergenerational deterioration in a District family perpetuates racist stereotypes of African Americans and plays into the hands of those who would have government retreat from its social responsibilities. There is always a chance that will happen in this kind of journalistic enterprise. But those seeking to use this series to support their racial prejudices will have to look for comfort somewhere else.

Rosa Lee Cunningham's personal story is not representative of all African Americans. While her grandparents and parents shared the experience of the millions of African Americans who migrated from the South to urban areas several decades ago, most children of migrant families did not end up like Rosa Lee. But then, neither did most of her 11

siblings. Likewise, there are thousands of District women on welfare and Medicaid; most don't lead lives like Rosa Lee's. They don't steal or teach their children and grandchildren to rip-off others. They don't prostitute themselves or their daughters. They don't sell or do drugs, or harbor criminals or teach their children to lie. They haven't gone to jail 12 times, or served years behind bars for theft and drug abuse. They aren't HIV positive. To conclude from this series that Rosa Lee's life is the way the poor live is to seriously misread and mistake what has been written. And yet there is much to learn from the series.

Within the nation's capital, as in inner cities across the nation, there are plenty of Rosa Lee Cunninghams—and people like her daughter, Patty, her sons Bobby (who died), Ducky and Richard, and her grandson, Junior—who are the real stories behind the hard-core drug, crime and social welfare statistics we read or hear about. The next time a discussion gets started on the devastating impact of crack cocaine on families or a community, or the failure of prisons and juvenile facilities to rehabilitate repeat offenders, or school systems that callously push through and then push out students who can't read their own names, or the next time you hear talk about secret sins of child sexual abuse or the power of the family (or the interdependence of the pathological)—think of Rosa Lee Cunningham, her children and grandchildren. But don't stop there.

Think, too, of her two sons Alvin and Eric, who set themselves apart from the family and turned the other way. There are other Alvins and Erics who need to know they have choices; that there is something better than hustling and manipulation of others within their reach, that life, despite it all, can be better. The series showed that Alvin and Eric were helped by the intervention of teachers and mentors who could channel their remarkable and stubborn will to free themselves—and now their own families—from the terrible cycle of dependency and desolation in which the rest of their siblings were caught. In that there is surely a lesson.

Stephen S. Rosenfeld

Why We Need a Democratic Russia

The rhetoric of the Clinton-Yeltsin summit says that two good buddies are cooperating and working on their differences, but the reality is that on the Russian side there is a creeping apprehension that cooperation on American terms may seriously diminish the Yeltsin reform regime.

Russians, pointing to progress on the political and economic fronts at home, believe their country is becoming "normal," a status they treasure. Americans are not entirely sure, but they want it to happen. Russians, picking up the hesitation, think that Americans have not entirely shed their Cold War reflexes of distrust. They want Americans to make ample room for them in their thoughts and in their policies and to recognize Russia's interests as a great power. The result in Moscow of American hesitation, they fear, is to reinforce currents of nationalism on the one hand and isolationism on the other.

These are some of the grievances that outlasted the summit and continue feeding Russian discomfort:

- Washington seeks a global system of restraints on certain high-tech and military exports to states like Iran, an American nemesis. But Washington does not heed the potential of nationalist backlash against Yeltsin for "bowing" to Clinton on arms for Iran. Meanwhile, the United States ignores exports of Islamic fundamentalism and terrorism from Saudi Arabia, an American friend. The reaction could yet lead Russia to set up a separate system of restraints.

- Even as Russia is criticized for leaning on the former Soviet republics in its "near abroad," Americans ignore Mos-

cow's huge subsidies (\$17 billion in a year) in un- and under-paid energy shipments to these otherwise bereft new states. But if Moscow went isolationist and demanded full and prompt payment, the resulting stress would generate "millions" of refugees to Russia.

- Washington insists that the United Nations make ready to subsidize a second-stage Haiti intervention for which Russia would partly pay. But it lets the U.N. duck Russian appeals for a parallel intervention in Georgia's Abkhazia. Russia is criticized for its policy there, even as the United States does far pushier things in—ah, yes—Haiti, where Russia goes along.

- To settle down the war between Armenia and Azerbaijan, Washington pushes Moscow not to deploy its own forces. Instead it supports the summoning of an all-European security group, which happens to have no military experience or capability and no budget.

Yeltsin came to Washington on the heels of a well-publicized Russian intelligence report declaring that the West had no good reason to equate Russia's natural and helpful attempts at "reintegration" among the former Soviet republics with a reassertion of empire. The content and timing of the report had the ring of a warning to Yeltsin to hang in there. The "nationalist" position, although not its fascist aspect, is now in the Russian mainstream.

No matter, Yeltsin had a point about reintegration: These links with the new states, if done right and on a voluntary basis, promise mutual benefit. No one else is ready to police the tremendous disorder in the Transcaucasus and Central Asian regions. No

government in Moscow can ignore the several tens of millions of Russians left marooned by the Soviet breakup: "Once they lived at home," said Yeltsin, "and now they are guests and not always welcomed." Though slowly, Russia has released the Baltics. It nurses Ukraine, a difficult patient.

Still, Russia needs to be more alert to the suspicions generated by the spectacle of Russian troops on the move. The army has units left over in nearly a dozen of the old Soviet republics—a political presence if not a military lever. Russians can be too quick to dismiss historically based skepticism about their intentions as evidence of foreign pressure and incipient encirclement.

I am, nonetheless, persuaded that the Yeltsin circle, as friendly to America as any group you could imagine ruling in Moscow, is dead serious about the political risks of its policy. To its right are the nationalists, an ugly crew, who want to throw Russian weight around. To its left are the isolationists, living in a dream world, who want Russia to pull up the ladder and to retreat from concern for the security and welfare of the other new states.

Engagement with the United States offers a middle path. But to be expanded and sustained, it must be done on terms that allow Yeltsin to maintain his political balance. That doesn't mean Yeltsin must be accommodated whatever—on fencing the old East Europe off from NATO, for instance. It does mean Washington must never undervalue its interest in the consolidation of a normal democratic state in Moscow.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

The U.N.'s Firm Line on Russia

A recent Rowland Evans and Robert Novak column ["Yeltsin's 'Peace-Keeping,'" op-ed, Sept. 15] misstated Ambassador Madeleine Albright's position concerning Russian peacekeeping operations in the Newly Independent States.

The United States recognizes that Russia, like other countries, has legitimate political, economic and security interests in stability along its borders. Unlike European colonial empires, the Soviet Union was geographically contiguous. Thus, the process of dissolution was inevitably complex. But as Ambassador Albright said recently in a statement in Moscow from which the Evans and Novak column quoted, but whose central thrust it ignored:

"[The] past imposes a burden. Russian policies and actions must reflect the fact that it is no longer surround-

ed by vassals, but by independent, sovereign states."

In the wake of the Cold War, the United States and Russia have developed a strong and cooperative relationship in many areas. As far as their actions in the former Soviet empire are concerned, we have taken a respectful, but firm, line.

We have insisted that NATO alone determine its membership; there can be no Russian veto. We successfully encouraged the withdrawal of Russian troops from the Baltics. As the column admits, we have called upon the Russians to honor their agreement to withdraw troops from Moldova within three years. We are pressing for a solution to the dispute between Armenia and Azerbaijan under the auspices not of Russia but of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in

Europe. We have insisted that U.N. observers monitor the actions of Russian peacekeepers in that country. Ambassador Albright has said that Russia "bears the burden of proof" in defending its action in the new republic. And both the president and secretary of state have stressed that the NIS has the right to treat Russia as an equal despite its size, power and proximity. Finally, more than half of the assistance we are providing to the former Soviet Union is allocated to states other than Russia.

Evans and Novak suggest deals where there are no deals, and naivete where sober realism exists.

JAMES P. RUBIN
Director of Communications
U.S. Mission to the United Nations
New York

The Rosa Lee Story ...

Richard Cohen

Of Rosa Lee Cunningham's eight children, five have different fathers and all but two have been to jail. Cunningham herself, a 57-year-old grandmother, has been a prostitute, thief, drug pusher and drug addict. As a parent, she has been an imperfect mentor. She never cared if her children did their homework or even if they attended school. But she did instruct them—and some of her 32 grandchildren—in the craft of shoplifting. For three generations, Rosa Lee's family has been feeding the jails.

Cunningham's life was recently chronicled in a Post series, and her story had me in the throes of mood swings: Sometimes I wanted to take Cunningham into my arms and say, "Oh, you poor woman." At other times, I wanted to punish her in some way. To put it mildly, she made me furious.

What's to be done with someone like Cunningham? The woman's close to amoral. Stealing, scams and rip-offs have almost always been the way she made money.

She's been an incompetent mother and only fleetingly a wife. While she exhibits a certain canniness, she conducts her life in a self-destructive manner—drug addiction (she's now on methadone) being only part of it. She rips off the public and in turn she's ripped off by some of her own children. They steal from her, using what money they earn—and what the government provides the family—to buy drugs. Cunningham herself is HIV positive.

There are two ways to see Cunningham. The first is to say that here is a woman who is the sum total and consequence of racism and poverty so severe that it has left her outside the main culture. In other words, she is a victim—and we owe her. The other is to wonder whether what we feel we owe her—the various welfare programs that help sustain her—has not

crippled her and made things worse for society in general. Cunningham, after all, is not some statistical rarity. She's all too typical a member of the criminal and dysfunctional underclass that lives, more or less, on our buck.

Among other things, she lives in publicly subsidized housing (\$120 a

Even after she confessed to crime after crime on page one of The Post, nobody from government dropped by her home to enforce the law.

month in rent) and has dipped in and out of various public assistance programs—welfare, food stamps, Medicaid, emergency grants of one sort or another and a Social Security program for the disabled that now gives her \$437 a month.

