

Florence Zinzun Interview
February 23, 2018, Pasadena, CA

When I was in high school I did certain things because I liked helping people. If you got in trouble, I had to be nosy—I wanted to know what you got in trouble for. I went to school in Los Angeles I went to high school Charles Drew and then I went to...I don't remember now. I graduated in 1972.

I became a nurse and I worked here in Pasadena for a while and I joined Kaiser and I worked for Kaiser for 29 years. I married Michael [Zinzun] in 1982. Before then, I was a Black Panther. When I met Mike, everything we were looking at, we would stop and see, why this kid got in trouble? What did this kid do, besides run from the police? All black kids run from the police, no matter what. So, is it a crime to run? It's not a crime to run. Did he have a weapon on him? What did he do? And my husband was very adamant about that.

We started the first breakfast program here in Pasadena in my own house down the street. We did it for years and years and years. People found out by word of mouth. We told them that we were going to do a breakfast program for the young kids, we're going to feed these kids so they can learn. When you've got a full stomach, you can listen. You eat, you learn, it stays in your mind. When you're hungry, the only thing you think about it food, even if you're in school.

We started the free breakfast program down in our center that we had right down the street, way before they were doing it in the schools. We sold our Black Panther newspapers and those that did work, we contributed like that. We paid our rent. We paid our lights, our gas, and when we had extra money, we would go down to a food center, which was right here. I had the Pasadena Community Information Center. We would help the kids learn how to do computers, they learned how to spray cockroaches. We taught them how to have respect. Counselors came to the house from different businesses, told them what attire to wear and what they were looking for, to get them jobs. We had a job bank. Channel 56, Message to the grassroots. We tried to provide so the kids would learn and go out and build themselves up.

We had a clinic for sickle cell. They were free to the community. Michael loved working with teenagers, because he felt that teenagers would learn and grow up to be men. Not these bullies that we have now. You talk to your kids and they will learn. I saved several kids lives here in Pasadena and they still come by and say thank you.