Much of her money has gone for illegal drugs for her or her children. Under Medicaid, for instance, she pays 50 cents for 60 pills of either Darvon or Xanax and re-sells them for either \$1 or \$2 to methadone patients who use them for a cheap high. She may be illiterate, but she's something of an entrepreneur.

It's hard to know what to do with Cunningham and, by implication, others like her. But I do know that Cunningham has been a thief—she says she no longer steals—and the money she took is ours. It's our welfare payment and our public housing. It's our Medicaid and food stamps.

The money for these and other programs comes from our tax dollars. We're all getting ripped off and no one is doing anything about it. A week after the Post series concluded, I asked the series' author, Leon Dash, if Rosa Lee had been visited by a single federal or local agency. Not one, Dash said, and he speaks to Cunningham on a daily basis.

When Sen. Daniel Patrick Moynihan (D-N.Y.) coined the phrase "defining deviancy down," he could have had Rosa Lee Cunningham in mind. Aside from the shoplifting, for which she was convicted 12 times for a total of five years in jail, the rest of Cunningham's illegal activities elicit a virtual shrug from officialdom—a case of crimes becoming so ordinary they are no longer treated as crimes.

Even after she confessed to crime after crime on page one of The Washington Post, even after her children were photographed using drugs, not a single member of the vast city-federal bureaucracy dropped by her home to enforce the law. Deviancy, of which Rosa Lee is the virtual personification, has not just been defined down, it has been defined out of existence.

Of course, government agencies—from the cops to welfare workers—are hard-pressed—and Rosa Lee is not a violent criminal. But if government cannot enforce its laws, it cannot then enforce morality—become the parent that, in many respects, Cunningham has never been. The practical difference between indifference and permission becomes blurred and government itself becomes discredited.

This is what's happened to welfare and associated programs. You can blame Rosa Lee—and she is hardly blameless—but you can blame government as well. Like Rosa Lee, it has its own morality—and in this case it amounts to none at all.

... Is Anybody Listening?

Richard Harwood

American journalists have rarely enjoyed great public esteem. They have been stereotyped over the years as political hacks, itinerant drunks, sob sisters and propagandists, the kind of people who—like Charles Colson of the Nixon gang in the White House—exhibit a willingness to run over their grandmothers in search of a story.

Their social standing, as a rule, has been as marginal as their economic condition. Washington is one of the few exceptions to that rule. But its journalists have image problems of their own. They are often seen as affluent and arrogant insiders and, like the city's politicians, are regarded with considerable cynicism and distrust.

But also like the politicians, we have been sustained by faith in the idea that what we do matters. In that sense, we are idealists. We believe that in gathering and presenting the news honestly and fairly we perform a public service. We think that democracy can't work without access to the information citizens need to govern themselves. That's what we try to do. That's what presumably gives our vocation moral standing and rationalizes the privileges we enjoy under the First Amendment.

Whether this idea has broad public acceptance has been debatable for years. A lot of evidence has accumulated that in certain circumstances—wars, national security affairs and invasions of privacy, for example—the people want the press controlled by the government. If a constitutional convention were held today, would the First Amendment survive in its present form? There is fear within the news business that it might not. A recent poll taken for Time magazine and CNN reports that 83 percent of adult Americans think the press has acquired "too much influence on government." We are at the top of that list along with "the wealthy" and "large corporations."

Last week we were given a glimpse of a poll suggesting that journalists themselves are not entirely convinced

that their role in American life is vital. Only a third of them "strongly agree" with the statement: "Without journalism the public wouldn't know what to support." A quarter of the journalists disagree with the statement "strongly" or "somewhat." Only 9 percent of the politicians "strongly agree" with the statement, and more than half of them disagree in whole or in part. Surprisingly, the public "strongly agrees" with the statement slightly more than journalism's practitioners: 34 to 32 percent.

These numbers are contained in a report on "Politicians and the News Media," prepared by the Freedom Forum's First Amendment Center at Vanderbilt University. The report is to be released on Oct. 12 at the annual meeting of the Associated Press Managing Editors Association. The report's elaboration on its findings will be made public then.

There are several possible explanations for the lukewarm attitudes of journalists toward the work they do.

It may be that many of us have always been skeptical that we are indispensable to society and the workings of democracy and that our attitudes toward our work have changed very little.

It may be that we feel a sense of displacement as other media erode our audiences. A majority of Americans say they now get most of their news from television. And there are other competitors. In the New York Review of Books, the journalist Thomas Edsall writes:

"For the past two years, Rush Limbaugh III has done more to shape the tone of national political discussion than any member of the House and Senate, than any Cabinet appointee, than the chairmen of both the Democratic and Republican parties or the anchors of the major network news broadcasts."

In the election for president in 1992, it was widely conceded in the press that Bill Clinton's victory owed more to

cable television, including MTV and to talk shows, than to the traditional media.

We may have become disenchanted with the increasing acceptance of "tabloidism" as an acceptable journalistic form. More than 30 cable and network programs fill both daytime and prime-time hours with lurid tales from the netherworld, the supermarkets are full of newspapers in the same genre, and the establishment press has begun to find this fare tempting. The media orgy over the O. J. Simpson case resumes this week. Is that what idealistic news people want to be associated with?

Yet another discouraging factor for reporters and editors may be a sense of futility about their work. We provide ample information on which voters can act, but as often as not they ignore us or misinterpret what we are doing. Over the past 18 months, the electorate has been inundated with information about health care reform; instead of action we have gotten legislative gridlock.

The Post has just concluded a stunning sociological report on the intersections between poverty, crime, ignorance and dependence. Four years of work went into it, and it is certain to become a major work of reference for future studies of the American underclasses. The author is a brilliant black journalist who wrote with great sympathy, compassion and understanding about the black family of Rosa Lee Cunningham.

The series has been highly praised, according to The Post's ombudsman, but has also brought down on The Post charges of racism for perpetuating "the notion that black people are a problem."

The conjunction of these developments—erosion of audience, a sense of ineffectuality etc.—is all in the day's work, of course, but provides no answers or reassurances for people in the news business who have begun to wonder what it is all about.

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 4, 1994 THE WASHINGTON POST

Stop the discrimination now

There seems to be a certain amount of disinformation, sowed in no small part by the Clinton administration, about the Supreme Court's decision not to review a controversial affirmative action case. In *Texas vs. Hopwood*, the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals declared unconstitutional an admissions policy at the University of Texas Law School that flagrantly judged white candidates differently from black and Mexican-American candidates. Some are saying that the Supreme Court's unwillingness to hear the case leaves the law in a state of confusion, with such race-based admissions schemes outlawed in Texas, Louisiana and Mississippi, but uncertain in the rest of the country.

Nothing could be farther from the truth. The Fifth Circuit panel might have thrown out the Texas admissions policy for any number of reasons. Instead, the majority opinion was unequivocal in drawing out the essential implication of a string of recent Supreme Court decisions on race. The Supreme Court recently overruled itself and rejected the notion that there can be such a thing as "benign" racial discrimination. Any racial classification, the Supreme Court has held, compels "strict scrutiny" — an assessment of

whether a government policy is "narrowly tailored" to advance a "compelling" government interest. But the promotion of "diversity," when it entails discriminating against people who have done no harm in favor of people who have suffered no injury, is not and can never be a compelling government interest.

If the Supreme Court thought the Fifth Circuit had gone too far, it could have heard the case and said so. As things stand, however, the court's decision to pass on the case sends an unequivocal signal to all law schools and every other state actor besides: Discrimination in pursuit of diversity is unconstitutional.

Admissions committees, even outside the three states of the Fifth Circuit, ignore this at their peril. The Fifth Circuit ruling in *Hopwood* makes it clear why: Any student who is now the subject of this sort of discrimination, the court noted, would have an excellent case for collecting punitive damages from those who knowingly discriminate against her.

Chances are that victims outside the Fifth Circuit will avail themselves of similar arguments. And for good reason. Discrimination is wrong. Admissions departments should know better. Thanks to *Hopwood*, they do. So they should just quit discriminating.

Ducking on Affirmative Action

In a hurtful blow to affirmative action in higher education, the Supreme Court said on Monday that it would not hear an appeal by the state of Texas from a lower court ruling that barred public universities from using race as a factor in selecting students. With this sidestepping, the Court left officials in at least three Southern states who are working to open educational opportunities for minorities in an untenable state of uncertainty. It also sowed confusion nationwide — hardly an uplifting way for the Court to finish its term and head into recess. The Court should instead have seized the opportunity to reject the lower court's flawed pronouncement and reaffirmed its historic commitment to carefully designed affirmative action.

The high court seemed insensitive to the long history of racism at the University of Texas Law School, whose affirmative action program was challenged by rejected white applicants, giving rise to the case. As late as 1971, the law school admitted no black students. The Court also ignored the Clinton Justice Department, which filed a brief warning that the "practical effect" of the lower court's holding "will be to return the most prestigious institutions within state university systems to their former 'white' status."

The refusal to hear the case left standing a ruling by the United States Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit that caused justifiable consternation in the academic world three months ago. An appellate panel invalidated a special admissions program at the Texas law school aimed at increasing the number of black and Mexican-American students. In doing so, the panel took the gratuitous, additional step of declaring the Supreme Court's landmark 1978 affirmative action decision in the so-called Bakke case no longer good law. That case, involving a suit by a rejected white applicant who sought entry to a California state medical school, resulted in a ruling that barred the use of quotas in affirmative action plans but permitted universities to use

race as a factor in choosing among applicants to serve the "compelling interest" of creating a diverse student body.

If Bakke is no longer good law, it is for the Supreme Court to declare. But instead of grabbing the case to reassert Bakke's sound principle, the justices found a way out in the odd posture of the case. In an unusual one-paragraph opinion that was also signed by Justice David Souter, Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg said that the Court was denying review because the case did not actually present a live controversy. The kind of two-track admissions system that inspired the legal challenge is no longer used or defended by Texas, she explained. Like most other colleges and universities, the University of Texas Law School now uses a single applicant pool, in which race is one factor to be considered among others in choosing among the qualified.

Justice Ginsburg's message, a welcome one, was that the Court's refusal to hear the case should not be read as an endorsement of the Fifth Circuit's analysis. But, in fact, there was a remaining live controversy before the Court in the Fifth Circuit's direction to a state's leading law school to completely exclude race as a factor in future admissions. The shame is the Court declined to address it.

Instead, the Court left behind a mess. Its refusal to hear the case has put educational institutions in the three states that make up the Fifth Circuit — Texas, Louisiana and Mississippi — in a terrible spot. They could face punitive damages if they fail to change their practices to conform to an ill-considered ruling that may ultimately be judged an incorrect statement of the law.

Nervous educators elsewhere in the nation can find some comfort at least in Justice Ginsburg's benign explanation. Eventually, this equal rights battle will find its way back to the Supreme Court. Meanwhile, it is premature to give up on affirmative action programs still needed to blot out historic racial bias and promote educational diversity.

THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release

June 19, 1996

REMARKS BY THE PRESIDENT
COMMEMORATING THE 35TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE PEACE CORPS

The Rose Garden

5:14 P.M. EDT

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you. Mandy, where are your family? Stand up there. Let's give them a hand. (Applause.) Thank you very much. You did a good job there. Thank you very much.

To Sargent and Eunice Shriver, thank you so much for the Peace Corps, for the Special Olympics, for everything you have done for America and for the world. Senator Wofford, thank you for the Peace Corps and for National Service and for everything that happened in between. Thank you, Mark Gearan, for proving that there is life after the White House. (Laughter.) To all the former volunteers who are here, to the distinguished members of Congress, to Ambassador Spio-Garbrah, thank you, sir, we're honored by your presence and by our friendship with your country.

The Peace Corps, for 35 years, has shown America at its best. In the summer of 1961, as has been said, there were 80 young Americans standing where these Americans stand today. Wearing their Sunday best, they waited excitedly to meet President Kennedy, and I understand they were chatting occasionally among themselves in Twi, the language they would have to use more frequently as they moved along. (Laughter.)

More than half of them were preparing to leave for Ghana, about to launch one of the greatest experiments in service to humanity in all human history. They would live as the people of Ghana lived and be active as a part of the communities they served. They were trained to teach, but they were going to learn and to bridge the gaps of development and custom with sturdy bonds of friendship and compassion.

On that day, President Kennedy said, "The future of the Peace Corps really rests with you. If you do well, then the Peace Corps will be developed, and more and more Americans will go abroad, and we will find a greater and greater response to serving our country." The men and women of "Ghana I" did the President, the Peace Corps, and America proud. I am very grateful to all of you and I'm glad to have you back in the Rose Garden today, 35 years later. (Applause.)

When President Kennedy created the Peace Corps 35 years ago with the extraordinary support of Sargent Shriver, Harris Wofford, Ted Sorenson and many others, he tapped an overflowing reservoir of energy and idealism. Thousands of young people answered the call to serve at the vanguard of the new frontier. Among the first was the Vice President's beloved sister, Nancy Gore Hunger. They gave of themselves to help others around the world to become the best they could be and to bring to them the message by the example of their lives that our nation is a great country standing for great ideals, a country that cares about human progress everywhere in the world.

The Peace Corps symbolized everything that inspired my generation to service. It was based on a simple yet powerful idea:

MORE

That none of us alone will ever be as strong as we can all be if we'll all work together. None of us can reach our fullest potential while others are left behind. Community counts, and every member of our community matters at home and on this increasingly small planet we share.

Since 1961, as Mark said, more than 140,000 Americans have served as Peace Corps volunteers. Today the Peace Corps' towering task is just as vital as ever. I am very grateful for those who serve today. And their mission is just as important today as it was 35 years ago. Even as we meet, the Peace Corps is hard at work in countries few could have imagined going to back in 1961. Indeed, the Peace Corps is hard at work today in countries that did not exist in 1961.

It has traced the rising tide of freedom to meet new needs around the globe from Central America to Central Europe to Central Asia, sharing the skills of private enterprise in nations struggling to build a market economy: empowering women, protecting the environment, and always showing others the path to help themselves. I'm proud to say that in April, after an absence of nearly five years, Peace Corps volunteers returned to Haiti to help the Haitian people make the most of their hard-won freedom. Just a couple of days ago, the First Lady and I had the honor to welcome to the White House for a brief visit former President Aristide and his wife. And he talked in glowing terms about the citizenship of the Americans who have come to help Haiti, from those who came in uniform, including 200 Haitian-Americans who could speak Creole to the people of Haiti, to the Peace Corps volunteers who labor there today.

With the agreement that the Vice President signed last December, as has already been said, our Peace Corps volunteers will go this year to serve in South Africa for the first time. They must be so excited. So many others have gone before them, but they can prove -- they can prove -- that South Africa can make its dreams and its promise real.

I'm also proud to announce the establishment of a Crisis Corps within the Peace Corps to help the relief community to cope with international emergencies. It will draw on the Peace Corps' recent successful experience in helping people affected by disasters, such as rebuilding homes in Antigua that were destroyed by Hurricane Luis and helping Rwandan refugees to grow their own food.

The dedicated service of Peace Corps volunteers does not end when their two-year tour is over. Today returned Peace Corps volunteers, as has been said, are making a difference in our administration, in the Cabinet, like Secretary Shalala, or those on Capitol Hill who have already been introduced. And I want to thank them all, Republicans and Democrats alike. I wish we had them up here explaining what the role of their service in the Peace Corps was in animating their future careers in public service. There are many leaders in journalism, in business, in education, including many who are here today. Thousands of volunteers just serve in their communities today or offer their time to teach schoolchildren about the world in which they live, in which they, the volunteers, were fortunate enough to explore at an earlier time in their lives.

Their spirit of service is the spirit of America. In that sense, it's more than 35 years old; it's as old as our country itself. And I can't help but note that not all our 140,000 volunteers have been so young. They just had to be young at heart, young in spirit, young in imagination. And thank you, sir, for making me feel that I might have a future in the Peace Corps. (Laughter.) I'm glad to see you. Thank you. (Applause.)

We all remember the legendary mother of former President Carter and her wonderful stories of how the Peace Corps changed her life. The Peace Corps is for all Americans who wish to serve.

When I became President we challenged America to rekindle that spirit of service. I thank Senator Wofford for working to support the creation of AmeriCorps in 1993, to give young people a chance to serve their country here at home, and for doing more by running the Corporation for National Service today. Americans now, in addition to the 140,000 of you who have worked in the Peace Corps, we've had 40,000 young Americans lifting their own lives by giving comfort and support to dealing with problems here in the United States.

Last month when I spoke at Penn State, I asked our people to further spread the ethic of service throughout our nation. I asked America's institutions of higher education to use more of their work/study money to promote community service here at home. And I challenge every community to get our students to answer the call of service. With our help, a year from now we want service scholars to be honored at every high school graduation in America. We have to take the spirit of the Peace Corps into the lives of every young person in this country. Every citizen needs to know that we give and we get; that we grow by giving and serving.

So let us always remember that the truest measure of the Peace Corps' greatness has been more than its impact on development. The real gift of the Peace Corps is the gift of the human heart, pulsing with the spirit of civic responsibility that is the core of America's character. It is forever an antidote to cynicism, a living challenge to intolerance, an enduring promise that the future can be better and that people can live richer lives if we have the faith and strength and compassion and good sense to work together.

Thank you all for making that live in our country. And God bless you. (Applause.)

END

5:24 P.M. EDT

THE WHITE HOUSE
Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release

June 18, 1996

June 18, 1996

MEMORANDUM FOR THE SECRETARY OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

SUBJECT: Child Support Initiative

I hereby direct you to implement the plan I am announcing today to strengthen the child support system and promote parental responsibility.

I direct you to exercise your legal authority to take the following steps to implement that plan:

- 1) issue proposed regulations relating to paternity establishment that:
 - (a) clarify the definition, under the Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) program, of "cooperation" with paternity establishment by requiring that a mother provide both the name of the father and other identifying information deemed appropriate by the State (except when there is good cause, such as being in danger of domestic violence, for not cooperating);
 - (b) require all applicants for assistance under the AFDC program to cooperate with paternity establishment efforts prior to the receipt of assistance; and
 - (c) require that applicants for assistance under the AFDC program be referred to the State child support agency within 2 days of application, so that the agency can initiate a legal paternity action; and
- 2) implement a pilot program matching new-hire data collected by participating States with Federal Parent Locator Service data in order to better track parents owing child support obligations who have taken a job in another State.

The plan I have outlined will help strengthen child support operations by toughening the paternity establishment requirements for applicants for welfare and by enabling States to locate, and withhold wages from, child support obligors who have taken a job in another State. Its prompt implementation is integral to achieving our goal of promoting the American value of parental responsibility.

WILLIAM J. CLINTON

#

THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release

June 18, 1996

PRESIDENT CLINTON DECLARES MAJOR DISASTER IN PENNSYLVANIA

President Clinton today declared a major disaster exists in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and ordered Federal aid to supplement state and local recovery efforts in the area struck by flooding on June 12, 1996.

The President's action makes Federal funding available to affected individuals in Bucks County.

Assistance can include disaster housing, grants, low-cost loans to cover uninsured property losses, and other programs to help individuals and business owners recover from the effects of the disaster. Federal funding is also available on a cost-share basis for hazard mitigation measures.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency is continuing to conduct damage surveys in other areas and additional counties may be added after the assessments are completed.

-30-30-30-

THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release

June 18, 1996

June 18, 1996

MEMORANDUM FOR THE SECRETARY OF LABOR

SUBJECT: Child Support Initiative

I hereby direct you to assist in the implementation of the plan I am announcing today to strengthen the child support system and promote parental responsibility.

I direct you to exercise your legal authority in a manner that will assist the implementation of the plan by encouraging those State employment security agencies that collect new-hire information for use in child support enforcement to report such information to the Department of Health and Human Service's pilot program for matching new-hire data with Federal Parent Locator Service data in order to better track parents owing child support who have taken a job in another State.

The plan I have outlined will help strengthen child support operations by toughening the paternity establishment requirements for applicants for welfare and by enabling States to locate, and withhold wages from, child support obligors who have taken a job in another State. Its prompt implementation is integral to achieving our goal of promoting the American value of parental responsibility.

WILLIAM J. CLINTON

#

THE WHITE HOUSE
Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release

June 18, 1996

STATEMENT BY THE PRESIDENT

Russian Election Results

I spoke with President Yeltsin this morning and conveyed through him to the Russian people my warm congratulations on the election, which is a success for Russia as a whole.

On Sunday, more than 70 million Russian citizens -- representing about 70% of the eligible voters -- voted in the first round of the presidential election that will determine who will lead the Russian Federation for the next four years. They were able to choose among ten candidates representing a wide range of political views in a contested election. Russian and international observers have reported nothing thus far to indicate any significant irregularities in the voting process.

This is an important milestone in Russia's history as a democracy and a welcome sign of just how far that country has come in a few short years. The run-off round will allow the Russian people to complete the process of electing their president.

A critical element of our post-Cold War relationship with Russia is its continuing development as a democracy. The United States will remain steady in its policy of active engagement with Russia to support political and economic reform and Russia's integration with the West.

#

THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release

June 18, 1996

REMARKS BY SAMUEL R. BERGER
DEPUTY ASSISTANT TO THE PRESIDENT FOR NATIONAL SECURITY AFFAIRS
THE WILSON CENTER
WASHINGTON, D.C.
JUNE 18, 1996

It is a pleasure to be at the Wilson Center and to see many familiar faces. I want to thank Sam Wells for that warm introduction.

I want to speak to you today about the challenges and the opportunities that America faces in the world at this extraordinary moment -- half way between the end of the Cold War and the dawn of a new century.

It is a moment of historic opportunity. Not too many years ago, Americans were gripped by a TV movie called "The Day After," which portrayed in graphic and horrifying detail what actually would happen in the event of a nuclear war. The genuine possibility of a massive nuclear exchange was vivid and real and cast a giant shadow over most of the last 50 years.

Today, the grinding burden of the Cold War has been lifted. Our nation is at peace. Our economy is strong. The tide of democracy and free markets is rising around the world. We have experienced the emergence of a global economy and a cultural and intellectual global village. These developments enrich our lives in countless ways every day.

In the last few months, I have been in Pakistan, Azerbaijan, Korea, Japan and Moscow. In each of these countries, I turned on CNN and was instantly plugged in to events around the world. Remember that only 52 years ago, when Franklin Roosevelt gave the order to launch 1 million men across the English Channel on D-Day, he didn't find out the results for several days. I use CNN only as a visible symbol of the revolutionary advances of the information age, which has so increased the goods, services and knowledge that are available to us -- and made Americans the most fortunate inhabitants of the global village.

But this promising new era is by no means risk-free.

- Democracy may be on the march, but forward progress is not assured -- and the gains are not irreversible. We know this is true in Russia and many of the other states of the former Soviet Union. It is also the case in our own hemisphere. Less than two months ago, the democratic government of Paraguay narrowly avoided a coup -- and elsewhere in Latin America, the power of the drug cartels throws an ominous cloud over some national governments.
- Global communism and fascism have exited stage left and stage right. But the forces of intolerance and hatred, ethnic strife and regional conflict persist in brutal and dangerous forms, from Northern Ireland to the Balkans from the Middle East to parts of Africa.
- The threat of nuclear annihilation has receded, but the danger that weapons of mass destruction -- biological, chemical and nuclear -- will spread into unreliable hands has grown as the technology becomes more widely accessible...and can in some cases be called up be on the Internet.
- As the President has noted, the very openness and freedom of movement that enriches our lives also make us more vulnerable to the forces of destruction -- terrorism, drug cartels and international criminal organizations. We have seen this in the bombing of the World Trade Center...in the sarin gas attacks in the Tokyo subways...and the gunning down of journalists, police and government officials by drug lords in many countries.

Because this new era of possibility carries with it so many real threats as well as new opportunities, the United States cannot afford to sit on the sidelines. Instead, American engagement in the world today is more important than ever. We cannot -- and should not -- go it alone or take full responsibility for combating the new dangers of our age. But at the same time, we know that without American leadership, more often than not, the job will not get done. One of the most striking facts of the last few years is the extent to which -- after the end of the East-West rivalry -- others look to us...whether it is Arabs and Israelis in the Middle East...Muslims, Serbs and Croats in the Balkans...or even, grudgingly, the nations of Europe and Asia as they seek to deal with the same threats that face us.

There is only one superpower now on earth: America. That leads to one inescapable fact: America must lead in the world if we are to maintain our security and increase our prosperity. We cannot hunker down if we want our children to live safely and thrive.

From the beginning of his Administration, President Clinton has recognized America's responsibility to lead in today's world. Let me focus on four dimensions of this leadership for the future that have been at the center of our attention over the past three and a half years. They are the cornerstones of our efforts to build peace and prosperity for America in this promising but uncertain era.

The first dimension is our nation's strength: military and economic.

America's military today is undergoing its most fundamental transformation in half a century. Our armed forces are simultaneously downsizing and upgrading. A military that was designed to stop

a massive invasion across Central Europe today is prepared to deal not only with traditional war-fighting contingencies -- in the Persian Gulf or the Korea peninsula for example -- but has the flexibility and training to deal with a range of new missions: restoring democracy in Haiti without firing a shot...keeping the peace in Bosnia...or delivering nearly 15,000 tons of food, medicine, and supplies to Rwanda's refugees. When you consider that only a few years after Vietnam, an Army chief of staff described a "hollow army"...this reshaping of capability and doctrine has been an extraordinary achievement. Today, our armed forces are smaller than they were at the height of the Cold War, but they are also better, more flexible and more sophisticated than at any time in our nation's history.

Increasingly, our nation's international position rests on the strength of our economy. And that, in turn, depends on our competitiveness in the global economy. Over the past three years, the President has spearheaded the most dynamic program of innovation in international trade in American history. He has expanded our American economy by expanding the global economy...completing the Uruguay Round...passing NAFTA...securing the APEC agreement for free trade in the Asia Pacific region...and forging more than one hundred bilateral trade pacts as well. Today, exports are the fastest growing part of the U.S. economy. We are, once again, the largest exporter in the world and the most competitive.

The second dimension of American leadership is effectively to use our capacity to be a peacemaker. We cannot be everywhere and do everything. But where our interests and values are at stake, the United States must take risks for peace.

We see just how much we can achieve when we look at the remarkable progress of the last three years in the Middle East. Israelis, Palestinians and Jordanians who were once sworn enemies together for a better future for the region. The agreements that have been forged between Arabs and Israelis have changed the landscape of the region profoundly.

We stand ready to help this work go forward. Let me emphasize: The United States remains committed to goal of a comprehensive and lasting peace. That's why we will work with Israel and the Palestinians to help them implement their agreements and resolve the issues that remain. That's why we will seek to strengthen relations between Israel and the Arab world.

In each of these efforts, the United States will work closely with the new Israeli government of Prime Minister-elect Netanyahu, and we hope to build strong and productive relationship with him as we did with his predecessors. We welcome the Prime Minister's commitment to continuing the peace process. And we urge our Arab friends not to prejudge the new government in Israel but to focus on preserving the achievements of the last three years and the momentum to go forward to new ones.

The United States is using its unique capacity as peacemaker to try to establish a lasting settlement in Bosnia. We have undertaken this task because continued war in the Balkans threatened both our interests and values. The fire that burned in the heart of Europe since 1991 would have spread and engulfed our friends and allies -- and drawn us into a wider conflict on this

continent for the third time in a century. And the unspeakable brutality we all witnessed was an affront to our humanity.

American leadership was essential to put out the fire and stop the slaughter. We strengthened NATO's response to the unrelenting Serb assaults on Sarajevo and other civilian areas. More effective use of that power enabled our diplomats to make vital breakthroughs -- and produce the Dayton Peace Agreement.

Six months later, the most dramatic fact in Bosnia is that the guns are silent. The war has ended. That change -- from war to peace -- is the single most important reality for the people of Bosnia. It means that killing fields are once again playgrounds. That cafes and marketplaces are full of life, not death. That running an errand doesn't mean running a death race against snipers and shells. That women are no longer prey to systematic campaigns of rape and terror. That the water and lights are on...and there is shelter from the wind and the cold. Peace means all these very basic things. As we work to make sure peace endures, we must not lose sight of its reality.

Now, we must help the people of Bosnia build an enduring peace they so desperately want. The hard work of civilian reconstruction has begun. It must move faster. We must continue to assist refugees to return...continue the work of the war crimes tribunal...help the Bosnians build the institutions of a national government. That is why it is important to hold the elections mandated by the Dayton Agreement on time. Bosnia they will enable to take another step forward toward creating the institutions and stability that will keep the peace and help give that nation future of hope.

The Middle East and Bosnia are just two of the regions where America is engaged in work for peace. We are at a pivot point in history when real change is possible -- and consistent with our interests and our resources, we must seize this moment and make the most of it: in Northern Ireland...on the Korean peninsula...in Haiti...and other places around the world. We must not overreach. We must work with others. But at this moment in history -- when turmoil, radicalism and instability are faces of future's threats -- America is uniquely positioned to be a powerful force for peace.

The third imperative of American leadership in the post-Cold War era is to continue to reduce the nuclear threat. In recent years, we have taken a giant step back from the nuclear precipice. Already, under START I, some 9,000 nuclear weapons are being removed from the arsenals of Russia and the United States. It is extraordinary to see a team of Russians sawing up a Backfire bomber or dismantling missile silos and turning those sites into wheat fields. With reductions agreed upon in Start II -- which we hope the Duma will soon ratify -- the cuts will go even deeper: U.S. and Russian arsenals will be reduced by two-thirds from their Cold War levels.

Our efforts to diminish the nuclear threat go further. Because of President Clinton's agreement with President Yeltsin, Russian missiles no longer target American cities. Through determined diplomacy, we helped persuade the Belarus, Kazakstan and Ukraine to give up the nuclear weapons left on their soil when the Soviet Union crumbled -- and as some of you may know, the last nuclear warheads in Ukraine were shipped back to Russia for dismantling just two weeks ago.

But even as we destroy the weapons of the Cold War, we must intensify our efforts to prevent spread of weapons of tomorrow. That is why we worked hard to secure the unconditional and indefinite extension of the Non-Proliferation Treaty. We achieved an agreement with North Korea to freeze and dismantle their nuclear program -- and that agreement is being complied with under international supervision. In the weeks ahead, we hope to sign a Comprehensive Test Ban treaty, a goal of American leaders since Dwight Eisenhower. We are working with the Russians and Europeans to make it harder to smuggling nuclear material...to keep Iran from acquiring the materials it needs to build a bomb...and to curtail dangerous arms races like the one in Southern Asia. This is the most ambitious arms-control and non-proliferation agenda ever set by an American Administration. Because this is the best chance to reduce the nuclear threat that we are ever likely to see -- and we are determined to seize it.

Finally, there is one more great challenge for American leadership in this new era: to construct new institutions and new arrangements that reinforce the growth of democracy and civil society where the iron fist of totalitarianism crushed freedom for decades. We see this imperative nowhere more clearly than in Russia, which is in the midst of a great decision.

All who believe in democracy saw in the voting on Sunday a stirring event. Seventy million Russians -- nearly 70% of eligible voters -- went to the polls to exercise their newly won right to elect their country's president. They did so in a way that observers are calling free and fair. While we await the results of the runoff, democracy already has scored a victory.

The choice of Russia's leadership if is for the Russian people to decide; it is not for us to tell them how to vote. As Sunday's results show, they have their own strong views on the subject -- which is as it should be.

But we still have an enormous stake in the outcome. We have made clear our unwavering support for reform and reformers. Nothing that has happened in the last week has changed that.

We support reform because a democratic, market-oriented Russia is more likely to pursue goals that are compatible with our own...it is more likely to be a reliable partner...and to respect the independence and live in peace with its neighbors...including those that were once part of the Soviet Union. A Russia that chooses to stay on the course of reform is one that will be more likely to continue to reduce the nuclear threat...to work with us to promote peace around the world...and create new markets for our products and jobs for American workers.

We don't have a vote in the Russian election. And we don't have a crystal ball. But several points are clear for the United States: First, we must support not an individual but a direction -- the direction of reform, democracy and free markets. We must, in Central and Eastern Europe, continue to build new bridges to the West -- through NATO expansion, Partnership for Peace and EU membership. And we must do that in a way that strengthens the relationship between NATO and Russia. We must proceed with steadiness and judgment, but the fact is, we have made good progress.

As we look over the map, there is obviously a great deal that I have not had time to discuss the tremendous growth in Asia and the extraordinarily important relationships with China and Japan...the positive developments in Latin America and parts of Africa. I'll be happy to answer your questions on these and other issues in a moment.

But let me leave you first with a final thought. While the need for American leadership has never been greater, our willingness to lead is very much in debate. The threat today is not so much from traditional isolationism, although that still exists on the left and the right in our society. Today, the more dangerous threat to American engagement are those who "talk the talk" of internationalism but who "walk the walk" of isolationism.

These are the people who argue that we must lead -- but say we must not spend. Already, America's spending on international affairs has plummeted 40% in just a decade. As a result, America, the world's richest nation, now ranks last among industrial nations when it comes to the percentage of GNP devoted to development aid.

These are the people who say we must be engaged in the world -- but never want us to do so where our engagement is needed. They say yes in the abstract. But then they say no to Bosnia...no to Haiti....and no to Russia.

America cannot lead in the abstract. This new era demands concrete engagement -- if we want to defeat the new threats we face....and if we want to turn the opportunities of today into tangible benefits for the American people. We cannot do so on the cheap...or simply through rhetoric...or by empty posturing. But if we grapple with the challenges before us honestly and directly...if we devote the resources needed to matter...if we are prepared to take risks for peace...then we can make the difference for America's security...America's prosperity...and America's future.

###

THE WHITE HOUSE
Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release

June 17, 1996

STATEMENT BY THE PRESIDENT

I am pleased to announce the appointment of former U.S. Representative Dr. Howard Wolpe as Special Envoy of the President and Secretary of State for Burundi Peace Negotiations. He will work closely with Ambassador Richard Bogosian who continues to serve as the Rwanda/Burundi Special Coordinator working from Washington to coordinate implementation of overall policy toward these two countries.

Dr. Wolpe will lend U.S. influence and support to efforts aimed at bringing an end to the crisis in Burundi, which has claimed more than 100,000 lives in the last two-and-a-half years. Dr. Wolpe brings to this mission a wealth of experience gained during 14 years as a member of Congress from Michigan, including 10 years as Chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Africa, and recently as a Visiting Fellow at the Brookings Institution. Dr. Wolpe received his Ph.D. from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in Political Science focusing on Africa.

#

THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release

June 17, 1996

STATEMENT BY THE PRESS SECRETARY

President Clinton Meets with President Clerides of Cyprus

President Clinton met today with the President of Cyprus, Glafcos Clerides. The two leaders affirmed the excellent relations that exist between the United States and the Republic of Cyprus. They reviewed the situation on the island and discussed how the United States could help promote prospects for a lasting and peaceful solution. President Clinton reaffirmed his personal commitment to this goal and informed President Clerides that the United States intends to intensify its efforts, through further consultations, to narrow the differences between the two communities on Cyprus, leading to a comprehensive settlement.

To this end, he will send his Special Emissary, Richard Beattie, to the region in July to begin discussions on the key issues involved in a comprehensive settlement, with special emphasis on security. President Clerides said he welcomed this initiative and looked forward to receiving Mr. Beattie during his upcoming visit.

#

THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release

June 17, 1996

MEDIA ADVISORY

Samuel R. Berger, Deputy Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs, will deliver On-the-Record remarks on the security challenges facing America over the last four years and as the millennium approaches. Mr. Berger will speak on **Tuesday, June 18, 1996, at noon** before the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars in the Center's Library located on the third floor of the Smithsonian "Castle" Building, 1000 Jefferson Drive, S.W., Washington, D.C. **This event is open to the press.**

Media planning to cover this event should contact Christina Carhart, Wilson Center Office of External Affairs, 202-357-4335 or Steven Naplan, National Security Council Communications Office, 202-456-9394.

#

THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release

June 17, 1996

STATEMENT BY THE PRESS SECRETARY

President Hosni Mubarak of Egypt has accepted the President's invitation to meet in Washington on July 30th for an official working visit. The two leaders will discuss regional issues, including the Middle East peace process, as well as bilateral and other matters of mutual interest.

#

THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release

Saturday, June 15, 1996

STATEMENT BY THE PRESIDENT

I am deeply saddened by the death of Ella Fitzgerald. The jazz world and the nation have suffered a tremendous loss in the passing of someone with so much talent, grace, and class. Ella's phenomenal voice and wonderful phrasing will remain close to the hearts of American's for generations to come. Hillary and I extend our deepest condolences to her family.

#

THE WHITE HOUSE
Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release

June 14, 1996

FATHER'S DAY, 1996

BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
A PROCLAMATION

America owes a debt of gratitude to the fathers that help our Nation's children grow up safe and happy. Providing a wellspring of love for their families to draw upon, these men strengthen our communities and enable their daughters and sons to master life's lessons with confidence. They share with us their experiences and energies, creating the strong foundation on which our children build their lives. A father's arm is there to protect and steer -- whether cradling a newborn baby, steadying the rider of a first two-wheeler, or walking his child down the aisle.

Fatherhood provides one of life's most profound joys and one of its most solemn responsibilities. Everyone who has been blessed by a father's love knows the abiding respect it inspires and the self-esteem that can grow from a dad's affectionate guidance. We must do all we can to encourage fathers as they strive to provide the fundamental emotional and economic support that helps ensure their families' well-being. Programs like the Fatherhood Initiative, the Responsible Fatherhood Project, and Parent's Fair Share work to support American fathers, emphasize their role as mentors and providers, and advocate their involvement in their children's health and education.

On this Father's Day and throughout the year, let us thank fathers for their sacrifices and struggles and celebrate the special care they give their loved ones every day. With grateful words and actions, we honor all those who have embraced fatherhood's unique rewards.

NOW THEREFORE, I, WILLIAM J. CLINTON, President of the United States of America, in accordance with a joint resolution of the Congress approved April 24, 1972 (36 U.S.C. 142a), do hereby proclaim Sunday, June 16, 1996, as Father's Day. I invite the States, communities, and all the citizens of the United States to observe this day with appropriate ceremonies and activities that demonstrate our deep appreciation and affection for our fathers.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand this thirteenth day of June, in the year of our Lord nineteen hundred and ninety-six, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and twentieth.

WILLIAM J. CLINTON

#

THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release

June 14, 1996

**PRESIDENT CLINTON NAMES A. VERNON WEAVER AS
U. S. REPRESENTATIVE TO THE EUROPEAN UNION**

President Clinton today announced his intention to nominate A. Vernon Weaver of Little Rock, Arkansas to become the U.S. Representative to the European Union with the rank and status of Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary.

During the past 15 years, Mr. Weaver has served as Assistant to the Chairman of the Board of Stephens Group and Stephens Inc., an investment banking firm of Little Rock, Arkansas. During that time, Mr. Weaver also acted as President of Stephens Overseas Services, supervising international operations in Europe and the Pacific Rim. In 1984, at the invitation of the British Delegation of the European Economic Community, Mr. Weaver served as a key advisor to the delegation. In the Carter Administration Mr. Weaver served as Administrator of the U.S. Small Business Administration from 1977-1981. As Administrator, Mr. Weaver initiated the Certified Bank Program, which transferred administration of government-guaranteed small business loans from the Small Business Administration to certified private banks. From 1964-1976 Mr. Weaver was President and Chief Executive Officer of Union Life Insurance Company of Little Rock, Arkansas. Mr. Weaver presently serves as a Member of the Board of Visitors to the U.S. Naval Academy.

Mr. Weaver was born in Miami, Florida on April 16, 1922. He earned a B.S. in Electrical Engineering from the U.S. Naval Academy. He served as an officer in the U.S. Navy from 1946-1953. He is married to Joyce McCoy Weaver and has three daughters, Valerie McNeese, Vanessa Weaver, and Daphne Weaver.

-30-30-30-

THE WHITE HOUSE
Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release

June 14, 1996

EXECUTIVE ORDER

- - - - -

AMENDMENT TO EXECUTIVE ORDER NO. 12963 ENTITLED
PRESIDENTIAL ADVISORY COUNCIL ON HIV/AIDS

By the authority vested in me as President by the Constitution and the laws of the United States of America, and in order to increase the membership of the Presidential Advisory Council on HIV/AIDS, it is hereby ordered that Executive Order No. 12963 is amended by deleting the number "30" in the second sentence of section 1(a) of that order and inserting the number "35" in lieu thereof.

WILLIAM J. CLINTON

THE WHITE HOUSE,
June 14, 1996.

#

THE WHITE HOUSE
Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release

June 14, 1996

**PRESIDENT CLINTON NAMES VALERIE J. BRADLEY CHAIR AND MEMBER OF
THE PRESIDENT'S COMMITTEE ON MENTAL RETARDATION**

The President today announced his intent to appoint Valerie J. Bradley as chair and member of the President's Committee on Mental Retardation.

Valerie J. Bradley of Cambridge, Massachusetts is president of the Human Services Research Institute in Cambridge, a non-profit organization that for 20 years has carried out major policy analyses and research studies in the areas of mental retardation, developmental disabilities and mental health. Previously, Ms. Bradley served as a research analyst in the California Legislature. Ms. Bradley has served on the board of the American Association on Mental Retardation (AAMR) and was also president of AAMR's Legal Process Division. She has written widely in the area of program reform for people with mental retardation and has a particular interest in the areas of family support and quality assurance. Ms. Bradley earned a B.A. from Occidental College in 1965 and an M.A. from Rutgers University in 1966.

The President's Committee on Mental Retardation provides such advice and assistance in the area of mental retardation as the President or Secretary of Health and Human Services may request, and makes annual reports to the President concerning mental retardation.

-30-30-30-

THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release

-June 14, 1996

STATEMENT BY THE PRESS SECRETARY

Visit of the Presidents of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania

President Clinton has invited President of Estonia Lennart Meri, President of Latvia Guntis Ulmanis and President of Lithuania Algirdas Brazauskas to visit him in Washington on June 25. The three Presidents have accepted the invitation. The four leaders will discuss the growing political, economic and security ties between the United States and the Baltic states and the integration of these countries into the community of Western market democracies.

#

THE WHITE HOUSE
Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release

June 14, 1996

As Prepared for Delivery

ANTHONY LAKE
ASSISTANT TO THE PRESIDENT FOR
NATIONAL SECURITY AFFAIRS
GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY
JUNE 14, 1996

Bosnia After Dayton

Six months ago today in Paris, the leaders of Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia and Serbia made a fateful decision: to turn Bosnia from the horror of war to the promise of peace.

Many of you in this room closely followed the Dayton negotiations that produced the peace accord. You know that, literally until the last minute, the outcome was in doubt -- indeed, our negotiators had their bags packed and, in the early morning hours, were ready to head home without an agreement. But the Balkan leaders decided, in the end, to make peace. They did so because, in the cold light of that Dayton dawn, the alternative simply was too terrible to pursue: renewed war, with all the horrors that came with it -- skeletal prisoners... mass graves... endless lines of refugees... economic chaos... international isolation... a wasted future.

Understanding the alternatives makes it easier to take difficult steps -- and since Dayton, that is what has kept the parties moving forward along the path to a lasting peace. Slowly... grudgingly... sometimes two steps forward, one step back. But moving forward. For three and a half years, the people of Bosnia lived the day-in, day-out destruction of war. These past six months, they have begun to enjoy the quiet blessings of peace. The more they understand the choice between war and peace... the starker it seems... the more likely peace will endure.

With that dynamic in mind, I'd like to discuss with you today what we've accomplished since Dayton, what we haven't accomplished, and the hard work that lies ahead. I don't want to play down the disappointments we've encountered so far, or the difficulties we still have to face. Freedom of movement, expression and association are not nearly as free as they should be. Indicted war criminals, most notably Radovan Karadzic and General Mladic, have not been turned over to the War Crimes Tribunal or fully withdrawn from authority. Fewer refugees have returned home than we would like. Economic activity is just resuming.

But I would ask everyone here first to step back for just a moment and look at the central facts. One year ago, war raged in Bosnia -- the worst war in Europe since World War II. Today, there is peace. A very fragile, imperfect peace, to be sure. But peace. That change -- from war to peace -- is the single most important fact of life for the people of Bosnia. It means that killing fields are once again playgrounds. That cafes and marketplaces are full of life, not death. That running an errand doesn't mean running a death race against snipers and shells. That women are no longer prey to systematic campaigns of rape and terror. That the water and lights are on... and there is shelter from the wind and the cold. Peace means all these very basic things. As we work to make sure peace endures, we must not lose sight of its reality.

Thus far, the peace has held because IFOR, the NATO Implementation Force, has done its carefully defined job -- and done it very well. In the days after Dayton, when President Clinton committed 20,000 American troops to lead a 60,000 strong IFOR force, the skeptics predicted gloom and doom. They warned of terrorism... renewed fighting... American casualties... and embarrassing retreat.

The reality has been the opposite. IFOR has maintained the cease-fire and compelled the parties to pull back their forces and weapons from a 3-mile wide separation zone -- without significant incident. Nearly all heavy weapons have been placed under IFOR supervision and many will be destroyed as part of the arms control agreement to be signed in the next few days. Already, more than 100,000 soldiers not based in barracks have been demobilized. And hundreds of square miles of territory were transferred from one entity to another without a shot being fired.

IFOR also has stopped the widespread killing of civilians and restored security to Sarajevo, where people now walk the streets in safety. Virtually all prisoners of war have been released and those few still in custody are being held as war crimes suspects. IFOR has moved aggressively to take down internal checkpoints and, while far from perfect, freedom of movement has improved -- between ten and fifteen thousand people cross the boundary between the Bosnia-Croat Federation and the Serb Republic every day.

As the climate in Bosnia becomes more secure, humanitarian assistance and reconstruction efforts have begun -- slowly -- to improve the lives of its people. On the American side alone, we've already spent \$86 million in "Quick Impact" aid the President announced after Dayton -- restoring heat, hot water and electricity and providing medicine and winter clothing for hundreds of thousands of Bosnians. The recent Donors' Conference in Brussels added \$1.2 billion to the \$600 million raised earlier for Bosnian economic recovery -- including an American pledge of \$200 million in reconstruction aid for this fiscal year, in addition to over \$350 million in humanitarian aid, support for elections, demining and other initiatives.

As I speak to you, dozens of projects are underway -- to build new housing... to rehabilitate utilities, schools, community centers... to fix roads and factories -- that will have a tangible impact on the way people live. To cite just a few examples, we have a program up and running to repair 2500 homes for 12,500 people in 44 villages that will also provide 2000 new jobs. Next month, we will begin spending \$70 million to rebuild Bosnia's economic infrastructure. And we'll start

disbursing an equal amount in loans to small businesses and industrial enterprises to jump-start the economy, create jobs and spur growth.

As President Clinton made clear in committing our troops to IFOR, the point of this extraordinary international effort is straightforward: to give the people of Bosnia the breathing room they need to begin to rebuild their lives and their land... and to give peace a chance to take on a life and logic of its own.

President Clinton has made equally clear what the point is not: it is not to take on responsibilities that are not our own -- and to create in Bosnia an unsustainable dependency instead of giving its people a chance to act independently. The United States is not in the business of building other nations -- but we can help nations build themselves, and give them time to make a start of it.

That's why the next step in the Dayton process -- Bosnia-wide elections -- is so important. Only after elections are held will the Constitution fully take effect... only after elections are held can the structures of a unified Bosnian state be created... only after elections are held will Bosnia have a Parliament, a Presidency and a Constitutional Court that represent the interests of all the people of Bosnia, including the hundreds of thousands of refugees and millions of displaced persons... only after elections are held will government agencies be up and running and able to pursue foreign trade and oversee customs and immigration... only after elections are held can the promise of Dayton be shaped into a political reality.

A few hours ago in Florence, Bob Frowick, the head of the OSCE mission in Bosnia, recommended that the OSCE certify that conditions will be suitable for holding free and fair elections in Bosnia on September 14 -- as called for in the Dayton Agreement. The Clinton Administration strongly supports that recommendation, and we hope and expect the OSCE will endorse it soon.

Some people who share our goals in Bosnia disagree. They would postpone elections beyond the Dayton deadline because the parties have, as of this moment, failed to meet all the necessary conditions. Let me tell you why we believe they are wrong.

If you took a snapshot of Bosnia, would it show that conditions for fair elections exist right now? The answer is no. But that's the wrong picture to look at. Our focus should be on whether those conditions will exist by September 14. And if you switch from still frames to moving pictures and pan three months down the road, very different images of Bosnia will begin to unfold. They would show people taking small, steady steps every day to put in place the mechanisms for free and fair elections -- just as they have for the past six months by opening up new media outlets so more voices can be heard... by forming new political parties representing different points of view... by setting up local election committees to oversee voter registration. I believe those are the images we will see more and more of between now and election day. Here's why:

The very fact of setting an election date is a forcing event. It will concentrate the minds of the parties on the progress they must still make -- and that they committed to in Dayton -- to expand freedom of movement and association... open the news media to opposition candidates and

viewpoints... give refugees and displaced persons the ability to vote and run for office in their original places of residence...make sure that war criminals have no part in the electoral process. We will hold them to those commitments. And 3200 international supervisors and monitors will make sure the elections themselves run smoothly and openly.

Some assert that elections risk cementing the hold of extremists on Bosnia and, in effect, partitioning the country. Well, it's a little hypocritical for those of us who wave democracy's banner around the world to say that, just because you fear the possible result of an election, you shouldn't hold it. Besides, as the campaign proceeds and more voices and viewpoints are heard, the forces of tolerance will grow stronger. We will work hard to return more refugees and organizing absentee voting. The sooner elections are held, the sooner people of different backgrounds will begin to work together and bridge some of the differences that divide them.

The argument that elections will hasten partition fails to explain how delaying them could possibly make things any better. On the contrary, it would make things worse for the Bosnian people. Without the incentive of an election and a deadline, we'd see less progress -- not more -- on freedom of movement, speech and association and on refugee rights. Delay would freeze into place the status quo... prevent practical interaction between the Federation and the Serb Republic... reinforce extremism and promote separatism on all sides. As the Balkan leaders said in Geneva earlier this month: "Delay in the elections risks widening the divisions which continue to exist."

You don't have to take their word for it -- or mine for that matter. Listen to the people who matter most -- the Bosnian people. Polls show that the average Bosnian -- whether Muslim, Croat or Serb -- wants elections. Ninety-three percent of Bosnia's Muslims, 79% of the Croats and an equal number of Bosnia's Serbs said elections are important. The overwhelming majority of each group intends to vote -- 93% of the Muslims, 86% of the Croats, 80% of the Serbs. So instead of making the perfect the enemy of the good, we should heed the will of the Bosnian people and move forward with elections. If they want to vote, we shouldn't stop them.

Some people point to the continued presence of Karadzic as reason enough to postpone elections. We all want him out of power, out of Bosnia -- and in the Hague to stand trial for war crimes. But let me remind you: under Dayton, he can't run for public office. He can't hold public office. So even if he's still there come September, elections would guarantee his removal from official positions of authority. Postponing elections might, ironically, allow him to cling to power.

There's been some confusion about what we've done and what we will do between now and election day to work for the removal of Karadzic and Mladic. First, we will continue to pressure President Milosevic to make good on his commitment in Dayton and strengthen alternative political forces within the Serb Republic.

And, to be very clear: IFOR has not been given the mission of hunting down indicted war criminals -- indeed, the reason IFOR has been so successful so far is that we have insisted on limiting its mandate to clearly achievable military goals. But let there be no mistake: if IFOR comes into contact with Karadzic and Mladic, it will detain them. Now that IFOR has completed

most of its military tasks, it will conduct more visible and wide ranging security patrols throughout Bosnia. This will have the added benefit of restricting Karadzic and Mladic's freedom of movement. It will make their active participation in the election campaign extremely risky and extremely difficult.

Elections are a part of the beginning, not the end, of the hard work required to bring democracy to Bosnia. After so much bloodshed and loss, there is no guarantee that Muslims, Croats and Serbs will come together -- and stay together -- as citizens of a shared state with a common destiny. But the whole point of Dayton is to give them the chance to try. Elections are the necessary next step along the long, difficult road to a unified, peaceful Bosnia. If we let them slip, other crucial provisions of the Dayton plan could slip. And that's a slope we don't want to be on. Thus far, we've held to Dayton with fierce determination. Now, it is our responsibility to bring that same determination to making sure the elections in Bosnia are free and fair.

As we look to the elections and beyond, it is absolutely vital that we avoid the paralysis of pessimism. That's an affliction common to just about every difficult foreign policy initiative. If we had let it overcome us in Haiti, we never would have sent our troops to pave the way for democracy's return. After all, the chorus of Chicken Littles was deafening -- Port au Prince will burn... Aristide will never return... the elections will never be held... Aristide won't step down. And so on. Well, Haiti still has a long way to go. But we can be very proud of what we achieved. The dictators are gone, democracy is back, the flow of refugees to our shores has stopped, and the Haitian people have their best chance ever to build a decent future in freedom.

In Bosnia, it's not hard to find places we've fallen short of our goals. The pace of economic reconstruction is too slow. Not enough refugees have returned to Bosnia and too few people within Bosnia have been able to reclaim their old homes. Political reconciliation has not yet met our expectations -- not just between Muslims and Serbs, but also between Muslims and Croats who have worked together as part of the Federation for two years now.

But instead of throwing up our hands in despair at the problems, we must redouble our efforts -- and solve them. That means seeing the elections through. But it also means making clear that our commitment to Bosnia's future extends well beyond the elections and the withdrawal of IFOR. Not by acting as a guarantor. Not by doing the hard work in place of the Bosnian people. But by doing our part for a lasting peace as long as they do theirs.

In the months ahead, the people of Bosnia can count on us to help them strengthen democratic institutions. To establish a stable military balance of power. To monitor the departure of foreign forces. To train a civilian police force. To help more refugees return. To secure cooperation with the War Crimes Tribunal. To help foster economic reconstruction, growth and prosperity. These are the building blocks of peace. As each one falls into place, the peace will become more and more secure.

That's a lot to accomplish. No one can guarantee we will succeed -- or that the Bosnian people will succeed. But already, in less than a year, we've changed the face of Bosnia. The war is over. The peace is just beginning. If we have faith in its promise while fearing its failure -- and if we

work away at its problems -- peace in Bosnia can last, it will last. That's our mission. Not just for those of us in government, but for all those who care so deeply about Bosnia's future, including many people I see in this room today. Some of us have disagreed on tactics in the past. No doubt we'll continue to have our differences in the months to come. So let's keep debating. But above all, let's keep acting, and moving forward, together. We owe at least that to the people of Bosnia.

THE WHITE HOUSE
Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release

June 14, 1996

STATEMENT BY JACK QUINN, COUNSEL TO THE PRESIDENT

We have today put in place a series of reforms governing the way in which the White House requests background information from the FBI.

These reforms include a provision requiring that a current consent form signed by the individual who is the subject of the background check be provided to the FBI before background information can be released to the White House. These reforms will impose rigorous procedures to protect both the privacy of individuals and the integrity of this process.

In arriving at these reforms, my office communicated our intentions to the FBI Counsel's Office to ensure that our efforts would work well with any changes being contemplated by the FBI. We have been told by the FBI that they believe our reforms, along with reforms they will be announcing today, will operate together effectively.

-30-30-30-

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

June 14, 1996

MEMORANDUM FOR LEON PANETTA
CHIEF OF STAFF

FROM: JACK QUINN
COUNSEL TO THE PRESIDENT

SUBJECT: WHITE HOUSE REQUESTS TO THE FBI

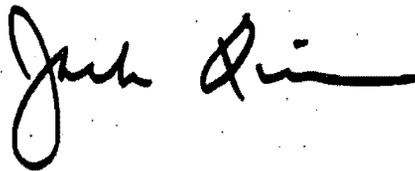
As you know, the White House has historically requested information from the FBI in order to evaluate the suitability of persons for Presidential appointments, nominations and recognition, employment at the White House, and access to the White House. In light of recent events, I have instituted the following rules and procedures to cover White House requests to the FBI for background investigation information, effective immediately:

1. White House requests to the FBI for background investigation information will be made only with the express written consent of the individual who is the subject of the investigation.
 - This rule applies to requests for any information beyond the type of computerized criminal history check required in the regular appointment clearance process at the White House complex.
 - The individual's consent must be current. Specifically, it must have been signed by the individual within thirty days of the White House request to the FBI.
 - The individual's express written consent must accompany the request made by the White House to the FBI for the information.
 - No information may be obtained without the individual's consent except in extraordinary circumstances set forth in a letter of justification to the General Counsel of the FBI signed by the Counsel to the President and concurred in by the Attorney General or the Deputy Attorney General.

2. Each request to the FBI must be approved and signed by the Counsel to the President or a specifically designated Counsel's Office attorney whose regular duties include the review of such information. Each request must also be signed by the security or vetting officer who initiates the request.
 - Signing for or in the name of another is prohibited.
 - The security or vetting officer who initiates the request must certify that the request is made for official purposes only.
 - The Counsel to the President will provide to the FBI the names of no more than three Counsel's Office attorneys who, in addition to the Counsel, are authorized to approve White House requests to the FBI for background information. No other persons may approve such requests.
3. Each request must identify the reason why the information is being requested (e.g., Presidential nomination, White House staff security clearance).
4. Only those White House employees authorized in writing by the Chief of Staff and the Counsel to the President whose assigned duties require the review or processing of such information will have access to FBI background investigations.

* * *

We communicated these changes, in proposed form, to the relevant officials of the FBI in order to make sure that our procedural reforms will be workable when taken together with changes the FBI is considering. These reforms were acceptable to the FBI and, so, we are now moving forward with them. In addition, I am requesting that the FBI assist us as promptly as possible in a thorough review of the background investigation files that we currently have to make sure that all of the files that were requested mistakenly have been returned to the FBI.



THE WHITE HOUSE
Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release

June 14, 1996

The President met with the following Democratic congressional candidates today at the White House.

Boyce Davis (AR-03)
Steve Owens (AZ-06)
Roberts Braden (CA-02)
Richard Lane (CA-15)
Brad Sherman (CA-24)
Diane Trautman (CA-25)
Bob Conway (CA-40)
Dan Farrell (CA-48)
Rita Tamerius (CA-51)
Al Gurule (CO-03)
Joan Fitzgerald (CO-06)
Bill Finch (CT-04)
Charlotte Koskoff (CT-06)
Kevin Beck (FL-01)
Robert "Bud" Feather (FL-07)
Jerry Provenzano (FL-09)
Mike Canady (FL-12)
Rosemary Kaszans (GA-01)
Jim Chafin (GA-03)
David Bell (GA-10)
Clem Balanoff (IL-11)
Jerry Houseman (IN-04)
John Frieden (KS-02)
Dennis Null (KY-01)
Chris John (LA-02)
Steve Eastaugh (MD-01)
Connie DeJuliis (MD-02)
Don Mooers (MD-08)
Lisa Donaldson (MI-04)
Kim Tunnicliff (MI-07)
George Parrott (NC-03)
Mark Costley (NC-06)

-more-

Mike McIntyre (NC-07)
Mike Daisley (NC-09)
Ben Neill (NC-10)
Ruth Katz (NJ-02)
John Leonardi (NJ-03)
Kevin Meara (NJ-04)
Chris Evangel (NJ-11)
David Delvecchio (NJ-12)
Nora Bredes (NY-01)
Dal LaMagna (NY-03)
Tyrone Butler (NY-13)
Richard Klein (NY-19)
Yash Aggarwal (NY-20)
Stephen James (NY-22)
Marty Mack (NY-25)
Bruce MacBain (NY-31)
Annie Saunders (OH-05)
Richard Blain (OH-7)
Cynthia Ruccia (OH-12)
Cliff Arnebeck (OH-15)
Tom Coyne (OH-19)
Darrell Roberts (OK-03)
Mike Dugan (OR-02)
John Innelli (PA-07)
John Murray (PA-08)
Monte Kemmler (PA-09)
Joe Cullen (PA-10)
Joe Paolino (RI-02)
Darrel Curry (SC-04)
Mark Stewart (TN-04)
Jim Turner (TX-02)
Janet Richardson (TX-06)
Charles Jones (TX-23)
Jeff Grey (VA-06)
Rodric Slayton (VA-07)
Bob Weinberg (VA-10)
Tom Horton (VA-11)
Paul Asmus (WA-02)
Glenn Phipps (WA-04)
Jerry Maiers (WI-01)
Lydia Spottswood (WI-01)
Tim Bakken (WI-03)
Jay Johnson (WI-08)

THE WHITE HOUSE
Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release

June 13, 1996

REMARKS BY THE PRESIDENT
AFTER THE ENTERTAINMENT AT THE STATE DINNER

South Lawn

11:15 P.M. EDT

THE PRESIDENT: Weren't they wonderful tonight? They made us all so happy. (Applause.)

I also want to say to President Robinson that she brought America a little of the luck of the Irish. I am pleased to announce to you that while we were here at dinner the long standoff with the freemen in Montana ended peacefully tonight. (Applause.)

I want to thank the FBI and the local law enforcement officials and say I am very, very proud of them. I know I speak for all of our people when we say we'll all say a little prayer tonight of gratitude for this peaceful resolution of a difficult situation. (Applause.)

Finally, you heard President Robinson say this is an Irish event and it can't end early, so after we break up, the Air Force Airmen of Note will be playing here. We urge you to stay and dance to your heart's content -- or till the angry neighbors run us off. (Laughter.) My experience is that will be quite some time. You can make it until dawn. (Laughter.)

Again, I thank you, Mary Chapin Carpenter; thank you, Mary Black; thank you, gentlemen. It was a wonderful, wonderful evening. And most of all, thank you, President Robinson. Thank you, Nick. It was wonderful for Hillary and me to have you here. Bless you. (Applause.)

PRESIDENT ROBINSON: Well, Mr. President, it's not just the luck of the Irish, I'm going to have to make a big concession here, and I'll do it graciously because that's the way we do it in Ireland -- you win. (Laughter.) You said that you would at least offer the warmth and hospitality you had received in Ireland. You win, you have done that. You have certainly more than offered that. (Applause.) And I can be truly gracious in acknowledging, as I do, that wonderful warmth and hospitality and thoughtfulness and all that today has meant, because I was thinking this evening, everything is going exactly the way it should. There's a reverse takeover taking place. The Irish are taking over this country, so all is well.

Good night. Thank you. (Applause.)

END

11:18 P.M. EDT

THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary
(Lyon, France)

EMBARGOED FOR RELEASE
SATURDAY, JUNE 29, 1996
AT 10:06 A.M. EDT

RADIO ADDRESS BY THE PRESIDENT TO THE NATION

Cite Internationale
Lyon, France

THE PRESIDENT: Good morning. I'm speaking to you today from Lyon, France, where the leaders of the world's industrialized democracies have gathered for our annual summit. We're meeting at a time of peace and prosperity, but in the shadow of terrorism. The cowardly, brutal attack on American military personnel in Saudi Arabia is on everyone's mind.

This weekend, all Americans will join me in mourning the 19 Americans who lost their lives in sending prayers to their loved ones. I've made it clear that I'll do everything in my power to discover who's responsible, to pursue them and to punish them.

I am pleased that our summit partners here agreed with me to direct our agenda to the work we can do together to fight terrorism and international crime. This is especially important now. While the international perils of the 20th century -- fascism and communism -- have been defeated, new dangers are rising up to take their place as we enter the 21st. New technologies and the rapid movement of information, money and people across borders bring us closer together and enrich our lives. But they also make us all more vulnerable to rogue states, crime, drugs and terrorism.

Unlike the previous great struggles of this century, we must confront these threats along a moving front -- from the Tokyo subway to the streets of London, from a bus in Paris to the World Trade Center in New York and the heartland in Oklahoma City and, of course, in Saudi Arabia.

But just as no enemy could drive us from the fight to meet our challenges and protect our values during World War II and the Cold War, we will not be driven from the frontiers of our fight against terrorism today. Working with our partners around the world, we will take on the forces of terror.

As a result of United States leadership, here in Lyon, we have adopted specific recommendations to combat crime and

terrorism -- practical steps that all governments can take and should take. They fall into four key areas.

First, we need to make sure that criminals and terrorists have nowhere to hide. So we will strengthen our efforts to prosecute and extradite major criminals and terrorists, to share information, and to develop joint witness protection programs.

Second, we must deny criminals and terrorists the resources they need to do violence to our citizens. So we will work to seize their assets, to gather more information on their financial transactions, and to shut down money laundering.

Third, we have to strengthen the defense of our national borders so that criminals and terrorists cannot violate them. So we will crack down on weapons trafficking, alien smuggling. We'll do a better job in safeguarding travel documents from fraud and abuse. And we will track forged or stolen documents together.

Finally, we must stop criminals and terrorists from misusing the high tech communications we all rely on for commerce and cooperation, so we will take the fight to those who would abuse government and financial institutional data bases.

There's more we can do together, so we directed our senior officials to come together as soon as possible to discuss additional steps to intensify the worldwide fight against terrorism. All these steps against terrorism, international crime, drug trafficking and the spread of weapons of mass destruction are part of a campaign America has been leading for three years now. Without our leadership, the job will not get done.

The good news is, the United States at this G-7 summit is in the best position we've been in for years to protect the physical security of our people, in part because of our strong leadership toward a more stable and prosperous economic future for ourselves and our allies.

When I attended my first G-7 in Tokyo three years ago, the United States was not in a strong position to lead. Our partners said instead of telling us what to do, you should get your own house in order.

Well, they were right. When I took office, our budget deficit was at an all-time high. Unemployment was more than seven percent. We had the slowest job growth since the Great Depression. And we were being outcompeted in everything from automobiles to computer chips. But America has traveled a great distance from Tokyo in 1993.

Here in Lyon in 1996, I was gratified to hear our partners praise the strength of our economy. We cut the budget deficit in half and proposed a plan to balance the budget. Lower interest rates have helped us to slash unemployment to 5.6 percent and create 9.7 million new jobs. Inflation is near a 30-year low. Interest rates have stayed down. Business investment is up nearly 30 percent. And America is the number one exporter and the most competitive nation on Earth.

We stand on the brink of a new century and an age of great possibility. To realize its potential, we must face the threats to our generation, just as previous generations faced the threats to theirs. If we show strength and steadiness and judgment and flexibility in the face of change; if America continues to lead the world and to work with others as we have here in Lyon, we will meet our challenges and protect our values. And we will enter the 21st century prosperous and secure with the greatest opportunity of any time in our history.

Thanks for listening.

END

-more-